

On justifying justifications of sport and physical education: Are there good reasons for the inclusion of sport and physical education within educational institutions?¹

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Abstract

In this paper, I aim to revisit and explore some of the philosophical arguments contravening the educational value or significance that seem to persistently beset that group of educational activities that we generally associate with the conceptual term “Physical Education”.² I begin by identifying and critically discussing what I consider to be serious arguments against the inclusion of sport and PE within educational institutions as a means to construct an apology and a coherent conceptualisation of sport and PE. The conclusion, towards which I argue, is that the reasons why these arguments are so prominent and pervasive is the product of firstly misleading philosophical-educational views that are ambivalent towards play, traditional justifications that are flawed, educational discourses that encourage and favour theory over practice, mental skills over physical skills, extrinsic over intrinsic values, and high culture over low culture as a result of dualism’s elevation of the mind over the body and secondly, from a failure in part with philosophers of education and physical educationalists to elucidate rational educational justifications and conceptions of sport and PE that are cogent and defensible.

There are legitimate reasons why the PE profession, its practitioners and academics ought to be concerned with, and strive for a more secure professional status. Historically, the discipline area has struggled for legitimacy at most, if not all educational levels due to the damaging claims made by critics who argue that PE is a trivial pursuit and as a result non-serious compared to other forms of knowledge and understandings that are considered to be educationally worthwhile. It is clear to me that there appears to be a general consensus within the relevant literature that PE is suffering from a crisis of legitimisation within education, particularly in relation to its nature and status.³ There are a number of factors why this has occurred. However, the PE profession and its practitioners have to accept most if not all of the blame for not counteracting with proportionately measured reasons against such serious claims. Consequently a lack of credible promotion has severely impeded the discussion of the educational aims, ideas, values and so on that sport and PE contributes to the point that its mere survival within the curriculum is at stake. Kretchmar (1990, p. 97) reinforces this viewpoint further by arguing that physical educationalists lack sufficient passion for their profession, because “. . . we do not care . . . and when we do care it is not with a deeply rooted, reasoned, consistent, durable, reliable passion . . .” and in the absence of any deep commitment there is a real cause for concern about the expected lifespan of the profession. Furthermore, for a contemporary example, the decision in 2009 to exclude PE⁴ within phase one as one of the core curriculum areas by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) that is responsible for developing the National Curriculum⁵ on behalf of the Commonwealth Government of Australia is significant for the profession.⁶ According to Meakin (1983, pp. 10-19) if a subject’s inclusion cannot be justified it implies one of three things: (1) the subject is harmful to either students or society; (2) even if it does neither students or society any harm, it does them no good; or (3) even if it does students or society good, it does so in a less significant extent than other curriculum areas. Therefore, the question of whether PE can be justified as part of the curriculum is essentially a moral issue, particularly if the continuation of the subject is perceived to have no educational value or worth. Whatever the reasons may be for such a decision, we should not complain that it is unfair that we have to bother with the onerous task of justifying ourselves when other subjects do not. The reality of whether it is fair or unfair is irrelevant because these subjects have been successful in this task in

the past or there is a general, albeit assumed, consensus as to their educational value. We need to be able to produce a reasoned account of our practice. This may involve a critical review of our own practice, which to some may be quite confronting, but if we are serious we need to be able to critically review the premises in which our practices are based. These may be concealed, even from ourselves, but unless these premises are revealed and identified there is the risk that they may continue to control and influence our practice without our reasoned consent. My point here is that most practical applications will be made from a philosophical position. Whether this can be expressed clearly will not be made clear to the apologist or even to the most ardent critic unless its philosophical justifications are articulated in such a way that they are coherent and accessible to all. Therefore, the reasons why we need justifying justifications for sport and PE are three-fold: firstly, because it is a simple matter of necessity at the moment; secondly, we need to be able to offer cogent justifications as to why sport and PE ought to be included within educational institutions; and thirdly, to identify what we are (or ought to be) so we can defend and further ourselves unashamedly. Consequently, we cannot, if we are serious, escape the task at hand, which is of an avoidably philosophical nature.

This paper consists of two sections. Section one, outlines how the intellectual orientation of Western thought regarding PE and the body emerges from two opposing philosophical positions influenced by Greek culture. In particular, I draw attention to the liberal-analytical tradition of Peters' intellectual account of education which effectively rejects and excludes sport and PE activities as trivial in nature and therefore non-serious compared to educationally "worthwhile activities" that satisfy his account of rational activities deemed to be of a serious nature. I argue that these traditional views of education which emphasises intellectual development in some narrowly specialised "cognitive perspective" exposes the lopsidedness of the dominant view of education which elevates the mind to a high status and relegates the body to a low status and in the process disregards our embodied dimension and therefore neglects our essential nature and the very foundation of our existence as a being-in-the-world. I go on to add that sport and PE are undervalued in educational institutions primarily because our embodiment is something of a mystery to the intellectualist and practical knowledge is not sufficiently understood. Section two, argues that PE has historically suffered from a "grandfather clock syndrome" and is one of the primary reasons why it is in a constant state of flux to the point that it has become difficult to distinguish "physical educationness" from the vast and diverse array of practices claiming to be PE. I go on to argue that the traditional intellectual notions of education are mistaken because schools are not just places that educate the mind of young people they are also concerned with the bodies of young people and as a result PE could benefit significantly from the establishment of a legitimate understanding of the body in education that promotes man's existence as an embodied being-in-the-world.

Preliminary Philosophical Considerations: ambivalence towards play, antiphysicalism, the problem of pleasurable activities and transcendental indifference

The educational value of play has a long history in Western education. Plato in his discussion of the education of the philosopher makes the point that anything learnt under duress and without freedom is pointless as it "never sticks", but if the lesson takes the form of play, they will learn more (Plato 1974, Book VII, Part VIII, 536e-537a). Ideas about play in education have been extensively influenced by psychology, sociology, philosophy and education. Since play was considered to be a naturally instinctive process and engaged in by young people, the desire to connect with this experience and the natural capacities of the learner led to the introduction of play as an educational process. As a result, the acceptance of play, games and sport⁷ as a pedagogical method of achieving educational goals significantly transformed PE, particularly in the twentieth-century. According to Mechikoff and Estes (2006) the development, acceptance and promotion of play, games and sport as methods for imparting educational ideas is important as it reflected a profound change in philosophical focus due to the growing interest in the phenomenon of play as an educational mechanism of value.

The philosophical position of the body relative to epistemological considerations and the nature of human existence becomes an important issue. This type of discussion might seem irrelevant to an understanding of play theory in PE, however, our concept of human nature will have a direct bearing on how we think man should behave, be educated and more specifically in this case, how we think man should be educated physically. According to Fairs (1968) the intellectual orientation of Western thought regarding PE and the body emerges from two opposing views about PE that have been significantly influenced by classical Greek culture. Each view of PE is the end product of a specific socio-cultural perspective and its dominant philosophical and anthropological theory of man. The first concept of PE is based on the concept of a harmonised and integrated balance of mind and body as the only pathway to the development of all man's faculties and potentialities. Fairs goes on to add that this "naturalistic" viewpoint is commonly attributed to the Periclean Greeks because they epitomised and exemplified the practical expression of this ideal (pp. 14-15). For instance, Plato makes it clear in the Republic that PE is a balanced concept taking two forms: physical and intellectual (gymnastics for the body and music for the soul) that evolved from the application of the "whole man" philosophy of education (Book III, Part III, 404a-412a). In pursuit of this ideal, man had to resist the temptation to develop any particular part of the body at the expense of the whole as this would distort both balance and harmony. In the second concept of PE, we start to see a diametrically opposed position of the "whole man" idea because the focus shifts to a distinctly one sided viewpoint in which man's physical nature is denied and the world of sense is rejected in favour of the self-created world of pure reason. As a result the body is relegated to a low status and the mind elevated to a high status. Fairs comments that this "antinaturalistic" or "antiphysicalism," one-sided concept of man originates in Platonic anthropology and its fundamental doctrine that the body was a source of evil and corruption which keeps us from wisdom and acquiring knowledge (pp. 14-15). Due to Plato's ambivalence towards the body and the paradoxical way in which he would sponsor two distinctly different philosophical concepts of the body: one being idealism which emphasises an ascetic and strict puritanical view of the body,⁸ whereas realism promoted man's physical nature and approved the expression of one's natural instincts through the guidance of reason.⁹ Unfortunately, it would appear that in order to improve the intellectual and academic standing of PE within the curriculum it would appear that physical educationalists have been selective in choosing whatever suited them, particularly in relation to Plato's realist position of the body, and consequently, it would appear that idealism has become to be associated with the Platonic tradition and its noticeable influence on Western culture, especially in education. The history of education is characterised by a range of culturally dominant positions on reality and conceptions of human nature that have arisen to a position of dominance before being dissolved and replaced by another. In a sense, PE would appear to be in a constant state of flux due to the dominant fluctuating cultural mentality that exists at any given period of time and as a result the history of PE is a representation of Western culture's understanding and interpretation of the dominant position surrounding the body. Fairs confirms the foregoing conclusion when he writes:

During the past three thousand years only three centuries have been characterised by a cultural mentality which charged education with the responsibility of the harmonious development of the mind and body, whereas for twenty-seven thousand centuries education has served the needs of *homo asceticus* and his degradation of the body or *homo sensualis* and his idolatry of the body. (Fairs 1968, pp. 18-19)

According to Reid (1996) the central Platonic-Cartesian tradition of western philosophy draws a sharp distinction between the mind (or intellect) and body which have been historically problematic for PE. For instance, from a Cartesian perspective, knowledge and understanding stem from the operation of pure reason as intellectual states or activities and when combined with Platonic idealism the goal of education necessitates the subordination of the physical appetites of the body due to the view that it not only keeps us from wisdom and acquiring knowledge but is a source of all evil and corruption. Such a view is essentially rational because it places enormous emphasis upon propositional forms of knowledge at the expense of other forms of knowledge. Consequently, given such assumptions, the very nature and meaning of PE seems

problematic because the term “physical” seems to indirectly refer to the body, its nature and functioning, whereas the term “education” typically implies the mind and its development. This influence is unquestionably significant for PE because it would appear to be based on dubious philosophical foundations and also the inability to reconcile the dualism of the mind and body that underlies Western culture and its philosophies of education. Reid (1996, p. 8) goes on to argue that this problem has understandably become a preoccupation for physical educationalists due to the paradoxical nature it seemingly rests upon. This is further compounded by the subject’s concern with practical knowledge or “knowing how” as opposed to propositional knowledge or “knowing that” commonly associated with intellectual education and hence the desire for cogent and coherent philosophical justifications for the legitimate place of PE within educational institutions.¹⁰ Therefore, it is my claim that if the body is considered to be integrated with the mind in a psychosomatic relationship, the body will have value and be esteemed, and consequently, PE will be in harmony with intellectual education in the fullest sense of man’s capacities and potentialities.

Historically, antiphysicalism has been a repressive and perpetual undercurrent in the development of PE. To fully comprehend the cultural repression of the body and PE in Western culture, I think, it is necessary to understand how the development of the intellectualistic tradition and religious asceticism have been influential in shaping powerful prejudicial views of the body and PE in education. The basis of this development can be attributed to Plato’s dualistic anthropological position of man composed of an immortal soul (bearer of man’s rational faculties) that temporally inhabits an evil body. The method whereby the soul can be released from its bodily corruption and the evil material world was through asceticism and the rejection of the body. Likewise, when Plato claims that man’s rational faculties can be cultivated by separating and elevating the higher rational soul from its lower irrational part we have the inspiration and the justification of the intellectual tradition in education (Plato, *Phaedo*, 66a-67e). According to Fairs (1968, p. 20), the depreciation of the body and the low status of PE in Western culture would appear to have been further compounded when asceticism and intellectualism evolved in such a way to complement and supplement one another in their common degradation of the body in its systematic effort to form man into an “ascetic animal”. As a result this has had a considerable influence on the history and course of human thought, particularly in European religious traditions. For instance, it was long accepted by the Reformed churches that the body was considered as something unclean and inferior that represented the animal part of man which needed to be controlled, managed and disciplined. Consequently the denial and rejection of bodily type pleasures such as play, games and sport is just an extension of the attitudes towards the things of the body that can be linked to Calvinistic Puritanism and deeply rooted in Platonic thought.¹¹

The influence of play theory in PE has historically been received with considerable ambivalence, particularly in isolation. The notion of hedonism and the values commonly attached to our capacity for pleasure, enjoyment, or satisfaction derived from differing kinds of experiences and in particular those associated with play may conflict with other types of values considered to be educationally worthwhile. Misunderstandings surrounding the distinction between play and seriousness seems to threaten the status of PE because the language of PE uses the terms, “play”, “games”, “sport” and so on and these terms seem to reflect a concern primarily with pleasure, leisure, recreation and hedonistic values in general and as a result these also constitute a problem by those who are taken with what they deem to be the seriousness of education (Reid 1996). Furthermore, the attempt by physical educationalists to continually attempt to justify the hedonistic values of enjoyment, fun and so on as the prime objectives of PE has been counter-productive, misguided and destructive as the promotion of pleasure in isolation is not normally regarded as of educational value. To be expected any subject that bases its inclusion within the curriculum primarily on these grounds is liable to be excluded or at best relegated to peripheral or extracurricular activity rather than part of the educational mainstream. Whilst it may not be unusual to gain pleasure from being engaged in a subject, which is indeed a goal of most teachers practice across the curriculum, but to place an emphasis on pleasure rather than on engagement or even mastery in PE reveals a misunderstanding of the connection pleasure has with an experience of a particular nature and most importantly a failure to identify the unique

educational features that PE has to offer. According to Whitehead (1990), physical educationalists have been reluctant to abandon the hedonistic justification even though it does a disservice to their case and what they are really trying to articulate about physical activity is basically the pleasure derived from their successful liaison between their motile embodiment and the concrete features of the world. She goes on to add that pleasure can indeed be derived from this embodied experience, however, the real value of PE does not lie in this pleasure but lies in the development of a specific mode of “ . . . relating to the world.” (p. 7).

Even though pleasure is an important component of the good life what gives rise to the idea that pleasure may on occasion be detrimental rather than a beneficial is the view that it may conflict with values considered to be more important such as preparing young people in the technical and vocational functions of work. It could be argued that work is instrumentally an economic process in which education plays an important part in preparing young people for the adult world of work, however, it is the “work-ethic” ideals that underpin work like skill, discipline, conscientiousness, industry, service and so on that represents in itself a set of values that are powerfully influential and significant in education. The problem for PE, as Reid (1997) outlines, is that there is something deeply paradoxical about championing PE’s alleged economic value as a potential vocation when PE is commonly associated with play, and play is fundamentally understood as pleasure and consequently these features seem at odds or even contradictory to most of the work-ethic values presented above. Therefore, the hedonistic character of the games and sports which play a fundamental part in school PE programmes are victims of the hedonistic fallacy in which play is a free activity standing outside of “ordinary” life as being “non-serious” and subsequently it follows that playing games (which shares features with play) is also non-serious and a frivolous pursuit because players pursue and desire its hedonistic pleasures such as fun, fantasy, and physical challenge and so on at the expense of pursuits deemed to be worthwhile and perceived to be of educational value. The fact that there are many people who make a comfortable living from playing sport and hence take these activities seriously seems contingent upon an accidental fact that does not eradicate the conceptual argument that the activities found in PE are essentially non-serious activities. Since PE activities are considered to be subordinate to other ends and only considered to be serious if the ends are serious insofar as they promote, for instance, health which is accepted as serious, but play, games and sport unjustified against such serious purpose is just trivial. Although we commonly associate and acknowledge a class of things which are serious just because they are intrinsically worthwhile, there appears to be an assertion that playing games cannot be among these things. It is though the very structure of games renders them non-serious which is conveyed by the adage, “X is just a game”, as though there was something inherently trivial about games that makes them unimportant to other ends.

The idea of play as an educational process is taken up by Dearden (1968) who does not deny that play is a “non-serious” activity in the sense that it has no ethical value, however, it is chosen because it is free from the demands of the serious business of ordinary life and consequently it does have positive educational merit because play enhances our life and thereby gives it value. He goes on to add that play is “self-contained” in the sense that it is set apart from serious duties like work and projects which make up the purposes of our ordinary life and this is essentially why we play, because we are immediately released from these duties momentarily. Even though we pursue play because of these non-serious qualities there are some play activities that have a functional aspect. For instance, we don’t play a game in order to become fit. Rather we play because of the self-contained elements of the game that we are attracted to such as the pleasure of exercising some skill which may only be available in play, the physical sensation and experience of executing some skill and so they can realise in themselves capabilities not realisable fully in our ordinary lives. To some this may be a sophisticated way of drawing our attention to what is brought about by play, however, a cursory observation of young people playing would suggest that there is a great deal unintentionally being picked up and as a result play does have a possible learning function particularly for children. Dearden argues that the traditional educational arguments towards play may appear at first glance to be logically flawless and seem to be preoccupied with its utilitarian and economic properties, but it was

also involved in an, “. . . error which can now become explicit.” (pp. 103-104). For instance, the argument goes that play is non-serious, education is serious, therefore education cannot be play. However, what has been ignored is that play can have a serious function, and therefore an educational function. Play is meant to be non-serious or it would not be referred to as play and does not have a clear equivalent in ordinary life, like ball games. For example there is nothing in ordinary life which resembles cricket or Australian Rules football. A good cover drive in cricket is simply useless in any other human pursuit and this is exactly why people play games. Ordinary life does not provide enough opportunities at all for such pursuits. Furthermore, game playing allows its participants to explore in safety and learn from their experiences without the consequences of real life. The notion of “play” in the early growth of a child is educationally significant due to the impact it can have upon expanding a child’s life space. Playing sport is just another form of play which can be invaluable to a young person as this can give them the freedom in which they are allowed to be children, try out a quasi-adult identity, to be in control of the environment where adult power and presence is limited or not present at all and where the everyday externals of the “normal” environment in which adult power operates are forgotten or at least suspended (Stolz, 2009). The use of games in childhood development cannot be underestimated, particularly as a transitional mechanism for the education of the young.

The idea that pleasure is a bad thing needs to be challenged. Aristotle argued that pleasure is closely linked to human nature and particularly important for the forming of a virtuous character (*The Ethics*, Book X, 1171a-1174a10). Pleasure is a powerful influence upon virtue and the happy life, because agents freely choose what is pleasant and avoid what is painful. Pleasure is a good, because every rational person seeks it and is attracted by it and therefore it is assumed that pleasure is a good thing. For example, no one asks why someone is enjoying themselves because it is assumed that pleasure is desirable in itself. This is why people are drawn to games and sport. Hurka (2007) develops this idea further by emphasising that if a player is attracted to a game for this property, this is good because the player pursues and takes pleasure in it. Therefore, when you play a game for its own sake because you enjoy rising to challenges presented by a worthy opponent through competition, not just in winning, you do something that is good and do it from a motive that connects directly to its good-making properties. For many people, PE is considered to be a serious activity that is more than just a fun activity or an optional recreational pursuit. Given the right conditions PE is educationally beneficial, because it can play a significant role in expressing and exemplifying our values. Some of these experiences are invaluable, ranging, for instance, from learning how to compete with friends, to playing with people one does not like, to persevering during hardships and so on.

Most of the misunderstandings surrounding the nature of PE and its activities stem predominantly from prejudiced attitudes toward practical knowledge and its educational value, on a narrow and question begging view of culturally and educationally “worth-while” activities. The use of the term “worth-while activities” owes much to Peters’ (1966) work on educational activities and their justification within the curriculum.¹² He develops his ideas of what he considers to be educationally “worthwhile activities” by posing a series of questions, “What ought I to do?” followed closely by the question, “Why do this rather than that?” which he methodically responds with his own justifications (pp. 147-166). His response to the first question is heavily influenced by the “doctrine of function” and what he considers to be the “good for man” which he goes on to add is to develop those faculties that separate us from other species and so activities which involve or develop the use of reason are worthwhile as they can therefore be instrumental to or lead to other things that are good (pp. 153-156). Consequently, man’s use of reason and its development features prominently throughout and underpins his “transcendental” argument because it is assumed that activities that appeal to man’s reason are good or intrinsically worthwhile to the suitability of the individual in question and so activities that satisfy this “cognitive perspective” will thus become transformed. In his response to the second question, Peters goes on to set down some of these transcendental activities by arguing that, “. . . science, history, literary appreciation, and poetry are ‘serious’ in that they illuminate other areas of life and contribute much to the quality of living” due to their cognitive content which makes them distinctly different from games which have a fabricated end, appear to be set aside from the ordinary aspects of life, limited to

particular times and places (p. 159). Furthermore, he adds that “skills” found in practical activities such as riding a bicycle, swimming and golf lack a wide ranging cognitive content and are largely a matter of “knowing how” rather of “knowing that”. According to this account rational activities are superior to games due to their cognitive content whereas PE activities are devalued as a mere instrument commensurate with serious ends.¹³ For instance, to Peters, PE is only important because, “. . . without a fit body a man’s attempt to answer the question, ‘Why do this rather than that?’ might be sluggish or slovenly” and the act of “physical exercise” is worthwhile in itself because its by-products of a healthy body are considered to be serious (p. 163). This only provides a limited justification for engaging in physical exercise, as it does not provide the grounds for superseding theoretical activities based on the argument that rational men will always find theoretical activities intrinsically worthwhile in themselves and not take the same view of physical activities primarily due to their trivial nature. Subsequently, Peters’ conceptual account of education implies the initiation into worthwhile activities must involve knowledge and understanding in some kind of cognitive perspective which in this case effectively rejects and excludes PE activities.¹⁴

According to Whitehead (1990, p. 10), it is not acceptable for Peters and Hirst to say that the nature and purposes of education needs to be the development of theoretical knowledge and understanding framed in a cognitive perspective because man’s essential being is not confined to his rationality but as a “being-in-this-world”. She goes on to add that to neglect our embodied dimension is to deny our essential nature and neglect the very foundation of our diverse existence in the world and as a result of these attitudes to our embodiment it is hard not to see it as based upon prejudice against the body. She raises a valid point that Peters’ (1966, 1973) claims about educationally worthwhile activities, even though used to justify involvement in activities that he deems valuable there is no reason that PE activities which focus on exploring and extending a particular mode of “operative liaison” like team games can also satisfying these same criteria (Whitehead 1990, pp. 11-12). For instance, cricket can be pursued for its own sake, giving its participants the satisfaction in testing their “skill, sensitivity and understanding” by offering “unending challenges”, which in turn can “illuminate” the standards and conventions of its practices which can all be achieved with an effective liaison with their surroundings. The movement based experiences pursued in PE are indeed perceived as worthwhile activities which is evident by the number of participants who are engaged in various forms of physical activities like sport in Australia¹⁵ and in many other cultures around the world. Consequently, participation is an important part of the lives of many people which extends beyond the simple use of our embodiment for utilitarian ends or instrumental ends such as good health and fitness. There is real desire to connect with our fundamental nature and engage in the capacities of their embodiment. According to Whitehead because embodiment is “. . . something of a mystery in its subtle, yet pervasive role in existence, that the intellectualist finds it difficult to come to terms with.” (p. 12). Furthermore, since PE is a practical subject in the curriculum it is often unvalued primarily because the concept of practical knowledge is not sufficiently understood.¹⁶

According to Loland (2006, pp. 60-70), “. . . PE is a socio-cultural construction created by people for people and on the basis of particular human goals and values . . .” and hence why views surrounding the meaning and values of PE are as old as ancient Greek culture and as diverse as environmental habitats. I believe it is worth examining the diverse views surrounding PE found in persons, groups and societies to determine if there are any core elements. Unfortunately, space does not permit what I consider to be some of the primary justifications of PE: PE as health prevention and promotion, PE as character development and moral education, PE as art and beauty, PE as a mechanism for finding meaning through movement, PE as sport education, PE as preparation for leisure and PE as academic study.¹⁷

The id² of PE: cutting through the rhetoric and identify what we are (or ought to be)

According to Paul (1996, p. 541), PE has historically experienced what he calls a “grandfather clock syndrome” that has caused the ideas of PE to swing from one extreme position to another and as a result the pendulum never stops in exactly the same place nor stays near the middle. He goes on to add that many of

the swings have made the field of PE appear as a paradox, as one that is ever changing and yet returning to what it discarded. Understandably, these pendulum swings and their resultant movements have led to serious philosophical conflicts that leave us as a field of “fractured identities”. He cautions us that the history of PE is much like a popular song where the same chorus is continually played over and over again and consequently after each swing of the pendulum, there are signs that we may be actually writing our own obituary.¹⁸ One of the main reasons why the PE profession has been in a constant state of flux has to do with the problems surrounding the place and purposes of PE within educational institutions and its continual preoccupation with reinventing itself in order to enter the academic mainstream. Kirk (2010, pp. 10-24) reinforces this viewpoint by arguing that school PE is the product of competing discourses vying for dominance in different places and times, to the point that the label of PE is nothing more than a rhetorical convenience in which anything goes. Central to Kirk’s idea is the concept of the “idea of the idea” (shortened to *id*² for succinctness) which he uses as a means to distinguish “physical educationness” from the vast and diverse array of practices claiming to be PE. Although Kirk acknowledges that there can be no immutable or transcendental essence of PE, there are, however, family resemblances that can be found in institutionalised practices and as a result such an approach can deal with the extreme relativist position in which anything goes in the name of PE. The reason why Kirk adopts a social epistemological approach in his characterisation of the essence of PE is to put an end to the competing ideological discourses competing for dominance in what he considers to be fundamentally the same versions of knowledge.¹⁹

There is no question that PE is inextricably linked to the practical body and consequently the philosophical position of the body and our concept of human nature will have a direct bearing on how we think man should behave, be educated and particularly in this case, how we think man should be educated physically. You would think that a field calling itself PE (or human movement studies/science, human kinetics and so on) would have sophisticated discourses about the human body but the predominant influence in PE is a reductionist view of the body as machine and restricted almost totally to the atomistic, instrumental and mechanistic approach adopted by sports scientists who have generally embraced a biomedical engineering model of the human body. According to McKay, Gore and Kirk (1990, p. 60) the body is seldom portrayed as a “. . . pleasurable site for ecstatic, aesthetic, vertiginous, autotelic, sensuous and holistic experiences . . .”, but portrayed as a biomechanical object that must be managed, maintained, conditioned, repaired for instrumental reasons such as improving performance or physical appearance. Therefore, if we are serious about enhancing the status and value of PE we need to develop an educational justification for PE that celebrates, rather than denigrates its practical body work focus because its current marginalised status hinges upon the low value accorded to young peoples’ embodiment in education. According to Schilling (1993) traditional notions of education which have an exclusive intellectual knowledge focus are mistaken because schools are not just places that educate the minds of young people. They are also concerned with the bodies of young people both biologically and socially. Consequently, the low status of PE is linked to the low value accorded to young peoples’ embodiment and corporeal experiences in education. Therefore, it seems clear to me at this juncture that PE could benefit significantly from the establishment of a legitimate understanding of the body in education. Armour (1999) states that if a legitimate body-focus can be argued for in education then it is more likely that a “body-linked” subject like PE will achieve the recognition it aspires for.²⁰ She goes on to add that there are four arguments why the body should be a concern for education and therefore a legitimate concern for PE. These are: (1) pupils are embodied; (2) embodiment is increasingly central to self-identity; (3) numerous social factors influence pupils’ embodiment; and (4) PE can have a significant role in the establishment of pupils’ embodied identity (p. 10). Furthermore, by acknowledging the primacy of the body in PE has many practical and theoretical advantages. It is not a panacea but at least it becomes difficult to envisage the “embodied pupil” in a dualistic sense.²¹

Notes

1. This paper represents a heavily edited version of the first chapter of my doctoral dissertation.

2. I will refer to “Physical Education” throughout by its commonly used acronym “PE” for convenience and ease. Philosophically, the use of this term is contentious, however, I use it here due to its universal standing in most educational systems to identify a learning area and all the associated derivations that may be available, such as: Health and Physical Education (HPE), Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) and so on.
3. For relevant literature, see: Kretchmar, R.S. (1989) The Naming Debate: Exercise and Sport Science’. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance*, 60:8, pp. 68-69; Kretchmar, R. S. (1990) Values, passion and the expected lifespan of physical education, *Quest*, 42, pp. 95-112; Evens, J. (1990) Defining a subject: the rise and rise of the new PE, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 11, pp. 155-169; Locke, L. (1992) Changing secondary school physical education’, *Quest*, 44, pp. 361-372; Tinning, R. & Fitzclarence, L. (1992) Postmodern youth culture and the crisis in Australian secondary school physical education, *Quest*, 44:3, pp. 287-303; Sparkes, A., Templin, T. & Schempp, P. (1993) Exploring dimensions of marginality: Reflecting on the life histories of physical education teachers’, *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 12:4, pp. 386-398; Stroot, S., Collier, C., O’Sullivan, M. & England, K.(1994) Contextual hoops and hurdles: Workplace conditions in secondary physical education’, *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 13:4, pp. 342-360; Tinning, R., Kirk, D., Evans, J. & Glover, S. (1994) School physical education: A crisis of meaning, *Changing Education*, 1:2, pp. 13-15; MacDonald, D. & Brooker, R. (1997) Moving beyond the crisis in secondary physical education: An Australian initiative, *Journal of Teaching Physical Education*, 16:2, pp. 155-175; Kirk, D.(1994) Making the Present Strange: Sources of the Current Crisis in Physical Education, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 15:1, pp. 46-63; Kirk, D. (1995) ‘Thanks for the history lesson’: some thoughts on a pedagogical use of history in educational research and practice, *Australian Educational Research*, 22, pp. 1-20; Kretchmar, R.S (1996) Movement and Play on Higher Education’s Contested Terrain, *Quest*. 48:4, pp. 433-441; Kirk, D. (1998b) Educational reform, physical culture and the crisis of legitimation in physical education’, *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*, 19:1, pp. 101-112; Kirk, D. *The Idea of Physical Education and Its Discontents: An Inaugural Lecture*, Leeds Metropolitan University, 27th June 2006; Kirk, D. (2009) The idea of the idea of physical education: Between essentialism and relativism in studying the social construction of physical education, *e Journal de la Recherche sur l’Intervention en Éducation Physique et Sport (eJRIEPS)*, 18, pp. 24-40; and Kirk, D. (2010) *Physical Education Futures* (England, Routledge).
4. A similar scenario occurred in Great Britain during the 1970s with the “Great Education Debate on Education” that produced the new National Curriculum proposals that excluded PE as one of the subjects chosen. As a result PE suffered extensively during the 1980s-1990s for legitimacy either due to inadequate justifications for PE as a school subject or an apparent unwillingness by the profession to show leadership in such a vitally important area. Understandably, the concern is that what happened in Great Britain is not repeated in Australia with our own “Education Revolution” that has produced a new National Curriculum.
5. It is interesting to note that the Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals of Young Australians by MYCEETA (2008, pp. 14-15) clearly acknowledges the importance of “HPE” as a learning area in a curriculum that should have “. . . breadth, balance and depth of learning to students’ phases of development . . .”, however, when one reads the Australian Curriculum proposed by ACARA and identifies what educational paradigm it currently operates in, it quickly becomes apparent that it operates in an intellectual tradition which excludes students’ corporeal embodiment in education.
6. For a detailed account, refer to: Stolz, S. A. (2009) Physical education and the national curriculum, *Professional Educator*, 8:4, pp. 44-47.
7. Unfortunately space does not permit an extensive critique of the nature of play, games and sport. For relevant literature refer, see: Huizinga, J.(1955) *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Elements in Culture* (Beacon Press, Boston); Suits, B.(2007) The Elements of Sport, in: W. Morgan (ed.) *Ethics in Sport*, (2nd edn), (Adelaide, Human Kinetics); Suits, B. (1995) Tricky Triad: Games, Play, and Sport, in: W. Morgan & K. V. Meier (eds.), *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport*, (2nd edn) (United States of America, Human Kinetics); and Meier, K. V. (1995) Triad Tricky: Playing With Sport and Games, in: W. Morgan & K. V. Meier (eds.), *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport*, (2nd edn) (United States of America, Human Kinetics).
8. Plato, (1953) Phaedo, 66a-67e, *The Dialogues of Plato-Volume I*, B. Jowett, trans. (Oxford, Oxford University Press).
9. *The Republic*, Book IV, 431a-444e.
10. Best (1978, pp. 50-64) argues that it is legitimate to use the term “kinaesthetic intellect” and that we should not restrict “intellectual” or in this case “knowing that” to purely cognitive activities. He goes on to add that to distinguish between intellectual and non-intellectual activities would be a contradiction in terms. He argues that a case could be made for the term “kinaesthetic intelligence” if it were to contextually mean, for instance, the ability to perform a variety of physical actions skilfully and to overcome new problems in different scenarios with proficiency, creativity and so on.
11. Basic to this puritanical mentality was a view that the body was the cause of our sinful nature and as a result the mind suffers from this contact. The Puritan work ethic (or commonly known as the Protestant work ethic) came to be promoted in various forms by intertwining moralistic aims of education that instilled the traits of piety and honesty in the minds of children whilst at the same time emphasising the characteristics of the Protestant work ethic such as respecting hard work, material frugality, shunned idleness and frivolity to the point that some adherents explicitly discarded the nature and purposes of play, games and sport in education as firstly a massive waste of time

that needed to be redeemed and secondly as a kind of bondage to gross bodily appetites that needed to be escaped in order to achieve wisdom. For the person in whom the Protestant work ethic is firmly established it is difficult, if not impossible to change such a mindset, particularly in communities where human and material resources are scarce because the main focus becomes the bare preservation of life and understandably play, game and sport seem to be frivolous in comparison. Such views changed significantly in the nineteenth century and old world priorities rapidly changed to the point that Protestants viewed sport as a mere instrument that developed and built character, and that, as part of the curriculum, cultivated desirable social and moral values of courage, honesty, and cooperation and so on. I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that to the Puritans it was work which also fulfilled the subsidiary role of exercise that accorded some seriousness to play but if anything it is play that gives work its seriousness and a means to enjoy play or at least leisure activities.

12. Peters (1966) argues that activities classed as pleasurable are notoriously difficult to distinguish and provides four reasons why such a task would be unhelpful. The first problem has to do with claiming that an activity should be selected because of the pleasure it brings delineates the activity as just one type of characteristic, which in this case is to be the pursuit of pleasure as an end. The second problem has to do with the diverse range of activities that could be considered pleasurable and pursued for what they are, which upon closer inspection may be immoral, such as intentionally telling lies. Thirdly, it would be impossible to fully describe in detail pleasurable activities without specifically distinguishing the activity in question. Fourthly, the emotional states of pleasure and pain that follow actions may be inseparable from the complexities in which they occur. These arguments outline Peters position on the type of activities that belong to a general class we call "pleasures" and as a result those activities that do meet this criteria cannot be "worthwhile activities".
13. McNamee (2005, p. 16) argues that at an analytical level, to claim that X is education or not education on the grounds of a pre-eminent criterion (cognitive depth and breadth) neglects to recognise the fact that there are competing conceptions of education. He goes on to argue that despite the fact that these conceptions embody particular evaluative elements regarding the nature of persons and society they all share the formal notion that education is the development of man towards the living of full and valuable lives. PE can therefore contribute to the living of valuable lives and hence of educational value.
14. According to Wilson (1967, pp. 13-14), to ask whether a particular activity is worth-while is subjective because what a person considers to be worth-while and what will help him in his pursuit of it can only be resolved empirically and as a result contingent upon the discriminable characteristics of the agent and of course the activity at a particular time and place. In addition there are many grounds on which some experiences or activities could be rejected on some occasions. He goes on to give the analogous example, that if we stop a child from having the experience of climbing a twenty-foot wall (which might well be a worthwhile activity), we may claim to have saved him from potential injury but failed to have educated him in any sense of why his life was protected and consequently missed the opportunity of his education later on (p. 14). Wilson adopts the position advocated by Dewey (1938) that education should promote "continued growth" or "education as growing" and argues that it is not the subject per se that is educative because ". . . no subject that is in itself, or without regard to the stage of growth attained by the learner, such that inherent educational value can be attributed to it." (p. 46). Therefore, the key to this argument is that it is not the activities or the things which certain curriculum areas ask young people to do which makes them educational but in this case what makes them educational or intrinsically valuable is the experience being more or less conducive to "continued growth" in the long term. This is reinforced further when Wilson states, ". . . certainly there must be 'judgements about ends', but there need be no absolute end to 'ends' . . ." because education is concerned with the promotion of continued growth, ". . . not growth towards a full stop." (p. 15). Furthermore, to help someone to discover, engage in, and determine what things may be worth-while for them is the task of education and consequently, ". . . it cannot be done at all if one assumes before one even starts that some things are always worth-while for everybody, some ends fixed, some wants unchangeable." (p. 16). As a child grows there will be a diversity of different wants at different times and as a result he may be interested in drawing Manga cartoon characters, next time into abstract painting and by chance he comes to appreciate the theatre and begins to study the craft of acting. Now he is all for art in its various expressions, however, next he moves at a tangent from art altogether and starts to play chess and cricket. On the face of it this may appear to be a succession of random wants of a young person going from one activity to next without any concern over what the extrinsic ends may be. Certainly, it is clear that Peters' view of education constructs what he considers to be classically orthodox wants and worthwhile activities but from a young person's point of view these may also appear to be a matter of random wants too, not at all constructed from what a young person wants. Obviously, he will need to be patient with our wants as educators as we do with his but my concern has to do with the potential destruction of future educability when there is no intrinsic value in doing things only out of fear of reprisal. This is why engagement is important in educational activities as there is more likelihood of the experience being more or less conducive to continued growth in the long term rather than some arbitrary constructed extrinsic end that is value loaded and narrowly focused.
15. Two-thirds (66% or 10.5 million people) of the Australian population aged 15 years and over reported that they had participated in some of sports and physical recreation at least once during the 12 months prior to the census according to: Linacre, S. Participation in Sports and Physical Recreation, Australia, 2005-06, *Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, Catalogue No. 4102.0, 2007, pp. 1-4.

16. According to Carr (1978, 1981) the main differences between theoretical and practical knowledge, is the former's concern with the discovery of truths that can be supported by reason and confirmed by experience, whereas the latter is concerned with the execution of purposes in action, conducted in a rational manner and confirmed by a reasonable degree of success. He goes on to add that knowing how is not to be understood in terms of a kind of theoretical reasoning that is associated with practical actions, nor should it, because it is practical reasoning differs from its theoretical counterpart in many ways. Consequently, it is a mistake to analyse practical knowledge in reference to theoretical forms of knowledge since it is a function of practical rather theoretical reasoning and as a result PE does have educational value because its significance does not lie simply in the pursuit of propositional knowledge but in practical reasoning which can be identified as a type of reasoning in its own right, which like theoretical reasoning, has its own logical standards.
17. These seven influential ideologies are what I consider to be some of the traditional justifications used in PE. These are as follows: (1) PE as health prevention and promotion is inextricably connected with "health" in contemporary school curricula to the point that it is clearly identifiable in the formal subject title found in most states and territories in Australia. In this kind of relationship, PE is viewed as instrumental to good health. The origins of current contemporary health justifications can be attributed to the rise of modern science because it established the idea and provided that empirical data to demonstrate the causal connection between physical inactivity being causally related to morbidity rates, and that an increase in physical activity levels can improve public health. Combine these trends with a global obesity epidemic all give force to the arguments for increased PE in school and its role as the "new public health". The emergence of the health ideologies within the PE profession has come to be accepted albeit taken for granted that it will fulfill a kind of preventative role. Why it is unquestionably accepted is primarily due to the overwhelming scientific evidence that physical activity can have positive health benefits. Additionally, the health crisis that has gained momentum in the media surrounding the prevalence of hypokinetic risks associated with inactivity such as obesity and other kinds of conditions in some ways have provided a legitimate justification for incorporating a health-based approach in PE curricula as a means toward health prevention and to improve public health. (2) PE as character development and moral education was influential during the British public school system during the second half of the nineteenth-century. This educational ideology was based on the widely held conviction that participation within physical exercise (particularly team games) was an instrument for moral and character training. The shift away from physical training to a more of a concern with physical "education" can be attributed to the belief that competitive team sports and the range of physical activities inherent within its practice had a positive educational value as a means of developing moral virtues, and as part of the curriculum contribute significantly to moral education. It is my claim that the traditional games ideology has been, and still is, one of the most powerful influences in contemporary PE programmes revolving around the predictably homogenised form of team sports, games and skill-based pedagogy. (3) PE as art and beauty claims that human movement of various kinds are both art and techne because skills allow us to be something like a golfer, sculptor and so on, however, has the capacity to also move beyond skilfulness to become art in the more contemporary sense. The argument is that that there is obviously a loci of beauty located in movements such as ballet, gymnastics and ice skating, but they are exemplary of the aesthetic possibilities found in all human movement and there are times in sport when athletes cross the border from skilfulness to aesthetic beauty such as Michael Jordan driving to the basket and consequently such artistry and creativity constitute another way that movement and sport can bring us home to our humanity. (4) PE as a mechanism for finding meaning through movement views PE as a sort of experience, in which we explore the possibilities and limitations of our bodies in the curriculum via three conceptual dimensions, "about, through and in". (5) PE as sport education legitimises the practice of competitive sport in schools which can be understood by the pyramid metaphor most commonly used to conceptualise the place of sport in PE. There are many differing versions of the pyramid model, however, they are all ideologically the same where PE forms the base of the structure where the majority of young people participate in school and learn the fundamental motor skills that can be applied within an ascending scale of competitive contexts with elite sports competition is at the top. (6) PE as preparation for leisure represents a paradigm shift in PE teaching ideologies away from the traditional games approach that stressed the importance of competition through a limited repertoire of team games to the identification and connection with youth trends with the express purpose of adapting school PE programmes to young people's changing leisure styles. The process of expanding the traditional curriculum to meet the perceived leisure needs of young people coincided with the view that PE should also encourage lifelong participation in diverse forms of physical activity that are specifically non-traditional, inclusive of all, non-competitive and has a distinct focus on health related exercise was in direct response to a growing body of research surrounding the negative experiences of young people in PE, declining trends in sporting participation, the causal connection between physical inactivity being causally related to morbidity rates which physical activity can improve are just some of the factors that have given force to the arguments for increased PE in school and its role as the "new public health". (7) PE as academic study has a distinct focus on the "study" of sport, particularly the utilisation and application of scientific principles in this study, rather than the practice of sport itself. This has been evidenced by trends in PE, such as, the growth of examinable PE, the increase in PE/sports science degrees and widespread acceptance of the "academicisation" of PE in contemporary curriculum and assessment policies. Certainly, some traction has been gained by such a justification by striving for academic status, particularly within the senior schooling structures by attracting students who are seeking credentials to work in the health or tertiary sectors and as a result securing the profile of PE albeit in a limited capacity in the academic realm.

18. Kirk (2010, pp. 121-139) cautions us that there are three potential PE future scenarios if the current dominant discourse of “PE-as-sport-techniques” cannot be radically reformed and the id² of PE is not properly understood instead of viewed as a rival idea of PE. The first scenario and the most likely short term outcome is more of the same. In the second scenario, Kirk passionately advocates for radical reform to secure the long term future of PE, however, this may be too confronting for some who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo which when combined with the allure and powerful influence of the dominant discourse of “PE-as-sport-techniques” approach may be too difficult to overcome. In the third scenario, while the “more of the same” scenario is likely, Kirk warns us that without radical reform there is the real potential that in the long term PE may become extinct due to a multitude of factors accumulating and conspiring against it.
19. As Kirk (2010, pp. 97-120) so skillfully explains, the form of school PE (since the 1950s) primarily deals with a special form of corporeal discourse which he refers to as “physical culture”, how learning that occurs in school PE can transfer to life beyond the school, which he refers to as “transfer of learning”, what are purposes of practical activities, particularly in relation to “ability” and how it is to be assessed and judged, which he refers to as “standards of excellence”, and lastly, how PE reproduces and expresses the significant values of our sporting cultural heritage, which he refers to as “cultural transmission, reproduction and renewal”. He goes on to add that school PE such as the multi-activity programmes influenced by the current dominant discourse of “PE-as-sport-techniques” may appear to be “forward-looking” in relation to growing cultural relevance and feature the use of games and sport to fulfill these aims, however, upon closer inspection these programmes are nothing more than “backward-looking” and built on archaic notions of games and sport and of pedagogy that have been resistant to reform.
20. Arnold’s (1979) classical text illustrates this approach properly because it views PE as a sort of educational experience, in which we explore the possibilities and limitations of our bodies in the curriculum via three conceptual dimensions, “about, through and in”.
21. The implications here are significant because such a position implies that there no longer exists a philosophical division between the object and subject because the world begins from the body and provides the means in which we can develop a sense of our own identity and at the same time come to know the world via physical action. This is confirmed by Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 140) who emphasises that our body is a “meaningful core” which engages with the world through the body, which in turn provides the “. . . link between here and a yonder, a now and a future . . .”.

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