PART V
Transformative pedagogies in physical education

Introduction
There is a growing and diverse literature on what is termed transformative pedagogy. It is seen in such diverse fields of practice as architecture, environmental sustainability and education. Much of this literature is inspired by the writings of scholars such as Aronowitz and Giroux (1985), Bowles and Gintis (1976), Freire (1972) and Giroux (1983).

Ukpokodu (2009) defines transformative pedagogy as an activist pedagogy combining the elements of constructivist and critical pedagogy that empowers students to examine critically their beliefs, values and knowledge with the goal of developing a reflective knowledge base, an appreciation for multiple perspectives and a sense of critical consciousness and agency (Ukpokodu, 2009, p. 43).

Taking Ukpokodu’s lead, this part considers the constructivist, dialogic, critical and reflective nature of transformative pedagogy as a democratic educational spirit and an educational philosophy rather than a particular pedagogy.

Physical education has not been isolated from the discourses that inform transformative pedagogy. Moreover, physical education pedagogy has a considerable literature on critical pedagogy, constructivist informed pedagogy and reflective practice. There are numerous examples of advocacy for PE’s role in social change and some analyses of the potential impact of social change on PE (see references in the chapter by Tinning in this collection). Indeed many social changes have provided, and will continue to provide, challenges to PE. However, notwithstanding all of this, to date, within the PE literature there is limited connection with transformative pedagogy as a specific concept.

In this part the authors consider the concept of transformative pedagogy in regard to physical education. Importantly, we all take the position that transformative pedagogy is a term for what is a broad church of transformative pedagogies. The overall question that orients the chapters in this part is “what might genuinely be regarded as transformative pedagogies in PE and what have been their success?”

This section begins with Richard Tinning’s chapter (18) which provides an overview of the discourse communities (both in PE and education more generally) that ‘gives voice’ to the critical agenda of transformative pedagogy and considers the possibilities and difficulties of
engaging transformative pedagogies within physical education. In particular it explores the possibilities for transformative pedagogies to bring about both personal and social change.

In Chapter 19, Alan Ovens examines the practices that provide a means for enacting transformative pedagogies in physical education teacher education programmes (PETE). Acknowledging that advocating for transformative practice is not the same as doing transformative practice Ovens suggests that the very possibility of transformative practice appears contingent on a range of social, political and material factors that constitute the landscape of teacher education. For Ovens, the doing of a transformative practice in PETE is about enabling a setting where the practices of teaching can be reflexively interrogated.

Kimberley Oliver and David Kirk argue in Chapter 20 that early advocacy for critical pedagogy in physical education was not easily translated into practice. Tracing the main theoretical approaches to conceptualising the body, its social construction and the experience of embodiment in physical education, they then use an example from activist research with girls in PE to show how a focus on embodiment as integral to a transformative pedagogy requires a radical reconstruction of physical education.

Katie Fitzpatrick and Eimear Enwright explore ‘transformative’ pedagogies of physical education (PE) in Chapter 21 and consider what these approaches might mean for addressing issues of gender sexuality in the field. They suggest that transformative approaches to PE require attention to the social and political contexts within which they occur, and which articulate with practice in complex ways at the intersection of body, culture and practice.

According to Fiona Dowling and Robyne Garrett (Chapter 22), narrative inquiry has the potential to bring about enhanced understanding about the social world of PE and to transform its social inequalities. Positioning narrative inquiry in a historical context, they then present an overview of the most relevant research carried out during the past decade. The collective findings of the various studies foreground a discussion about how narrative inquiry can be developed in the future within the field of PE (theoretically and practically), and in particular, address what narrative pedagogical strategies might be useful, and why, for the purpose of transforming inequitable relations.

Drawing upon the relatively new area of study of critical obesity scholarship, Erin Cameron, Moss Norman and LeAnne Petherick employ the notion of transformative pedagogy in Chapter 23 to challenge scholars, students and professionals in the field of physical education to critically consider the construction and representation of the so-called ‘obesity epidemic’. In an attempt to disrupt both the pervasiveness of dominant obesity discourse, the critical obesity pedagogy they describe uses what they call “obesity stories” to deconstruct commonly held assumptions about bodies, weight and health, and to expose the injustices of a culture that assigns moral value to body weight.

In the last chapter (24) in this part, in Transformative pedagogy in physical education and the challenges of young people with migration backgrounds, Dean Barker and Suzanne Lundvall provide an overview of scholarship dealing with ethnicity and cultural diversity in relation to PE. They identify two central themes that have occupied scholars over the last two decades: Muslim girls’ experiences, and teachers’ preparedness to respond to increasing cultural pluralism. In synthesising this literature, the chapter underscores recurring issues, central findings and implications for practitioners, as well as identifying themes that require further theoretical and practical attention.
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TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGIES AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION
Exploring the possibilities for personal change and social change

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In writing about a certain disposition with regard to education, Kenway, Bigum, and Fitzclarence (1995) used the term the critical project to describe a set of shared views around three key themes: the unity of educational theory and practice; the historical formation, social construction, and continual reconstruction of education and educational institutions; and the possibilities of education for emancipation and active and productive participation in a democratic society (Rizvi, 2011, p. 151). The critical project is inspired by a sense of criticality (Rizvi, 2011) that embraces the ethics of social justice and the principles of critical theory.

When we consider how Ukpokodu (2009) defines transformative pedagogy we can immediately see that she is talking about a pedagogy (this includes multiple pedagogies) that is underpinned by a criticality and which can be thought to be part of the critical project. To paraphrase her definition, we can say that by means of certain pedagogical practices, students have their beliefs, values, and knowledge transformed and, as a result, are not only empowered with a critical consciousness and a sense of greater agency over their own lives, but also to influence the lives of others via activism. There are two dimensions of change that are implicit in transformative pedagogy – personal change and social change. There is also an assumption that empowerment at the individual level will lead to a social transformation in the form of a more democratic, equitable, and liberal social world. As Storrs and Inderbitzin (2006) argue, “Transformative pedagogy and a learning-centered paradigm are at the heart of a liberal education” (p. 176).

In this chapter I will consider transformative pedagogies as a manifestation of the critical project and present a cautionary account of what might be claimed in regard to transformative pedagogy in physical education (PE) from a personal and social change perspective. For example, in addition to what needs to be transformed in PE, what do we really think can be transformed through PE? Can we really empower students to make changes in their lives in relation to their beliefs and values that are consistent with liberal democratic ideals? Moreover, if PE is to make a contribution to the making of critical citizens and liberal democratic ideals, should this be its foremost task? – its main objective? In my view we need to keep the potential for PE to make such contributions in perspective.
In regard to the field of health and physical education (HPE), Leahy, O’Flynn, and Wright (2013) argue that critical approaches in HPE have been the subject of much research and writing. Overwhelmingly the emphasis has tended to be to argue for, and seek to demonstrate how a socio-critical or critical pedagogical approach might be implemented in teaching movement and/or health education. (p. 176)

This observation is an important beginning for this chapter because it allows for the distinction between scholarship that argues for the critical project (advocacy) and scholarship that reports on actual attempts to implement the critical project. In order to progress this observation I will suggest that transformative pedagogy can be thought of as a discourse community that includes scholarship for and on the critical project.

Transformative pedagogy as a discourse community

Transformative pedagogy can be thought of as a discourse community. As a concept, discourse community links the power discourses have to create specific perspectives for interpreting the world, with the affiliations people make with particular groups or communities that circulate such discourses (Ovens & Tinning, 2009). Importantly, discourse communities can be constituted of smaller discourse communities and, in the case of transformative pedagogy these include, but are not limited to, the discourse communities of critical pedagogy (Wink, 2011), critical action research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), critical teaching (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998), “liberatory pedagogy” (Freire, 1972), critical inquiry (Zeichner, 1983), critical approaches (Leahy et al., 2013), and critical reflection (Waring & Evans, 2015). Accordingly, in this chapter when I write of, for example critical pedagogy, I will do so with the understanding that it is part of the larger discourse community of transformative pedagogy.

To date, there is limited specific use of transformative pedagogy as a specific term within the PE literature. However, the discourses that describe transformative pedagogy are found within advocacy for and research on critical pedagogy (e.g. Bain, 1990; Culpan & Bruce, 2007; Fernandez-Balboa, 1995; Garrett & Wrench, 2011; Kirk, 1986; Penney & Waring, 2000; Wright, 1999); on gender and PE (e.g. Azzarito & Solmon, 2009; Dowling, 2006; Fisette & Walton, 2014; Fitzpatrick, 2013a; Larsson, Redelius, & Fagrell, 2010; Oliver, 2001; Wright & King, 1990); on sexuality and PE (e.g. Clarke, 1992; Griffin, 1981; Sykes, 1998; Wright, 1991); on race and ethnicity (e.g. Carroll & Hollinshead, 1993; Dagkas & Benn, 2006; Fitzpatrick, 2011b, 2013b; Flintoff, 2014; Knez, Macdonald, & Abbott, 2012); on obesity and PE (e.g. Burrows & Wright, 2004; Fitzpatrick, 2011a; Gard & Wright, 2001; Garrett, 2006); on disability and equity in PE (e.g. Dowling, Fitzgerald, & Flintoff, 2012; Evans & Davies, 1993); and on knowledge in PE/physical education teacher education (PETE) (e.g. Karlhus, 2010; Kirk, 1992; Nyberg & Larsson, 2014).

Numerous scholars in PE have specifically examined critical pedagogy ‘in action’ to see if it ‘delivered’ on its claims. In the PETE context the work of Curtner-Smith (2007), Gore (1990), Hickey (2001), Ovens (2004), and Philpot (2015) provide evidence that the best of intentions are often difficult to realize, to make real. It is also noteworthy that critical pedagogy has not been a focus across all countries that have scholarship and research in PE and PETE. By far the largest concentration of critical scholars in PE publishing in English journals tend to be working in the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, USA, Sweden, and Norway, with almost nothing registered in Asian countries such as Japan and Korea. Maybe this all says something about
receptivity to the liberal democratic ideal of the critical project. There are also obvious language barriers to this observation. Germany, for example, has a long history of work on critical theory, but it’s mostly published in German.

**A voice from within the ‘big tent’**

In progressing with this cautionary account of transformative pedagogies and PE, I need to explicitly confirm my long-time commitment to the ideals of transformative pedagogy. As I have argued elsewhere (Tinning, 2002), I have long been happy to place myself within what Lather (1998) called the critical pedagogy ‘big tent’. This ‘big tent’ could also be described as housing those who, in the language of this Handbook section, advocate for transformative pedagogies.

**Positive achievements and cautionary observations**

There is no doubt that over the past 30 years, physical education as a field of study has shown a growing interest in the critical project. Not only have critical discourses influenced academic writing and research in PE, they also have been ‘taken up’ in some curriculum reform documents (for example within Australia and New Zealand). An Australian example is instructive here. In 1990 we saw the introduction of National Curriculum guidelines that were underpinned by the principles of social justice, diversity, and supportive environments. This prompted Macdonald and Kirk (1999) to argue that this official discourse meant that HPE teachers in Australia now have a “responsibility to teach the socially critical liberal curriculum as defined by the State” (p. 140). Subsequent curriculum manifestations in Australia have kept a similar ethic.

To see many of the issues critical pedagogy advocates raised in the 1980s now being addressed within the official discourse of our field is surely a small victory for those of us in the ‘big tent’ of critical pedagogy – those of us who champion transformative pedagogy. However, my enthusiasm for this apparent victory is tempered since, in my view, the social justice discourses that are central to transformative pedagogy have become mainstreamed and have often been appropriated by some teachers and administrators for reasons at considerable distance from their original intention. In this regard McLaren (1998) argues that because postmodern critical pedagogy has an emphasis on values such as diversity and inclusion, its language is easily co-opted by neo-liberalism and has become an ally of new capitalism and neo-liberal educational policy.

While Rovegno and Kirk (1995) claim “that socially critical work has shown that empowerment and emancipation are central goals of physical education” (p. 453), the terms emancipation and empowerment are rather ill-defined in PE and elsewhere. Giddens (1991) provides a useful conception of what he terms emancipatory politics: “a generic outlook concerned above all with liberating individuals and groups from constraints which adversely affect their life chances … Emancipatory politics is concerned to reduce or eliminate exploitation, inequality and oppression” (pp. 210–211, original emphasis). When we apply this observation to the history of the critical project in physical education we see that it has been more concerned with a rather restricted and individualized notion of emancipation. The concern has been more with the freedom of an individual to participate in the movement culture, become self-reliant or independent rather than with the broader sense of emancipation underpinning critical pedagogy. It seems that most physical education teachers are typically more concerned with what Giddens (1991) terms ‘life politics’. As a “politics of choice” (Giddens, 1991, p. 214, original emphasis) life politics does not primarily concern itself with the conditions that liberate us in order to make choices. Since there is evidence that some PE teachers are insensitive to social issues,
elitist, sexist, ‘pragmatic sceptics’, anti-intellectual, and conservative in their politics (Dewar, 1989; Macdonald, Hunter, Carlson, & Penney, 2002) we can surmise that they are probably more concerned with life politics than emancipatory politics, and it is likely that in their teaching they also embody this orientation.

**Disquiet in the tent**

Notwithstanding its ethical purpose, over the past two decades critical pedagogy has become the target of considerable critique, not just from the conservative Right, but also from many feminists and others on the educational Left who might be expected to share similar political agendas to the critical pedagogues. These criticisms have been concerned with both practical and conceptual issues (e.g. Biesta, 1998; Buckingham, 1998; Ellsworth, 1989; Gore, 1993; Lather, 1989; Luke & Gore, 1992). The fact that much of this criticism comes from many who were originally advocates for critical pedagogy (for example Gore, 1990) is a healthy sign for those still committed to the critical project and the whole idea of transformative pedagogy.

In reflecting on her own experiences of the limitations of critical pedagogy, Kohli (1998) argued that there were limits to the power of rational dialogue to change deeply held beliefs. In this regard, Gur-Ze’ev (1998) argues for a more sceptical, less utopian “counter education that does not promise collective emancipation” (p. 471). Not only have questions been raised about the actual influence of critical pedagogy on classroom practice, but also about the (very) possibility of critical pedagogy itself. Beista (1998) reminds us that since critical pedagogy is founded on the Enlightenment ideal of emancipation through critical reflexivity, fundamental questions about the possibility of a critical pedagogy are raised by poststructuralist critiques of the Enlightenment project. Lather (1998) is also persuaded by poststructural theory and its critique of Enlightenment ideals and she comes to the conclusion that “[i]mplementing a critical pedagogy in the field of schooling is impossible” (p. 495).

The physical education literature has also reported confusion and disquiet in regard to the scholarship on critical pedagogy. First, there is confusion because it seems that there is not a common understanding of what critical pedagogy actually is, or might be. In their study of the critical pedagogy practice of a number of physical education teacher educators (PETEs), Muros and Fernández-Balboa (2005) found that most of these teacher educators were quite confused regarding their own pedagogical theory, purposes, and methods, and displayed important contradictions in their own practice.

Disquiet is revealed in O’Sullivan, Siedentop, and Locke’s (1992) article ‘Towards collegiality: Competing viewpoints among teacher educators’ in which they challenged what they considered to be the often ‘overzealous’ language used by some ‘radicals’ in the prosecution of their critical pedagogy ‘mission’, the perceived high moral ground taken by them, and the lack of evidence to support many of their claims. As I have argued elsewhere (Tinning, 2002), the early critical pedagogy literature does contain some rather forceful language (e.g. in describing the limitations of traditional pedagogies), it does take a high moral ground in its advocacy for ‘freedom from oppression and unjust social practices’, and it does contain claims for which there is little available empirical evidence. However, one can read this criticism as essentially a criticism of the rhetorical style of the critical scholars rather than of their underpinning mission. Importantly, O’Sullivan herself is clearly an advocate for the ideals of the critical project (see, for example, Enright & O’Sullivan, 2010) and her disquiet was related more to the style of writing than the social ethic underpinning it.

Fernández-Balboa (2015), a PETE and former resident in the ‘big tent’, offers an iconoclastic critique of transformative pedagogies in which he claims that there is a real “possibility
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that teachers and teacher educators, including those who call themselves ‘transformative’, may be in a sort of ideological cave [like Plato’s allegory of the cave] wherein their notion of reality is limited and limiting”. Fernández-Balboa (2015) asks how can we be sure that as advocates of transformative pedagogy we are not deluding ourselves as to its potential? Fernández-Balboa also takes issue with Ukpokodu’s (2009) definition of transformative pedagogy and its capacity to inspire what he calls ‘true transformation’. He argues it does not include any concrete purposes and, therefore, poses a considerable threat to its application. He also sees a problem with its epistemological perspective and suggests that if you try to assign a concrete meaning to each of the concepts presented within that definition (e.g. “empower students”, “examine critically”, “reflective knowledge base”, “critical consciousness and action”), you will soon appreciate the multiple interpretations possible for each case. Thus, two people holding similar intentions (not to mention if they held opposite ones) may have serious difficulties to provide a reliable definition of “TP” (transformative pedagogy).

Notwithstanding these critiques of the definitional, theoretical, and epistemological foundations of transformative pedagogy, there are also some very practical issues that need to be considered.

What counts as transformative pedagogy?

If an individual makes transformative changes to their attitudes, beliefs, and or behaviour as a direct result of a particular pedagogy, can we call this a transformative pedagogy? For example, many of the young men who were engaged with Don Hellison’s (2003) Responsibility Model actually changed the way they behaved in the gym in positive ways that are consistent with some aspirations of transformative pedagogy, but can we call Hellison’s pedagogy a transformative pedagogy? A similar question can be asked of Cooperative Learning (Dyson & Casey, 2012), Sport Education (Siedentop, 1994), Teaching Games for Understanding [TGfU] (Rossi, 2000; Kirk & McPhail, 2002), and, most recently, Sport for Development (Rossi & Rynne, 2014).

Interestingly, Oliver and Kirk (Chapter 20, this volume) in concluding their chapter on ‘transformative pedagogies for challenging body culture in physical education’, suggest that researchers need to move beyond paradigmatic approaches to adopt a more pragmatic position. This position needs to focus, we suggest, on three questions: ‘Can we make the situation for these youth and children better than it is currently?’, ‘What would be better?’, and ‘How might we go about this task?’

While sympathetic to the pragmatist perspective, I am left thinking that, if these are the orienting questions for transformative pedagogy then surely the work of Don Hellison (Responsibility), Daryl Siedentop (Sport Education), and Ben Dyson (Cooperative Learning) would also fit the criteria. However, if we think of these as instructional or pedagogical models (Metzler, 2011), then the Oliver and Kirk pragmatic position lacks some of the essential features of transformative pedagogy. As Ukpokodu (2009) defines it, it is an educational perspective concerned with questions of justice, democracy, and ethics, and cannot be thought of as an instructional model that can be learned and operationalized as a performance. Thought of in this way, transformative pedagogy is more of an educational philosophy than a particular pedagogy. It is not a set of practices that can be reproduced (on demand as it were) irrespective of context.

On the other hand, if we privilege the ontological and epistemological dimensions of the idea of transformative pedagogy while ignoring the transformative possibilities of certain pedagogical models, are we merely securing the boundaries of the discourse community and
shutting out other possibilities? There are no right or wrong answers here – only certain shared agreements (e.g. about what stands for justice, democracy, and ethics) between members of the transformative pedagogy discourse community.

**Transformative pedagogy and personal change**

While Socrates was reported as asserting that “an unexamined life is not worth living”, it is important to understand that the examined life is not without its problematic side – what we might call its ‘collateral damage’. Underpinning a transformative pedagogy seems to be the development of a sort of sociological way of thinking (see Eimear’s story in this collection). This is akin to what Mills (1970) calls the *sociological imagination* that necessitates, above all, “being able to ‘think ourselves away’ from the familiar routines of our daily lives in order to look at them anew” (Giddens, 1994, p. 18). The development of such a sociological imagination would necessitate some reflection on one’s own personal epistemology. This personal epistemology is philosophy at the individual level and reflects how we think about knowledge and knowing (Hofer, 2010). It is a kind of reflexive project of the self.

However, this is not an easy project. How shall we understand the self is a question that has captured the attention of many fields of study over time. There are philosophical approaches (e.g. Descartes, 1641); psychological theories (Lasch, 1984); psychoanalytic theories (Elliott, 1995; Kristeva, 1991); postmodern theories (Gee, 1990), and social theories (Elliott, 1995) that might be brought to bear to better understand the self, and in particular the self in regard to teaching and learning.

Transformative pedagogies require students to critically challenge their beliefs, values, and knowledge with the intent of developing a sense of critical consciousness and agency. Critical reflection, a process that is central to transformative pedagogy, is highly oriented around the self and, as Brookfield (1994) noted, it is “not without risk. It should not be undertaken lightly given its potential impact to destabilize both individuals and organizational systems” (p. 213). We do know that the results of using transformative pedagogy can be unpredictable. Devís-Devis and Sparkes’ (1999) account of the Spanish PETE student named Guillem who burnt his book provided a vivid account of the power of critiquing dominant values and ideas. Devís-Devis and Sparkes (1999) suggested that:

The case of Guillem reveals how the simple act of being confronted with views that challenge one’s taken-for-granted assumptions about the world, one’s cherished beliefs, preferred identities and sense of self can be an excruciating experience for some students, who experience it in the form of a crisis. (p. 147)

The link between student identit(ies) and what they might learn from (and about) the socially critical curriculum is clearly demonstrated in this example. The potential ‘slippage’ between what is intended to be learnt and what is understood, is clearly evident. Oliver and Lalik (2004) “wonder whether learning critique alone might not leave adolescents with feelings of frustration and helplessness” (p. 122). Kenway and Bullen (2001) remind us that we need to be very careful of using pedagogical encounters that embarrass or degrade students’ values, choices, and commitments. With similar sentiment on the limits of critique, Crowdes (2000) claims that in many classes in which critical pedagogies are used, students “are often left with their fairly extensive sociological vocabularies and socially aware minds detached from their bodies and agency in matters of conflict resolution and change” (p. 35). Accordingly, she argues for the use of pedagogic strategies that join somatic and sociological perspectives. In both school
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PE and in the field of Kinesiology more generally, when we do engage in critical pedagogies it is usually rather strong in the sociological and rather weak in the somatic.

In regard to changing the self (personal change) Homer’s *Odyssey* conveys something of the issue facing those of us who attempt to ‘make reflective citizens of PE students’. As Zigmunt Bauman (2000) relates the story, apparently some of Odysseus’s sailors were turned into hogs by Circe (Greek goddess of magic) and they relished their new condition so much so that they ran away from Odysseus when he attempted to rub a magic herb on them which would restore them to human form. However one pig was caught and, having been transformed back into a man, was far from grateful for his release and furiously attacked his liberator.

So you [Odysseus] are back, you rascal, you busybody? Again you want to nag us and pester, again you wish to expose our bodies to dangers and force our hearts to take ever-new decisions? I was so happy, I could wallow in the mud and bask in the sunshine, I could gobble and guzzle, grunt and squeak, and be free from meditations and doubts: ‘What am I to do, this or that?’ Why did you come?! To fling me back into that hateful life I led before? (in Bauman, 2000, p. 18)

In the course of this storytelling Bauman asks: “Is liberation (read emancipation) a blessing or a curse”? (p. 18). In thinking of some of the negative reactions to the underpinning ideology of reflective practice that some PETE students display we must recognize that ‘success’ will always be, at best, only partial. Most people do not want to have their views and opinions challenged … even if it might mean that they make a better contribution to a more equitable and just society. For example, many PETE students do not welcome being ‘emancipated’ from their ‘false consciousness’ regarding the obesity crisis (see Chapter 23 by Cameron et al., this volume).

Indeed, Eimear Enright (in Chapter 21 by Fitzpatrick & Enright, this volume), in providing an example of their ‘transformative work with young people’ provides evidence that her transformative pedagogy (a visual diary task) was a “transformation of sorts” for two of her students who speak about “seeing things they hadn’t noticed before” and “looking at our own lives in different ways”. However, she then qualifies this success by saying that

for a minority of students in this course the visual diary task specifically was “a waste of time … that took away from time we could be doing practical stuff” (Anonymous male student). This student voice reminds us that while we can work to create conditions which might support transformation, we can never be sure that our efforts will be well received or will actually lead to transformation.

Enright’s observations are also confirmed by Ukpokodu (2009) who claims that pre-service and in-service teachers tend to exhibit resistance and defensiveness that negate their ability to experience transformative learning.

**PE and social change (possibilities?)**

There are numerous examples of advocacy for PE’s role in social change (see Sage, 1993) and some analyses of the potential impact of social change on PE (see, for example Macdonald, 2014). A number of critical scholars have argued that the intent of critical pedagogy is to move beyond critique with the explicit objective of transforming social inequality and empowering those without power. In this regard, transformative pedagogy has the dual aim of educating
about social inequity, identifying and highlighting oppressive structures, and educating for emancipation, actively dismantling oppressive structures and engaging in change. Waring and Evans (2015), in writing about critical reflection (which is part of the transformative discourse community), claim that

[underpinning the concept of critical reflection is an emphasis on transformation informed by social and political analysis of contexts. A key question is the extent to which engagement in critical reflection enables teachers and their students to become successful change agents. (p. 173, my emphasis)]

This ethic has found voice in some contemporary (H)PE curricula which explicitly expect that students should not only become critical consumers of physical culture, but they should also take action in the community to address oppression where they see it. For example, one of the aims of the 1999 New Zealand HPE curriculum was that students should “participate in creative healthy communities and environments by taking responsible and critical action” (p. 7). Although such expectations are compatible with the activist dimension of the Ukpokodu (2009) definition, the question remains, are they realistic?

There is no doubt that broader social changes have provided, and will continue to provide, challenges to PE, but there is little evidence of PE offering significant challenges to broader social conditions. For example, we can think of the social change in regard to sexist language that has permeated all (or most) Western democracies. Addressing the changing expectations regarding language use has influenced PE (see Wright & King, 1990), not the other way around. In all discussions of PE for social change, we need to keep a sense of perspective regarding what can realistically be achieved. Hyperbole is seldom useful.

Keeping a sense of perspective

As I am writing about the possibilities for PE to be transformative, I am confronted with the news of the tragedy of the Charlie Hebdo killings in Paris. This act of terror was many things, not the least of which was a full-frontal attack on the ideals of the liberal democracy. I am left thinking whether it is possible that by empowering students by means of transformative pedagogies “to examine critically their beliefs, values, and knowledge … [and] an appreciation for multiple perspectives” (Ukpokodu, 2009, p. 43) we could help avoid such horrors. But of course that is just a pipedream, for the fundamentalist thinking that underpins the Islamic jihad does not welcome an examination of beliefs. Like all fundamentalist groups (religious or other), uncritical obedience to one interpretation of a text is what is expected. Fundamentalist thinking is clearly the antithesis of criticality (Rizvi, 2011) and is anathema to liberal democratic perspectives.

There is no doubt that certain experiences can be transformative. For example, I vividly remember the impact that reading the The Women’s Room (French, 1977) had on me back in the 1970s. However, just because something facilitates a transformation does not meant that there has been a transformative pedagogy involved. I’m sure that when Marilyn French wrote The Women’s Room she wasn’t intending to be pedagogical. There was no explicit pedagogical intent (see Tinning, 2010), but nevertheless it had a transformative effect.

Attributing an effect to transformative pedagogy is not a simple matter. ‘Connecting the dots’ (Klein, 2000), or making connections between actions, events, and ideas is a difficult process. Moreover, attributing a single cause to complex events is naïve, if not impossible. For example the Arab Spring revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests, riots, and civil wars that began in Egypt around December, 2010 and spread throughout the countries of the
Arab League was not simply a protest at the corrupt and dictatorial government of President Mubarak. While recognizing the significant influence that social media played in mobilizing the protestors, other contextual matters also were important. For example it occurred at a time when there was a drought in Kansas and Russia that resulted in a substantially reduced wheat crop and an increased price of wheat. Both are major suppliers of grain to Egypt for the making of bread. As Rami Zurayk (2011) observed: “Although the Arab revolutions were united under the slogan ‘the people want to bring down the regime’ not ‘the people want more bread’, food was a catalyst”.

Maybe we can claim that many of the participants in the Arab Spring uprisings had, as a result of a combination of circumstances, become empowered to change their circumstances – to overrun their oppressive governments. But can we say that this was the result of any transformative pedagogy? This raises the question of what, precisely, do we want to be the result of transformative pedagogies in PE? Is it the case that when students become ‘armed’ with a new consciousness, they will be empowered to overthrow the ‘oppressive’ regime of modern schooling? Other than a few remaining fans of Ivan Illich (1971) and his de-schooling movement, it is probably not what the advocates of transformative pedagogies have in mind. But how about ‘overthrowing’ the oppressive regime of body culture, the dominance of the male sports curriculum, and sexist practices that we have learned constitutes much of contemporary PE?

In thinking about this issue we need to remind ourselves of the things that we do know for certain. Such knowledge forms the context in which any attempt to ‘do’ transformative pedagogy must be understood. We know, for example, that some kids in PE classes are alienated and marginalized by their gender, ethnicity, sexuality, body type, or physicality. But we also know that in heterogeneous PE classes not all students are alienated or turned off by PE and we know that sport offers a great deal to many young people. Further, we know that over the past three decades the impact of schooling on the lives of young people is diminishing (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997), that the influence of social media on their lives is increasing (Sirna, 2014), and, despite the good intentions of some PE teaching, the cult of the body continues to be pervasive and powerful (Tinning, 2010). It is within this context that the possibilities for a transformative pedagogy in PE must be understood.

A closing word

Answers to the best way(s) of achieving the aims of transformative pedagogies for PE will not be found only within the restricted academic discourse community of transformative pedagogy. In thinking about the aspirations of transformative pedagogy as outlined by Ukpokodu (2009), it seems to me that a certain openness to knowledge and ways of knowing is required, rather than a rather tribal commitment to a particular academic discourse community.

In this regard Giroux (1992) discussed his own shift in both his politics and his theoretical work as border crossing. For Giroux, this border crossing took him to trans-disciplinary perspectives that crossed the theoretical divides of critical pedagogy, post-structuralism, cultural studies, social theory. Fitzpatrick’s (2013a) recent book *Critical Pedagogy, Physical Education and Urban Schooling* provides a good example of such border crossing in PE critical research. Fitzpatrick used critical ethnography to provide an in-depth account of urban youth in the subjects of health education and PE. Her work crossed the discursive boundaries of youth studies, feminist theory, cultural studies, and educational theory. However, as Evans and Davies (2011) point out, there is no doubt that some borders seem particularly difficult to cross.

Developing an openness to border crossing is not an easy task. Evans and Davies (2011) argue that limited (restricted) theoretical perspectives develop early in one’s academic training.
and that many research students “enter research environments with ‘eyes wide shut’ to the possibilities that other perspectives and forms of theory and understanding might offer” (p. 275). Indeed, new researchers are often asked “what are you? A Foucauldian? A critical theorist?” (Gard, 2011, p. 32). There are clearly identity making and stereotyping processes at work here that have the potential to seriously limit the potential for any border crossing.

Finally, the mission of the critical project remains as important in PE today as it did in the 1970s and 1980s and criticality is still a necessary disposition to prosecute the mission. However, as we prosecute the agenda of the critical project through transformative pedagogies we should keep in mind the target ‘audience’ of our work. While there is undoubtedly an increasing critical project inspired literature produced by the critical discourse community in PE, there is little evidence that the aims of transformative pedagogy are increasingly being realized. Rather, the audience of such literature is typically other academics in the discourse community and not the teachers and students who are meant to be empowered or emancipated. It is clear that prosecuting an academic career within the competitive university environment demands increasing high-level scholarship and critical scholars are advancing in this regard. However, the ideals of transformative pedagogy require more than sophisticated theorizing, they also require getting our hands ‘dirty’ in the messiness of practice and to learn what it actually takes to ‘transform’. Balancing these tensions will not be easy.

**Reflective questions for discussion**

1. Why is it that we have not seen a ‘take up’ of the critical project in Asian countries like Japan, South Korea, and Hong Kong? It’s popular in Europe and many Anglophone countries but why not in Asia?
2. What are the key tenets of transformative pedagogy?
3. What is the relationship between transformative pedagogy and critical pedagogy, and critical reflection?
4. What factors might limit the possibilities of transformative pedagogy?
5. What are some of the possible unplanned consequences of engaging transformative pedagogy in the classroom?

**References**


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