REFORMING CURRICULA FROM THE OUTSIDE-IN

Dawn Penney, MONASH UNIVERSITY, AUSTRALIA
& Stephen Mitchell, KENT STATE UNIVERSITY, USA

The starting points for this chapter are some of the characteristics of contemporary curriculum reform in physical education (PE) that other chapters in this part have touched on. In particular, the chapter engages with the growing complexity of ‘the curriculum space’ that is associated with PE in schools and the increasing influence and involvement of government and other organisations in shaping the direction and momentum of curriculum reform. Put simply, the chapter reflects that in many instances, very significant pressures, investment and impetus for changes to the experiences that are provided in PE curriculum time are coming from sources other than national, state or local education authorities. We direct attention to a body of research that has sought to better understand the influence of so-called ‘external’ organisations and initiatives that have emerged from various health, physical activity and sport interests and policy imperatives. The chapter recognises that curriculum reform may not be an explicit intention of many of the agencies and organisations that offer ‘physical education’ services and resources to schools. We contend, however, that reform is an important, albeit subtle effect of changing models of provision of PE, physical activity and sport in schools. Hence, the chapter explores ways in which contemporary political and policy dynamics are influencing developments in official policy and in the pedagogical practice of ‘physical education curriculum’ (see also Jess & Gray, Chapter 10). It also provides further insight into teachers’ positioning and influence in curriculum reform (as discussed by Petrie, Chapter 12) and pursues the implications of the developments described in relation to concerns for equity and inclusion in PE (see Wilkinson, Chapter 13), and for enhanced ‘quality’.

The notion of ‘quality’ in discussions about PE curriculum is something that we recognise as contested and that this chapter seeks to encourage reflection on amidst changing patterns of curriculum provision. We are also aware of the need to be clear in our use of various terminology. At the same time, however, we acknowledge that blurred boundaries in use of terminology has long been a feature of PE curriculum reform and remains something that is itself influential in the sorts of reforms that we address here. Discursive shifts including, for example, the move towards increasing adoption of the term ‘PESS’ (Physical Education and School Sport) in policy developments in the UK (see Jess & Gray, Chapter 10; Wilkinson, Chapter 13), illustrate that a change in language may reflect or reinforce particular directions in and for ‘physical education’. Similarly, as many readers will recognise, conversations with students, teachers,
principals, parents and/or other individuals involved in policy developments, invariably illustrate that the terms physical education, physical activity and sport are frequently interchanged. International and national policy statements continue to provide definitions that simultaneously articulate distinctions and relationships. In this chapter we refer particularly to statements made in the UNESCO (2015) *Quality Physical Education Guidelines for Policy-Makers*, while also illustrating distinctions being blurred amidst various policy initiatives and changing policy contexts. Notably in our view, the UNESCO (2015) guidelines make it very clear that any discussion about quality must engage with matters of equity and inclusion and, furthermore, must be a discussion that extends to the many stakeholders in PE curriculum and curriculum reform. Ultimately, we therefore challenge the labelling of some organisations and agencies as ‘external’ and advocate for a shift in thinking about who is involved, via various means in the curriculum reform ‘space’ of PE.

The notions of policy *spaces, contexts* and *networks*, are key constructs that we discuss further in the theoretical overview below. We explore ‘curriculum’ and hence ‘curriculum reform’ as a social and political construct, and locate the issues pursued in this chapter within the political frames of neoliberal and market discourses. We reaffirm, however, that in any exploration of curriculum reform, a historical perspective is important. The following section reflects that there is always a need to look at origins of events and consider, particularly, series of events that often indirectly create circumstances in which particular directions for curriculum reform become possible, are considered legitimate and/or desirable – or equally, are deemed impossible or inappropriate to pursue. Our theoretical discussion extends this thinking. The section that then follows, focusing on trends and issues associated with the changing space of PE curriculum reform, provides in-depth insights from a number of international contexts. We then consider the implications of the research studies and theoretical insights provided for evidence-based policy, curriculum and pedagogical practice in PE and present both possible and probable future directions for research and practice moving forward. The chapter concludes with a summary of key findings and reflective questions that are designed to prompt critical engagement with the issues we have raised.

**Historical perspective**

This chapter is grounded in notions of shifting curriculum landscapes and relations that are anchored in broader ideological and political changes to, and in, education and broader social policy. As Evans and Davies (2015a) recently acknowledged, changing public-private relations “has taken different forms in different countries, localities and contexts with widely differing pre-existing balances between private and public provision and degrees of autonomy afforded to established ‘partners’ in State provision” (p. 1), and furthermore is “always mediated and shaped by national and local politics, economic contingencies and levels of prosperity and austerity” (p. 1). This provides an important reminder, first, that the involvement of non-government agencies in education is, in many instances, not new. Second, it highlights that amidst global trends, it is critical to engage with the particularities of their articulation in any specific national and local context. Yet a parallel message from Evans and Davies (2015a, p. 2) is equally strong, namely that it is the “sheer scale, scope and penetration” of privatisation that is “what is new” in education and indeed, PE. Hence, in this section, we use a historical perspective to direct attention to a complex mix of continuities and changes over time. We take on board Penney, Petrie and Fellows’ (2015) prompt to look beyond a surface impression of change and examine the structural and power-relations that have variously been reaffirmed, transformed and progressively normalised amidst changes that span the “governance, organisation, delivery and
purposes” (Evans & Davies, 2015a, p. 2) of PE curriculum. We point to the need to consider curriculum continuities as well as changes that feature amidst the growing prominence of market discourses and practices in PE.

It is pertinent to note that the history of PE and specifically PE curriculum reform is a story of various interests, understandings and professional practices gaining legitimacy – and of educational discourses often having marginal status. Physical education having a low status in broader curriculum debates and being a low priority for funding and/or other resource allocations, are familiar features of curriculum reform internationally. In many instances PE curriculum reform amounts to a somewhat uncomfortable re-negotiation of relations between internal and external discourses to reach a new ‘settlement’ (Luke, Woods & Weir, 2013) in what has long been acknowledged as a complex and contested policy space (Houlihan, 2000). Insights from sport sciences, coaching and, similarly, developments in health knowledge and practices have all influenced PE curriculum over time and have provided the foundation for reform in official curriculum texts and pedagogical practices (see for example, Kirk, 1992). From a historical perspective then, what were once seen as ‘new practices’ become legitimised and normalised through uptake and enactment. Past curriculum reforms have also involved particular discourses of health, physical activity and sport being re-positioned, gaining status or being sidelined by politicians, individuals accorded authority in official curriculum development and/or, teachers. As Jess and Gray’s chapter (10) also shows, a situation of PE welcoming and/or needing to look beyond education for support and investment, is not new.

Evans and Davies’ (2015a) comments indicate, however, that the global influence of neoliberal and market discourses is such that developments in several countries now point to contexts of reform having been transformed as we have moved from commercialisation to privatisation of education. They explain that while the former has been seen in education systems internationally for several decades, the latter “is not just incidental or piecemeal involvement of private enterprise in education … but, rather, marketisation of education in and of itself” (Evans & Davies, 2015a, p. 2, original emphasis). In the next section we further explore concepts that are central to understanding this distinct shift in relations between public and private interests in education and PE, and the implications of the shift for curriculum reform.

**Theoretical insights**

As indicated above, the research in PE that this chapter focuses on relates to changing relations between the public and private sector in the provision of educational services. It reflects scholarship in education and PE that has responded to the growth (in extent and influence) of market economies, politics and ideology, associated particularly with neoliberalism and ‘Third Way’ thinking (see e.g. Ball, 2007; Evans & Davies, 2015a, 2015b; Macdonald, 2011) and that has sought to extend conceptualisations of the contemporary politics and processes of PE curriculum reform (see e.g. Penney et al., 2015) and the role and influence of teachers within that (see e.g. Macdonald, 2015; Powell, 2015). Insights from education policy sociology, sociology of education more broadly and curriculum theory specifically, are brought together here to inform discussion of concepts and conceptualisations relevant to our interest in the changing dynamics and landscape of curriculum reform in PE.

The concept of privatisation is central to the research and issues discussed here. Ball (2007, p. 13) provides a timely reminder that privatisation “has a long history” and suggests that to understand ‘what is new’ amidst recent developments in education, it is arguably “more appropriate to think about ‘privatisations’” (p. 13, our emphasis). As he points out, production of textbooks, testing programmes, equipment and building projects are all things that have long featured
as ‘privatisation’ in education and that are easily recognisable features of the broad context of PE curriculum provision. The distinction that Ball (2007, p. 13) draws in relation to contemporary privatisation, relates to (i) the scale of involvement of various types of organisation in education (including private and not-for-profit companies, voluntary and community organisations, and national government organisations); (ii) the nature of involvement of these organisations, with historical patterns and boundaries of involvement “thoroughly breached” such that private sector participation now extends to any aspect of educational resources and services; and (iii) the parallel “fundamental re-design of the public sector”, encompassing state involvement in and responsibility for, education. Ball (2007, p. 13) identifies the state as “increasingly re-positioned as the guarantor” rather than provider or financer of education. He also draws our attention to Hatcher’s (2000) distinction between exogenous privatisation, involving “private companies entering education to take over directly responsibilities, services or programmes” (Ball, 2007, p. 14) and endogenous privatisation, which “refers to changes in the behaviour of public sector organisations themselves, where they act as though they were businesses, both in relation to clients and workers, and in dealings with other public sector organisations” (p. 14). Evans and Davies (2015a, 2015b) refer to the representation of exogenous and endogenous privatisation as respectively, privatisation of education (concerned with relations between State and private sectors) and the privatisation in education (concerned with relations within institutions). Taken together, the two notions convey the complexity of contemporary public/private relations in education and, we contend, PE curriculum. Directly and indirectly, we see privatisations impacting curriculum reform processes and directions in PE and below we draw on a growing body of international research to illustrate this. In doing so, we endeavour to take on board Ball’s (2007) emphasis that analysis needs to avoid “lazy binaries” and “move beyond a simple juxtaposition of public/private to explore the blurrings and elisions between them” (p. 15). Considering these issues specifically in relation to curriculum reform in PE we also draw particular attention to Ball’s (2007) observations that “privatisation can have paradoxical effect, good and bad together, and that the small particulars of privatisation might contribute to larger-scale social and political changes” (p. 15). We critically review what insights recent research in PE has provided and highlight the need for more research that can extend insights into the collective and longer-term impact of changing patterns of resourcing and provision of PE curriculum ‘services’ (design, teaching, testing) in relation to ongoing and prospective future reforms.

**Discourse**

Discourse has been a key tool in PE research focusing on curriculum reform and seeking to bring historical, political and sociological issues to the fore in analyses. Work in education policy sociology positions discourses as “influential particularly in providing possibilities of political thought and thus policy” (Ball, 2007, p. 1) and generating “subject positions, social relations and opportunities within policy” (p. 2). Ball and colleagues’ work (e.g. Ball, 1994, 2007; Ball, Maguire & Braun with Hoskins & Perryman, 2012; Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992) and research in PE drawing on the theoretical frameworks and conceptualisations articulated in this work, has sought to reveal the overt and more subtle ways in which particular discourses come to be included, excluded, legitimised, privileged and marginalised in and amidst curriculum reform processes (see also Penney, Chapter 9). Particularly relevant to this chapter is the dynamic interplay between discourses ‘within and beyond’ PE. Our contention is that shifts in the discourses that dominate the broader education and public sector space are impacting curriculum reform in PE and changing the ‘possibilities for thought’ about it moving forward.
Outsourcing

Outsourcing is another concept relating to the notion of privatisation/s in and of education and PE that is important to consider. Outsourcing can be seen as a form or element of privatisation. Drawing on Lair (2012), Williams and Macdonald (2015) explain outsourcing as “characterised by the movement of activities to a market-based organizational location from some other market or non-market location” (p. 57). They acknowledge that the practice is not new. The focus again is instead on the changing nature and extent of the practice, such that they describe it as “complex, controversial and pervasive” (p. 57); “an exogenous form of privatisation that coincides and coalesces with a number of endogenous forms of privatisation” (p. 69). As we discuss further below, theirs and others’ research shows that the contemporary practice of outsourcing encompasses the systematic provision of PE learning experiences and ‘delivery’ of curriculum. This chapter reflects our view that opportunities and possibilities for curriculum reform need to be understood in the context of growing acceptance of outsourcing as an educationally sound and legitimate practice in PE.

Other concepts discussed by Ball (2007) help extend understanding of how outsourcing and privatisation more broadly relate to curriculum reform processes and relations in PE. Ball (2007) highlights that the changes in education policy that we associate with growth in privatisation in/of education need to be acknowledged as progressively transformative, such that “Each move makes the next thinkable, feasible and acceptable” (p. 19) even if the appearance is of disjointed or uncoordinated developments (Whitfield, 2001, cited in Ball, 2007). We argue that the directions pursued (and able to be pursued) in contexts of curriculum reform need to similarly be understood as reflecting the progressive culmination of a complex set of policy developments and the effects that they have over time on what is regarded as legitimate and desirable curriculum practice in PE. Ball (2007) further explains progressive transformation of education (and the public sector more broadly) as “both creative and destructive, a process of attrition and re-invention” (p. 19). We contend that this notion is highly pertinent in examining the trends and effects that we describe further below, centring on the increasing presence and influence of ‘external providers’ in PE curriculum. Whitfield (2001, cited in Ball, 2007, p. 20) has further identified three facets of transformation that potentially add depth to analyses of the privatisation and future of PE curriculum: “destabilisation, disinvestment and commodification” (our emphasis). The first facet involves a “discourse of derision” underpinning repeated criticism of public service. The second facet, Ball (2007) indicates could be termed “re-investment” rather than disinvestment, involving the redistribution of funding both within and away from the public sector. Third, commodification works to make “transformation possible by re-working forms of service, social relations and public processes into forms that are measurable and thus contractable and marketable” (p. 24). Ball (2007) explains that commodification “is both then cause and effect in relation to privatisation” (p. 24). Below we discuss research that evidences the commodification of PE and, more specifically, PE curriculum and the ‘curriculum work’ of teachers. We reaffirm Penney’s (Chapter 9) emphasis of the need to understand curriculum reform as an increasingly complex process that involves an array of organisations and actors and the accompanying need to employ new theoretical tools to explore re-configured policy and curriculum relations.

Network Theory

‘Network Theory’, developed in education by Ball and Junemann (2012), enables the notion of governance in and of education to be re-framed. In research it enables us to reveal the changing landscape of PE as a policy (curriculum) ‘space’ that features changing policy and
pedagogic relations (Penney et al., 2015). As Penney et al. (2015) have discussed, Ball and Junemann’s (2012) theoretical work particularly prompts us to consider what curriculum reform scenarios are currently deemed (and will in the future be deemed) “possible, and eventually, obvious and necessary” (Ball & Junemann, 2012, p. 24), and what the curriculum effects of “the displacement and replacement of [curriculum] actors” (Penney et al., 2015, p. 53) within reconfigured policy and curriculum networks will be. This brings us back to significance of discourses and the need for research to explore the representation and positioning of various discourses within restructured curriculum networks. Penney et al. (2015) have drawn on Ball and Junemann’s (2012) work to highlight that we should not assume that changing network relations (and, hence, knowledge relations) will precipitate distinct shifts in long-established patterns of dominance of particular discourses in curriculum reform in PE.

Macdonald (2015) adds the concept of knowledge brokering to the theorising of the action and, arguably, professional responsibility of individuals (and particularly teachers) within the increasingly complex local and global networks that we can associate with education and more specifically PE curriculum and curriculum reform conceptualised as a complex and ongoing political, policy and pedagogical process (see also Penney, Chapter 9; Petrie, Chapter 12). The concept of knowledge brokering importantly identifies brokers as intermediaries and mediators of knowledge services, systems and discourses that currently, or may in the future, feature as part of the education and, specifically, PE networks. We suggest that in contexts that are reframed by neoliberalism and privatisations in and of education, brokering is an integral and important aspect of developments associated with “official”, “implicit” and “prudential” curriculum policy (Connelly & Connelly, 2013; Leahy, Burrows, McCuaig, Wright & Penney, 2016; see Penney, Chapter 9), and a valuable conceptual tool for analyses of reform of official curriculum texts and curriculum practices in PE.

To conclude this section it is pertinent to acknowledge that individually and collectively the concepts that we have discussed relate to changing, blurred and contested knowledge relations and boundaries in/of PE (Evans & Davies, 2015b; Macdonald, 2015; Penney, Chapter 9; Penney et al., 2015; Williams & Macdonald, 2015). They are tools that we employ in seeking to better understand contemporary contexts of curriculum reform and their consequences for curriculum reform. We try to reveal the shortcomings of binary language and conceptualisations, including who and what is now seen as ‘internal’ or ‘external’ to PE, or as ‘outside’ and ‘within’ the policy field and the profession.

### Current trends and issues

The preceding discussion has highlighted that changes in political and economic contexts globally and locally are central concerns in considering ‘trends and issues’ associated with outsourcing and the involvement of various ‘external providers’ in PE curriculum. From the outset it is important to reiterate that while global developments are clearly impacting education policies and provision within national, state-based and local contexts, the particularities of each context are crucial to acknowledge. Hence, we fully expect variations in how pertinent or pressing the issues that we raise will seem, and urge readers to contextualise the points discussed in relation to their own specific political, policy and institutional settings.

#### ‘External providers’ – key players in the physical education curriculum space?

The insights that research internationally provides about the involvement of various agencies, governmental and non-governmental, commercial and charitable, in the development
Reforming curricula from the outside-in

and delivery of PE curriculum repeatedly points to notable shifts in the presence and influence of so-called ‘external’ agencies and organisations in curriculum matters. The theoretical discussion above highlighted that this is characteristic of education as a whole, such that it is far more appropriate to think of curriculum development and reform processes in terms of networks and network relations, than bounded and linear structures. In the case of PE, we emphasise that while there is an undeniable history of ‘external agencies’ having interest, involvement and influence in PE curriculum reform in policy arenas and in schools, recent research raises critical issues about (i) the number and range of organisations active and influential in shaping PE curriculum policy and provision and, in some contexts, the growing (dominant) influence of particular organisations; (ii) the ways in which ‘external providers’ are gaining curriculum influence; and (iii) prospective implications for how curriculum reforms will play out in practice. In relation to our first two points, it is useful to explore the involvement of agencies in arenas associated with official curriculum policy developments, and then beyond that, in terms of involvement and influence in what Connelly and Connelly (2013, see above) refer to as “implicit” and “prudential” curriculum policy.

Previous research in PE, particularly relating to National Curriculum developments in England and Wales, evidenced the direct involvement of key representatives from professional sport and from business in the official processes of curriculum reform in PE (Penney & Evans, 1999). Subsequent research in the UK has further conveyed shifting power-relations within and across the policy domains of education, sport and health, such that contexts of ongoing official curriculum reform have been characterised by the prominence of discourses with origins in fields other than education (see, for example, Houlihan & Green, 2006; Kirk, 2006; Thorburn & Horrell, 2011). Analysis of policy and curriculum developments in New Zealand has further illustrated the emergence of increasingly complex policy networks, with changing structural and funding relations amongst agencies and organisations in the education, sport and health policy sectors (Penney et al., 2015; Petrie & lisahunter, 2011). This research has also revealed that such developments can act as a catalyst for a host of organisations to play a direct and indirect role in the interpretation and enactment of PE curriculum (Petrie, Penney & Fellows, 2014). From their research findings Petrie et al. (2014) have argued that the proliferation of ‘external providers’ offering a variety of curriculum resources and services should not be equated with enhanced breadth in PE curriculum. Rather, they point to clear prospects of curriculum narrowing, with many organisations focusing attention on the same, selective elements of curriculum requirements associated with PE. In the USA these elements are in the form of the SHAPE America National Standards and Grade-Level Outcomes (Society of Health and Physical Educators, 2014) that, while being reasonably broad in domain scope, serve to focus the curriculum development efforts of state and local educational agencies. In a sense the standards also act to focus the involvement of other external agencies, in that commercial agencies usually develop their materials with a focus on the national standards and grade level outcomes. This said, from a network perspective, it is also important to acknowledge that these other external agencies are, essentially, SHAPE’s competitors. For example teachers and school districts might purchase the (for profit) standards-based SPARK curriculum, but those same teachers are probably not SHAPE America members.

Newly composed and configured policy communities, and a corresponding new set of influential policy actors who can be seen as critical in establishing and legitimising particular network relations, are amongst the features that Ball (2007) identifies with changing governance in and of education. In England, these features were arguably epitomised amidst
the development of specialist schools, including specialist sports colleges that became the hub of and catalyst for numerous programmes and initiatives associated with PE and school sport, involving a mix of public and private funding sources. The Youth Sport Trust (YST), established in 1995 from philanthropic funding, vividly illustrated Ball’s (2007) point that the incorporation of philanthropy into state policy can provide “a form of ‘fast’ and often very personal policy action” (p. 126). That action was overt and influential within government arenas and resulted in a period of unprecedented government and non-government investment in PE and school sport provision. A glance at the YST website and the list of its programmes and partners reflects that the charitable organisation was, and remains, instrumental in facilitating significant commercial investment and involvement in ‘curriculum matters’. The policy developments and initiatives that it was instrumental in formulating and establishing fundamentally changed both contexts of curriculum provision in schools and the context for official curriculum reform. It is an example of an organisation with people skilled in forging ‘partnerships’ and influential network relations that directly and indirectly impact official curriculum policy; an organisation active in the production of “implicit curriculum policy” (Connelly & Connelly, 2013, see above), and in the provision of resources and services associated with curriculum enactment. Pertinent to this chapter, the YST was an ‘external’ organisation that rapidly moved to a central policy position within PE and that facilitated and sanctioned the involvement of many other external agencies in reform of policy and practice relating to PE curriculum provision and the provision of opportunities beyond the curriculum.

In the USA the most prominent parallel to the YST in terms of its role in forging multiple partnerships relevant to PE curriculum policy and provision, is SHAPE America, formerly known as the American Alliance for Health, PE, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD). In contrast to the YST, SHAPE is a professional member-based organisation. It has a mission “to advance professional practice and promote research related to health and PE, physical activity, dance, and sport” (retrieved from www.shapeamerica.org/about/) and to provide resources for and advocacy on behalf of its 15,000 members. Through partnerships with other external corporate, not-for-profit and governmental agencies, including with the American Heart Association, the Centers for Disease Control and the President’s Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition, SHAPE America seeks to impact PE curriculum and instruction in schools and to influence legislation at both the federal and state levels. While this influence has been pervasive, it is important to reiterate the significance of state legislation in driving the day-to-day operation of schools. Achievement standards are adopted and implemented at the state level, with varying degrees of accountability in terms of student learning for PE teachers and school districts. Most states have adopted or adapted the SHAPE America standards, though again there is little systematic assessment of student achievement (SHAPE America, 2006). It is also important to recognise the impact that the varied political landscape, and especially differing Republican and Democratic philosophies, has on local educational landscapes. In states with a Republican controlled legislature, such as Ohio in the Mid-West, the prevailing political orientation towards school operating standards is one of ‘local control’. Essentially this means that politicians seek to devolve responsibility for decision making to the local level, under the assumption that school district boards and district superintendents are best informed as to how their schools should operate in terms of curriculum and procedures, provided that federal and state mandates are met. In these circumstances, different prospects arise for the development of new networks; there are greater ‘freedoms’ regarding allocation of resources and, therefore, the contracting of various educational services.
Reforming curricula from the outside-in

Outsourcing curriculum ‘services’ in physical education

As indicated above, Ball’s (2007) discussion of privatisations in and of education brings to the fore the range of services that can be linked to processes of curriculum reform. This includes the contracting of advice on future developments and/or the production and revision of syllabus documents and associated materials (such as sample examination papers for examination PE syllabi), and the contracting of the provision of physical and/or technical infrastructure to support the implementation of reforms. It also encompasses production of supporting resources including textbooks, other teacher materials, assessment and reporting frameworks; the design and provision of professional development for teachers charged with implementing curriculum reforms; and the provision of staff who can be contracted to deliver aspects of new curricula. Readers in different countries and jurisdictions will recognise these as services that, in the case of PE, have been or are currently ‘contracted out’ at a system or individual school level.

Some services are embedded within reconfigured education systems as an integral dimension of curriculum reform. For example, schools in the UK and internationally that choose to offer an examination course in PE from one of the various examination boards (such as OCR, AQA, edexcel, or WJEC) ‘buy into’ the associated applicable assessment system. The production of materials and resources that ‘support’ or ‘accompany’ examination PE syllabi internationally illustrates the way in which “implicit curriculum policy” (Connelly & Connelly, 2013) can be critical in shaping interpretations and enactment of formal curriculum policy, and the extent to which the direction of and possibilities for reform may well be in the hands of commercial companies. The production and distribution of textbooks for examination PE courses has long been acknowledged as ‘big business’ and the examination PE space can certainly see linkages and tensions emerge between commercial and curriculum reform interests. The dominance of particular texts within national or state-based markets may prove an important factor in consideration of (and ‘consultation’ about) reforms. Individuals who have been members of advisory groups or boards associated with the development of formal curriculum policy (and associated assessment policy, thus including examination writers or markers) may also be accorded high status as writers of textbooks and/or other resources and services (including provision of professional development courses for teachers and examination preparation courses for students). The texts, resources and supporting courses that are made available all shape, sometimes in profound ways, readings and enactment of new official curriculum (Brown & Penney, 2016).

Beyond examination PE, recent research in England, Australia and New Zealand has shown that outsourcing of various elements of ‘core’ PE curriculum provision (offered as part of the compulsory curriculum for all students) and the outsourcing of provision that is designed (and marketed) to ‘value add’ to curriculum experiences, are both now firmly established features of the contemporary PE landscape (Griggs, 2008, 2010; Lavin, Swindlehurst & Foster, 2008; Petrie et al., 2014; Williams, Hay & Macdonald, 2011). Williams et al.’s (2011) research involving primary and secondary schools in Queensland usefully identified outsourcing as cross-cutting the government and non-government school sectors in Queensland. Their survey findings also revealed that provision of particular activities constituted ‘instructional services’ that were being outsourced. From a curriculum reform perspective, the “ten most frequently outsourced” services give a clear appearance of alignment with a multi-activity curriculum model. Further, the most frequently cited reason for outsourcing was “to access external suppliers’ expertise” (Williams et al., 2011, p. 407; see also Williams & Macdonald, 2015). Petrie et al.’s (2014) and Williams et al.’s (2011) research both point to the need to consider patterns of supply of services in looking at apparent demand preferences and in considering the implications of current outsourcing for curriculum reform. In both instances, the suggestion is that the services provided
by the dominant players in the PE outsourcing market may well reaffirm the established dominance of sport-based discourses.

In the USA, both not-for-profit and commercial programmes are similarly familiar features of contemporary PE provision. Such programmes generally support, rather than replace, curriculum offerings and teachers. Varying degrees of outsourcing occur in those states that permit student ‘waivers’ for PE, most often by allowing participation in activities such as interscholastic sports, marching band and cheerleading to count as the required PE credit for high school graduation. This occurs in approximately 50% of states, with a further 25% of states permitting high school students to earn their PE credit through commercial online offerings that are often not taught by a licensed PE teacher (SHAPE America, 2006). Perhaps the best example of not-for-profit involvement in PE in the USA is *Fuel Up to Play 60*, an in-school nutrition and physical activity programme developed by the National Dairy Council and the National Football League, in collaboration with the US Department of Agriculture. As the title suggests, the focus of the programme is on healthy nutrition and the accumulation of sixty minutes of physical activity per day, during and outside of each school day. The most used commercial programme is the SPARK packaged curriculum, with lesson plans developed for elementary, middle and high school PE, along with before, during and after school physical activity ideas. These curriculums have been used extensively, with research to support programme efficacy in terms of impact on physical activity and fitness levels of elementary students (Sallis et al., 1997); academic achievement (Sallis et al., 1999); and sustainability (Dowda, Sallis, McKenzie, Rosengard & Kohl, 2005).

Focusing specifically on the ‘supply’ side of outsourcing, Petrie et al.’s (2014) research pointed to the significant role that cross-sector government funding mechanisms in New Zealand are playing in facilitating particular patterns of outsourcing, with many physical activity, sport and health-related programmes offered free of charge to schools as a result of the distribution of direct and indirect funding from both sport and health policy initiatives. Their findings also counter the notion that an increasing proliferation of providers of services can be assumed to equate to greater diversity in the range of PE related ‘curriculum’ services being offered to schools. Powell’s (2015) analysis reaffirms the complex mix of government, not-for-profit and commercial funding and interests behind outsourced PE programmes stemming from the NZ$82 million government initiative *Kiwisport*, and specifically associates *Kiwisport* with helping “to reproduce the ‘PE is the same as coaching sport skills’ discourse” (Powell, 2015, p. 78). New Zealand is by no means the only context where this discourse remains dominant and has been openly legitimated by policies and funding initiatives. In England initiatives featuring joint funding from education and sport have similarly been designed to support growth in outsourcing of co- or extra-curricular programmes to specialist sport providers and coaches (see Flintoff, 2003, 2008; Wilkinson & Penney, 2015). These developments reaffirm the significance of policy contexts in shaping prospects and possibilities for ongoing and future curriculum reform.

**Destabilisation and disinvestment in physical education curriculum**

This section reflects that the sort of systemic change in “the fabric of education and physical education” (Evans & Davies, 2015b, p. 18) that we have discussed has been by design rather than accident. As Ball (2007) posits, the notions of destabilisation and disinvestment play a critical role in making the growth in presence and status of new players and services in curriculum provision both possible and necessary. From this perspective, the widespread and sustained curriculum marginality of PE in comparison to other curriculum areas, the extent to which discourses of standards and accountability direct curriculum reform attention to other areas, and (at least in
Reforming curricula from the outside-in

some jurisdictions) a lack of confidence, expertise and training in PE for primary teachers (see for example, Petrie & Lisahunter, 2011) are all conditions contributing to, and being used to legitimate both the supply and uptake of PE curriculum services and resources. They are also all factors underlying the growth of many and varied new partnerships, alliances and networks as the mechanisms to produce and deliver these services. A context of sustained disinvestment in PE curriculum can, for example, be seen as fundamental to the profile that the YST in England has attained and to the policy initiatives and networks that it has played a central role in leveraging. Similarly, Petrie and Lisahunter (2011) point to other players effectively filling a void left by education in the PE curriculum space in New Zealand.

Powell’s (2015, p. 75) contention that we need to simultaneously view the term assemblage as a noun (“the privatisation assemblage”) and a verb (“to assemble”), and his analysis of the ‘product’ and ‘process’ in New Zealand, conveys the dynamic relationship and critical interplay between policy action and policy contexts. His ethnographic research also illustrates the link that Ball (2007) emphasises, between changing policy communities and changes in discourses, such that new networks need to be seen as legitimating new curriculum actors and new curriculum narratives. Powell (2015, p. 86) identifies views about “the purpose of PE, what quality PE looks like, who the PE expert should be” as all things that are “re-assembled” amidst and through the privatisation assemblage. Classroom teachers are de-skilled and their work de-professionalised within and by the assemblage; the ‘expertise’ of external providers and the quality of the services they are providing, is simultaneously accepted and legitimated as a natural and desired policy solution to a constructed policy problem (Powell, 2015; see also Ball, 2007; Evans & Davies, 2015b; Flintoff, 2003). In the next section we direct attention to other research that prompts us to consider curriculum discourses that are potentially marginalised amidst the trends we have discussed.

**Quality and equity amidst privatisations in/of curriculum?**

Evans and Davies (2015a) recently asked: “what legitimacy will innovative, radical and inclusive PE (in early years learning, schools and ITE) have in an education market where social justice is not a primary concern?” (p. 3, original emphasis). Here we therefore focus on matters of equity in PE and draw attention to research findings that reaffirm the need to continue to probe the implications of reforms that are stimulated and facilitated by new political, economic and policy agendas and relations. A point of reference for our discussion is the 2015 publication from UNESCO, *Quality PE Guidelines for Policy-makers*. In particular, the guidelines established that a commitment to inclusion, with difference positively embraced and the contribution that all participants bring to PE valued, is an essential and integral aspect of quality PE (UNESCO, 2015, pp. 8–9). The pronouncement prompts us to ask what impact the sorts of reconfiguration of the PE curriculum ‘space’ that we have described above, are having in relation to notions of ‘quality’ and concerns for equity and inclusion in PE.

Flintoff’s (2008) research focusing on the School Sport Partnership Programme in England illustrated that initiatives that legitimate the established dominance of arguably narrow competitive sport discourses and serve to further conflate provision of sport and provision of quality PE, may do little to meaningfully advance gender equity in PE. Flintoff’s (2008, p. 407) research highlighted that while the programme “was providing more opportunities for children, including girls and young women, to be physically active, within and beyond the curriculum”, in parallel it revealed “how the scope and range of opportunities developed was limited by a competitive sport discourse”. She concluded that the provision arising “has done little to include the vast majority of girls and young women (as well as some boys) and
especially who have not already identified themselves as ‘sporty’ or interested in this particular kind of physical activity” (Flintoff, 2008, p. 407). More recently, Wilkinson and Penney (2015) pointed to the tension between discourses that are central to the increased involvement of external agencies (and, specifically, sport coaches and sport organisations) in extra-curricular provision and concerns for equity in relation to both ability and gender in PE. While the developments that their research explored did not directly relate to curriculum provision, we highlight the potential (often indirect) impact that the discourses that are legitimated amidst such developments can have on thinking about what constitutes quality PE curriculum provision and practice (see also Williams & Macdonald, 2015). Flintoff’s (2008) caution of the inadequacies of “equality politics” (p. 407) and developments framed by discourses of access remain highly pertinent for any curriculum reform in PE. As we discuss below, there is a clear need for more research that pursues how patterns of long-standing inequity in PE are being impacted by the range of “privatisations” (Ball, 2007) of PE curriculum matters that research indicates are emerging if not yet fully established in curriculum discourse and practice (see also Evans & Davies, 2015a, 2015b).

‘Quality’ in this context is not merely a contestable concept. It is also now a highly marketable entity. ‘Quality’ provision of PE services and quality assurance, have, in some places, themselves become commercialised entities through formal accreditation or recognition schemes and endorsements. For example, tucked into the latest issue of *Physical Education Matters*, the professional journal from the Association for Physical Education (afPE) in the UK, is an A4 glossy flier, advertising resource packs called “PE CORE ACTIVITIES” produced by 1st4sport.com, “endorsed and supported” by afPE, and designed to support teachers in “effective delivery of the national curriculum PE programmes of study” (1st4sport.com, 2015). The AfPE has also been proactive as an association in promoting its “Quality Mark” award scheme “to celebrate and develop the quality of PE and Sport (PES) in schools” (Abrahams & Roberts, 2014, p. 1). In concluding their recent research review of the scheme, Abrahams and Roberts (2014) stated that “Tools that validate externally the quality of leadership, management, teaching and learning in PES should be encouraged and the afPE quality mark is a suitably robust protocol that is a sustainable driver for high quality PESS for young people” (p. 4). It is also an income generator for the association and a marketing tool for schools. Similarly in the USA, to ‘set the standard’ SHAPE America packages its National Standards and Grade-Level Outcomes for K-12 PE in a glossy publication, complete with a suggested curriculum framework, instructional strategies for implementation, assessment suggestions and ideas for using technology during instruction. Again this publication is a commercial product contributing to SHAPE America revenues. It further endorses the complex nature of privatisation activities and their impact on PE curriculum matters.

**Implications for evidence-based practice and future directions**

In considering implications of the trends and issues discussed, we reiterate that the “privatised education terrain” (Evans & Davies, 2015a) is far from uniform and nor is it stable. The localised form and effects will mean that what people recognise as key implications for PE curriculum reform now and into the future, will vary. Furthermore, we also recognise that what one recognises as implications and how one views them (as for example, either concerning or somewhat incidental) will reflect personal political and professional viewpoints. The majority of the research cited above is aligned with socio-critical scholarship and has been undertaken with the explicit agenda of asking questions of developments that are, arguably, in danger of never being voiced amidst the rolling process of more and more diverse privatisations becoming an
Reforming curricula from the outside-in

established aspect of PE globally and locally. Amidst that process, we contend that researchers and PE professionals in schools, teacher education and curriculum authorities have an ongoing professional responsibility to critically and actively engage with new and emerging policy communities and the shifting discourses and relations that are a part of them. Albeit in varying ways (depending where we are located geographically and what our role in relation to PE curriculum is), the terrain has changed, necessitating that we think differently about how to influence curriculum reform and that we seek to work with a potentially diverse collection of individuals and organisations in that endeavour. Ball (2007) made a telling point in stating: “There is no going back to a past in which the public sector as a whole worked well and worked fairly in the interests of all learners. There was no such past” (p. 187). PE curriculum can be viewed similarly. The terrain of and for reform is different, but in important respects the central challenge remains unchanged; can we do better in delivering on quality and equity than we have in the past? The research findings that we have presented indicate that the critical challenges are associated with how we work with and influence thinking in policy contexts and communities that privilege particular discourses in curriculum debates. The risks are that curriculum reform decisions and discussions at many levels are reframed in narrow economic terms and, within this process, what it is to be physically educated and what constitutes a quality PE curriculum is also redefined (see Evans & Davies, 2015a, 2015b; Penney et al., 2015; Williams & Macdonald, 2015). In these circumstances, we contend that it is essential that teachers and teacher educators engage seriously with the notion of physical educators becoming (and needing to be) skilled “knowledge brokers” (Macdonald, 2015) and informed, astute “policy actors” (Penney, 2013).

In our view, the issues that we have discussed are ones that need to be at the core of initial teacher education and professional learning in PE, and future research. “[P]rivatisation is an ongoing and contested process, not a complete, predictable nor necessarily foregone one” (Ball, 2007, p. 185). We arguably know all too little about the knowledge and skills required for teachers and teacher educators to act in the above ways amidst contexts that will continue to change. Research and researchers have a key role to play in extending current knowledge and we by no means wish to portray that as a simple task. As Evans and Davies (2015a) highlighted, outsourcing and the associated trends that we have described continue to proliferate and be taken up “without an ‘evidence base’ beyond that provided by its proponents” (p. 5), and, furthermore, often without a desire for alternative evidence bases to be established.

Summary of key findings

- Privatisations (Ball, 2007) in and of education have significantly changed the landscape of and context for curriculum reform in PE.
- Multiple agencies, spanning private and public sectors, are directly and indirectly influential in shaping reform of official curriculum texts (mandates). They are also active in producing resources that connect with reforms and in offering services to support the ongoing implementation of reforms. The composition of the networks associated with PE curriculum reform and the specific roles and influence of various agencies, reflects the interplay of global, national and state political, economic and professional contexts.
- Outsourcing of services that directly or indirectly relate to curriculum reform includes the production of texts, curriculum support resources, assessment frameworks and reporting systems, inspection and quality assurance services, and provision of professional learning for teachers.
D. Penney & S. Mitchell

- Long-standing patterns of limited government investment in PE curriculum, initial teacher education and professional learning for PE, have helped to create the opportunity for, perceived need for and justification of, growing privatisation in and of the PE curriculum ‘space’.
- Teachers and teacher educators have a crucial role to play as “knowledge brokers” (Macdonald, 2015) in curriculum reform in PE.
- It is critical to consider continuities alongside changes in relation to PE curriculum. In particular, there is no guarantee that privatisations signal enhanced quality or greater equity in PE.

Reflective questions for discussion

1. What issues and developments discussed in this chapter appear familiar, or in contrast ‘foreign’?
2. What key changes do you associate with (i) privatisation in PE, and (ii) privatisation of PE?
3. Who do you see as the ‘major players’ influencing curriculum reform in PE?; and what discourses are therefore being privileged or, in contrast, marginalised in PE curriculum development?
4. What do teachers need to know as “knowledge brokers” (Macdonald, 2015) working in increasingly complex PE curriculum networks?
5. What are the prospects for greater equity in contexts of increasing privatisations in and of PE curriculum?

Notes

1 Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation for Kids (SPARK) was developed at San Diego State University in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the goals of combating rising levels of childhood obesity. See www.sparkpe.org/what-is-spark/.

2 OCR is the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations board; AQA is the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance; edexcel qualifications are now owned by Pearson; WJEC is the Welsh Joint Examination Council.

References


Reforming curricula from the outside-in


171


