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**Levels on the playing field: Ability and inclusion in level frameworks in Health and Physical Education.**

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**Abstract**

This paper takes up the challenge posed by Evans (2004) for researchers in physical education to refocus their attention upon 'ability' and critically review both what and whose abilities are acknowledged, celebrated and advanced through the policies and practices of physical education. The paper uses comparative policy analysis in pursuing these issues in relation to the introduction of level frameworks for student attainment. In several countries 'level frameworks' have now been established as the reference point for teacher judgments about learning in Health and Physical Education. This paper addresses the interplay of cultural, political and historical issues in determining the particular 'abilities' that are respectively privileged and marginalized in official policy texts, and the implications of the differences observed for students' health and physical education in schools. The need for teachers and teacher educators to critically engage with level frameworks and associated assessment and reporting systems, is highlighted.

## **Levels on the playing field: Ability and inclusion in level frameworks in Health and Physical Education.**

### **The Social Construction of Physical 'Ability'**

The need to understand what it is that motivates an individual to take advantage of the learning opportunities available to them; (requires that we) shift the focus of research concern away from the *provision* of educational opportunities, from the factors that influence the *ability* to learn and towards those that impact upon the desire to learn.

(Osborn et al., 2003, p.9)

In this paper we develop our previous analyses of how 'educability' and 'physical ability' are socially configured through the practices of Physical Education (PE) in schools (Evans, Davies and Penney, 1999; Evans, 2004; Evans and Davies, 2004a,b). We pursue this interest as part of a broader project, shared by many in the wider community of social science researchers in PE, to better understand how '*knowledge of the body*' is produced, transmitted and 'received' in and through the educational practices of schools; and how these processes relate to social justice, inequality, cultural re-production and change. Addressing these concerns means that we are inevitably as involved in a sociology of the visceral and affective elements of teaching and learning, with *feelings, emotions* and *desires*, as of the intellect and with the inseparable relationships between these aspects of embodiment (McWilliam, 1996; 1999; Shilling, 2004a). Our specific interest here, however, is in how the curriculum and practices of Physical and Health Education (PHE) are 'encoded' with particular conceptions of childhood, development and 'educability' and how these, when expressed through various pedagogical modes, may impact a child's opportunity and willingness to display, perform and receive recognition for 'ability' in PHE classrooms, their 'desire' to learn and their positioning as learners in PHE (Osborn, 2003; McWilliam, 1996; Evans and Davies, 2004a, b; Tinning, 2004).

### **Performing 'ability'**

In recent years there has been a broadening of how teaching, learning and by extension, pupils as learners, are conceptualised. Renewed interest in theories of teaching and learning, including an interest in the social 'situatedness of learning', stemming for example, from the work of Vygotsky (1978)

and to more recent work of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) has presaged a shift towards more complex understandings of teacher and pupil identity. Though little of this work has specifically addressed how learning is embodied, or how 'physical ability' is variously re-configured (1) within and across different situations of learning, it is now suggested that more 'hybrid, multiple, global, social constructivist conceptions of personhood' are beginning to feature in the thinking of some teachers in schools (Hughes, 2004) and in some arenas of emergent policy and curriculum development in PHE (see below).

From a different perspective, in the UK Richard Bailey and David Morley's (2003) research on talent identification in PE and sport, and Mike Jess' on skill development and acquisition (Jess & Penney, 2004; Jess, Dewar and Fraser, 2004), has also begun to throw some light on the ways in which teachers think about and identify competence and 'talent' in PE classrooms. Bailey and Morley for instance suggest that, ' "outside of sport" almost every theorist now favours domain specific multidimensional conceptions of ability that stress the development of behavioural potential and its interaction with personal and environmental characteristics' (p.3). Bailey and Morely (2003) endeavour to bring more sophisticated models of teaching and coaching in respect of this thinking, to those involved PE. Their qualifying comment 'outside of sport', however, ominously signals the progress still to be made. Other researchers in PHE, most drawing on post-structural theory (for example, Burrows and Wright, 2001; Beckett, 2004) have illustrated how particular conceptions of child development underscore the rather narrow ways in which teachers continue to think about students' development in PE and Health classrooms. Indeed, there is now a growing body of knowledge albeit touching rather tangentially on issues of 'ability', that documents how 'embodied subjectivities' are constituted through the discursive practices and inter and intra personal relationships in schools and Initial Teacher Education in PHE. Lisa Hunter (2004) for example, has pointed out, 'The discursive space of 'the good' student in PE is shaped by characteristics of competence, competition, comparison, display, skill, and fitness' especially within a context of PE- *as sport*' (Hunter, 2004, p.181). Hunter's research vividly revealed that to accrue physical capital in PE, students must be able not only to recognise the appropriate discourses of sport or health but operate successfully within them. 'Appropriate' skills, fitness and or corporeal appearance are repeatedly legitimated through approval, support and attention from teachers and significant others.

In today's PHE classrooms, dominated by performance and perfection codes (see Evans and Davies, 2004a, b), particular predispositions, body shapes or 'looks' (Featherstone, 1982) clearly carry with them and are inscribed with status and meaning as valuable 'physical capital', benefiting some pupils

while alienating others (Rich et al, 2004; Hunter, 2004). Students are expected to routinely work on and add value to their bodies, to display or perform their 'ability' in terms of, for example, the amount and kind of exercise they take, the kind of food they eat, the shape they are or desire to become. In effect, they are constantly required to fabricate their 'ability' in terms defined less with reference to any 'real' potential, health or physical capacity than to their corporeal surface features, crude indices by which 'ability' is apparently displayed. So, for example, to lack cardio-vascular fitness and be thin may be 'read' as being healthier/'better' than having relatively high cardio-vascular fitness and being comparatively fat. In effect, students (and their teachers) must express themselves in terms of the 'performativity' of the sub cultures of the subject areas, or of the organisations of which they are part (Ball, 2004). Such tendencies, of course, are not peculiar to Physical Education and we say more on the nature of contemporary 'performative culture' (Ball, 2004) later in this analysis. For the moment we simply note that teachers' and pupils' careers are increasingly being reconstructed within these/its texts as 'a seamless, developmental progression to the present, with lines of further development, a potential value added, streaming off into the future'; they are unavoidably 'caught up in the logic of representation, amongst other things, through attainment targets and performance indicators' (Ball, 2004, p.151). These tendencies are as evident in PE as all other areas of the curriculum in the Primary sector of education (see Woods and Jeffrey, 2004) and endemic in secondary, further and higher education.

While much of this research has productively centred on teaching and the minutiae of classroom interaction, to date rather less attention has been given to the way in which contemporary cultures (amongst them, of 'performativity') enter the curriculum, privilege particular knowledge codes and frame teachers' and pupils' thinking and actions on 'ability' in PE. Teachers' actions are rarely arbitrary or accidental. Nor are they always a reflection of preferred ways of thinking and acting. More often than not they have an origin and a history and are almost always inevitably constrained by the requirements of organisational contexts and the cultures of which they are part. Some understanding of these relationships is necessary if we are to understand why teachers act as they do and indeed, why their thinking and actions towards pupils' educability and 'ability' may run counter to how, in other contexts, they may wish to speak, act and feel. At a time when teachers are, by all accounts beginning to think in more sophisticated and comprehensive ways about teaching and learning we thus ask why certain narrow, conservative, conceptions of 'ability' seem to prevail in the curriculum and teaching of PE?

## Encoding Action

In order to undertake this analysis we draw on Bernstein's (2000, p.202) rather slippery concept of 'code' (see Evans and Davies, 2004a, b) which in his terms refers to, 'the regulative principles which select and integrate relevant meanings (classifications), the forms of their realisation (framings) and their evoking contexts'. Elsewhere, we have described in some detail the range of 'codes' and the pedagogical modalities to which they give rise, now inherent in the Physical Education curriculum (Evans and Davies, 2004a, b) and the political struggles to privilege certain of them (Penney and Evans, 1999). In order to illustrate and foreground how particular conceptions of 'ability' and 'educability' are encoded in the curriculum, however, and indeed to highlight how much has changed over the last 50 years in the way in which teachers are encouraged to think about children and what they can or can not do and achieve in PE, we first turn attention to a text that was highly influential in the development of PE in the UK in the 1950 and 60's, the Ministry of Education Pamphlet No. 24 (HMSO, 1952) *Movement and Growing*, before turning for comparative purposes to the 'modern' requirements of the National Curriculum for Physical Education (NCPE) in England and the Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum in parts of Australia and in New Zealand. We centre on texts issued to Primary schools in England, Australia and New Zealand because these, we suggest, are likely to have a powerful bearing on the embodied self conceptions of children still in their formative years; potentially with lasting effect on how they think of themselves as 'embodied learners' in P(H)E in secondary schools and beyond. We emphasise, however, that we draw these comparisons not to romanticise or privilege a particular curriculum, version of P(H)E or of 'ability'; though our sympathies for 'competence codes' and associated pedagogies will later become evident. Nor is it to make the case that modern variants of P(H)E are somehow less pleasant and more concerned with control than old variants. As we have emphasised elsewhere, all pedagogical relations invoke power relations; there is no instruction without regulation, no pedagogy divorced of control (Evans and Davies, 2004b, p.215). We will, however, suggest that what we witness in these documents is a contrast between pedagogies of *order* - predicated on a weakening of boundary relationships between 'ruler' and 'ruled', knower and known, (e.g., teacher and pupil), exemplified in *Movement and Growing*; and pedagogies of *control* - predicated on a hardening of such relationships (though often within a rhetoric that obfuscates and disguises such a trend) that may be discerned in the NCPE and HPE curricula. In the contrast between the 1952 curriculum and more 'modern' variants we can begin to assess the merits of current practice; what we have lost and gained in terms of teaching and learning in P(H)E over the last fifty years, whether children are now more or less likely to be left with the 'desire' to pursue involvement in physical

activity in and outside school and have more or less opportunity to be 'able' to achieve satisfaction/succeed in those contexts.

### **Competence Pedagogies (of the embodied self)**

*Movement and Growing* was published in Britain in 1952 by the then Ministry of Education and the Central Office of Information (HMSO, 1952). Endorsed by central Government it was intended to have a significant impact on the way in which PE was both thought about and taught in Primary schools in the UK. The educational and political context of the development of this text has been outlined elsewhere (see Kirk, 1992, 1998) so while acknowledging their significance, we will not dwell on those matters here.

*Movement and Growing* is a remarkable document, not just for the amount of space it gives to an educational rationale for the teaching of PE, something barely present in more modern variants defining the curriculum of PE, but for its ideological orientation, the spirit of optimism and liberation that pervade its pages. Reflecting theoretical and educational orientations in the wider educational community in the UK at the time (see Kirk, 1992, 1998, Bernstein, 2000) its narrative is profoundly child centred. It defines a view of teaching and learning that celebrates (as the title implies) the centrality and importance of playful 'movement for growing' through a range of activities (games, swimming, 'movement as an art', dance, dramatic movement, and 'PT' (Physical Training)) leavened through a pedagogy emphasising creativity, spontaneity and risk. Indeed, it advocates and illustrates practices that now, in the contemporary climate of risk-avoidance, would never find a place in schools (see *illustrations HMSO 1952, p.84, 88, 104*).

Pedagogy, as Durkheim pointed out, is always an embodiment of the collective features of society (Esland, 1971, p.84). As mentioned, *Movement and Growing* needs to be read in the context of post second world war two optimism; a period of hope and of rapid and radical social, political and cultural change. The narrative is powerfully democratic and anti authoritarian; as eager to register what children as individuals have in common (in terms of their corporeal needs) as to recognise relevant *and*, given the transience of physical development and the accident of one's genes, irrelevant differences within and across age groups. The body was to be freed from the constraints of environment and the limitations of ones culture and class (whether the overbearing, over disciplined confines of the upper classes, or the physical impoverishments of the lower). In Bernstein's terms, it was an example *par excellence* of liberal progressive 'competency code'. Although health issues receive a mention in this

narrative they do not dominate. Health is seen a natural extension, an indirect outcome of movement based physical *education* and of being left with the desire for further involvement in physical activity. Here then, the emphasis is not the extrinsic or vocational outcomes of physical education but the intrinsic, inherent benefits of development through movement and of learning from and realising the 'potential' within.

In this narrative a picture tells a thousand stories and those presented in *Movement and Growing* wonderfully illustrate and convey far better than we can, the sense of liberation, spontaneity and exploration that was to define the content and pedagogy of PE. The methods advocated were to break radically with the authoritarian drill practices of the pre war years and profoundly alter not only how teachers were to think and teach but how children were to learn.

PE....embraces a much wider scope of activities than the 'drill' of the beginning of the century; it also reflects a different relationship between teacher and the class, and a different conception of discipline...

(HMSO, 1952, p. 51)

Furthermore, its explicit ontology endorsed both an anti-dualistic and holistic vision of humankind that rejected any analysis of movement which separated 'body and mind', and in so doing called into question the very essence, meaning and naming of Physical Education.

Physical Education may not be permanently regarded as a satisfactory term. In the past the study of man led to an analysis which split him up into body, mind and spirit; at the present time we are becoming increasingly aware of his wholeness and of the interdependence of those processes that we have been accustomed to describe as physiological or psychological. It may not be long before we realise that the term 'physical' – in relation to humanity – has a very limited meaning.

(HMSO, 1952, p.51)

Notwithstanding the sex differentiated language and gender differentiated views of this narrative, the text sought explicitly to challenge traditional hierarchies between teacher and taught including conventional expectations around 'boys' and girls' potential, and more pointedly, established traditional 'drill' centred pedagogies - in the interest of new social relations and to ensure that all/more children learned.

*Movement and Growing* is organised into five chapters – Chapter one, 'Moving and Growing' contains sections on 'factors which develop movement', and 'modes of movement'; Chapter two deals with the nature of 'Children in schools'; Chapter three, 'Physical Education', addresses the 'movement period' and 'ways of learning'; Chapter four outlines the fields of Physical Education and Chapter five, 'Progress', outlines how teachers were to monitor the development of children in their class. Perhaps the first thing to note of this last chapter (and the text as a whole) is that there is very little approximating a narrative of 'assessment' in its pages. There are no explicit guidelines for classifying or measuring children or their achievements, no manifest or obvious criteria by which the child is to be judged as having learned or failed; though it has much to say about 'progress'. Indeed, the text studiously avoids invoking social and ability hierarchies. Here is a narrative that asks teachers to recognise relevant 'difference' rather than engage in 'differentiation'. The former process is repeatedly qualified to register the dangers of drawing premature distinctions between children and to elaborate the importance of securing an individual's unique development (through movement) from within. 'Progress is essential, but the aim must be to develop children to the top of their capacity as children rather than to produce prodigies' (HMSO, 1952, p.79). The focus is on the development of the embodied self in relation to its (his/her) potential, summed up in the headline principle of (therapeutically) repeatedly asking "HOW IS HE (sic) GETTING ON?" (original emphasis). The text is at pains to emphasise that while others, particularly parents, may be interested to note the more obvious features of their child's performance in physical activity and to record how many, or how much of an activity their child can do, for teachers

Information of this kind, which can only be expressed in figures, may serve as a framework for further observation, but no more than a framework.....we should want to enquire 'What sort of child is he?'. This leads us at 'once into the field of quality, and we use such words as 'lively', 'restless', 'placid', 'stubborn', 'sensitive'. These qualities fill in and round out for us the outline provided by the figures.

(HMSO, 1952, p.77)

In this narrative then, teachers are invited to embrace a language of emotion, to consider the qualitative, embodied aspects of learning; to deal with the desires and feelings that more recent texts (see McWilliam, 1999) suggest, lie at the heart of how individuals learn. Indeed, wherever there is talk of differences, it is acknowledge that they are to be cautiously observed,

For example, it is true to say that children at the age of four tend to be chubby, while at seven they tend to be comparatively skinny. But take a look at the differences in build shown in these children of the same age and in the same class at school (2, 3, 4)

(HMSO, 1952, p.7)

*(see illustration HMSO, 1952, p. 7)*

Even if we take such a limited characteristic as height there is, as we can see, great variation.

(HMSO, 1952, p.8)

When compared with more modern texts and discourses around PHE this narrative now seems particularly poignant, given the tendencies in contemporary culture, reflected in school pedagogies (see Evans and Davies, 2004a, b) to encourage the 'one size fits all' assumption that, in terms of body shape and size, all children, if they aren't already, should either become or be made to be more 'the same' (thin frame). Here then is a pedagogy grounded in the notion that there is a corporeal presence, a set of competencies, a 'potential' to be discovered, released and worked on through a variety of movement forms (some innovate and creative, others more structured, as in 'PT'). Together these would countervail the variety of social and inherited factors, across the social classes, which could impair a child's physical education, development and well being. (We are, of course, here merely interrogating a text intended for a school and teacher education readership that 'needed changing' rather than an accurate reflection of what was happening in schools).

### **Performance Pedagogy (and the disembodied self)**

We now compare the above text with the narrative of the 'modern' National Curriculum for Physical Education (NCPE) in England, and Health and Physical Education curricula in parts of Australia and in New Zealand.

Since 2000 in England and Wales, National Curriculum documentation has set out the legal requirements of entitlement for all pupils aged 5-16, across all subjects, in all state schools. The requirements for PE are but one component of this documentation and are thus set within a structure and framework of expectations and aims that is common across curriculum subjects. Prepared, developed and changed throughout the late 1990s National Curriculum content reflects the social and political ideologies of the time. Ideologically, the 'managerialism' and 'liberal individualism' which

characterised the UK of the Thatcher years, refined, modified and retained under successive new Labour governments, pervade its pages (Bottery & Wright, 2000; Bowe et al, 1992; White, 2004). Unsurprisingly then, its narrative is encoded with principles and meanings quite different to those evident in the 1952 text. Again, our task here is not to dwell on the political context of the production of these documents (see Graham with Tyler, 1993; Penney and Evans, 1999), but rather to explore how particular meanings around 'ability' and educability are encoded within their requirements for the curriculum of PE as articulated in the most recent version of the National Curriculum in England.

The handbooks for teachers (primary and secondary) charged with implementing the most recent National Curriculum in England (DfEE/QCA, 1999a, b.) comprised five sections. The first outlines 'the values, aims and purposes' of 'The school curriculum and the National Curriculum'. The second centres on 'Key stages 1 and 2' (ages 5-11) (or in the case of the handbook for secondary teachers, Key stages 3 and 4, ages 11-16) and explains for teachers 'Where and when the National Curriculum applies', 'The structure of the National Curriculum' and 'other requirements' that accompany the National Curriculum (including Religious Education) and skills and knowledge to be addressed in 'learning across the National Curriculum'. The third focuses on the Programmes of Study for the National Curriculum, explaining the 'common structure and design for all subjects', the 'General Teaching Requirements' applicable to all teachers and the specific requirements for each subject. Requirements are articulated in terms of 'Knowledge, skills and understandings' to be taught and the 'Breadth of Study – the contexts, activities, areas of study and range of experiences through which the Knowledge, skills and understandings should be taught' (DfEE/QCA, 1999b, p.28). In PE, the breadth of study comprises a specified range of activities through which the 'Knowledge, skills and understandings' (the latter defined in terms of 'fitness and health' (DFEE/QCA, 1999a, p.132) are to be pursued at the various Key Stages. Thus, although pointing to the complexity of Physical Education, the text clearly announces a separation of the cognitive and the corporeal that *Movement and Growing* studiously sought to avoid.

In the 'General Teaching Requirements' this latest National Curriculum was notable in specifying that teachers would be required to 'have due regard to' three 'principles for inclusion': 'setting suitable learning challenges'; 'responding to pupils' diverse learning needs' and 'overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of pupils' (DfEE/QCA, 1999a, b). While the commitment to inclusion is certainly to be welcomed, the limitations of these principles also need to be acknowledged. In many respects it seems that discourses of compensation and accommodation prevail in this guidance for inclusion. Again, therefore, we see a contrast to the emphasis of *Moving and Growing*.

The fourth section of the handbooks provides teachers with 'Guidelines', relating to personal and social and health education, Modern language teaching in primary schools, and a Statement of values by the National Forum for values in Education and the Community'.

Finally, the 'National Curriculum attainment targets' for each subject' are presented. In the language of the NC, an attainment target sets out the

...knowledge, skills and understandings that pupils of different abilities and maturities are expected to have by the end of each key stage. Except in the case of citizenship, attainment targets consist of eight level descriptions of increasing difficulty, plus a description of exceptional performance above level 8. Each level description describes the types and range of performance that pupils working at that level should characteristically demonstrate.

The level description provides the basis of making judgements about pupils' performance at the end of key stage 1, 2 and 3. At key stage 4, national qualifications are the main means of assessing attainment in National Curriculum subjects.

(DFEE/QCA, 1999, p.37)

Accompanying notes of guidance from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority announce 'Pupils will usually demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding by performing a task in an authentic context...' (QCA, 2004) and 'You will arrive at judgements by taking into account strengths and weaknesses in performance across a range of contexts and over a period of time, rather than focussing on a single piece of work...' (QCA, 2004). By the end of key stage 2 (aged 11) the most gifted and able will be performing at level 5.

Section five, in both form and content, perhaps best captures the magnitude of the differences between the NCPE and the 1952 text and their inherent, distinctive, pedagogical codes. Here the narrative advocates a pedagogy largely devoid of any reference either to the affective dimensions of learning or to spontaneity, fun and risk taking, and any driving sense of idealism, purpose and development, that so characterised *Movement and Growing*. What it lacks in colour and passion, however, it makes up for in an abundance of detail on how children are to be observed, monitored and assessed. Here is a narrative predicated on the development of social and ability hierarchies, of principled differentiation, on measuring 'performances' in a range of activities according to pre-given criteria of what each student can or should display as they progress through school by age and key stage. Although additional web

information provides accessible video examples of how these things are to be achieved (see QCA, 2004), to all intents and purposes the text represents a curriculum devoid of illustration, its emphasis instead upon targets and performance, on what at each 'key stage' students should ideally achieve. For example, at Level 4 (the level that it is expected that the majority of students will have achieved by the end of their primary school education):

Pupils link skills, techniques and ideas and apply them accurately and appropriately. Their performance shows precision, control and fluency, and that they understand tactics and composition. They compare and comment on skills techniques and ideas used in their own and others' work, and use this understanding to improve their performance. They explain and apply basic safety principles in preparing for exercise. They describe what effects exercise has on their bodies, and how valuable it is to their fitness and health.

(DfEE/QCA, 1999, p.37)

Indeed, the 'Programmes of study' and 'Attainment Targets', neatly separated from any detailed, softening educational rationale, are presented with the raw emotional sterility, excitement and enthusiasm of a wine taster smelling socks. The 'development theories' implicit in this curriculum, and, according to Burrows and Wright (2004), equally evident in the curriculum of HPE in states within Australia and in New Zealand, are not only intended to shape the understandings of teachers and produce particular kinds of physical education, as did the 1952 curriculum but 'a specific kind of 'child' to which its practices are applied' (see Burrows and Wright, 2004, p.165). The message in these texts is that 'children who do not develop in a prescribed way, or whose development differs from the norms development discourse construct, are positioned as in need of remedial help or labelled as developmentally delayed' (Burrows and Wright, 2004, p.168). The effect of this discourse, as Burrows and Wright pointed out, is 'to construct those who, through location in culture and class, do not 'play' or perform in the right ways, as deficient or at a disadvantage and, therefore, less prepared for life' (p.168).

Despite the 'professional' sophistication of the NC text, the detail given to targets and assessment and the perfunctory introduction on educational values and ideals, here then is a discourse that, ironically, is profoundly a-social and disembodied in its separation of body and mind and its sanitation of the affective, embodied dimensions of learning. In the Western Australian HPE curriculum, it is interesting to note the emphasis that the outcomes in the HPE learning area – namely Skills for Physical Activity; Self-management Skills; Interpersonal Skills; Knowledge and Understandings; and Attitudes and

Values- 'are **interrelated** and all contribute to the development of healthy, active lifestyles for students', and that 'Learning and teaching programs developed by teachers should allow students to learn and achieve the essential knowledge, attitudes and values and skills in an **integrated** manner' (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 1998, *our emphasis*). Yet a fundamental tension still remains, with 'Knowledge and Understandings' identified as a distinct outcome. In contrast, the HPE curriculum text in New Zealand embeds and integrates the development of knowledge and understanding within each of its four general aims and the strands derived from these (Personal Health and Physical Development; Movement Concepts and Motor Skills; Relationships with Other People; Healthy Communities and Environments; Ministry of Education, 1999).

Certainly in the case of England, without reference being made to the qualitative and more visceral dispositions that underpin how children learn and with heavy concentration on extrinsic goals, children are inevitably to learn to access and assess their 'ability' not with reference to their inherent potential or 'educability' or to how good 'movement feels', but how others define and judge and value their performances displayed in a variety of pre defined activity forms and according to externally defined norms and ideals. The NCPE text offers little in the way of incentive either for children to 'merely' enjoy or derive pleasure from learning 'for its own sake', or to teachers to try and understand why some children fail and have no 'desire' to learn. As Shilling (2004a, p.xv) has argued, 'knowledge is not dispensed and received by a 'circuit of minds', but flows within a corporeal context that determines its salience and that shapes what particular individuals make of the curriculum on offer to them'. Modern variants of Primary school Physical Education may thus do very little to help teachers understand 'how the *physical* habits, senses and dispositions of embodied students' respond to and are shaped by the organisation and transmission of knowledge within schools' (ibid, p.xv).

### **From 'How is he/she getting on'?, to 'what level is he/she on?'**

In the documents discussed above, we see expression of Bernstein's (2000) **competency** and **performance** codes par excellence (see Evans and Davies, 2004a, b). Bernstein proposed two models of pedagogic discourse, which he labelled competency and performance, each referring to specific procedures for engaging with and constructing the world. Each has a social logic, that is to say, an implicit model of communication, interaction and the subject. Bernstein argued that in competence models 'competences' are viewed as 'internally creative and tacitly acquired in informal interactions'. They are practical accomplishments. Their internal logic implies 'a universal democracy of acquisition' where everyone is considered inherently competent. There are no deficits and the subject is active and creative in

the construction of a valid world of meaning and practice. In this perspective, there are *differences between* people but not deficits, subjects are self-regulating, sceptical of hierarchical relations and the focus of analysis is upon the 'present tense', on what can be achieved in the here and now (ibid, p.43).

**Performance** pedagogical modes by contrast arise from quite different fields of discourse and theories of learning of a behaviourist kind which have quite different epistemological leanings, origins and implications. These place emphasis upon the specific outputs of acquirers, upon particular texts they are expected to construct and upon the specialised skills necessary to the production of the specific outputs, texts or products. For Bernstein, this modality was clearly expressed by the selective grammar schools in the UK and their discursive organisers, 'codes of singulars' (knowledge structures whose creators have appropriated a space to give themselves a unique name and specialised discrete discourse; see Bernstein 2000, p.52) and strongly classified collection codes. Whereas competency modes (CM) focus on procedural commonalities shared within a social class, ethnic or other relevant category, performance modes (PM) focus on something that the acquirers do not possess, upon an absence, as a consequence placing emphasis on the text to be acquired and upon the transmission (ibid, p.57).

Whereas competency modes are predicated on '**similar to**' relations (what people have in common), performance modes are based on '**different from**' relations (what sets them apart); in competency modes differences are viewed as complementary, in performance modes as hierarchically distinct. Performance modes are more directly related towards the interests of the economy than the systems of symbolic control to which competency modes are primarily oriented and are, argues Bernstein, pervasive and empirically normal across all levels of formal education (op.cit: 52), including Physical Education (see Tinning 1992, 1997). Whatever differences we may observe in the detail of texts such as the NCPE, the HPE curriculum in Western Australia and that in New Zealand (see Appendices 1 & 2), a key commonality is undisputable; the requirement for children to be positioned in relation to an eight level scale of achievement, and for levels to be clearly distinguishable from one another.

Which discourse (competency or performance) is appropriated and privileged in the curriculum depends on the dominant ideology in the official recontextualising field and upon the relative autonomy of the pedagogic recontextualising field (PRF, Bernstein, 2000). In the UK there was a shift in formal education from performance to competency modes in the 60's, with a reverse shift from competency to performance modes in the 70s and 80s as a result of state intervention in the official recontextualising field and a weakening of the PRF, reflected most clearly in the UK in the Thatcher years but endorsed and sharpened under the new Labour governments of Tony Blair ever since. 'Traditional' games teaching and the post

1988 Education Reform Act emphasis in England and Wales on a sport dominated curriculum (Penney & Evans, 1997) are expressions, *par excellence*, of performance modes. In contrast, the more recent post Piagetian/Vygotskian emphasis on situated and collaborative learning in PE which foregrounds the active acquirer in a situated pedagogic relation (Kirk and Macdonald, 1998), may be taken as examples of competency modes. In our ongoing collaborative work we are pursuing the visibility and expression of these modes in the HPE texts established and emerging in Western Australia. Meanwhile, we turn attention to the privileging of performance codes in a wider culture of 'performativity' and its implications for the development of competency codes.

### **Being 'Able' in a Performative Culture**

If nothing else, the analysis presented here has highlighted the extent to which the complex corporeal dimensions of embodied learning have been significantly diminished, if not removed from, the modern curriculum of PE. Yet as Erica McWilliams reminds us these are often central in determining what, how and whether pupils learn. 'What teachers often struggle against in their classrooms is not so much a lack of knowledge (amongst pupils) but resistance to knowledge – what Lacan calls the passion for ignorance -- an active dynamic is needed to counter its power' (McWilliam, 1999, p.309). These qualitative dimensions of embodied learning, of desire and other emotions may struggle to find a place in mainstream professional pedagogical work in Physical Education given the dominant and pervasive culture of performativity now defining teachers' work and which privileges the performance codes inherent in PE curricula. Given the sterility of modern texts, teachers may find it very difficult either to explore or understand how pupils 'feel' when they succeed or fail to meet their ideals.

In Stephen Ball's (2004) terms

Performativity, is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation, or even a system of terror' in Lyotard's words, that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as a means of control, attrition and change. The performances of – individual subjects or organisations – serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotion or inspection. They stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality and value of an individual or organisation within field of judgement.....The issue of who controls the field of judgement is crucial.

(p.143)

'Accountability' and 'competition', clearly evident in and exercised through the texts of the NCPE, are 'the lingua franca of this new discourse of power as Lyotard describes it' (Ball, 2004, p.143). Our point here, however, is that it is not only teachers' 'ability' that is (re-) configured within this culture (see Ball, 2004) but children too. And the criteria for 'its' performance, set within the official recontextualising field by Government agencies, or powerful interest groups outside the educational establishment, create conditions over which they have little direct control. Others' discourse 'provides the legitimation for both the production of knowledge and its legitimation through education (Ball, 2004, p.143). And as Ball points out, 'it is not that 'performativity' gets in the way of real academic work, it is a vehicle for changing what academic work is'. Drawing on Lyotard (1984) Ball argues,

the commodification of knowledge is a key characteristic of the 'post modern condition'. This involves not simply a different evaluation of knowledge but fundamental changes in the relationships between the learner, learning and knowledge, 'a theoretical exteriorisation of knowledge'(Lyotard, 1984, p.4). Knowledge and knowledge relations, including the relationships between learners are de-socialised.

(Ball, 2004, p.152)

Furthermore,

Within a framework of performativity, academics and teachers are represented and encouraged to think about themselves as individuals who calculate about themselves, 'add value' to themselves, improve their productivity, live an existence of calculation. They are to become 'enterprising subjects', who live their lives as an enterprise of the self' (Rose 1989).

(Ball, 2004, p.152)

'It represents changes in the way we recognise ourselves and act upon ourselves as certain kinds of subject (Rose, 1992, p.161)' (Ball, 2004, p. 152).

Ball, however, has little to say about the embodied/disembodying implications of these changes, yet his views echo McWilliams' (1996) who, more directly, points to the way in which such a culture presses towards the disembodiment of pedagogy and simply fails to recognise that 'the teacher is some body who teaches some body'.

The actual 'performance' is not the sort of scholastic and physical postures, poses, persuasions that a teacher engages in; rather the quality of the entire 'performance' is assessed by ignoring the utterances and actions of teachers altogether. What the student can individually 'perform' after/as a result of the pedagogical event - 'learning outcomes' as observable skill – separates by deferral the measure of the worth of any series of pedagogical events from the present 'performing' body of the teacher.

(p.312)

As McWilliam goes on to emphasise, these tendencies reflect (rhetorically at least) concerns to improve the 'quality' of teaching' and have meant 'a flurry of activity around notions of 'effectiveness' and 'efficiency', including the development of 'performance indicators' which attempt to demystify pedagogical work in order to give 'assurance' to 'quality outcomes' (p.312). They define what the 'good' teacher, 'good' professional, 'good' student is and ought to be, and as such are very difficult to contest or change. Nowhere are these tendencies more evident than within contemporary culture of school Physical Education, reflected in the 'modern' curriculum texts discussed above. Powerful and pervasive discourses around health and sport, driven by an array of vested economic and political interests have succeeded in changing the social relations of educational production and with it, what it is to be a teacher and what it is to learn. The texts, set as they are, within contexts promoting performativity, concentrate attention on the end products of formal education, the performative aspects of education and how and what individuals 'display' in and outside school. In the search for performance rather than competency teachers are now 'forced' to look for what is absent in the student and to what he or she isn't but should become. Notably, a consequence of this discourse is that individually and institutionally 'the Physical Education Profession' is increasingly held accountability for behaviours / 'abilities' over which it has little direct control. Over what, for example, students achieve in other subjects areas (examination results), or what they physically do once outside schools. Hence Physical Educationalists are now much more likely to be damned for children not being sufficiently physically active, or not eating or exercising properly, than for whether or not they have learned anything of any educational value or have developed their physical 'ability' in school. Fitness ratings or rankings in sport set within competition between (institutions) and groups within institutions, inevitably 'engender individual feelings of pride, guilt, shame and envy – they have an emotional (status) dimension as well as (the appearance of) rationality and objectivity' (Ball, 2004, p.145). Hardly surprising then, that individually and collectively Physical Educationalists now feel vulnerable, always under pressure for failing to deliver what they simply can not achieve (e.g. mass fitness or slender bodies). Guilt, uncertainty, instability are a new subjectivity – they constitute a new kind of teacher' (Ball, 2004, p.145).

## Conclusion

In this paper we have barely begun to explore how conceptions of student and teacher 'ability' have altered/ been re-configured over recent years. But from our analysis to date we can reflect that the changes that have occurred over the last fifty years may, ironically, have effectively reduced rather than enhanced the likelihood of more students achieving some success in PE classrooms, becoming physically educated and more active once they leave school. Comparison and commodification, the main aspects of educational 'performativity' now encoded in the curriculum have become the order of the day. As these processes are inextricably linked to the provision of information for consumers within the education market forum (Ball, 2004, p.148) they will be very difficult to contest and change. This culture has filtered into the fabric of institutional activity; its curriculum, pedagogies, organisation, administration, generating systems of surveillance, technologies of accountability, and an ideological carapace that configures and defines the ability of both teachers and students in schools. It has created a 'new attitudinal and ethical framework within which teachers in schools (and colleges) are having to work and think about what they do and who they are' (Ball, 2004, p.144). Teachers and pupils are, as Hunter (2004) revealed, constantly engaged in 'fabricating' versions of themselves or of their organisation which perhaps do not exist. They are not 'outside the truth' as such (Ball, 2004) 'but neither do they render simply true or direct accounts – they are produced purposely 'to be accountable'' (p.148). In this context the 'able' teacher and the able student is one who can speak the language of performativity and can meet its demands.

Is there a possibility within such contexts for the development of alternative codes? Where now lies the opportunity for all pupils to express their potential 'ability' and experience what they inwardly 'feel' they can achieve? These are the questions that we are seeking to engage with in our ongoing work.

## Notes

1. Increasingly we prefer to use the term 'configuration' rather than 'construction' to avoid the reductionism inherent in the former concept and the rather absurd claim that 'ability' can be considered simply as a discursive production or linguistic artefact. Taking such a stance would leave us in an untenable position, unable to deal adequately either with embodiment, with pain, pleasure and other corporeal dimensions, albeit associated with meeting criteria of 'ability' that are socially defined. Indeed, our analyses have increasingly suggested that in any discussion of 'ability' we need to adopt a form of 'corporeal realism' which, as Shilling (2004b) argues, allows us to view the body and society as real things, 'that cannot be dissolved into discourse, possessed of causally generative properties' (p.12). This presses us to see the *embodied subject* as 'an emergent, causally consequent phenomenon and an important object of analysis *in its own right*' (*original emphasis*) (p.15); and studiously avoiding a form of reductionism that separates the biological from the social, while retaining a view that structures and embodied subjects are not identical and cannot be reduced to one and the same thing.

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## Appendix 1

### **Outcome Level Descriptors: Level 4 within the HPE Curriculum in Western Australia**

#### *The Student...*

- SPA 4 Performs controlled movement skills and demonstrates a range of strategies in modified games, sports and physical activities.
- SPA 4.1 Performs movement skills with control in an open environment.
- SPA 4.2 Demonstrates a range of strategies in modified games, sports and physical activities.
- SMS 4 Uses self-management skills, applies their knowledge of beliefs and values, and predicts the risks and benefits for the achievement of health and physical activity goals.
- IS 4 The student selects and plans to use interpersonal processes and the related communication and cooperation skills, to enhance interpersonal and group relationships.
- KU 4 Understands how factors influence personal health behaviours and how to appraise their own and others' health, safety and physical activity practices.

## Appendix 2

### Outcome Level Descriptors: *Level 4 within the HPE Curriculum in New Zealand*

Students will...

- Describe the physical, social, emotional and intellectual processes of growth and relate these to features of adolescent development and effective self-management strategies;
- Participate in regular physical activity and describe how this contributes to a balanced lifestyle;
- Investigate and practise safely procedures and strategies to minimise risk and to manage risk situations;
- Investigate and describe the ways in which people define their own identity and sense of self-worth and the ways they describe other people.
- Acquire and apply complex motor skills by using basic principles of motor learning;
- Develop skills, and responsible attitudes about safety, in challenging physical situations;
- Investigate and experience ways in which scientific, technological, and environmental knowledge and resources assist in and influence people's participation in regular physical activity;
- Investigate and experience ways in which people's physical competence and participation are influenced by social and cultural factors;
- Identify issues associated with relationships and describe options to achieve positive outcomes;
- Demonstrate an understanding of how attitudes and values relating to difference influence their own safety and that of other people;
- Demonstrate a range of interpersonal skills and processes that help them to make safe choices for themselves and other people in a variety of settings;
- Investigate societal influences on the well-being of student communities;

- Investigate community services that support and promote people's well-being and take action to promote personal and group involvement;
- Identify the rights and responsibilities of consumers and use this information to evaluate health and recreational services and products in the community;
- Investigate and evaluate features of the school environment that affect people's well-being and take action to enhance these.