As other chapters in this part of the handbook reaffirm, curriculum reform is a constant in educational settings, and can be viewed from a number of perspectives. Regardless of the sector of education we work in we have most likely all experienced curriculum reform associated with ‘imposed change’, or played a part in a complex process of negotiation between interested parties, be they government departments, school heads, boards of governors, classroom teachers, and parent communities (see Penney, Chapter 9). Curriculum reform can feel as if it has been imposed with haste and with what appears to be limited consultation or trialling, or it may seem to be advanced after an extensive and seemingly fraught period of negotiation between physical education (PE) experts, ‘invested’ outsiders, and government departments (as is often the case with national curriculum statements). In other instances, it may be a rich and fulfilling endeavour by a group of individuals trying to enact curriculum change at the local level. As Macdonald (2003) argued, and this chapter further reflects, whatever the origins or intentions of curriculum reform in PE it is teachers who are at the centre of curriculum reform, as they are responsible for the day-to-day implementation of any curriculum framework and requirements. From this perspective, curriculum reform happens daily in schools as teachers develop their own PE programmes, lessons, and assessment tasks in response to, and in the context of, various broader reform agendas and requirements (Ball, Maguire & Braun with Hoskins & Perryman, 2012; Priestley, 2011).

Given the centrality of the teachers amidst reform efforts, it would seem logical that teachers have a key role as drivers of any curriculum developments, regardless of the focus, object, rationale, scale of the reform. Kirk and Macdonald (2001, p. 565) posited:

What might the consequences be for generating and then sustaining good practice if teachers were involved as partners, not only in the reform projects that produce new instructional discourse, but also in the maintenance of mandates during implementation?

In spite of this expressed desire to move beyond top-down approaches to curriculum reform, it would appear that teachers’ roles in reform in PE have remained remarkably unchanged, and there has been little progress in effectively supporting teachers to be partners, let alone drivers of curriculum reform that has the potential to enhance equity and opportunities in PE. Why is this?
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‘Silencing’ and/or ‘sidelining’ teachers

Over time and across continents the impetus, focus, object, rationale, and scale of curriculum reform can be seen to vary greatly, yet it would appear that teachers’ roles in reform movements have remained remarkably unchanged (Calderhead, 2001). Current global and many national policy contexts appear to intensify conditions that preclude teachers from being heard in curriculum reform agendas and undermine their position and professionalism as ‘curriculum reformists’ (see below). Of course, the positioning and role of individual teachers of PE amidst reform varies significantly. Research into the life and career histories of PE teachers (Armour & Jones, 1998) illustrates how different cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political preconditions (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) influence individual teachers. With that in mind it is important to caution against discussion of factors that impact on teachers’ roles in curriculum reform as if teachers are a generic group. It is essential that as the reader, you remind yourself throughout the discussion that teachers operate across a spectrum of authority, involvement, and personal investment in curriculum reforms. In some instances teachers will be leading initiatives, in others they will be clearly recipients of reform. Furthermore, it is also important to acknowledge the inter-related nature of the many and ever changing factors in the complex landscape that is curriculum reform in PE. While I necessarily discuss factors independently, in reality they are intrinsically linked and operate collectively to mediate, shape, and form the praxis of teachers.

The policy context

Contemporary curriculum research in PE has increasingly directed attention to the significance of ideological and political contexts for reforms that have and may in the future be seen in PE. Neoliberal agendas, enacted differently in different educational contexts, are identified as permeating all aspects of education and PE (Macdonald, 2004, 2011; Pope, 2013). The Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) (Sahlberg, 2006), has directed attention to conditions that frame teachers’ work, as practice in schools has become characterised by the marketisation of schools, performance pay, extensive accountability measures, charter schools, narrowing of curriculum, and productivity agendas. Many of these issues have been discussed in other chapters, however, it is important to briefly consider what they mean for teachers as curriculum reformists.

Teachers of PE face demanding reform agendas that are variously associated with curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, whilst concurrently working in school settings that are persistently “being sucked into a vortex of endless demands, and reduced to a problem-solving institution to whose doors the social ills of society are laid” (Hopmann & Kunzli, 1997, pp. 259–260). This is evident internationally in PE curriculum reform with the extent of attention directed towards improved physical health outcomes associated particularly with nutrition and physical activity, and a parallel perpetual focus on enhancing sporting performance. In many parts of the western world, a focus on nutrition and physical activity in PE in response to claims and concerns associated with levels of childhood obesity has seen extensive investments made by governments into schools to help address this issue (Evans, Rich, Davies, & Allwood, 2008). The public health agenda places an impetus on teachers to get children ‘more activity more often’, and, furthermore, to ensure that children are monitored (by tools such as Fitnessgram) and that they self-monitor, as they ‘learn’ about nutrition, healthy eating, physical activity, and sport (Gard & Plum, 2014). Such reform agendas are arguably focused on finding superficial answers to complex questions, which shift attention away from local priorities and the specific needs
of individual learners. Further, as highlighted in Chapter 11 (Penney & Mitchell) when frameworks for reform and for learning are increasingly determined by ‘experts’ outside of schools and/or outside of PE (for example: economists, epidemiologists, politicians), teachers become further sidelined from curriculum decision-making.

The neoliberal environment thus “increasingly encourages teachers [and arguably university-based researchers] to conceptualise their work in terms of what can be easily measured and quantified, and tend to value those things above the more complex, human dimensions of education practice” (Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell, Mockler, Ponte, & Ronnerman, 2012, p. 58). The dominant focus on accountability measures and the need for teachers and researchers to provide quantifiable evidence can profoundly affect educators’ decisions about what matters most as they contemplate and/or respond to curriculum reform. Both the position of PE amidst wider reform and what is deemed important in PE, are prospectively impacted. The context that increasingly is reported as characterising education amidst neoliberalism is one that pressures teachers towards adopting the policy approach to reform that has become favoured by many governments; that is, teachers may resort to accepting standardised, decontextualised PE programmes and packages, at times offered by outside providers, in an endeavour to ensure that they and their students are ‘measuring’ up against the desired standards (see also Chapter 11, Penney & Mitchell). As highlighted by Petrie, Penney and Fellows (2014) in New Zealand, these developments have the potential to notably skew the direction of curriculum reform, narrow PE curriculum and precipitate disconnected programmes of learning that may do little to meet the unique needs of individual students.

Contexts of curriculum reform dominated by discourses of standards and performativity also carry very real possibilities of an escalation in performance anxieties amongst teachers as efforts to ‘please’ the head teacher (principal), board of governors or trustees, and/or education review offices contribute to a culture of compliance (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). Acting in agentic ways, thinking imaginatively about the needs of individual students and ensuring that there are more equitable opportunities for all learners in PE classes may be regarded as potentially a costly professional decision. Such approaches may jeopardise a teacher’s ability to measure up against the outcomes privileged in ‘quality teaching standards’ and ‘performance pay’ principles. The political and policy context is thus fundamental in shaping the potential for teachers to opt to act as curriculum reformists in PE. Following Darling-Hammond (2011), Groundwater-Smith et al. (2012, p. 56) note that “punitive measures against teachers for perceived ineffectiveness and poor practice are unlikely to be as successful as generative professional learning in creating a strong and effective teaching profession” who feel empowered to lead, invest in, and engage with reform.

Whose ‘knowledge’ is valued in curriculum reform?

Countering the above emphasis is the recognition that teachers undoubtedly drive curriculum developments and decision-making in their own classroom, to construct curriculum that is localised and specific to their students’ needs (Priestley, 2011). Many teachers actively seek out innovations to enhance their teaching and improve student learning in PE, they adopt or adapt new curriculum and pedagogical models, read material on the Internet, share ideas on social media, engage in teaching as inquiry or reflection, and introduce new activities to their curriculum. In doing so teachers generate their own theories about teaching and learning and, therefore, about what constitutes good practice in PE. Such ‘bottom-up’ approaches to curriculum reform are often reliant on individual teachers, whose agency in their own classrooms infrequently translates into changing the nature of PE beyond their own school gates.
Curriculum reform at this level is frequently viewed as practical knowledge, or “knowledge in practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 250). This notion appears to place teacher-driven reform as inferior to more highly valued theoretical or formal knowledge, “knowledge for practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 250), generated by university-based researchers and government departments. Not only is the latter knowledge the predominant source of ‘information’ drawn on in the development of many curriculum reform agendas, it also positions teachers as recipients and consumers of information that will enable them to implement change and improve their understandings and practices. As such, teachers are then expected to deliver a curriculum constructed by agents and agencies external to the school context (Penney, 2006). As Ball et al. (2012) suggest: “Teachers, and an increasingly diverse cast of ‘other adults’ working in and around schools, not to mention students, are written out of the policy process or rendered simply as ciphers who ‘implement’ ” (p. 2, emphasis added).

Research within and beyond PE continues to point to teachers’ role in curriculum reform as that of recipients and implementers of ‘well meaning’ and ‘evidenced-based’ curriculum initiatives, with an underlying suggestion that many teachers do not have the knowledge to engage in curriculum planning (Ward & Doutis, 1999) as their expertise does not extend beyond the knowledge of their local context students, school, and resources (Kirk & Macdonald, 2001). A ‘divide’ thus characterises the conception, process, and experience of much curriculum reform in PE – as opposed to an emphasis upon working in ways that draw on the collective knowledge of all members to the education community.

While teachers’ voices may not be privileged in many official curriculum reforms in PE, in most instances teachers get opportunities to provide feedback on draft policy documents, and some may have opportunities to act as members of panels or advisory groups that inform developments. Teachers are thus typically ‘consulted’ on and about reform, but many questions remain, including – how many teachers are given or take up the opportunity to engage in the dialogue associated with reform and in what ways? And when they do engage, are they listened to?

**Curriculum reform as a transaction**

As other chapters in this handbook discuss, professional learning can be framed in many ways. It is something that, arguably, demands more critical attention in relation to curriculum reform in PE. Under the guise of professional learning work between university-based or government-based ‘experts’ and schools, PE curriculum reforms are, in many instances, essentially ‘dumped’ on teachers as ‘experts’ share new knowledge about curriculum models, and improved approaches to assessment and pedagogical approaches. These professional learning opportunities often take the form of abbreviated workshops or once/year professional development days framed around somewhat disjointed topics – often sponsored by school district administrators (Armour & Yelling, 2004; Macdonald, 2004). Teachers gravitate to these simplistic reform efforts in search of the next new idea, game, ready-made lesson, possibly as a pragmatic response to workload pressures (Petrie, 2012), and because such ‘reform’ efforts are less threatening as they do not challenge the status quo. Such approaches suggest that curriculum reform is linear and transactional, that is, ‘new’ knowledge is directly ‘sold’ to teachers ready for enactment.

The processes associated with the development and dissemination of many curriculum reform materials openly reaffirm transactional or linear thinking about knowledge relations and curriculum reform and, in so doing, marginalise teachers and teachers’ knowledge. From this perspective, materials developed by university or government-based ‘experts’ are passed down to teachers ‘with support’ that it is envisaged will allow them to adapt them “for their
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local context” (Kirk & Macdonald, 2001, p. 565). As discussed further in Penney and Mitchell (Chapter 11) an array of other ‘experts’ are now active in the development of curriculum reform materials that ‘support’ delivery of PE in schools (Penney, Petrie, & Fellows, 2015; Powell, 2014; Powell & Gard, 2014; Williams, Hay, & Macdonald, 2011). This research highlights that the transactional nature of such reform activities carries the potential to exacerbate the narrowing and commodification of PE curriculum around a fixed body of knowledge and skills (that is more likely to fit within dominant physical health and sporting discourses) with limited reference to local contexts. It arguably signals a move towards curriculum reform that sees PE becoming increasingly standardised, formulaic, and quantifiable – especially when we consider that pre-packaged resources, designed to support teachers to reform PE curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment are employed and adopted by teachers “as a practical and sensible solution to the problem of curriculum time, resources, and ‘skills’ ” (Apple & Jungerk, 1990, p. 248), and in some sectors a lack of confidence. The use of such materials, provided by ‘experts’ and designed in ways to support the curriculum reform and the ‘reskilling’ of teachers, can thus work to deskill the teachers (Apple, 1982; Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid, & Shacklock, 2000) as they divorce the conceptualisation of the resource from the delivery or execution. As the transactional approach and neoliberal context combine, teachers’ abilities to adapt resources to their local contexts and the needs of their learners are marginalised or eroded, and large-scale national agendas take precedence. For PE curriculum reform, the danger is that teachers’ contextual work will become less relevant, and their knowledge of individual learning needs will count for very little. Furthermore, the transactional approach does little to advance collaborative or significant reform in PE curriculum.

Space and time to think ‘reformatively’

As discussed above, political and economic forces drive a reform movement that places schools in a constant state of flux and correspondingly teachers on a treadmill of change. It is important to reiterate that teachers are not only dealing with reform directly concerned with curriculum, pedagogy, and/or assessment. They are simultaneously working in school contexts that are being reshaped by a multitude of reform agendas, many of which at first glance may appear to sit outside of the ‘core business’ of PE curriculum, but can easily morph into daily responsibilities. As Ball et al. (2012) highlight, teachers are variously charged with contributing to and implementing policies and associated with national assessment programmes (National Standards, Senior Subject Qualifications), mental health, school uniforms, break times, and behaviour management. All schools are also grappling with broader curriculum reform initiatives, such as eLearning, student-centred pedagogies, culturally responsive pedagogies, and engaging student voice. The multitude of reform initiatives facing teachers is accentuated in many primary school settings, where classroom generalist teachers are expected to engage not only with PE developments, but also curriculum reform associated with all other learning areas. It is not surprising, then, that teachers of PE are at times overwhelmed by expectations to engage and contribute to ‘reform’. What matters most, what initiatives should be priorities, and how does all of this get balanced against the imperative to raise performance? What are the incentives and possibilities for teachers to invest in generating curriculum reform in PE?

Agency, infidelity, and slippage

Even when “policies ‘done’ in schools are ‘written’ by governments, their agencies or other influential stakeholders” (Ball et al., 2012, p. 2) teachers demonstrate their agency as they act
in resistance to the prescribed reform. Teachers’ agency is expressed in all attempts to interpret, contest, and adapt curriculum policy in ways that have meaning for them and their learners. These responses further reflect recognition of the need to reshape and contextualise curriculum reform in response to multiple aspects of context – including the physical spaces and resources available, the diverse culture and social context of school communities, and the human capital to support reform efforts. At times such efforts have been seen as teachers being unfaithful or demonstrating infidelity to curriculum reform initiatives, reinforcing the low status accorded to teachers’ knowledge and skills in relation to reform. Yet, as Ball et al.’s (2012, p. 3) recent work has highlighted, policy texts – and more specifically, curriculum texts, “have to be translated from text to action – put ‘into’ practice – in relation to history and to context, with the resources available”, by teachers. Teacher agency is then, integral and essential to curriculum reform that will be contextually appropriate and effective. Hence, there are significant problems in framing the notion of “slippage” (Bowe & Ball with Gold, 1992; Penney & Evans, 1999) as inherently problematic or a shortcoming amidst curriculum reform endeavours. What works in one context, with one group of learners, may turn out to be a disaster in another. Therefore, in contrast to teachers being unfaithful to ‘mandated’ curriculum reforms in PE, agency in adaptation to meet the needs of learners in any specific context, can be seen as a central facet of teacher professionalism.

This is of course a very teacher centric view, so it is important to also note that teachers speak back to policy through their actions for a diverse range of reasons, some personal, others professional. As long as there are teachers willing to try new things and to learn with colleagues as part of their work as teachers, there will also be teachers who never engage with reform or innovation, and/or who actively find ways to accommodate reforms within unchanged curriculum and pedagogical practice as documented by Curtner-Smith (1999). Amidst any externally driven reform in PE, there will always be teachers who ‘do what they have always done’, some who will align with visions for quality and equity, and some who will not (see Chapter 13, Wilkinson). Alongside this, and in an education landscape in which performativity is rewarded, we are, however, more likely to see teachers ‘playing the system’ and adopting possibly questionable practices. This has become evident in the USA in relation to standardised test scores, with entire districts ‘fudging’ results to evidence ‘enhanced’ student achievement (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). While addressing issues of teacher performance is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to be conscious of how reform agendas, especially those fostered by neoliberal discourses, may influence professional cultures, teachers’ actions, and the scope and expression of agency in relation to PE curriculum reform.

**Centring teachers as leaders in curriculum reform**

The nature of many reform efforts means that the relationship between practitioners and policy makers is destined to remain complex. Yet, as long as teachers are silenced or sidelined in and amidst talk of curriculum reform in PE, there will be limited opportunities for teachers of PE to be drivers of curriculum reforms that make a meaningful difference for learners beyond their own classrooms. As Macdonald (2003) and Penney (2006) have previously discussed, there is a need to move from conceptualisations of curriculum reform as top-down or bottom-up and, instead, look to partnership approaches, that “contribute to educator-driven, educator-directed and educator-led arrangements and which, in turn, we argue, nurture informed and strategic change” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 179). There is then, the opportunity to dissolve the theory practice dualism, and work in and for curriculum reform in PE in ways that allow “legitimate
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theory building [to] occur at the intersection of university and school sites of practices” (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2012, p. 16).

There is, however, a dearth of literature in the field of PE about how curriculum reform can be generated alongside collaborative non-hierarchical partnership approaches. The early work of Tinning, Macdonald, Tregenza, and Boustead (1996) went some way to attempting to utilise action research as a professional development approach and subsequently curriculum change. Since then there has been a growing body of evidence demonstrating collaborative approaches to professional learning in PE, where community of learners include both university-based lecturers and teachers in schools (see Chapter 10 by Jess and Gray). Yet there is still limited evidence of such approaches being adopted as part of system-level programmes of PE curriculum reform where teachers are positioned as curriculum developers and leaders, as opposed to implementers. Here it is also important to note that a collaborative practitioner research focused approach to curriculum reform that is underpinned by commitments to dissolve historic knowledge hierarchies, may constitute a valuable professional learning opportunity both for university partners and school-based practitioners. The sections that follow extend theoretical and empirical insights into such an approach.

Future directions: collaborative practitioner research

Collaborative (critical, transformative, action) practitioner research can be viewed as a way to support teachers to be drivers of and partners in curriculum reform. Building on the traditions of action research, Kemmis et al. (2014), Groundwater-Smith, et al. (2012), and Coburn and Stein (2010) amongst others, continue to progress the notion of collaborative research approaches, that involve the academy working to support teachers to take ownership and develop their capacity as curriculum drivers and researchers in their own right. The emergent and iterative nature of collaborative practitioner research (Paulus, Woodside, & Ziegler, 2008) is underpinned by “the assumption that inquiry is an integral, not separate, part of practice, and that learning from practice is an essential task of practitioners” (Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006, p. 509). The adoption of a collaborative practitioner research framework to curriculum reform thus provides a space to explore PE curriculum in ways that are organic, systematic, participatory, emancipatory, and driven by shared desires to problematise, whilst working toward collective decision-making. Curriculum reform that is undertaken within a culture of collaboration and where critical colleagueship (Lord, 1994) underpins practice has the potential to generate new dialogue and theorising about PE curriculum in schools. Groundwater-Smith et al. (2012, p. 79) explain that a “collaborative and critical perspective, means that through inquiry, meetings and discussions, teachers become aware of trends and policy shifts that are happening around them and can take up an activist perspective by broadening their decision-making and scope of action”. The approach also aligns closely with the notion of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that has been adopted as a model to support the professional learning of teachers of PE. In addition, the philosophies that underpin Kaupapa Māori research (Bishop, 1998; Smith, 1999, 2005) as a model of respectful collaborative, culturally responsive, and respectful partnerships are useful to consider amidst efforts to advance curriculum reform from a collaborative standpoint. As the following section emphasises, a collaborative practitioner research approach rejects views of curriculum reform as neat, transactional, or linear. Instead the research and curriculum reform process is both fluid and messy.
**Collaborative practitioner research and curriculum reform in practice**

While within the PE community there is extensive evidence of research that has problematised practice (Evans, Davies, & Wright, 2004; Gard, 2011; Wright, Macdonald, & Burrows, 2004), it is significantly more challenging to find evidence of collaborative practitioner research being utilised to inform PE curriculum reform, development, and implementation. In the USA, and drawing from the collective work of Coburn and Stein (2010), there seems to be a push for collaborative curriculum reform models where university researchers design curriculum (programmes and/or resources) and then work with teachers to trial the ‘reform’ and make modifications to improve the product, before sharing it with others. In the USA and elsewhere, protocols have reflected a need for the process and impact of curriculum reforms to be scientifically measurable and replicable for the purposes of up-scaling. These agendas have similarly shaped reform efforts elsewhere, for example, in research directed towards the reform of assessment practices in senior secondary PE in Western Australia (Penney, Jones, Newhouse, & Campbell, 2012).

In other examples from the USA (Engle, 2010; Gosin, Dustman, Drapeau, & Harthun, 2003) teachers’ work is posited as more central to the reform, as they partner with academic researchers to ‘solve the problems’ that have been predetermined by the ‘academic’ partners. Teachers are partners, and to some extent there is evidence of transformation of practice, however, it appears to be within bounds of achieving a predetermined purpose or as respondents to predesigned materials, and enacted in ways that the teachers are still to some extent ‘subservient’ to the expertise of others. As Kemmis (2006) cautions, we need to be wary of *inadequate action research*, where practitioner research is used as an implementation tool to get teachers and students to conform to particular notions of schooling, and to reinforce particular or narrow notions of PE curriculum, pedagogies, or assessments. Groundwater-Smith et al. (2012) stress that “the very act of engaging in critical or transformative practitioner research is thus to swim against the tide of current global discourses in education” (p. 58). This is of course not easy to accomplish, especially amidst research and/or professional learning aligned to implementation phases of curriculum reform. A further challenge internationally, is that in order to get research funding that allows for the sustained time needed to undertake collaborative practitioner research, projects have to align with state agendas and requirements, over and above localised classroom needs. Discussion in other chapters in this section illustrates that some efforts are nevertheless being made to build elements of resistance into such alignment and to pursue reform agendas that go beyond seeking ‘quick fix’ solutions to complex issues and dilemmas. The following section serves to highlight that the ways in which we seek to do this are as critical as the intent. It illustrates a collaborative practitioner research framework being used to develop ‘new’ understandings that are contextualised, localised, framed alongside social justice agendas, and with a desire to ensure educational opportunities cater to diverse needs.

**Reimagining health and physical education in New Zealand primary schools**

My own work (Petrie, Burrows, & Cosgriff, 2014; Petrie et al., 2013) with partners from academia and local schools goes some way to demonstrating how collaborative practitioner research can place teachers at the centre of curriculum reform. Notions of collaborative practitioner research and the *Teaching as Inquiry* process outlined in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC) (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 35), were tools used to help us make sense of current practice and refocus teaching and learning in health and physical education (HPE) to better reflect the needs and interests of all learners. This project provided an opportunity to
reimagine what was taught in primary school HPE and engage in what could be regarded as ‘radical’ curriculum reform within the broad frame of HPE as conceptualised and presented in the NZC. Four primary school teachers joined with three university lecturers to build knowledge about current practices in HPE, expand repertoires, and reconstruct practice, before implementing and evaluating innovative HPE approaches in their classrooms. Teacher and student interviews and in class tasks prompted collective concerns about students’ narrow conceptions about health, physical activity, and bodily appearance, raising questions about the role current HPE practices in schools play in contributing to these perspectives. This led us to question what we teach in the name of HPE, why we teach it, and how we teach it. In reforming the curriculum we collectively wanted to explore ways to better support the diverse needs of all learners and challenge students and ourselves to think and do differently in relation to HPE. To support this process it was necessary to establish conditions that gave all partners the space to engage in reflective dialogue. Our collective efforts to reform curriculum thus relied on:

- time to talk, think, discuss, debate and imagine;
- respectful partnerships where the shared expertise of all team members was acknowledged and drawn on;
- awareness of how our view of teaching and learning is influenced by our own assumptions, values, and beliefs, as well as the complexity of the landscapes in which we work;
- living with the discomfort of not knowing, and therefore being willing to grapple with, question, and dither about what teaching and learning in PE could become.

As this work has been disseminated some have queried the depth of change, or ask if the same would be possible with a different group of teachers or on a bigger scale. Others have suggested that it was a professional development activity as opposed to a collaborative research programme. Others may query it being foregrounded in relation to discussion of curriculum reform. Yet, we contend that a key to the shifts in thinking and practice evidenced in this research, demonstrate how collaborative practitioner research is professional learning and development for all partners and, furthermore, can undoubtedly facilitate curriculum reform. We learnt from each other, and in doing so we were able to collectively come to new and richer understandings of PE curriculum and practice. Our curriculum reform agenda was a collective action, in response to the contextual needs of students and the local communities in which we work. Such work was not based on the premise that the ‘experts’ told teachers the answer(s). Rather, the research process involved a constant reshuffling of roles. The university partners became co-teachers, resource suppliers, and sounding boards for new ideas, and the teachers became both the generators and collectors of data, practitioner researchers, and activist professionals. In utilising this approach “we have taken the time to grapple with the discomfort of not knowing, engage in reflective dialogue, talking and dithering, and come to a place of reconfiguring and reimagining HPE together” (Petrie, Burrows, et al., 2014, p. 54). Our reimagining has made for significant shifts in how we all view what constitutes quality HPE for learners in primary school settings, and how this ‘new curriculum’ can be enacted in ways that ensure more equitable outcomes for all students. Sadly, while a range of attempts have been made to disseminate our learning to practitioner audiences (see Duggan, 2013; Keown & Petrie, 2013; Naera, 2013; Petrie with Devcich, 2013), the status of HPE in our communities remains limited by the demands of performative agendas associated with numeracy and literacy standards. In this context, the impact of this curriculum reformation has had limited extension beyond local schools.
Facilitating curriculum reform grounded in collaborative practitioner research

Collaborative practitioner research as a model of curriculum reform, requires education ‘leaders’ with the skills and willingness to do partnership in genuine and ethical ways that meaningfully supports teachers as drivers of curriculum reform, and that is effective in creating equitable learning opportunities for students of PE. Transformative, emancipatory partnerships between university researchers and teachers require a move beyond notions of privileging ‘academic’ theory and knowing over practice-informed theories generated by teachers. It also requires a move beyond simplistic, transactional, linear conceptualisations of curriculum reform. Arguably both shifts should be easy for a PE community that to a significant extent has prided itself on adopting a socio-critical perspective, and as seeking to ensure that practices in PE are equitable, contextually relevant, and meaningful for diverse learners and communities. What knowledge and therefore whose voices counts in relation to curriculum reform thus remains a critical issue for the field as it does for education more broadly (Ball, 1990; Ball et al., 2012). We cannot seek to suggest partnership is the way forward when we continue to create and legitimate hierarchies of knowledge in the way we speak of curriculum and reform. Future reform efforts must, therefore, position and seek to strengthen PE teaching as a research informed and a research informing profession, where teachers are both generators and utilisers of research (Lingard & Renshaw, 2010).

There are a growing number of texts and journal publications (for starters see Coburn & Stein, 2010; Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2012; Kemmis et al., 2014; Locke, Alcorn, & O’Neill, 2013) available to assist teachers of PE and university partners to position themselves as curriculum reformists. Across these there are some guiding principles (listed below) that facilitators of research directed towards curriculum reform need to attend to in their efforts to undertake Collaborative Practitioner Research that ‘makes a difference’. Furthermore, responsibility rests with the instigator/s of any reform agenda to consider what they can do to ensure that the process is one of collaborative co-construction that values the knowledge of all, and that keeps equity issues to the fore talk about of curriculum reform in PE (see Chapter 13, Wilkinson).

1. All partners value the shared expertise of the group, respecting each other’s knowledge and experiences, and are willing to engage in learning with each other. In doing so there is scope for strengthening each other’s position by building and enhancing relations.

2. Interventionist models with predetermined outcomes determined by academics are parked in favour of listening to local concerns. The challenge is “how best to address the difficult work of challenging accepted practices in order to develop the conditions that can genuinely enrich teachers’ learners, rather than simply managing them to a predetermined solution” (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2012, p. 88).

3. Decisions are made collegially. This can only occur when partnerships are founded on genuine relationships, where there is an ongoing process of respectful negotiation and re-negotiation, and fortified by rapport and trust. This is key to fostering confidence and capacity in the use of teacher professional judgement, grounded in robust professional knowledge.

4. There is an atmosphere where practical as well as theoretical knowledge is acknowledged and valued. Reciprocity allows practitioners to challenge academic partners about theories and research, while academics can query practitioners’ practice knowledge. Together there is the scope to develop knowledge of practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), when partners possess the ability to ask questions that are respectful, and yet challenging.
5. Members of the partnership are selected with care. It is necessary to ensure that each person has a disposition and the capacity to be respectful of others. This will require a concentrated effort to ensure that academic researchers, as partners, are not condescending of teachers and their work, but instead can demonstrate relational practice that enables others, and which supports a move beyond transactional models of working.

6. Explore opportunities to incorporate people who are not already perceived as experts in the field as they may provide fresh ideas in the process of challenging discourses that pervade the ‘known’ ways of thinking and doing in PE. This has the potential to create generative partnerships and allow for new ways of thinking that expand narrow perspectives.

7. Act as an outstanding academic partner (Ewing et al., 2010). This requires university partners to: give generously of their time and demonstrate a commitment to the school and projects; take the time to understand how schools operate; adopt a critical stance as opposed to pushing one agenda; demonstrate a willingness to provide learning opportunities (timely, contextualised) for team members and others; question their own sense of powerlessness and query our ethics around power relations (Locke et al., 2013); and, finally, have the quality and magnitude of professional knowledge relevant to project and translatable in local context. Such an approach will provide a platform for the academic partner to shift between the roles of expert, learner, mentor, and critical friend.

Summary of key findings

Teachers continue to be positioned as implementers, as opposed to developers, of curriculum reform by a range of contextual barriers including global reform movements, government and school policies and practice, teachers’ status as knowledge generators, and curriculum reform process. The silencing of teachers in curriculum reform limits teacher agency and the potential for curriculum development that is contextually and culturally relevant. A Collaborative Practitioner Research approach, based on genuine non-hierarchical partnerships, presents an opportunity to reconceptualise how curriculum reform occurs in ways that are transformative and emancipatory for all. Education policy makers must reconsider ways of working with teachers to ensure teachers feel valued and motivated to engage and spend precious energy on this laborious task of curriculum reform. Reforming our own practices, as curriculum developers, would help counter teacher peripherality in PE curriculum reform agendas.

Reflective questions for discussion

1. What drives curriculum reform? The needs of the students, the local community, national, or global interests?
2. Who drives curriculum reform? Whose voices are really valued in curriculum reforms at school, local, or national level – where are teachers’ and student voices?
3. Whose knowledge counts in this curriculum reform and therefore, how genuine is the ‘partnership’?
4. What does contextually relevant curriculum reform entail?
5. What does it take to operate effectively as a partner in curriculum reform efforts?
References


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