

Revisoning physical education futures

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Background

During the past decade, physical education and school sport in England has received unprecedented and unparalleled financial investment from government aligned to two major strategic interventions, PESSCL 2003-2007 and PESSYP from 2008. Evidence from government-sponsored research (Loughborough Partnership, 2008; Ofsted, 2009; Quick et al., 2009) indicates that the landscape of physical education has been transformed organisationally through the development of some 450 School Sport Partnerships. Independent research studies (Flintoff, 2008; Smith et al., 2007) suggest, however, that many traditional practices of physical education have remained untouched by these structural changes. Flintoff (2008) contends that a competitive masculine sport discourse continues to dominate physical education and school sport and despite teachers' best efforts it curtails many opportunities created by government investment. She proposes that nothing less than a transformative politics is required.

Kirk (2010) argues that a 'molecularised' (Rovegno 1995) form of physical education based on the teaching of decontextualised sport techniques has dominated in schools since its first emergence in the 1950s, and has proved highly resistant to change. He projects three future scenarios for physical education, 'more of the same', 'radical reform' and 'extinction', and suggests while the first example is the most likely response in the short to middle term, radical change is required in order to assure a sustainable future for some form of physical education in schools.

Research Questions

This paper builds upon Kirk's (2010) analysis and considers the radical reform scenario as a preferred future for physical education. The focus of the enquiry is to begin the process of revisoning the future for physical education by identifying the key factors that must be taken into account in order to optimise the possibility of realising radical reform. The idea of radical here is to go to the 'roots' in order to bring transformation to fruition. The suggestion in this approach to change is that the traditional or problematic is first embraced in order to be understood so transformation is initiated from the basis of pedagogy in place of a pile up, cover up, or stir up effect. The conception of reform that we consider is one whereby change does not transpire merely for the sake of change but rather for the betterment of physical education curriculum, teaching and learning.

Methods

We draw on a number of sources such as those aforementioned to understand the extent to which the recent and ongoing reform agenda aligned with Playing to Win (DCMS, 2008) and the PESSYP and their predecessor policies and strategy have brought about change in physical education. We also bring into play the work of key contributors to the futures agenda in physical education, in particular Lawson (2009) and Kirk (2010), in order to examine the transformative potential of revisoning in action. From a critical theoretical perspective we interrogate the complexities of physical education as 'more of the same', 'radical reform' and 'extinction' through a hypothetical (see Aoki 1993) scenario involving a learner, an educator, and a curriculum developer. The hypothetical serves as a space whereby we might not only envision possibilities of transformation in physical education, but can also play out the challenges encountered by learners and educationalists when attempting to enact change.

Frame

The theoretical frame of this work can be described broadly as social constructionism informed by a social epistemological approach to change in school curricula and fields of knowledge more broadly. It draws upon the notion of 'curriculum as plan/curriculum as lived' posited by Aoki (1993) as a means to demystify the privileged technoscientific mindset that continues to dominate physical education pedagogy. It further employs a critical lens to engage in rhizomatic conceptions of curricular reform.

Research findings

This paper begins from the point Kirk (2010) reaches in *Physical Education Futures* in considering the process of revisioning the future of physical education. It identifies the various factors that will need to be considered and the actions to be taken in order to countenance a future scenario of radical reform. Through the hypothetical a series of "imaginings" (Halas and Kentel 2008) are presented as a means to identify the knowledge resources that will inform revisioning, the human resource requirements and cost of reform, fundamental principles that might in Lawson's (2009) terms produce new design criteria for curriculum in schools and teacher education programmes, and analyses of the alignment of future forms of physical education and physical culture. Finally, this paper considers the creative resources and imagination required to revision the future and to think 'outside the square' in order to provoke transformation.

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