"It's Groundhog Day": Foucault's governmentality and crisis discourses in physical education

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Abstract

Dominant discourses in physical education research center on subject wide crisis. This is despite repeated calls to address enduring concerns about how physical education is taught. In short, the subject seems caught in Groundhog Day (defined by Oxford Dictionaries (n.d.) as "a situation in which a series of unwelcome or tedious events appear to be recurring in exactly the same way"). This paper scrutinizes this position through Foucault's lens of governmentality, which focuses particularly on power/knowledge relations and their relationship to subjectivity. Through this lens research functions as a shaper of contemporary understanding, and becomes a means for intervention by 'experts'. The paper is structured as a conversation between authors about dominant discourses in physical education research and issues of governmentality. It argues that research approaches such as action research are framed within other power/knowledge relations and may provide a way to wake up on a new day.

Keywords: Physical education research, Crisis discourse, Foucault; Governmentality, Action Research,

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Introduction

For decades, physical education has been portrayed as a school subject in or close to a state of crisis. Its vulnerability is expressed in many countries both in terms of reduced resources and teaching time, questions regarding the quality of the teaching, and what expectations it can live up to (Bailey et al., 2009; Hoffman, 1987; Marshall & Hardman, 2000; Siedentop, 2012; Tinning & Fitzclarence, 2012). In short, the future of physical education is far from assured (Kirk, 2010; Tinning, 2012).

In considering physical education's future there are a number of problematic issues that recur over decades, for example uncertainties regarding the subject's educational value (cf. Arnold, 1991; Hirst, 1974; Kirk, 2010), and gender and other social inequalities, (cf. Azzarito, Solmon, & Harrison, 2012; Hall, 1979; Scraton, 1992). Research articulates the same, or similar, messages year-on-year, namely, that not much has changed in the practice of physical education over the last few decades (Green, 2016; Kirk, 2010). If this is true; if physical education is largely the same today – with the same kinds of problems – as it was decades ago, then it begs the question: why? Arguably, we need to know more about the overarching influence (or lack of it) that research has on practice. Do researchers expect to simply change physical education by writing about the same issues for decades? Or do we need to approach the problem from other angles? What are the dangers if research simply continues to explore the same problems over and over again?

In this article, we suggest that the danger is related to the research on physical education rather than to physical education *per se*. At a time where policy-makers and curriculum developers do not read research and "teachers rarely take a scholarly approach to their work" (Bailey & Kirk, 2009, p. 4) there is a very real risk that research will continue to become increasingly irrelevant, and will fail to support development in and of the subject. We tentatively suggest that

practitioner research approaches such as action research[1] might be one way of changing the situation (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Casey, Dyson, & Campbell, 2009). We are not suggesting that action research is a new approach in physical education research. After all, Kirk (1986), Almond (1987) and Tinning (1992) were all early advocates of action research in physical education. Despite this advocacy, however, action research has made little impact, to date, in the field of research on teaching in physical education (Casey et al. 2018; Rossi and Tan 2012). What it has done, however, is show the importance of teachers doing research; especially when we consider that action research performed by teachers, or at least initiated and driven by teachers, places decisions about the course of action with teachers rather than researchers. We do not suggest either that action research will allow us to tell 'real truths' about physical education, the truths that will, at last, spearhead future development. Rather, we suggest that action research by teachers could be more appropriate to contemporary governance which seems to be "intrinsically linked to developments in knowledge and to the powers of expertise" (Rose and Miller, 2010). This is not to say that expertise is harmful *per se*, just that it may strengthen the profession if the expertise is not only external to the profession, but also internal.

The purpose of this article is to problematize the relationship between research/researchers and practice/teachers of physical education, and position action research as a possible, although not unproblematic, way to contribute to the development of the subject. This exploration will be conducted with due consideration of what Foucault (1991) called governmentality, i.e., the linking together of modes of governance and forms of knowing which collectively make citizens (or a particular group of citizens) governable (Dean, 1999). Foucault (1991) argued that different approaches to research are not only about different ideas about how to gain new – and useful – knowledge, but also about governance. In this case, we are interested

[1] Drawing on the work of Henry and Kemmis (1985), Casey, Fletcher, Schaefer and Gleddie (2018) argued that action research is undertaken by a person (or persons) in their own context to improve their practice, their understanding of their practice and their understanding of the location in which they practice.

in how different forms of knowing physical education (i.e. through action research) relate to different modes of governing – or developing – physical education practice. As will be argued later in this article, a recent emphasis has been placed on developing 'physical education teachers as researchers' in Sweden. This indicates a national belief that teachers find subject specific development based on research more appealing when they are *themselves* involved as researchers. The question that remains however, is what are the costs for those teachers who have participated in such research?

Approach

Authorship through conversation.

The paper emerged from an extended conversation between the two authors: a conversation that stretched over several months in the autumn and winter of 2015. Håkan was granted an academic sabbatical for this semester at Ash's institution and consequently we found ourselves working on the same corridor, in the same institution for an extended period. During this time, our conversations turned increasingly to 'the state of the nation', and a problematizing of the place of research in informing practice resulted. We both approached the conversation from different backgrounds and perspectives – academically, culturally, practically, and yet increasingly found ourselves addressing the same problem albeit from related, if somewhat adjacent, perspectives.

In many ways, the development of this paper is unconventional: perhaps this unconventionality has allowed us to see the milieu of research in physical education afresh. It does not adhere to any theory or model of good practice when it comes to conducting a review of the field. In fact, it is very much the child of chance and circumstance. That said, it has allowed us to see our field from the shoulders of others who have written about physical education. For this, we are grateful. While we have presented the idea and notion of the paper as a somewhat contrived (and edited and reedited) conversation between the two of us it does represent the processes that occurred as we developed the paper.

Literature Sources.

In 2012, Routledge published a four-volume book, *Major Themes in Education: Physical Education*, edited by David Kirk (2012). Kirk (personal communication, April 18, 2012) recalled that the aim of this monograph, which collected 95 of the most significant papers in the field of physical education research, was to gather together seminal papers in physical education and provide a resource for libraries to acquire in lieu of expensive journal subscriptions. Kirk also noted that, as editor, he had sent invitations to academics across the world seeking nominations for papers for the book. The papers in the monograph, therefore, were those nominated by 30 distinguished researchers within the field of Physical Education and Sport pedagogy and should be considered as representative of a global perspective of the field. At the time of our initial discussions, the book retailed at more than $1000 and Ash joked to David that no one would buy it. To offset this, he obtained a copy and undertook to blog about each of the 95 papers in turn.

Between January 2013 and December 2014 (approximately 100 weeks) Ash read the papers and then wrote 95 blogs exploring and summarizing each paper in turn (see www.peprn.com). Towards the end of this period Ash was invited to keynote at a conference for teachers in the USA and chose the concept of Groundhog Day – having watched the film of the same name on many occasions - as a vehicle to best represent the argument that "the audience of such literature is typically other academics in the discourse community and not the teachers and students who are meant to be empowered and emancipated" (Tinning, 2017, p. 290). Groundhog Day is defined by Oxford Dictionaries as "a situation in which a series of unwelcome or tedious events appear to be recurring in exactly the same way" (Groundhog Day, n.d). For the purpose of this paper, those unwelcomed or tedious events are the problematic issues reported in the physical education literature that appear to recur again and again over time.

Blogs Analyzed.

In preparing his keynote Ash analyzed the content of each of the 95 blogs. There were four main steps in the analysis. First, all blogs entries were uploaded into the NVivo Software program. Second, given the preexistence of a general concept (Groundhog Day) that was guiding the inquiry (LaBoskey, 2004) an *a posteriori* approach informed the analysis, that is, the search for recurring problems represented in the construct of Groundhog Day. Consequently, in the third step Ash used the analyze function in NVivo to code the blogs into nodes. Last, Ash identified examples of text/codes that he both found meaningful, insightful, or that highlighted a potential aspect of the Groundhog Day construct. In carrying out this step, Ash sought to identify and express tentative themes he felt would resonate with the conference delegates, who might therefore be able to add to the trustworthiness of his claims and interpretations based on their own experiences (LaBoskey, 2004). The initial analysis revealed six themes which are introduced in the conversation that follows this section.

The arrival of Håkan prompted Ash to share his ideas and concerns about the premise of Groundhog Day and the impact of research on practice. What followed in our interactions at the university was an extended conversation about Groundhog Day, the outcome of which was our decision to ask a contrary question i.e. is it researchers and not teachers who keep waking up on Groundhog Day? We were (and still are) fascinated and troubled by the apparent lack of progress in our subject area and felt a need to ask why little has apparently changed in the last five decades or more (Kirk, 2010; Tinning 2010). Whilst the main purpose of the paper is to problematize the alleged contemporary crisis of physical education, we also seek to open our conversation to peer-review and scrutiny, and challenge the field to think carefully about the bodies of research we pursue. In the remainder of the paper, we employ the conversation style that is the mainstay of this work.

The Keynote

Ash: I started writing the blogs about the papers in Kirk's (2012) edited book because I wanted to help teachers access research. When I was invited to keynote at the National PE Institute in

the USA I decided that I wanted to bring the ideas in the blog together and challenge the audience to change the way physical education was occurring in their classrooms. To this end, I revisited the blogs, and concluded that physical education research kept finding and reporting the same problems with practice over and over again – like in the movie Groundhog Day.

Håkan: I know that movie, but what do you mean by the analogy?

Ash: Groundhog Day is a traditional holiday celebrated in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania on 2nd February. It is suggested that should the groundhog (Punxsutawney Phil) emerge from his burrow and see a shadow, then he is said to predict six more weeks of winter. In the movie *Groundhog Day*, Phil Connors (played by Bill Murray) is in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania reporting on Groundhog Day. This is Connor's fourth Groundhog Day and he makes no effort to hide his frustration at reporting on what he sees as a meaningless event. On waking the "next day" he learns that it is Groundhog Day again, and again, and again. Initially he takes advantage of the chance to relive the same day but quickly comes to realize that he is doomed to spend eternity reliving the exact same day.

I wondered if, despite a whole body of research in physical education, we are doomed to spend eternity in the same place? Is there anything we can do to make a difference or improve the field? I remember listening to Richard Tinning, as a discussant at a major conference, asking a doctoral student (and his supervisor and the audience) why he had undertaken his study because we have known the answer he was giving for 30 years. This seemed the same with the papers I was reading. We keep researching the same "stuff" and therefore does anything, or can anything, actually help us wake up on a different day?

Håkan: I don't fully agree with your argument that we are in the same place as we were 50 years ago. After all, new perspectives and methodologies have been introduced in research. Nonetheless, maybe this is similar to what Phil Connors is experiencing in Groundhog Day. What I mean is that whatever he or you or I do, we all keep waking up on the same day. Regardless, to me, what Tinning said reflects talk about the "crisis" of contemporary physical

education (Bailey et al., 2009; Hoffman, 1987; Marshall & Hardman, 2000; Siedentop, 2012; Tinning & Fitzclarence, 2012) and the need for "radical reform" (Kirk, 2010). That aside, how did the teachers respond to your account?

Ash: I think I challenged many, surprised many and got a lot of them thinking. However, I also think I turned a few off; more than a few I'm sure. I'm not convinced that some of them saw the problems as I saw them – at least not the different themes I discussed. I presented the subject in stasis, crisis even, and argued that physical education kept facing the same six problems and yet perhaps they [the teachers] didn't see this as a problem.

Håkan: So, what you mean is that research suggests that physical education is stuck in its own Groundhog Day.

Ash: Yes.

Håkan: Why did you position it that way around? I would argue that since society – including child and youth sport and youth culture more broadly – has changed, then arguably physical education practice has also changed, to some extent at least. Couldn't we equally argue that it is researchers who are waking up on Groundhog Day? If, as Tinning suggested, we know the answers then are we doomed to write about the same things for eternity? That's the crux of the matter, isn't it?

Ash: Perhaps. This conundrum seems to be at the heart of the alleged crisis of physical education.

Håkan: In order for researchers to wake up on another day, I think that another research agenda is necessary; an agenda that radically changes the relationship between research and practice, between researcher and practitioner.

Ash: I agree. In my experience action research, particularly when teachers are in charge of the research, can contribute to change the relationship between researcher and practitioner.

The Themes

Ash: In preparing the keynote, and in keynoting itself, I used my analysis of the 95 peer-reviewed papers to present physical education as a *traditional subject* that was habitually *in crisis* because of: (1) *the perceived state of the subject*, (2) *taken for granted truths*, (3) *girls and non-sporty boys*, (4) *measuring not practicing*, and (5) *the hidden curriculum*.

Håkan: Hearing this, I think about Stephen Thorpe's paper (2003) "Crisis Discourse in Physical Education and the Laugh of Michel Foucault." Here, Thorpe problematizes all the "crisis talk" in physical education with the "help" of Foucault's concept governmentality. In short, Thorpe maintains that crisis talk "functions as an important shaper of contemporary understandings of physical education, and in this sense crisis talk becomes a means for intervention by 'experts'" (p. 131).

Ash: But whose contemporary understanding was Thorpe writing about? Experts? Teachers? Physical education as a school- or university-based subject?

Håkan: Thorpe wrote first and foremost about research, and how research relates to governance. In a way, research – and researchers – align with particular political initiatives for change. Crisis talk in research can be seen as a way of drawing teachers', and others', attention to a perceived need for change.

Ash: So, as researchers, are we guilty of finding and propagating crisis (Kirk, 2006; Thorpe, 2003; Tinning, 2012, 2014)? Based on my analysis of the blogs and their related papers, I suggested that research presents physical education as a traditional subject that is strongly biased towards the development of high quality motor skills (Ennis, 2012; Rovegno, Nevett, Brock, & Babiarz, 2012), in games (Fairclough, Stratton, & Baldwin, 2012), and sport and leisure (Williams, 2012). Legitimate participation in physical education is defined by fixed notions of "ability" and "skill" (Kirk & Macdonald, 2012) and teachers control (i) what counts as knowledge, (ii) student behavior, and (iii) the pace of lessons or learning (Wright, 2012). Finally, girls and boys are directed towards gender appropriate sports and activities (Fairclough et al., 2012).

Despite the representation of physical education as a subject in control (of content, success, activity etc.) the subject is shown, in a huge body of research across many decades, to be *in crisis*: one that is in danger of extinction (Kirk, 2010). Kirk (2012,), among others (see for example Arnold, 2012; Morgan, 2012), argued that "long lists of the benefits of physical education continue to be trotted out, with little or no evidence to support them" (p. 3). Such lists sustain belief in a number of *taken for granted truths*, for example, that doing team sports is an inherently good thing, and that doing physical education develops social and moral character. Further, physical education is purported to help children develop physical competence and confidence, and develop a positive attitude towards physical activity which, in turn in, helps them make informed choices about their own participation (Smith & Parr, 2012).

Håkan: Wow, that is some heavy critique. Do you mean that this pertains to all physical education programs?

Ash: Well, I did not (or would not) suggest that all school physical education matches the assertions above. Indeed, in the keynote I echoed Ennis's (1999,) argument that "it would be unfair, however, to say that it is impossible to teach effectively using a multi-activity sport approach. Highly competent, motivated, and energetic male and female physical education teachers have used it successfully in the United States for over 50 years" (p. 32).

I did suggest, however, that the children catered for in most traditional curriculum are the most able boys (in terms of skill and mastery) and that *girls and non-sporty boys* are not always able to participate equitably in most curricula (Ennis, 2012). In fact, many authors argued that while able boys can participate in games that celebrate speed and power (Vertinsky, 2012), girls (and as I argued non-sporty boys) are positioned as "needy", as lacking and as being weaker (Wright, 2012).

In other papers, it was argued that physical education has become strangely disembodied and that movement itself has been marginalized in our efforts to *measure and not practice movement* (Anderson, 2012; Maivorsdotter & Lundvall, 2012). Some argued that we spend too much time

focusing on kinesiology and have neglected the pedagogical knowledge teachers need to teach (Siedentop, 2012). The final theme, *the hidden curriculum*, argued that despite the efforts of teachers, children do not learn what teachers plan (Dodds, 2012). In contrast, many undesirables, such as homophobic and sexist bullying, name calling, disparagement of ability and/or gender, and competent bystanding (Tousignant & Siedentop, 1983) are accepted or ignored (Dodds, 2012). Lessons don't have a single meaning (Gore, 2012) and different curricula impact on what is actually "seen" in lessons and in schools. The explicit (publically stated in the syllabus), the covert (based on expectations around behavior and performance), the null (what is not taught and therefore cannot be learned) and the hidden curricula (the unexamined patterns and routines, for example registers, tests, picking teams) all combine to create the functional curriculum (Dodds, 2012).

Håkan: This is fascinating. I'm curious why it's called a "hidden" curriculum. Surely the notion of "hidden" means hidden from the teachers, because students seem to have no difficulty discovering it? I think that it's termed hidden because while teachers don't know what their students (and researchers) allegedly already know about their subject they should want to know. In short, it is their responsibility to know. In this way we might better position the hidden curriculum as the overarching theme of this paper (and your keynote). In this sense, the other themes are parts of what is taken to be hidden from the teachers, and this is why teachers remain "deficit" and in need of researcher "enlightenment."

Ash: The subtitle of the keynote was "being the change and changing our being" and I guess my challenge to the audience was to be change agents and help physical education wake up on a different day. They had as teachers, after all, been waking up on Groundhog Day again, and again, and again. At least, as I posited, based on the research. One of the things that stood out for me in this whole experience was the surprise shown by the audience. Some were applauding, others were embroiled in their own conversations. I guess I just got a sense of that nobody had quite laid it all out to them as I did. I guess the surprise could equally have been around issues of

ambiguity and presentation in my keynote or the functional decisions I made about what to include and what to exclude.

Håkan: There may be other reasons for why your audience responded as they did. More generally, research discourse is problem-oriented to a greater extent than everyday discourse and teachers may interpret problematization, namely, researchers' tendency to ruminate over certain issues or ask a lot of questions, as a way of suggesting that there is a problem, or that all is not the way it ought to be. Further, physical education teachers are probably more accustomed to positivistic discourses, which dominate the physical education teacher education content in physiology, biomechanics, motor control and public health, as well as competitive sports, all of which are frequently recurring in physical education teacher education (cf. Kirk, 1992; Larsson, Linnér & Schenker, 2016; Tinning, 2010), which highlights expert knowledge and is based on a strong division between researcher and researched; in this case teachers and teaching. In addition, science discourses designate a quest for certainty rather than the ambiguities and contingencies that underpin much educational discourse (Kelly, Hickey and Tinning, 2000). Thus, teachers may expect researchers to act as experts who, incisively, can tell "how it is" and "what to do," rather than being critical friends who repeatedly call for critical reflections. In short, the surprise noted in your account could be seen as a reflection of how teachers, more generally, have other expectations on the role of research and researchers.

Ash: So, are you saying I'm the expert here? Someone who should tell them what's wrong and provide a solution? Isn't that a little arrogant? Kirk and Macdonald (2001) argued that teachers are the experts at the point of implementation, while others have argued that top down curriculum change doesn't work (Apple, 2004).

Håkan: I guess it could be seen as arrogant, but it still may be what teachers expect. As well as telling them the problem, teachers may also expect some solutions. However, you wanted them to see problems, and find solutions. This takes me back to Thorpe's (2003) paper.

Ash: How? Why did Thorpe argue that Foucault would be laughing?

Foucault's Governmentality

Håkan: Arguably, Foucault would be laughing because you were so undecided. Fundamentally while you didn't want to provide the teachers with solutions because you feared they might have found that arrogant, that might have been precisely what they expected from you. This takes me back to the concept of governmentality. Foucault was interested in how knowledge, or knowledge production (or truth production) related to governance. The concept governmentality, which is a play with words, designates his attempt to illustrate the interdependence between knowledge and governance; both in the sense that knowledge production is dependent of governance, and that governance relies on knowledge about the nature of what is to be governed. Foucault did not himself touch upon physical education, but governmentality is not necessarily linked to any particular social setting. In Foucault's (1991, p. 220) own words, governmentality designates:

> The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and its essential technical means apparatuses of society.
>
> The tendency that, over a long period, and throughout the West, has steadily lead toward the preeminence over all other forms (sovereignty, discipline, and so on) of this type of power - which may be termed "government" resulting, on the one hand, in the formation of a whole series of specific governmental apparatuses, and, on the other, in the development of a whole complex of knowledges [saviors].

Ash: Okay, but what does the linking together of modes of governance and forms of knowing mean in a physical education context?

Håkan: Well, scientific knowledge is generally expected to serve society and its citizens, and therefore a favorable attitude towards the power of scientific knowledge "ensures" that the citizens perceive that their government acts in their interests. That said, such knowledge needs to

be "objective" in the sense that it isn't "political." This is what affords it legitimacy. In a physical education context – as is the case in any educational context – this means that researchers and teachers need to be strictly separated; lest the results of research be discredited for being biased. However, the social separation between researchers and teachers, with the subsequent distinction between research and practice, could be the very reason why teachers find research results useless or incomprehensible: because the research lacks the teacher perspective and vice versa.

Different modes of governance both rely on and promote certain forms of knowing. Forms of knowing are the explicit and implicit things that we "know," or take for granted, when we orientate ourselves and then act in the social world. Modes of governance are different ways of governing people. Brute force is, of course, one mode of governance, but not a mode that interested Foucault, since brute force is an influence by a subject upon an object. The mode of governance that interested Foucault (1982) was the relationship between free subjects, and how their actions influence others' actions and have power effects, that is, how they shape our perception of reality.

Ash: Can you paraphrase that? What does this mode of governance mean for physical education as an ensemble of teachers, researchers, policies and historical practices?

Håkan: It's really interesting to see what forms of knowing support the attempts to govern physical education, and how this knowledge relates to teachers and their work. For instance, most teachers seem to find it easy to relate to scientific approaches, while approaches like critical pedagogy seem to be more difficult for them to "handle."

Ash: So, on the one hand we're saying that teachers are used to being governed by top down initiatives based on objective scientific knowledge, while on the other hand much social and educational research language is more subjective. In other words, we want to guide them and they want to be told?

Håkan: Sort of. From a positivist perspective (as you would find in science) then such objective knowledge is sought for and should then be "applied" in practice. From an interpretivist

perspective (such as action research), such "objective" knowledge is hard to achieve, and even if finding it were possible it may well be too decontextualized to serve as guidelines for action by others. As early as the 1950s, chemist and philosopher Michael Polanyi (1998/1958) pointed out that "[t]heories of the scientific method which try to explain the establishment of scientific truth by any purely objective formal procedure are doomed to failure" (p. 135). To Polanyi, "scientific passion," which is a subjective element, is necessary for any *meaningful* scientific discovery.

Ash: Can you contextualize this within educational research?

Håkan: For instance, Tinning and Kirk (1991) pointed out that a science-based experimental approach to pedagogical issues within complex social settings, such as schools, is limited. It may well be that the rigorous procedures for producing valid, objective and generalizable knowledge embrace just a marginal part of the "big picture" of life in classrooms, otherwise it wouldn't be possible to measure accurately. Consequently, it may prove difficult for teachers to act upon; after all they experience all the complexity.

Ash: On the other hand, from the point of view of scientific knowledge, knowledge that is produced through action research is too subjective and as such isn't well placed to legitimately serve as guidelines for future action. Ok … but before discussing alternative discourses around knowledge, such as action research, I think we need to link the themes, which were *a traditional subject in crisis* because of: (1) *the perceived state of the subject*, (2) *taken for granted truths*, (3) *girls and non-sporty boys*, (4) *measuring not practicing*, and (5) *the hidden curriculum*) to governmentality.

Unpacking the themes around governmentality.

Håkan: I feel that it's useful to position the different stakeholders or actors, that is you - the researcher, and the audience - the teachers. On one hand, teachers are indeed experts in their own area and can quite possibly silence you, or ignore your research, if you fail to engage with their perspectives. On the other hand, if they take you seriously – if you grab their attention, according to a traditional relationship between researchers and teachers, then they might feel a weight of expectation to listen to the expert researcher and subsequently apply the new

knowledge themselves, as experts in the "local contexts of implementation" (Kirk & Macdonald, 2001, p. 558).

Despite your best intentions I would argue that your keynote challenged the audience to acknowledge: that teaching and the content of physical education is possibly anachronistic and in need of change if it is to meet what is taken to be the needs and interests of present-day children; that it is sometimes problematic simply to tell students to be, for example, healthy and active; and that it is not enough to appeal to the students' reason, you have to provide a meaningful, that is embodied, subject where practising negotiated capabilities is essential, rather than reckless measuring which may be experienced as a "turn-off" by students. This was, as it were, the implicit message of your keynote. Perhaps another implicit message was that teachers generally, and perhaps your audience specifically, need to challenge the traditional subject, the subject in crisis, with its enduring taken for granted truths. They need to see that traditional physical education doesn't benefit or support girls and non-sporty boys. Why? Because they measure rather than practice skills and learn how to succeed through the overarching hidden curriculum. However, I think that most educational researchers prefer, much like you did, just to present the analysis and refrain from proposing too much change. The change is the teachers' responsibilitity.

Ash: So my keynote should have prompted the teachers to find their own solutions?

Håkan: Yes, if they were disciplined in line with the forms of knowing that your research is based on, which could be called practitioner research. You can emancipate the teachers by making suggestions about how to teach, or encourage them to emancipate themselves, which is the role of the critical friend.

Ash: Are they free to maintain the *status quo*?

Håkan: Of course, but what is "free?" Foucault (1984, p. 245) maintained that freedom is not a property that can be possessed. Rather, freedom is a practice; freedom is exercised. Hence, they

are free to maintain the status quo as a deliberate exercise of freedom. You can hardly maintain that they are "free" to maintain status quo because of an ignorance of the alleged state of affairs.

Ash: So they are free even after they have now been told that researchers keep telling teachers that they're waking up on the same day again and again and again?

Håkan: Ironically, if they agree with your analysis, or at least if they acknowledge it, they were perhaps freer before they were told that they were caught in physical education's version of Groundhog Day. Now, they are almost obliged to emancipate themselves from that situation.

Ash: But haven't we returned to my starting point? In other words, teachers haven't always listened to what researchers say and therefore our job is to keep telling them the same story, year-on-year, until they "wake up" on a different day.

Håkan: Perhaps. Researchers are, at least to some extent, frustrated by the notion that teachers don't engage much with research and that whole bodies of academic work fall on deaf ears. Then, when they do appear to listen, they don't see themselves as agents of change, but rather as receivers of answers. They are not disciplined as free subjects, which is to say as knowledge producers and change agents. This could be why they meet critical research with surprise and skepticism: "All these questions and no answers?!" I think there's something missing. A link between critical research and critical practice is needed. Some means for teachers to take the objective and make it subjective (and vice versa) is required. For me one link might be action research. I feel it can be seen as a way of inviting teachers to research in new ways, thus disciplining them such that they will experience autonomy as knowledge producers, self-improvers and change agents. You've been involved in action research. What was it that you found appealing with that approach?

Action research.

Ash: When I first started exploring the gaps between theory and practice that seemed to exist in the literature I was drawn towards action research. Action research was perhaps best explained to me as a cyclical process of creating an overall plan and then thinking, planning, acting and

rethinking on each stage of implementation. This cyclical process would, more often than not, then lead to changes or tweaks in the overall plan. As a teacher I wanted to better understand the gaps that I was seeing and felt that I could position myself differently and be a bridge between the two. What I discovered, however, was that I did not, or perhaps could not, occupy both spaces and, in aiming for what Carr and Kemmis (1986) termed praxis, I ended up in a borderland between them both.

Håkan: What you say about ending up in a borderland between research and practice is interesting. I don't think that the field is governmentalized in a way that "fits" action research.

Ash: What do you mean?

Håkan: Action research doesn't seem to be entirely appropriate to the modes of governance that are presently exerted on teachers, and possibly not on researchers either. The teachers are, in the main, expected to "apply" scientific knowledge, or "evidence" in some sense, not to scrutinize their own practice in the way that is intended within action research. Correspondingly, researchers are, to a great extent, expected to produce valid knowledge about "best practice."

Ash: So teachers are traditionally positioned as the passive receivers of scientific knowledge and evidence about best practice which they are then expected to implement? This, in turn, positions researchers as expert problem finders but not solution providers.

Håkan: In my understanding action research is appropriate if you want to increase teacher autonomy. That is to say, if we want teachers to be both problem finders and solution providers. But what is teacher autonomy? Seen through the lens of governmentality, increasing teacher autonomy by getting them involved in research can hardly lead to unconditioned autonomy. Action research, as compared with other intervention studies, like the Random Control Trial (RCT) studies, links to other modes of governance, where teachers are expected to transform "from within," and this transformation is hardly unconditioned. I have some examples that illustrate this.

For a number of years, I've been working with physical education teachers who attend a graduate school alongside their work as teachers. Initially, they opposed what research had to say about the state and status of physical education.

Ash: Did this change over time?

Håkan: At first, the teachers were a bit annoyed and maintained that we (the researchers who were responsible for the graduate school) were overly critical about physical education, but gradually they were disciplined much in line with what the research had to say.

Ash: And what you as researchers had to say?

Håkan: Of course. It's difficult to say, but from what I've asked them, even though they were initially doubtful about the research, in hindsight no one felt that the research was forced on them. Gradually they came to embrace the perspective of the research. This is how governmentality usually works! This is, perhaps, the price the teachers paid for participating in action research. Action research did not so much liberate them from the educational research paradigm. Instead, it seems to have facilitated a strong feeling that their autonomy as teachers had increased. Now they felt that they could act upon many of the things that educational research previously have highlighted as concerns in their practice, but to which they did not know how to respond. They all wrote very interesting theses, but from my point of view, maybe the most interesting things were said in the prefaces to their respective theses. Here, they articulated some aspects of what it means to undergo graduate education, or, if you don't mind me saying, be disciplined in line with the enjoined form of governmentality. This discipline includes a kind of critical reflection over their own practice that it is necessary to master if critical research is to support changing the practice. As an example, this is what "Mary" and "Gary" wrote respectively:

> Looking back at my many years of teaching experience, I have realized that I was organizing effective lessons with a variety of exercises with high physical activity levels. Nowadays, there is a greater focus on learning and knowing, and consequently on what

> teachers need to know in order to be able to teach and assess it. […] To teach the ability to orientate oneself with the help of a map is in my experience difficult – students do not always see the relationships between the nature and the map. Why is this, then, when they have participated in varying exercises based on different difficulty levels? Could it be because the teaching is not explicitly planned to give students the opportunity to learn? Or do they not have enough time to learn? Have I really focused enough on what the students are to learn, and what they need to experience, through participating at the lessons, in order to learn it? (Mary)
>
> To move from being a teacher to being a teacher researcher is a step that goes through postgraduate training, including courses, writing and participating in seminars. But above all, it means a questioning of what one has previously taken for granted. What I used to be sure of is no longer that obvious and my new experiences have both widened and specified my knowledge. From that perspective, my research project resulted in personal development which I hope can contribute to better and more research-related education for my students. (Gary)

Ash: Do you mean that skepticism is the key to knowledge? Why shouldn't, for example, they treat the claim to be skeptical with skepticism?

Håkan: I agree, they should. What I'm thinking about here is more that, through their graduate studies, they were governmentalized in a way that they started to see skepticism as an asset when scrutinizing their work. Before they didn't. But as we said, action research is not the answer to everything. You may well still say that this way of governmentalizing teachers is obscure.

Ash: Well, in any case these experiences certainly reflect mine. It's like these teachers are emerging from Plato's cave and have seen the light for the first time. I certainly felt like that. I was "born again" as a teacher and could see the "errors" of my previous practice. In fact, to return to the Groundhog Day analogy, I felt like Phil Connors who, at the end of the film, finally gets to wake up another day.

Håkan: That, I think, mirrors their experiences. Their "re-disciplining" enabled them to get involved with the educational research and still experience themselves as autonomous change agents. Hence, their sense of autonomy seems to be related to their being disciplined in line with forms of knowing that they previously were unaccustomed to. Through the graduate school they were not only exposed to a certain kind of research, they also "realized" that in order to change their practice they would have to start with changing themselves.

Ash: So are we saying that action research is a form of governance? Or that formal research by teachers is a greater form of governance? Did either of these two teacher-researchers "do" action research?

Håkan: Let me think about your first question for a while. Now, did any of these teachers do actions research? Both of them undertook intervention studies into their own practice. One study was about orienteering with the help of a map, and the other was about game-sense (Nilsson, 2014; Teng, 2013). Both of them acknowledged that their kind of research into the teacher profession embraced self-transformation and self-improvement (Foucault, 1988).

Ash: That links closely to work by Henry and Kemmis (1985, p.1) who defined action research as "a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice in their own social or educational practices, as well as their own understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out." In a recent publication colleagues and I (see Casey et al, 2018, p. 24) concluded that:

> By understanding that steps and not just journeys are important [in action research in physical education] we begin to see how change occurs. In the cycles of think, plan, act, evaluate, reflect the practitioner, through self-reflection, seeks to better understand the social situation in which the study occurs and improve future practice. It is an ethical process in which change is built on both present day understanding and future improvements. The different cycles of action research are aimed at helping practitioners to enhance their normal practices and then make these enhanced practices the norm.

Conversely, Carr and Kemmis (1986) argued that outside of their classrooms (where their own social or educational practices are theirs to change), teachers traditionally have little professional autonomy. They suggested that to change this teachers needed to a) ground their practice in educational theory, b) seek the opportunity to participate in the broader educational context in which they work, and c) extend their professional obligation to include the community at large. This, they argued, might hinge on a shift in teachers' and researchers' views about the kinds of knowledge research should provide.

Håkan: Did Carr and Kemmis say anything about how this approach to knowledge connects to governance?

Ash: Carr and Kemmis (1986, p. 9) argued that if teaching became a more generally professional activity then:

> The sort of knowledge required from research would not be limited to that which affects classroom practice and teaching skills. Rather, it would include the sort of knowledge that would facilitate collaborative discussion within the teaching profession as a whole about the broad social, political and cultural context within which it operates. Moreover, if professional autonomy was extended in this way, research findings could not be regarded as something that teachers accepted from researchers and slavishly implemented.

In many ways, I would argue, without "the sort of knowledge that would facilitate collaborative discussion within the teaching profession as a whole about the broad social, political and cultural context" knowledge governance won't change either.

That said, the big question, the one that sits above all our talk of stasis in physical education, still remains. How do we wake up on a new day?

How Might We Wake up on a New Day?

Håkan: Well, first of all, I don't think that waking up on a new day would necessarily result in immediate changes to physical education practice. Importantly, it would probably mean that researchers woke up and saw things in a different light. Perhaps they/we might acknowledge the

professional autonomy of teachers and pursue research in new ways or in ways that prompted collaboration and the co-construction of knowledge rather than the slavish implementation of research findings.

Ash: Could you elaborate on that a bit?

Håkan: Simply put, if research is to "speak" to teachers, or if teachers are to speak with researchers for that matter, they need to some extent be disciplined – or governmentalized – in the same way.

Ash: So we need to start a conversation between teachers and researchers then. Some have argued that action research is a private dialogue made public – or perhaps a soliloquy might be a better term – inasmuch as it talks with someone whereas research is talking at or to someone. Stenhouse (1981) argued that too much research is published to the world and not enough to the village and this seems to be the mistake here.

Håkan: I agree, action research could be one way out of physical education's Groundhog Day, but it isn't without its problems. For instance, when action research is mandated as part of in-service training for teachers it ceases to be seen as a methodology for knowledge production in education (Noffke, 1997). Indeed, and in respect to physical education, Tan, Macdonald and Rossi (2009) posited that when the concepts of governmentality and performativity are used in parallel then there is a very real danger that a discourse of managerialism is channeled into teacher-researchers' approaches to, and the outcomes of, action research in schools. Hence, when doing action research, teacher-researchers (as any researcher) may well, albeit unintentionally, submit to power orders.

This is not to create despair, but just to highlight that we have to be mindful that there is arguably no research that can have 'the final word." Here I would like to get back to your previous question about whether research is just another form of governance, or that truth is reducible to power. Truth is, in Foucault's (1980, p. 133) words, "a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements," for instance

about physical education. Any truth is "linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it," in this case, the truths about physical education. Now, this doesn't mean that truth is reducible to power, but that truths cannot be produced without, or outside of, power relations. Different forms of knowing are linked to, or interrelated to, different modes of governance. Thus, I wouldn't say that action research is a form of governance, although it is a certain form of knowing that is linked to a certain mode of governance. Action research can hardly produce absolute truths, but it may well be able to advise teachers how to change their practice where other research approaches have not. But of course, we must also be mindful about possible drawbacks with settling within the corresponding governmentality.

Ash: Drawing this to a close we need an ending. I don't think we can conclude, because we have barely scratched the surface, but we do need to provide a parting message and suggest a way of waking on a new day. From my perspective, it feels that we (as researchers) will, like Punxsutawney Phil, continue to see six more weeks of winter until such time as we acknowledge that the ways in which we 'wield' knowledge need to change. Things won't change when the perceptions of practice and practitioners don't change. It can't be enough to persist with forms of governmentality that simply don't work. The world is simply too big and people are simply too enmeshed in power/knowledge relations (Foucault, 1980). Rather than keep telling teachers about the same issues year after year, it may be more constructive to create research collaborations where teachers are more 'in charge' of the research process, much as is the case in action research.

Håkan: I agree. I believe that researchers need to become more attentive to the perspectives of teachers, but also to be more honest. Sometimes, I think, those of us who are working within a critical tradition may be overly cautious about suggesting certain kinds of developments. However, this caution may be rooted in a concern that the suggestions will be either rejected from the outset or adopted too uncritically by the teachers. At least, this is the way I have felt.

On the other hand, if the social separation between researchers and teachers is reduced, as is the case in action research, then hopefully my concern is unnecessary.

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