

Physical Education Defined

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This paper reports on data from a larger study which seeks to investigate the events leading up to the Senate Inquiry on Physical and Sport Education (1992), the Senate Inquiry itself and consequences for school physical education. Goodson's (1987) theoretical framework underpins the investigation which aims to contribute to the profession by reaching an understanding of the way physical education is evolving in Australia and why.

This paper draws on an analysis of the Report of the Senate Inquiry and identifies the versions of physical education that are stated within the report. It is of concern, in particular, to note those aspects of physical education that are emphasised and those aspects which are marginalised. This analysis seeks to contribute more broadly to our understanding of the social construction of school knowledge.

Introduction

The 1992 Senate Inquiry into Physical and Sport Education was an important event for physical educators, even though few of the most far-reaching recommendations of the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Recreation and the Arts have materialised. The Inquiry was also important for researchers of school physical education. This is because the Inquiry is a rich source of information, comment and opinion on the state of school physical education in Australia up to 1992. Never before has such an Inquiry, with a national focus and extensive data base of over 200 submissions and additional oral evidence, been mounted. The Report of the Committee effectively provides a window on the richly complex process of socially constructing school physical education.

This paper is 'work in progress' since it is part of a larger 'contemporary history' of the Inquiry, its genesis, its part in the so-called crisis in physical education, and some of its consequences. Here, we report our findings of a content analysis of the first chapter of the Report of the Senate Inquiry (hereafter Report) in an attempt to gain some initial insights into the social construction of school physical education. Our study draws on a number of lines of research, including curriculum history, curriculum development, and philosophy of curriculum (Kirk, in press; 1998; 1994; Macdonald, Kirk & Braiuka, in press).

The work of Ivor Goodson (1987) in curriculum history has been particularly important in shaping some of the basic assumptions underpinning our work. One key assumption we make is that school subjects such as physical education are shaped, not by a process of 'natural evolution', but instead by the active engagement and struggles of individuals and groups of people in the pursuit of various, sometimes conflicting or vying, interests. A second assumption is that the primary focus of these struggles is the discursive resources that permit us to say what physical education is or ought to be. A third assumption is that there is a complex though significant relationship between the forms of physical education in schools and related practices in the public sphere, such as sport, exercise and physical recreation.

These assumptions have structured our larger research program, and are also clearly in evidence in terms of what we will attempt to do in this paper. Our content analysis of the Report is on three interlocking levels. As this is work in progress, the analysis reported in this paper will be concerned only with chapter one of the Report. The first level of analysis involves a relatively straightforward description of the actual contents of the Report and how this content is set out. The second level involves a more reflexive account of how the interaction of the structure and the content of the Report combine to serve particular functions within the Report, especially in terms of representing particular versions of physical education. The third level involves an ideological critique, where we attempt to go beyond the boundaries of the Report itself to show how various segments of discourse are linked or articulated with each other in order to privilege a particular view of physical education, a view that in turn reproduces particular understandings of related social phenomena that exist outside the school, such as gender relations, constructions of the body, of exercise, sport and physical recreation.

In the process of working through these three levels of content analysis, we will be attempting to tease out the various vying interests that are represented in the Report and the discursive resources accessed and proposed in support of one or more versions of school physical education. The paper begins with a brief account of the methodology of content analysis, and then provides some of the context of the Inquiry before reviewing the contents of the Report as a whole. We then begin our three levels of content analysis of chapter one, presenting our findings for each level as we go. In the final section of the paper, we discuss the points of interest in these findings for the social construction of school physical education.

Methodology and Method

The data from the first chapter that has been analysed form the basis of this paper. The analysed document can be considered as text and as such reflects dominant values. In post-structuralist terms, a text can provide a vehicle to examine the relationship between many codes and perspectives. Deconstruction of text can expose silences and gaps between that which is valued and devalued, and to consider contradictions and ambiguities (Cherryholmes, 1988:160).

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 142-143) believe that documents provide a rich source of evidence which can lead to significant findings:

How are documents written? How are they read? Who writes them? Who reads them? For what purposes? On what occasions? With what outcomes? What is recorded? What is omitted? What is taken for granted? What does the writer seem to take for granted about the reader(s)? What do readers need to know in order to make sense of them?

It is with this framework of questioning in mind that work has been completed and similar questioning will lead to further discoveries as more analysis occurs. This analysis will be complemented by interviews with key personnel involved in organising the Inquiry, as well as key personnel who gave information which was subsequently cited in the Report.

Document analysis has often been undervalued by researchers and yet it has great potential for unearthing relevant sociological findings. Silverman (1993: 63) states that public records "are relevant to important issues - revealing how public and private agencies account for, and legitimate their activities. Second, they are accessible; the field researcher does not have the problem, so common in observational work, of negotiating access".

However, it is still essential that we are aware of the limitations of document analysis. Merriam (1998) states that the documentary data may not have been developed for research purposes and it may, therefore, be incomplete from a research perspective. Similar to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), Merriam asks a series of questions to unearth the relevance of what is included in the document. She, however, extends these questions to ask do "other documents exist that might shed additional light on the same story, event, project, program, context? If so, are they available, accessible? Who holds them?" (1998: 122).

The analysis that follows presents a three tiered approach. First, the face value, straightforward information contained within the document will be described. Second, who appeared to be influential in the report will be presented as well as attempting to answer some of the questions suggested by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) regarding the structure and function of sections of the Report - Where is the report leading the reader? What is recorded? What is omitted? What is taken for granted? What does the writer seem to take for granted about the reader(s)? What do readers need to know in order to make sense of them? The third level takes the form of an ideological critique and involves linking of the 'rest of the world' and provides some ideas as to why certain voices appeared to be privileged over others. A key question here is what was occurring outside the Inquiry that was influencing the findings?

The Context of the Inquiry

On the 7 May 1992, the Senate established a Committee to investigate Physical and Sport Education. The aim of the Committee was to "assess, investigate and report"

(Commonwealth of Australia, 1992a:ix) on:

- a) the present level and status of physical education and sport skills and the involvement of Australian school children in physical and sport education;
- b) current training practices, skill levels and involvement by teachers and members of the community in providing physical and sport education in schools;
- c) the allocation and use of resources to physical and sport education in schools; and
- d) the consistency of physical education and sport policies and programs, within and between schools and states.

The Committee was chaired by Senator Rosemary Crowley and heard evidence from 51 individuals and/or groups, and received 219 submissions from a variety of interested parties. One inspection tour was made. The Report was published seven months later in December 1992.

Overview of the Report

The Report is in six parts. Part one, titled Physical education and sport - the state of play, does not contain reference to a