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Physical education, privatisation and social justice

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Editorial

Physical Education, Privatisation and Social Justice

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Editorial

Physical Education, Privatisation and Social Justice

This special edition sets out to explore the implications across the globe of privatisation of provision of physical education and its variants, such as HPE (Health and Physical Education), HSPE (Health, Sport and Physical Education) and Sport Education in schools and other sectors of education (1). Such privatisation has been represented by some as a tsunami of potentially damaging change driven relentlessly by neoliberal and Third Way ideologies, positively sanctioning transnational company and other business interests (see Ball, 2007; Ball and Youdell, 2008; Hatcher and Jones, 2014; Macpherson, Robertson and Walford, 2014). Such change has been depicted as aimed at breaking public sector dominance in a number of areas of economic activity and social and welfare provision including, for example, in the UK, core services of the Welfare State in education, health, social services, social security (including pensions) and housing. Others, particularly of neoliberal ideological persuasion, have seen it as portending, for example, in education, ‘new freedoms’ for parents and teachers to exercise greater choice and opportunity ‘free’ from overbearing governmental or state, interference and control. Such change has taken different forms in different countries, localities and contexts with widely differing pre-existing balances between private and public provision and degrees of autonomy afforded to established ‘partners’ in State provision, such as religious bodies, always mediated and shaped by national and local politics, economic contingencies and levels of prosperity and austerity. However, we take the common denominator of such change to entail the ‘transfer of assets, management, functions or responsibilities [e.g., relating to education] previously owned or carried out by the State to private actors’ (Coomans and Hallo de Wolf, 2005, <http://www.right-to-education.org/issue-page/privatisation-education>).

Such privatisation can range from ‘total denationalisation’ (zero public ownership) to various degrees of private ownership ‘hybridity’ in the form of joint public-private ventures (see Whitfield, 2000; Ball, 2007; Ball and Youdell, 2008), not all of them new. In education, according to ActionAid International:

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3 'Private actors may include companies, religious institutions or non-governmental
4 organizations. There are many different ways in which privatisation can occur,
5 through for example, the development of public private partnerships. Additionally, the
6 unmonitored and unregulated expansion of private sector provision of education, such
7 as for profit schools or low fee private schools, may have a privatising effect if
8 students have no other choice of school. ([http://www.right-to-education.org/issue-](http://www.right-to-education.org/issue-page/privatisation-education#sthash.RtKm9KyO.dpuf)
9 [page/privatisation-education#sthash.RtKm9KyO.dpuf](http://www.right-to-education.org/issue-page/privatisation-education#sthash.RtKm9KyO.dpuf))
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15 The diverse rationales proposed for privatisation in education across the globe, outlined in
16 some detail by a good many researchers (e.g. Ball and Youdell, 2008; Rizvi and Lingard
17 2010; Macpherson, Robertson and Walford, 2014; Hatcher and Jones, 2014), need not be re-
18 rehearsed here. Even a cursory reading of this literature indicates that privatisation is a
19 complex global phenomenon, best considered as process, often involving multiple players,
20 agencies and networks (see, Macdonald, and Penney, Petrie and Fellows this edition), not
21 simply product (Ball, 2007). Moreover, readers of this journal worldwide will be
22 experiencing their own versions of it whatever their sector or location in formal education,
23 whether primary, secondary, further or higher. However, what is new about its recent
24 manifestation is its sheer scale, scope and penetration into almost all aspects of the education
25 endeavour, from the administrative apparatus to policymaking to both formal provision in
26 education settings and out-of-school activities, such as private tutoring and coaching in sport,
27 leisure and play opportunities (Macpherson, Robertson and Walford, 2014; Stirrup,
28 Duncombe and Sandford, this edition).
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39 In analysing its nature and scale, distinction might usefully be drawn between
40 commercialisation and *privatisation* of education. The former involves adoption of a
41 'business ethic', reflected in, altered language of accountability, outcomes, standards and
42 rewards and transfer or outsourcing of ownership of certain aspects of the curriculum or
43 teaching (for example, in respect of health or sport) to private agencies (see Williams and
44 Macdonald, and Powell this edition). This has been occurring in education systems across the
45 globe for 40 and more years, indicatively in the wake of Reagan (in the USA) and Thatcher
46 and Blair (in the UK) governments. However, what many in education and physical
47 education are witnessing now in schools and the wider education system is not just incidental
48 or piecemeal involvement of private enterprise *in* education (i.e., commercialisation of
49 interest and piecemeal outsourcing of certain aspects of knowledge and teaching) but, rather,
50 marketisation of education in and of itself, in terms of its governance, organisation, delivery
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and purposes. These involve more profound change in relations both endogenous (*within* institutions between teachers, knowledge, and taught) and exogenous (*between* State and private sectors) (Ball and Youdell, 2008). In effect, education itself is ‘being recast as a sector, opened up to profit-making and trade, and to agenda-setting by private, commercial interests’ (Macpherson, Robertson and Walford, 2014, flier p1); and see Powell, Macdonald and Penney, Petrie and Fellows this edition), putatively in the name of ‘new freedoms’ and raising standards (see Evans and Davies, this edition).

But what of the consequences of these processes for Physical Education’s stakeholders - teachers, lecturers, coaches, children, young people, parents and others with interest vested in its character and outcomes? What consequence for its knowledge base, teaching and learning, assessment and other outcomes, including those for civil society itself? It is argued that privatisation entails processes in which learners tend to be conceptualised and treated more narrowly as consumers and education as a consumer good, while teachers become mere ‘brokers’ rather than ‘producers’ of knowledge (see Macdonald, this edition) and parents, also as consumers, are ‘freed’ to take decisions as to what or which is best among multiple learning opportunities for their offspring, from their early years (see Stirrup, Duncombe and Sandford, this edition). Are these processes to be considered progressive, benign, inherently bad, or merely neutral if our accepted goal is achievement of significantly greater levels of equity and inclusion in society and schools? In the UK for example, it is suggested with some passion that privatisation in effect: ‘converts education into a commodity to be purchased and sold in a highly commercialised and competitive market.

These characteristics of privatisation are further augmented by:

- The absence of a national curriculum or forms of assessment that engender wider social outcomes and goals necessary for social cohesion and consistency;
- The effects on the (already parlous) state of the public system, which ends up catering only to students from the most deprived communities;
- The removal of middle-class children in particular from the public schooling system based on the criteria of affordability and ostensible "choice", and their separation from a wider network of social engagements and interactions;

- Deepening social inequality and stratification among the citizenry, whatever the putative "gains" of private education;
- The frequently continued use of public infrastructure and almost invariable reliance on the best publicly trained teachers. There is little or no training of teachers in the private sector and consequently the privatisation of education plays a parasitic role by depending on the public provision of qualified teachers;
- The stimulation of perhaps the greatest outbreak of corruption in the public service, as the empires of many billionaires will attest, through textbook provision, standardised tests, school meals and other outsourcing measures; and
- Most importantly, the engendering of competitiveness and individualism as the overarching values in society' (Vally and Motala, 2013, p.1)

Matching concerns, albeit in very different specific social, economic, cultural and political contexts, are echoed across the globe. In India for example, it is argued that, among many other things (see <http://www.preservearticles.com/201107058868/essay-on-the-privatization-of-education-in-india.html>), the privatization of school education is rapidly churning out children from high income groups into English medium 'public schools' while their poor and lower middle class counterparts continue to go to impoverished State-run schools. In the USA, Hinchey and Cadeiro-Kaplan (2005, p30) argue 'that current "reform" strategies are intentionally driving well-educated professionals from the classroom and that once a teaching shortage has been exacerbated, teaching will be virtually fully deskilled'.

Certainly, among the range of questions we might reasonably ask of privatisation (Macpherson, Robertson and Walford, 2014; Evans and Davies, 2014; Kirk, 2014) is what legitimacy will innovative, radical and inclusive Physical Education (in early years learning, schools and ITE) have in an educational market where social justice is *not* a primary concern? In this light, it is well worth considering the research of Mampae and Zaroni (2014) in Flanders as to how tensions between what they refer to as 'quasi-market' and educational interests, if not effectively managed, potentially damage schools pursuing inclusive ideals. The key point they make is that in educational 'quasi-markets' 'in which education has no price, as it is subsidized, and students are free to choose schools of their preference, ethnically diverse, inclusive schools face a fundamental dilemma' (p.353), such as is

becoming increasingly familiar to practitioners in Physical Education. They demonstrate that, on the one hand:

‘to minimize the attainment gap, teachers and schools need to implement radical individually-and culturally focused pedagogical practices (e.g., multicultural curricula, mono cultural pedagogical practices on ethnic minority students. On the other, precisely their ethnically diverse population and radical pedagogical practices expose them to higher risk of loss of legitimacy in the eyes of powerful stakeholders, such as ethnic majority parents, on which they depend for the acquisition of the resources necessary to implement such practices’ (p. 353).

Such findings might give us pause to consider what legitimacy is likely be given to new, radical and inclusive pedagogies (whether addressing multicultural or other social justice issues) in physical education if privatised education prevails. Mampae and Zanoni point out that ‘legitimacy’ refers essentially to ‘the external stakeholders’ generalized perception of the desirability, propriety or appropriateness of organizational practices’ (Suchman, 2005, p. 575; in Mampaey and Zanoni, 2015, p.354) and illustrate how, in the quasi-market of Flemish schools, in the absence of a market price, ethnic majority parents tend to use socio-demographic composition and pedagogical project as proxies for educational quality. Researchers in the UK, New Zealand, Australia and elsewhere have documented much the same phenomenon, where parents associate students’ ethnic diversity (or social class, on the part of privileged middle class factions amongst them, in the UK) and radical pedagogies with lower quality education and withdraw their support, leaving the school. Maintaining legitimacy for schools and subjects/disciplines within them, in general, and for inclusive schools in particular, is thus vital to the educational wellbeing of all children and society as a whole. Importantly, however, their research also reveals that achieving legitimacy, while difficult, is not impossible through a deft combination of ‘conformity/decoupling and symbolic impression management strategies’ (Mampaey and Zanoni, p. 368).

The challenges facing physical educationalists, researchers and practitioners alike on privatised education terrain are, then, many and varied and, for the most part, the papers in this edition raise critical questions as to their trajectories. They are also collectively forthright in the opinion that further research is both necessary and desirable if we are to at least consider what progressive potential is to be found among new assemblages, relationships and multiple providers of education already present and emerging on privatised terrain. Certainly,

if change is inevitable, we need address how professionals (researchers, teachers, coaches, parents and others) might best respond to it for, whatever our ideological ‘take’ on privatisation, it will not go away. But has it outrun our capacity as researchers to address it? Much of what is occurring, not least by way of proliferation of free schools and academies and outsourcing of health and sport in schools and ITE in the UK, as well as Australia, New Zealand, across Europe and elsewhere, is untried and untested, yet progressing apace without an ‘evidence base’ beyond that provided by its proponents. If such ‘radical’ developments in education policy and governance are, indeed, not only affecting the forms, structures and modalities of educational provision and organisation but have also, to an extent, ‘outrun the current purview of our research agenda’, then, we seriously need to ‘adapt and adjust what it is we consider as research and political problems in order to catch-up’ (Ball, 2011, p.50; Evans and Davies, 2014; Mentor, 2014).

The papers in this edition, in addressing this lacuna, foreground some of the potential outcomes and consequences of privatisation as matters for debate and further research. Albeit modestly, they add to a burgeoning literature in education and sociology more generally exploring emerging forms of the private across the globe (see Ball, 2007; Macpherson, Robertson and Walford, 2014) through case studies of school and Early Years Learning provision of physical activity, Physical Education and Health and Physical Education (HPE) in the UK, New Zealand and Australia. Each case study offers a distinctive view of aspects of privatisation to enable better informed assessment of how different expressions of ‘the private’ in physical education might alter what is at stake, for whom, and with what outcomes and consequences for individuals and societies.

As something of a backdrop to the rest of the papers in the edition, with reference to an ‘Academy Show’ in England (a Government/industry sponsored day exhibition promoting Academy schools and all things necessary to support them) Evans and Davies foreground what might be termed the ‘discursive accompaniment’ to privatisation, a rhetoric of ‘freedom’ and ‘opportunity’ that has rationalised and driven education in the UK, as elsewhere, in recent decades. They also emphasize the magnitude of privatisation changes underway in England, highlighting their capacity to change both the structure and culture of education, potentially altering fundamentally the ways we [are meant to] think about people, particularly policy makers, parents, teachers, pupils and pedagogic, curricular, assessment processes and the relationships between them.

In the next paper, Doune Macdonald documents an emerging educational complexity, reminding us that, “the knowledge industry needs to be, and has become, increasingly heterogeneous in terms of providers and consumers of evidence and knowledge” (Sin, 2008, p. 87). This, in Doune’s view, behoves those involved in educational provision (e.g., policy-making, curriculum writing, teaching) to take a futures-orientation to knowledge production and access, integral to which is consideration of the proper role of teachers in innovation processes. Specifically, she suggests that while there are clearly ‘vested interests’ in the production of HPE materials for Australian schools consistent with neoliberal marketisation of schooling, they nonetheless capture the vibrancy of new ways of teaching and learning that are to be expected from acknowledging changing technologies and resources that are, or should be, central to 21st century schooling. She contends that it is in this sphere that the concept of the teacher as a ‘knowledge broker’ has been generated. Though having some attraction, she advocates great caution toward its embrace, as:

‘to talk of the teacher-as-knowledge-broker is to buy into discourses that position teachers as technicians; functionaries of state-sponsored surveillance systems of teacher and student performance standards and abandon aspirations such as teachers as intellectual or creative workers.’

Thus, she closes expressing ambivalence toward the concept and its uses, calling for urgent discussion on what core knowledge, skills and practices for 21st century health and physical educators might begin to look like and, indeed, how and in what capacity they are to have a say in these things.

Dawn Penney, Kirsten Petrie and Sam Fellows offer further testimony as to the growing complexity of educational provision and its making, highlighting that ‘education and social policy are now being ‘thought’, influenced and done, locally and nationally in many different sites by an increasing number and diverse set of actors and organisations’ (Ball and Junemann, 2012, p.9). Data from their web research reveals an array of government and nongovernmental agencies and organisations now acting as producers of resources and deliverers of HPE related programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand schools and structural convergence between

government and non-government sectors, highlighting some of the prospective curriculum and pedagogic implications of new networks of policy makers and providers.

The papers by Darren Powell, and Ben Williams and Doune Macdonald both attend to specific elements of privatisation reflected in the increasing incidence of ‘outsourcing of health and physical education in primary and secondary schools, the latter having in previously published research raised awareness of the implications of a year-long, collective case study of six Australian secondary schools and their external providers of outsourced HSPE (Health, Sport and Physical Education). They describe how educational value, human resources (e.g., expertise), physical resources (e.g., facilities), and symbolic resources (e.g., status), were reasons for outsourcing commonly cited by principals and specialist HPE teachers, while external providers frequently cited educational value, income generation and promotion/advertising to explain their work. Their findings clearly illustrate the ways in which outsourcing practices in HSPE articulate with, and are implicated in, broader educational privatisations and also highlight the boundaries that outsourcing practices ‘trouble or reinforce, such as those marking the purview of markets, membership of the HPE profession, and the constitution of expertise’. It concludes that ‘If the ethical question, “Ought HSPE be outsourced?” is to be answered in a thoughtful, considered and informed way, rigorous empirical studies and robust theoretical analyses of these boundary processes will be crucial’. Powell’s paper also centres the practice of ‘outsourcing’ Physical Education lessons to external sports organisations, but in two primary schools in New Zealand, as a feature of wider privatisation processes. Using Foucault’s notion of government, he demonstrate how schools’ employment of four outside providers worked to govern teachers towards certain ends. Drawing on the analytical framework of the assemblage he examines how the dual notions of the ‘inexpert’ classroom teacher and the ‘expert’ outside provider converged with the discourse of ‘PE as sport’, neoliberalism, Kiwisport, National Standards, professional development and multi-sector partnerships to form a privatisation assemblage. His analyses clearly show that the latter worked to restrict and constrain teachers’ possible thoughts and actions rather than liberate them, making teachers’ ‘choice’ to outsource PE an almost inescapable practice, rendering such privatisation deeply problematic and not in the best interests of teachers or students. He suggests that further critical examination of the multifarious ways in which teachers’ thoughts, actions and work are imagined and shaped within ‘the privatisation assemblage’ may enable the privatisation of PE to be exposed as anything but inevitable, natural, or ‘perfect’.

The paper by Julie Stirrup, Rebecca Duncombe and Rachel Sandford, brings to the fore social class and cultural dimensions of privatisation. Their research offers salutary reminder that the processes documented in the entire special edition papers need to be located in wider cultures and social structures, many featuring enduring social hierarchies and inequities. All are contexts in which parent are not equally well resourced (e.g., with time, money, knowledge) to equip their offspring with the physical and social capital needed to address the relentless demands of a ‘risk society’ or take advantage of, access and enjoy, ‘success’ in newly privatized education systems. Historically, inequality and social differentiation starts very early in the UK and clearly is consolidated in Early Years Learning. Parents do not have equal opportunity or financial wherewithal to take advantage of new and burgeoning opportunities for physical activity and ‘play’ provided by private enterprise outside pre-school settings. Such opportunities are intended to resource children with knowledge and skills that enrich and advantage them, setting them apart from their peers once inside schools, and distinctively so.

Finally, as discussant, Michael Gard provides searching and critical reflection on the content of the papers in this edition, not as closure to research and debate, but as further stimulus for both.

Centred in only few countries the case studies presented in this edition are inevitably limited in both scope and focus, though the politics and processes described may hopefully resonate with the experiences of practitioners elsewhere. If nothing more, they may stimulate further discussion as to the opportunities and constraints presented by what are widely regarded as unavoidable and pressing privatisation agendas. Together they identify important questions about what privatisation might mean not only for conceptualisations of physical, health and sport education, and the nature of learning and teaching *within* these curricula, but also for education as a distinctive site and means for emancipation, inclusion and social justice. These questions reach out for urgent further analyses not least of changing contractual relationships between teachers/lecturers/coaches/health educators and employers and between parents, teachers and taught; of the aims and purposes of education, physical education and health education; and of the roles of teachers/practitioners and researchers in documenting and dealing with these processes. Fundamentally, they bring to the fore (if not directly then indirectly) issues of ideology, class and culture, of resource and opportunity, authority, power and control. Now more than ever we need research capable of addressing these things,

documenting how privatisation not only implicates distributions of opportunity, access and control but also in its constitutive processes assemble and/or reassemble individual and collective (class and cultural) subjectivities. Needless to say, addressing these issues will require research both with policy makers and practitioners, and for them, and in forms certainly more varied than those favoured, sponsored and controlled by central Governments (see Mentor 2014).

Notes

1. Versions of the papers of this edition were first presented within a Health and Physical Education Special Interest Group symposium at the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) Conference, December, 1-5th Adelaide, 2013.

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