Neo Liberal Freedoms, Privatisation and the Future of Physical Education

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Neo Liberal Freedoms, Privatisation and the Future of Physical Education

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Abstract

Focussing on the ideological aspects of privatisation, this paper explores ways in which 'freedom' has been activated discursively to justify actions involving changes both to the structure and content of formal education in the UK. Empirically, the paper will analyse examples in England of UK Government 'new provider' rhetoric relating to 'Academies' in order to address both the claims and counter claims made by governments, educational producers and others for the privatisation of education and Physical Education within it. The paper suggest that such changes may have significant implications not only for teachers of PE, but also the educational entitlements of pupils and specifically, their opportunities to enjoy a liberal, comprehensive, high quality Physical Education (PE). Privatisation may also consolidate rather than help erode and eradicate existing social hierarchies and associated distributions of educational social and physical capital.

Background and Context

Economic arguments cannot justify or explain the significance of ‘privatisation’ in the neoliberal, new conservative project, either in the UK or elsewhere. Indeed, policy analysts have argued that to suggest that privatisation is led by economics alone is to grossly underestimate the political nature of the privatisation agenda and the role of ideology in promoting it. Australian scholars Fazal Rizvi and Bob Lingard (2011) claim that the political context in which privatisation is promoted is inherently ideological and based on an almost ontological assumption that the private sector is intrinsically more productive and efficient than the public sector. Such an assumption, they say, carries a particular ‘social imaginary’ (see Ball, 2012b) and a ‘philosophical conception of society as constituted by self-maximising individuals with the free capacity to choose (for example, whatever school, or health care they may want), as well as a conception of government as necessarily inimical to individual interests. Critically, however, a very particular conception of ‘freedom’ resides within this neoliberal discourse acting as a key rhetorical device for mobilising support for and rationalising policy change. It is a negative view of freedom, a ‘freedom from’, rather than a positive view of freedom, a ‘freedom to’, in terms, for example, of ‘capabilities that people have to exercise choices and live decent lives, free from poverty and exploitation’ (Rizvi and Lingard, 2011, pp. 87/88).

Some years ago Margaret Talbot (1993) made similar observations, noting that the most frequently used principle of equality is that of *equality of opportunity*: ‘in education the idea is to widen the franchise of opportunity by removing as many structural constraints to access as possible, so that no one is actively prevented from taking part’ (p.83). She also pointed out that the problem with this interpretation is that *access* is not the same as *opportunity*. The distinction between access and opportunity is ‘based on two aspects of freedom: freedom *from* constraint confers access, while freedom *to* do as one wishes - confers opportunity. This active and positive definition is crucial because it relates to individual interpretations of what is possible, salient and relevant’ (ibid, p.83). Given this distinction, we might consider how neoliberal governments’ policies in the UK, as elsewhere, of opening up access through deregulation of educational markets to ‘superior’ private fee paying and state financed Free and Academy schools tend to be experienced by those without requisite knowledge, desire, financial or other resource to materialise such opportunities. Policy portending ‘freedom to’ without ‘freedom from’ is likely to be experienced as merely hollow.

In this paper we want to foreground the nature of privatisation agendas in the UK, centre the significance of 'freedom rhetoric' in their development, and consider the implications of these processes for teachers, teaching and pupils in school Physical Education (PE). To be sure, a tour of the world of privatised Education and PE as it is beginning to appear in England, UK would reveal features familiar to those involved in school and teacher education work in central Europe (see Holger, 2011; Olmedo, 2013) and elsewhere (see Ball, 2012; Rizvi and Lingard, 2011; Arreman and Holm, 2011). Ball and Youdell (2008) have usefully identified the very many common elements of privatisation, albeit differently mediated by nation state histories, politics, government ideologies and levels of resource in Australia, New Zealand, England, the United States, Canada, France, Germany and India. They emphasise that in each of these democratic states privatisation processes are advancing apace. However, they rarely involve a straightforward relinquishing of state control of 'public' services (e.g., education and health). Rather than simply conceding responsibility for the provision of 'public' services governments are more likely to find shared or hybrid forms of governance provided by networks of state and private agencies and populations. Indeed, their analysis signals the importance of recognising privatisation as process not product, in their terms, a 'policy tool', not a simple 'giving-up' by the state of the capacity to manage social problems and respond to social needs; it is 'part of an ensemble of innovations, organisational changes, new relationships and social partnerships, all of which play their part in the re-working of the state itself'. (Ball and Youdell, p.10)

In societies, such as the aforementioned, all of which have long had significant private sector school provision, more or less clearly distinguished from state schools, largely for socially privileged and/or religious faith clienteles, re-working areas and elements of state provided education as privately provided products has offered new levels of legitimacy to educational market enterprise, positioning schooling and Teacher Education as objects of potential or actual profit (see Glatter, 2012 and Morris, 2012). These processes are neither new, nor have they occurred suddenly or without dispute. Ball and Youdell's distinction between 'endogenous' and 'exogenous' privatisation usefully signals something of the trajectory that governments across the globe have taken over recent decades when implementing neoliberal policies in gradually reshaping state education provision as market enterprise. The tendency has been, in the first instance, to alter schools' internal relations according to market principles and market vocabulary followed by systemic reconfiguration in terms of their

governance, organisation, design and outcomes. In Ball and Youdell's (2008, p. 8-9) terms, these processes can be represented as:

Privatisation *in* Public Education or *Endogenous privatisation*: the importing of ideas, techniques and practices from the private sector in order to make the public sector more like businesses and more business-like' [and] Privatisation *of* Public Education or *Exogenous privatisation*: the opening up of public education services to private sector participation on a for-profit basis and using the private sector to design, manage, or deliver, aspects of public education. (Our emphases)

While *endogenous* privatisation involved the introduction of processes of quasi-marketisation, with emphases laid on performance management, accountability, performance-related pay and managerial roles cast in 'new public' forms, *exogenous* privatisation introduced practices, such as public education for private profit, private sector supply of education by contracting out services and schools, public-private partnerships and international capital commercialisation or 'Cola-isation', each embracing a variety of forms of philanthropy, subsidy and aid. The former, then, impacts *relations within* education, conditioning and regulating the principles that underpin the message systems of schooling: curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (Bernstein, 1975, 1990). Its market vocabulary invites managerialism, a performative culture, emphasis on the standardisation of practices, measurement of observable learning outcomes, accountability measures, heightened surveillance through inspection regimes and greater accountability (via league tables, etc.). *Exogenous* privatisation, however, reconfigures *relations between* the state, markets and education, affecting governance, organisation, design, purposes and goals of education. It alters the landscape of education, redefining the principles which regulate the shape of the education terrain. Furthermore, in this process, as Ball and Youdell point out, it is not simply education and education services but policy that is subject to forms of privatisation. In the UK, for example, private sector organisations are increasingly involved in both policy development and policy implementation (Ball, 2012). Both endogenous and exogenous privatisation policies drive education toward becoming a market enterprise *in and of* itself.

While many governments embracing neo-liberalism have pursued market agendas and ideals for several decades, global economic recession has added impetus to privatisation agendas. In Europe (see Holger, 2011; Olmedo, 2013), governments of predominantly centrist shades

have adopted 'austerity measures' as part solutions to widespread fiscal deficit crises. In England these have merely added impetus to and further legitimised Lib/Con New Conservative commitment to Old Conservative and New Labour privatisation agendas (see Hatcher and Jones, 2011). There is further permeation of market vocabulary into education policy and increased marketisation, commercialisation and privatisation of provision. There is rethinking of the role of the relation, between government and the private sector and increasing involvement of the latter in many areas of public service that were traditionally taken to be the domain of the state. New ways of combining private and public initiatives for ensuring provision in sectors thought previously to be the responsibility of the state (e.g., education and health) are high on the political agenda, rationalised by the need for fiscal stringency and recessionary debt crisis. New and non-traditional methods of funding education are being sought, including increasing use of private sector resources for public services. At the same time, there is even more emphasis and rhetoric than formerly on human capital development involving education as means of increasing national economic growth and development and maintenance of global market position. Together, these changes have undoubtedly brought a sharper focus on the instrumental value of education and its 'learning outcomes' and their functional relationships not only with the work place but, also, other areas of life post-school e.g., in health and sport (see Macdonald, 2014; Pope, 2014).

In England, Australia and New Zealand, as in many other countries, we are, then, faced with a strengthening of privatisation agendas. In England, current policy aspiration is that all secondary and as many as possible primary schools will be 'freed' from local authority control and supervision, so as to enter into direct and independent contractual relation with central authority. There is to be a 'massive expansion of the Government's free schools and academies [1] programmes [...] every failing primary school and those already given "notice to improve" by inspectors will become sponsored academies in the next year' (Garner, R, 2012, p. 1, citing the UK Education Secretary, Michael Gove, whose writ now runs in England though not in devolved and diverging Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). Such measures are almost invariably couched in a language of raising standards (2) via new consumer 'freedoms' offering greater diversity, opportunity and choice within a 'Big Society' in which individuals take responsibility for their own and other's interests and needs, critically, with diminishing levels of state/government resource and support. If 'Education, Education, Education', was New Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair's mantra, then Freedom, Diversity, Choice, is Lib/Con Prime Minister Cameron's and Secretary of State for Education

Gove's, claiming to perfect the Blair project. These are, however, clearly to be regulated freedoms (de-regulations), given the kind of ministerial missive exemplified above, the persistence of 'national' (Ofsted) inspection frameworks and a curriculum expected to deliver a 'back to basics' education, featuring core skills, discipline, tradition, national values and consumer ideals. New Conservatism, it seems, offers no departure in these respects from the morally loaded economic aspirations of Old (see <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2010/02/in-a-league-of-their-own/>).

Marketising the Individual through Education

Implicit in the privatisation project, then, are two central neoliberal 'imaginaries' (Rizvi and Lingard, 2011; Ball, 2012b). The first is that individuals are self-responsibilising, ameliorating and actualising across the life course. This implies that they (e.g., parents, patients, consumers) are equipped with knowledge, desire and economic means to access and accumulate social and economic capital in deregulated markets. Again it is to be noted that the idea of 'freedom' which underlies this imagery is tied to a negative view of freedom, as 'freedom from', rather than a positive view of 'freedom to' in terms, say, of the capabilities of people to actually exercise choices (Rizvi and Lingard, 2011) for example, over education or health). The second imaginary is that private enterprise (driven and guided by the profit motive) is inherently better than public/state control, and can, either alone or in partnerships with Government, provide more cost efficient services than the State unaided, including those in education and health. It is such views in England which are driving both major expansion of Academy and Free Schools, taking a less than scrupulously examined lead from examples of privatisation in the USA of Charter Schools and Sweden of Free Schools, as well as the deregulation of ITE (see Lundhal, 2011).

Privatisation and PE inc

If our aim is to ensure that every child has the right to a high quality, liberal, comprehensive/common education, to at least 16 or 18 what are these new 'freedoms' likely to mean for education in general and PE in particular (see Macdonald, 2014; Pope, 2014, Evans, 2014)? At one level we merely guess at implications and outcomes of policy measures largely untried and untested beyond the imaginations of the closed policy circles advocating them. Limited available information as to the effects of privatisation in Sweden, the USA, Australia and elsewhere suggests that a good deal of caution ought to temper privatisation

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3 agendas (Lundahl, 2012; Hatcher and Jones, 2011). The brief empirical descriptions below
4 drawn from our recent visit to ‘the Academies Show’ (see below) and tentative comment that
5 follows, then, are intended to offer but a glimpse of what privatisation portends as marketised
6 education gathers pace; they are but reference point for discussion as to the potential effects
7 of privatisation for the future of PE in England, Europe, Australasia as elsewhere.
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10 11 12 **Education Public Limited Company (PLC)**

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14 It is Wednesday, 16th May, 2012; we are here at ‘Olympia’, Earls Court, London, the home of
15 National Exhibitions. We are in West Block for ‘*The Academy Show*’, effectively a
16 travelling exhibition sponsored by UK Government and providers of Academy school
17 services, aimed at potential and current providers of Academy schools:
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22 ‘If you are a head teacher, governor, finance director or bursar, a local authority
23 education leader or anyone else with a serious interest in the Academies Programme
24 and regardless of whether you have already converted, looking to convert or simply
25 fact finding for the future, The Academies Show will provide you with a wealth of
26 relevant, valuable and FREE insights, discussions and practical advice’. (The
27 Academy Show <http://www.academiesshow.co.uk/>)
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33 It is easy to feel more than usually under/badly dressed among the hundreds of other
34 interested parties present (3), most of whom, it seems to us, are more suitably attired for a day
35 out in banking, insurance, or, we guess, prospectively running an Academy school – it is a
36 sea of tidy, black and grey or (liberal) brown suits – either milling in front of the many (100+)
37 stands on display or standing behind them in anticipation of offering something vital to
38 willing passers-by. Some present seem excited by the wares on offer and are confidently
39 locked in conversation with potential service providers. Others, like us, look on bewildered
40 searching, perhaps, for some intellectual reference point to education as once we knew it or
41 for direction as to how we too might better understand what it is we need to know and do in
42 order to enter this brave new world of privatised education and achieve Academy status if
43 that is, or has to be, a goal. Our exhibition booklet announces:
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52 “As of April 2012, over half of secondary schools and a rapidly growing
53 number of primaries in England are academies or are in the process of
54 converting”.
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Its ‘welcome address’ from the Department of Education asserts that:

‘Academies offer unique opportunity for school leaders by liberating them to deliver education in the way they think is best for their pupils and staff. I hope that your visit to the Academies Show will leave you excited about these opportunities, motivated to apply for these freedoms in your school and with the knowledge you need on how to take the next steps’ (Dominic Herrington, Director, Academies Delivery Group, Department of Education, p.6).

The message is clear, if not a little pointed – join up, enjoy the new ‘freedoms’ available on this fast-changing education terrain, do not be left behind. Walking the aisles one is reminded of a little metal lapel badge recently spotted in a city Design shop in Stockholm, which pithily stated:

‘Join in or ***** off’

The iconography of the publicity offers a world of exciting vibrancy, direction, support, independence, change, conversion, leadership and sponsorship without risk (represented in the safety road symbol on the front cover of the exhibition guide). Many of the major players are present, the movers and shakers of privatisation policy - policy makers and those already active in managing or running Academy schools; there to reassure the converted or yet to be convinced:

‘We are thrilled to confirm a line-up of prominent experts who will share their knowledge and insights with you on the day:

- Dominic Herrington, Director, **Academies Delivery Group, Department for Education**
- Dr. Elizabeth Sidwell CBE, **Schools Commissioner for England**
- Jack Salter MCIPS, Head of Commercial Policy, **Department for Education**
- Tom Clark CBE, Executive Chairman, **Freedom and Autonomy for Schools – National Association (FASNA)**
- David Wooton, Chair, **Independent Academies Association** and Chief Executive, **Emmanuel Schools Foundation**

- Russell Andrews, Director, Technology and Planning, **Education Funding Agency**
- Emma Knights, Chief Executive, **National Governors Association**
- John Atkins, Chief Executive, **Kemnal Academies Trust**

So, whether you are considering conversion, are in the process of converting or already managing an established Academy and want to see its staff and students thrive, make sure that you don't miss this essential day; (<http://www.academiesshow.co.uk/event-at-a-glance/>).

Who could, or would, demur from these worthy socio-educational ideals or fail to be impressed by the 100 or more stalls present to help individual schools better achieve them? And so we mill, mingle and move, IKEA fashion, from stand to stand, occasionally stopping to ask, 'what is it that you provide exactly?' if the logo or the bill boards is not an immediate giveaway to the service on offer, e.g., 'Frog' (an IT company providing 'a powerful learning platform that sits right at the heart of school culture allowing teachers to create engaging and interactive resources that really capture the imagination of their students'). We press on to get into one of the many 'seminars' tents scattered around the perimeter of the large auditoriums to listen to Academy advocates presenting throughout the day (<http://www.academiesshow.co.uk/presentations/>). Is this it, we ponder, the culmination of Prime Ministers Thatcher/Blair project - realisation of the latter's City Technology College/Academy dream, by all Exhibition accounts, certainly here to stay! It is a world of endless procurement opportunities, for those able and willing to embrace Secretary of State Gove's New Lib/Conservative Academy school ideals. Anything, just anything and everything associated with education in what we once more or less unambiguously called the 'state sector' is up for grabs, to be traded, bought and sold, at a price, if you have the pupil intake to generate the capital to acquire it. The subtext is clear, 'freedom' to everyone at a cost, for those with ability to pay.

So, let's look more closely at the 'freedoms' on offer, starting with the free conference bag. It is rather a nice one, suitably cheap and cheerful, flamboyantly announcing the new world of possibility and choice that all good and decent educationalists should want to embrace. On the front:

"Make the Most of Your New Found Freedom"

On the back:

‘Academy Insurance - Zurich Municipal’

Morality and the market, contented bedfellows, providing insured security and freedom - the Blair/Gove project writ large in a logo, emblazoned in the stitches of a carrier bag. Everywhere else too, ‘freedoms’ and a bright new future are thrust to the fore, in advertising, in brochures, in titles of the seminar talks: *‘The Academy Agenda – The Future of Education’*, David Wooton; *‘Make the Most of your Freedoms’*, Paul Tombs (Head of Education, Zurich Municipal); *Making the Most of School Autonomy – Academy Freedoms and Responsibilities*, Bill Watkin, Operational Director, The School Network (Brochure, p. 8). Voices, human and artificial, together echo endorsements of ‘freedoms’ lauded elsewhere in Government policy texts:

‘Freedom’

Academies benefit from greater freedoms to innovate and raise standards. These include:

- freedom from local authority control
- the ability to set their own pay and conditions for staff
- freedoms around the delivery of the curriculum
- the ability to change the lengths of terms and school days’.

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies/b00205692/whatisanacademy>; <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/>

The hall is abuzz with noise and activity, eager faces informing curious bystanders of what their schools need to acquire if they are to enjoy such freedoms and become successful Academies. Some seem increasingly subdued, bewildered by both the magnitude of their ‘need’ and the range of private involvement/investment available to help meet them. It is unfamiliar and unsettling territory. Time to stop to sup the mini taster ice-cream that's been thrust into one’s hand by 3663 (catering solutions) ‘we can supply all your school’s dietary needs’ - and muse on the previous relationships between Governments, LEAS, teachers in schools which historically have defined education in the UK. How quaint, how archaic, how irrelevant, such relationships suddenly seem.

Changing the fabric of Education and Physical Education

Again it is important to note that what we are witnessing here is not just the incidental outsourcing of education and PE to private enterprise, or indeed ‘just’ increasing commercialisation of some of their internal/endogenous activities but the privatisation of the governance, organisation, purposes and practises of education, of its structures, processes and cultures, via the marketisation of just about everything required to make schools work. The Exhibition invokes a new attitude of mind and new relationships to the market, those in which schools and teachers are expected to engage knowledgeably and routinely with private enterprise, adopt its logic, its language, its vocabulary of practice, in order to consume services willingly and wisely, not least those of:

Future Leaders; Impact Teachers; Jobs in Education; ifs School of Finance; Hoge Business Systems; The Institute of Administrative Management; Lloyds TSB; PS Financial; Strictly Education (support services); Thornton Sports (synthetic surfaces); My Eco school; Hand Made Places (indoor and outdoor play spaces)...etc. etc. (Exhibition Brochure)

Here, then, writ large in the 100+ Exhibition stalls, both the depth and reach of market involvement in education, illustration of privatisation practises defining education both *within and of itself*. The range of services that Schools should procure to become Academies announce an effect, i.e., what is needed to either achieve or maintain position and profile in an education market, to ensure ones school’s distinction, to place ‘it’ out and up front:

‘Do it! You can make a difference. Use excellent, proven solicitors. Secure a fixed rate legal fee before you start. Choose your partners wisely to create maximum synergy and complementary skills sets. Stay focused on the children and the benefits it brings to teaching and learning. Build a future for your school that will deliver the long game of excellence.’ (The Primary Academies Trust, Devon, Exhibition Brochure, 2012, p. 15).

What questions might we ask of privatisation as it relates to PE?

Again it is to be noted that involvement of the market in education is not new. Nor is it necessarily all bad. As Estelle Morris (2013) pointed out,

Thirty years ago, "not for profit" would have been assumed to be at the core of a key public service like education – part of its reason for being. Yet, in recent years, there has been enough overlap of the public and private sector in the running and management of state schools for some to claim that schools returning a profit would be a next logical step. The role of the private sector has already been contentious. It's certainly easy to make the case that it has not been a universal success – some school meals services and messy PFI contracts, for example – but the new "mix" ought to be welcomed. There is a wider and more diverse range of service providers, many bringing new ideas as well as experience, as schools increasingly control their own budgets.

However, she goes on, there is

a world of difference between private providers being paid to do a job or deliver a service and being allowed to make a profit. The encouragement of new providers accelerated through the [free schools](#) (and we add, Academies) programme provides a structure in which, for the first time, "for profit" schools are possible. (p. 1)

The language of managerialism and performativity is already well established and endemic *inside* education (Evans, et al, 2008). What's more, elements of education have historically been outsourced to private enterprise either to 'enrich' the curriculum, i.e., additional specialist expertise (e.g., coaches in private, fee paying schools), or 'compensate' for its putative inadequacies (e.g., Youth Sport Trust PE resources for primary schools in the UK), albeit on small scale. Indeed, Buckingham (2009), for example, had reported that schools in the UK have become 'an increasingly important arena for children's encounters with the commercial world. Commercial messages and marketing activities are increasingly evident in schools' (p.13). Raine (2007) revealed that commercial activity is prevalent in primary schools in the North of England and that 85 per cent of the 248 responding schools in a recent study had participated in voucher/token collection schemes. The data further revealed that over 50 per cent of responding schools had also participated in three other types of commercial activities, business-linked competitions/contests, business-linked sports coaching and sponsorship (ibid p. 217). Researchers in Australia and New Zealand (Macdonald, Hay

and Williams, 2008; Pope, 2014) have similarly reported the outsourcing of Physical Education and Health Education to private enterprise, offering confirmation of tendencies of which Richard Tinning (1992) many years ago foretold.

The market, then, has long had a toehold in education, affecting its internal message systems and, potentially, the subjectivities of school children, including attitudes towards diet, physical activity and health. Heightened privatisation may simply further steer and increasingly impact their relations and orientations toward consuming/consumption and ‘the market’ more generally. *But, once again, we emphasise that what **The Academy Show** portends is not just incidental or piecemeal involvement of the market in education but, rather, the marketisation of education in and of itself, its governance, organisation, delivery and purpose* (4). It intends to capture the pedagogic device (Bernstein, 1990), the principles regulating thought and action in and on education, in ways that may have profound implications for the provision, practices and outcomes of PE.

Moreover, it is worth noting that Academy and Free schools in England are being introduced within former locally democratic entities long differentiated by their histories, locations, pupil intakes and resource levels, some advantaged, others disadvantaged. Privatisation is, thus, being plied on uneven terrain, such that one would expect to find diverse attitudes toward its development, again, both in education in general and PE in particular. Advocates (e.g., key speakers at the Academy Show and some head teachers) laud its potential, one Primary head stating:

‘We’ve introduced curriculum changes – a drive on outdoor education, which has impacted upon self-esteem and team building; and more use of technology to allow pupils to drive their own learning, which hopefully will enhance with academies outside the area.’ (Robinswood Primary School, Exhibition booklet, p. 15)

Others, such as Accrington Academy (5), have also clearly benefited from its new status, its excellence and potential recently ‘enriched by a new state of the art 3rd generation synthetic grass pitch’ (‘Soccer Turf’ - an Exhibition exhibitor flier) and attested in their web site publicity, as is their new aquatics centre, along with other sport and PE facilities on a brand new, multimillion pound site. <http://www.accrington-academy.org/>

It is not the purpose here, however, to assess either the merits or otherwise of expansion of faith-connected school control, or new-built schools or facilities for old but, rather, to highlight the implications of privatisation *in* and *of* education for the future of education and PE. To this end we might first consider the complexities of governance they portend, for example, how PE teachers, such as those in the ‘United Learning Trust (ULT) family’ to which Accrington belongs, might register their interests, or access decision making processes perhaps with regard to resources or curriculum across consortia schools. What must be of interest to us, among others, are questions of: how they might identify the locus of authority, influence and control, over their curriculum and budgets; what say might they have over what is to count as PE and the ‘abilities’ they are to nurture in these contexts; what kind of intra and extra ‘family relations’ are to be enjoyed with wider communities of sport and physical activity outside schools; and what status as PE specialists they are to enjoy in such settings. What resources will they access to procure some of the fine assets for example, on display at Academy shows? Youdell (2008, p.17) for example, has argued that in privatised education the nature of labour relations and conditions of employment might alter dramatically:

‘Academies create conditions where performance-related contracts of employment and pay can be introduced; contracts can be made with more flexible personnel without teaching qualification, on lower pay and soft contracts can be brought in: Individualised contracts, performance-related pay, flexible contracts and the mix of qualified and other teaching personnel. These factors come together to differentiate teachers both inside education systems and even inside individual institutions’.

By what performative criteria or measurement standards are PE teachers (or/as privatised peripatetic ‘bought in’ sport coaches/instructors) to be assessed and rewarded in such contexts? How are ‘good’ professional/teachers and ‘good’ pupils to be ‘produced’ (i.e., trained and offered continuing professional development) recognised and defined, by whom, where Academy status, in or out of consortia, prevail? Youdell further points out that markets and competition create ‘economies of student worth’ in which students (like their teachers) are likely to be deemed to be desirable, or not, on the basis of whether they are perceived to be an asset or liability in relation to the performance benchmarks to which institutions must aspire:

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3 'In such local economies of student worth, those students who are seen as having high
4 levels of academic 'ability' (or presumably certain physical or sporting talents) and as
5 being easy to manage and teach are highly valued and sought after by institutions.
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7 Conversely, those students who are perceived as being of lower academic 'ability', or
8 have special needs, or are perceived as presenting behavioural challenges, or who are
9 recent immigrants with additional language needs are avoided'. (loc. cit.).
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14 Again, there is nothing brand new in this. 'Unselective' school systems where intakes are
15 created by catchment area, religious and even linguistic (as, for example, in Wales, where
16 Cardiff would be an excellent example) choice are notoriously prone to differentiation. And
17 within secondary schools there have always been 'markets' for subjects and sporting
18 affiliations, quasi-competition among teachers, parents and students involving ability
19 grouping, subject option availability and team and activity access. That both staffrooms and
20 student bodies have hierarchies of esteem and desirability and micro political under-life has
21 been noted since Waller (1933) described our loss of innocence and Ball (1987) began
22 codifying his voyage into the mundane reality of school organisational work. However, it
23 takes no great stretch of the imagination to see both the potential and the pitfalls in such
24 tendencies for teachers and pupils in PE and their implications more widely for equal
25 opportunity and equity ('freedoms from' and 'freedoms to') agendas when schools overtly
26 compete for pupils and the resource allocations which they represent. In Youdell's (2007)
27 view, judgements of these kind influence pupil/parent access to schools and, as such, they are:
28 'one aspect of social segregation between institutions and the homogenisation of student
29 populations inside them. [...] Where institutions continue to be relatively mixed, the
30 judgement of the value of students in terms of performance indicators continues to influence
31 practices' (p. 17).
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46 So how will institutions sort, select and allocate resources to pupils and students and 'subjects
47 (i.e., PE) in attempts to maximise overall performance and consequent institutional
48 attractiveness? Will physical ability/literacy be seen as a source of human capital beneficial
49 to schools' market/able profile (reflected already in the sports scholarships now being offered
50 in some private – fee paying schools), and if so, of what kind? Will 'the talented and the
51 teachable, and the hopeless, be differentiated and unevenly treated'? (Youdell, loc. cit.). If so,
52 then these processes will, as she and Ball attest, mark a newly sanctioned shift from all
53 students being perceived as 'able' learners to a conception of student and learners defined in
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terms of external performance indicators. Is PE to substitute fitness, weight-loss (sic) and the production of sporting talent for its wider educational endeavours in pursuit of market goals? (see Macdonald, 2014; Pope, 2014). Youdell reminds us that one of the most frequent findings from studies of marketised education systems is that institutions that are deemed most successful in terms of published market information (test scores etc.) have skewed or unrepresentative student populations:

‘As some institutions secure a desired student population and strong position in the market, others become residualised, with an under-supply of students, and an over-representation of those who have been rejected by or selected out of the higher status, higher performing schools, colleges or universities. These circumstances lock such institutions into cycles of poor performance and student and educator attrition. Markets and the demand for institutions to compete against each other have, in many contexts, seen increased outputs at the performance indicator benchmark. But these patterns of overall improvement have masked growing gaps between the most advantaged socio-economic groups and the least advantaged groups as well as between ethnic majorities and particular minority ethnic groups’ (p.17)

Will PE willingly play a role in processes, accentuating the endemic tendency, certainly in England and Wales, to class and ability differentiated entries and output performance in state (now in England to become largely state privatised) schooling?

Conclusion

If nothing more, allusion to the Academy exhibition announces the potential magnitude of market involvement in English education, that profit driven privatisation is well underway and will not go away, neither in England nor elsewhere. Indeed, it is already affecting the ways in which PE teachers (and teacher educators) speak, think, act, and worry about their work (see Macdonald, 2014; Pope, 2014; Evans, 2014). For some, privatisation is compounding longstanding anxieties and concerns over status and position in the school curriculum and the search is on to demonstrate how ‘we’ can demonstrate use value in marketised education so as to meet performative ideals (Montague, 2012). For others, it appears to be something to be embraced as an exciting opportunity for new curriculum content, facilities and modes of delivery, at least to judge by some schools publicity

brochures. Clearly the effects of such measures are a matter for refocused empirical investigation research agendas in Physical Education (Evans and Davies, 2014; Sparkes, 2013). Indeed, like Andrew Sparkes (2013, p. 456) we would suggest that high on our agenda should be consideration of what kind of academic or professional subjectivity is being created in the context of privatisation and neoliberalism. Sparkes has talked of the way in which flexible and opportunistic 'professionals' who can 'deliver' (e.g., success in sport, or lowered BMI levels) are constructed as the ideal type for employment purposes in the neoliberal era with its audit culture and new public management ideology. He attests, it is 'imperative that we better understand neoliberal discourses and practices, how they work, and their effects in, on and through ourselves and others so that their normalising and naturalising features can be interrupted and read as just one of many discourses through which action can be shaped' (ibid).

Privatisation tendencies and new governance do, then, herald profound systemic and personal/professional change invoking new structures and cultures. It constitutes 'a new language, a new set of values, incentives and disciplines and a new set of roles, positions and identities within which what it means to be a teacher, student/learner, or parent, are all changed' (Ball and Youdell, 2008, p.8). In this respect, as Youdell points out, 'the market' is already 'hegemonic', entrenched as 'common sense' in many countries, 'to an extent that further moves to privatise sections of public education are openly argued by policy makers and often seem to achieve widespread support' (2008, p.17). How are PE teachers and professions to respond in this context?

Is there some midpoint between overbearing (and sometimes) inefficient local bureaucracy and deregulation and free market ideals? In the UK, 'local management of schools' entailing removal of schools' local authority control and planning in education, in play now for several decades, followed by current privatisation of education provision, has eroded local democratic agency to the point where it is largely powerless to express a view on, let alone shape, a coherent and equitable system of local education provision responsive to the collective wishes of local communities. How are physical educators (if minimally 'trained' and under resourced) to respond to these changes or consider what are the alternatives if they do not want to subscribe to neoliberal practises or privatisation ideals? What other imaginaries can the profession invoke? Can it, for example, imagine democratised local school systems and PE within them, more hospitable to popular participation than either neoliberal or bureaucratic models provide? What should the balance be between teacher/coach, school autonomy and community and central/local state influence and

accountability? What should and could PE look like on this new terrain and, critically, who should decide these things? (Evans, 2014).

In this emerging context of practice, Physical Education associations or, indeed, increasingly, groups of PE teachers working within and across networks of Academy consortia, along with the research community, will have a profoundly important role to play in identifying the trends and informing the profession and the public about their effects. In an increasingly polyvocal, poly-centred, privatised system where multiple service providers and consortia prevail, spotting the locus of decision making, of influence, and control, and engaging multiple interests, may be nigh impossible. But it is certainly a necessary first step toward retaining some semblance of control over one’s destiny in education and Physical Education.

Postscript

On 21 March 2014 it was reported that 14 academy chains ‘have been barred from running any more schools because of concerns over standards and financial management in the ones they run now.’ (Garner, 2014: 9).

Notes

1. Initially established under New Labour to replace ‘underperforming schools’ with sponsorship from a wide range of sources including successful schools, businesses, universities, charities and faith bodies, Academies now are developing in the UK across the sector, embracing a variety of secondary schools; including those deemed by inspection to be ‘bad’ or failing schools (Garner, 2012, p7). **‘Academies:** Are ‘State schools that are semi-independent of central government. They receive funding directly from Whitehall, outside of local authority control, and have greater freedom over finances, curriculum and teachers' pay and conditions, but are unable to make a profit. In this school year (2013), there are 2,309 academies, including 200 set up under the previous Labour government. The number is expected to reach 5,000 by the end of this Parliament. **Free Schools:** Schools set up by groups of parents, teachers, charities and voluntary non-profit-making groups. Funded in the same way as academies, and based on the charter school system in the US and trust schools in Sweden. As of September 2012, there were 79 free schools in England. Many have been controversial as local councils have little influence over where they are set up, meaning that groups can set them up in areas where there is already full school provision, but create a two-tier system within neighbourhoods. **Independent and private schools:** Run by profit-making organisations; although they fulfil charitable-status rules by offering bursaries to poorer students. Are regulated separately from state schools, and can teach outside the national curriculum’. See <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/secret-memo-shows-michael-goves-plan-for-privatisation-of-academies-8488552.html>
2. According to Lisa Freedman, writing in Prospect, ‘Academies to date owe part of their success to fewer students eligible for free school meals (a measure of poverty) in their intake’ and ‘Astute parents are quick to spot an improving school, edging out the poorest families. Since there is a strong correlation between intake and achievement, results rise, regardless of what academies do. “There is no clear evidence that academies work to produce better results than the kinds of schools they replace,” says Stephen Gorard. “But neither is the evidence as clear as it was that they are... failing

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to do so.” See <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2010/02/in-a-league-of-their-own/> (accessed 11/9/2012).

3. We cannot provide a verifiable breakdown of exhibition participants by gender, class or culture; however, we did note the prevalence of youngish (35- 40 year old) and more ‘elderly’ middle aged white males in the crowd. Subsequent Exhibition brochures cited Academy Business Managers, Head Teachers, Trust School Directors of Finance and School Business Managers as previous attendees of Exhibitions, and from this we might speculate that those present included some already ensconced in Academies and others who aspired soon to be, and in senior management roles.
4. To help us appreciate the complexity of the new educational market place Ball (2012) examples the various hybridities of providers emerging from all of this in the UK, amongst them ‘new kinds of mobile actors, hybrid organizations with compounded or conflicting values and interests’. He cites, *Innovative Schools*, a Charitable Trust, which is interested in running chains of Academies (website). It is headed by Valerie Bragg who is also joint Chief Executive of 3Es, which is an edu business which grew out of Kingshurst CTC [City Technology College] and which now ‘runs’ a federation of 6 schools. According to the NCSL website, Faber Maunsell (a major professional and management services company) is the private sector partner of 3Es. However, more accurately Faber Maunsell owns 3Es which it bought in 2006. Faber Maunsell is, in turn, now a fully integrated subsidiary of AECOM, a US-based multi-national professional and management services company, whose most lucrative contracts are currently with the US Department of Defence, for security and reconstruction work in Iraq. Ball contends that these developments in education policy, which affect the forms and modalities of educational provision and organisation, have out run the current purview of our research agenda and that we need to adapt and adjust what it is we consider as research and political problems in order to catch-up. The implications of privatisation for PE research have been outlined elsewhere (Evans and Davies, 2014).

5. Accrington Academy is sponsored by the [United Learning Trust \(ULT\)](#). ULT was formed in 2002 as a subsidiary of the United Church Schools Trust (UCST) and has been running independent schools in the UK for more than 125 years. ULT is the largest single sponsor of academies in the UK.

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