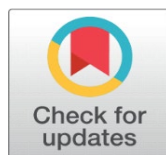


THE EVOLUTION OF CURRICULA IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to spark professional discussion on the future of physical education, particularly concerning how curricula should evolve in response to rapidly changing societies and times. The focus is on reorienting and restructuring the subject to meet the educational needs and interests of the 21st century. The ongoing revision of the curriculums for Physical Education serves as a foundation for advocating a new approach in the design of PE curricula, units, and lessons. The paper draws on the work of Bernstein and Young to critique established practices and propose their reconstruction through a framework informed by 'critical pedagogy for social justice' and Critical Postmodernism in Human Movement, Physical Education, and Sport. It suggests a curriculum framework that emphasizes learning through activity contexts rather than merely learning activities. The proposed changes are seen as challenging but necessary advancements in physical education and are relevant to the international professional community.

Keywords: Physical Education, Curriculum, Pedagogy, Postmodernism, Human Movement, Fitness

1. INTRODUCTION

As educators prepare to address revisions to the curriculums for Physical Education (NCPE), this paper aims to stimulate and broaden discussions about the future of the subject, including potential curricula and teaching methods. It focuses on issues that have often been overlooked or marginalized in recent discussions about changes to physical education and the development of curriculums. The paper emphasizes the role physical education should play in preparing children for life in the 21st century, a world significantly different from the 19th and 20th centuries, and explores the implications for the structure and content of physical education curricula. We question the current definitions, structures, and teaching methods of the subject in state schools in England and Wales, highlighting both the need for and potential of significant changes in policy, curricula, and pedagogical practices.

As academics and researchers dedicated to critical inquiry, our goal is to not only better understand contemporary educational policies and practices but also to inspire and facilitate meaningful changes that enhance the quality and scope of learning opportunities for young people. We aim to contribute to a sociology of education that informs practical transformation in teaching. Drawing on Basil Bernstein's work, we present concepts that we believe hold particular promise for advancing pedagogical critique and development in physical education. Bernstein's and Young's ideas together offer a robust framework for examining and improving physical education. While we focus on current and future developments, we also underscore the international significance of these issues. Although others have previously

addressed concerns about definitions and structures in physical education, we believe it is a crucial time to revisit and thoroughly explore these topics.

2. PEDAGOGICAL CHANGES

Studies have highlighted the shifting nature of work and economic development. He argues that societies are moving towards economic growth driven by human resources, where the success of nations will depend more on their education and training systems than on their economies alone. Young believes these changes raise essential questions about the current design of curricula and their specializations. He advocates for the creation of new Connective Specialisms, where subject areas actively adapt to the evolving job market, moving beyond viewing subjects as isolated entities to addressing the complex real-world applications of the knowledge they offer. Supporting Young's perspective, we argue that education should not only respond to changes in the world of work but also to transformations across all aspects of society, including leisure activities and the shifting dynamics between work and personal life. We emphasize that education should not merely react to societal changes but also drive future developments

Thus, when considering new "connective specialisms," we should also reflect on the kind of work environments and societies we aim to connect with. Young stresses that curriculum debates are essentially debates about different visions for society's future. The interaction between curricula and society provides an opportunity to be proactive in driving social change rather than just reacting to it. Futures must be actively created, not left to chance. In examining current curricula, Young urges us to consider whether they represent a future we want to support or a past we wish to transform. This leads to essential questions for those involved in physical education: What type of citizens and learners do we aspire to develop? What are the implications of these aspirations for physical education as a subject and for our roles as educators? Does physical education contribute to the development of societies we endorse? With changing societies and future visions, do we need to reform our specialism? How can physical education become "more connective" in terms of integrating with other subjects and with broader societal contexts?

We believe physical education can play a significant role in fostering self-directed learning and highlighting the importance of both individual and collective actions. We argue for a curriculum that prepares students for a rapidly changing world, balancing flexible attitudes with enduring values. However, achieving this vision requires radical changes in policy, curriculum design, and teaching methods. In this paper, we will explore necessary actions to achieve these goals and adopt what might be termed "a critical pedagogy for social justice" (Fernandez-Balboa, 1997). We will discuss the aims of physical education, their implications for curriculum structure and content, and the teaching strategies needed to achieve our goals. Drawing on Bernstein's concepts, we advocate for a curriculum that signals a new "voice" in physical education, emphasizing the value of different learning contexts and shifting from a focus on predefined knowledge to a more negotiated and student-centered approach. We identify the need to weaken the classification and framing of physical education curricula, develop a new curriculum voice, and create new teaching messages.

3. GOAL OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

While physical education professionals might agree on what the subject is not, there remains considerable ambiguity and tension regarding its core objectives. The diverse claims about the benefits of physical education for children's development, their future lives, and societal impact are varied. For instance, the Physical Education Association of the United Kingdom (PEAUK) states that physical education helps young people develop an appreciation for skillful performance, supports healthy lifestyle choices, and contributes to their spiritual, moral, social, and cultural awareness. In contrast, the British Association of Advisers and Lecturers in Physical Education (BAALPE) emphasizes the critical role of a rigorous physical education program for both individual well-being and national health. Additionally, Sir Rodney Walker of the English Sports Council underscores the significant role of the PE curriculum in a child's overall education and grassroots sports.

This paper questions whether physical education can realistically maintain such diverse claims and objectives. It appears that the compatibility of these various aims and their implications for curriculum and structure have been largely overlooked in current discussions. Physical education may be overextending itself and might have failed to focus on specific, achievable goals within its vast potential. The implications of these multiple aims for curriculum design and teaching have not been thoroughly examined, leading to a dominant and seemingly unquestioned curriculum approach.

The analogy of selling refrigerators to Eskimos is apt here; it illustrates the issue of focusing on a curriculum that may not adequately address the needs or questions at hand. This dominant focus on learning specific activities and sports has led to a curriculum that appears to validate physical education as merely a collection of activities. This issue is not unique to England and Wales but is relevant internationally. To truly achieve the aims of physical education, there needs to be a fundamental restructuring of the subject, which would involve redefining it and making significant changes to the associated curricula. Locke's suggestion that physical education might benefit from a complete overhaul if it is to remain relevant in the 21st century resonates with this view. However, it is crucial to acknowledge and build upon the existing rich history of physical education while adapting to new practices and perspectives.

4. ACTIVITIES IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

We do not dispute the importance of activities and sports within physical education. However, our concern is less about the inclusion of these activities in the curriculum and more about their purpose. We believe that physical education is not solely about the activities themselves. Instead, the role of teachers should focus on educating children through physical activities, ensuring they experience enjoyment and success, and helping them acquire skills, knowledge, and understanding that will support a healthy and active lifestyle. Teachers should also aim to foster children as creators of knowledge rather than just recipients, with a commitment to addressing social justice. We question whether the traditional activity-based structure of physical education is suitable for achieving these educational goals. Specifically, this structure often emphasizes performance in individual activities, which may lead to a focus on developing elite skills rather than broader educational aims. The curriculum tends to highlight the distinctions between different activities without promoting connections within the subject or between physical education and other areas of learning.

Many related curricula exhibit strong classification and separation of physical education into distinct components. Unfortunately, recent revisions of the NCPE may not adequately address these issues. A recent document from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) continues to portray different activities as separate entities, each serving different values and interests. We value the diversity of experiences in physical education but are concerned about the specific divisions and emphases within the curriculum, which may limit coherence in teaching and learning. We believe that to become a more integrated and connective field, physical education needs a fundamental redesign. We argue that physical education should be framed as an educational process that aligns with visions for future citizens and societies.

This involves clearly defining the subject's core purposes, focusing on themes or strands of learning rather than just activities. Our proposed approach would emphasize thematic units that guide the curriculum, with activities serving as contexts for achieving the identified learning goals. This shift from an activity-based to a theme-based curriculum would challenge the current rigid classifications and promote a more cohesive educational experience. We suggest that such a structure would better support the development of skills and understanding in physical education, ultimately enhancing participation and performance in physical activities and sports. We recognize the need for detailed discussion on how to implement these ideas and encourage further debate on curriculum design and pedagogy in physical education as we progress into the 21st century. We hope our suggestions will inspire others to engage in this important conversation and expand current discussions beyond existing limitations.

5. LET US CONCLUDE

Unfortunately, due to the time constraints and scope of the current NCPE revision, there hasn't been enough opportunity to debate whether the proposed strands of learning are ideal or suitable for 21st-century physical education. More critically, while these strands have been introduced, the proposals continue to focus on areas of activity when outlining physical education programs. This focus on specific activities rather than the new strands seems to reinforce a rigid classification and separation within the curriculum, which could hinder efforts to create more integrated teaching and learning experiences. Previous research has pointed out that new statutory requirements often fit within existing teaching structures, and we question whether the core strands will be effectively prioritized in teaching. Maintaining the emphasis on activity areas may perpetuate outdated organizational practices and prevent a shift towards a more cohesive educational approach.

To achieve clearer focus and alignment in teaching and learning, we argue that the NCPE's programs of study and curriculum requirements should be redefined according to the established strands. Identifying appropriate activity contexts to develop these programs will highlight the need for flexible curriculum design and professional judgment. Our

proposal for a thematic curriculum framework is based on the realization that alternatives to activity-based models exist and can provide valuable insights. For example, curriculum frameworks from Australia's Health and Physical Education (HPE) sector offer a contrast to activity-focused models, with themes such as 'human functioning and physical activity' and 'health of individuals and populations' providing a different organizational structure (Australian Education Council, 1994a, b; Penney, 1998b). These frameworks have sparked reflection and innovative curriculum development in Australia, influencing our suggestions. Our themes are a result of extensive discussion and reflection on these international examples, as well as on the development of the NCPE in England and Wales.

We aim to bridge current practices with potential future developments, ensuring that valuable aspects of the subject are preserved while moving towards a more connected and relevant curriculum. We propose the following themes for physical education curricula: Movement and physical literacy Physical activity, health, and fitness Competition and cooperation Challenge These themes are intended to promote a multidisciplinary approach, addressing physical, psychological, emotional, and social dimensions of physical activity. We advocate for a curriculum that not only focuses on individual themes but also makes connections between them. We recognize that this proposal is not a complete model but rather an initial framework requiring further discussion. Key issues that need to be addressed include: Whether the proposed themes adequately cover the breadth of physical education learning. Whether the themes should be consistent across primary and secondary education or tailored differently for each sector. How learning objectives and progression should be articulated for each theme at various educational stages.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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