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PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES (A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON CURRENT STATUS AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA)

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Abstract

This paper explores the experiences of the author about living the discourse of physical education (PE) and physical education teacher education (PETE). More specifically, it focuses on the future of physical education in the United States will look like on its current path and how the author's views differ and/or match published perspective. The author position statement is also supported by research to look for path physical education and PETE in the US should take and ultimately what it will look like at the end of that path. There also exist some research areas the US PE need to focus more or less on physical education and PETE. The author proposes some essential research questions about physical education and PETE that deserve investigation. The last part of the paper offers specific aspects of physical education and PETE practices that warrant special attention; barriers that have impeded research in the areas, and change to overcome such barriers.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman penulis dalam menyelami wacara pendidikan jasmani dan pendidikan keguruan pendidikan jasmani. Secara lebih khusus, makalah ini memfokuskan pada masa depan pendidikan jasmani di Amerika Serikat sebagaimana saat ini sedang berada di jalannya dan bagaimana pandangan penulis berbeda dan/atau sesuai dengan perspektif literature. Posisi pernyataan penulis juga didukung oleh penelitian untuk melihat jalan yang harus ditempuh oleh pendidikan jasmani dan pendidikan keguruannya dan pada akhirnya bagaimana bagaimana bentuknya di akhir perjalanan. Beberapa area penelitian juga diidentifikasi di mana peneliti seyogyanya memfokuskan perhatiannya. Penulis mengusulkan beberapa pertanyaan penelitian yang esensial tentang pendidikan jasmani yang harus diteliti. Bagian akhir dari makalah ini menawarkan aspek praktis pendidikan jasmani dan pendidikan keguruan yang harus diperhatikan, berikut hambatan dan perubahan-perubahan untuk mengatasi hambatan tersebut.

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INTRODUCTION

This article serves as a critical reflection on my experiences living with the discourse of physical education in the United States. I have spent 8 years working on my degrees which put me in academic atmosphere related to physical education both in theory and practice. These experiences speak my legitimacy to share the status of physical education in the US along with the research agenda. I will, however, acknowledge my limitations to comprehend physical education in a complete picture. Readers would also be expected to be aware that this is a reflection paper which locates me as a central 'story teller'. Therefore, the article provides subjective account of the future of PE in the US.

The first part of the article explores the future of physical education in the United States based on what is on the current path. Second, I use research to support my position statement, what path should physical education and PETE in the US take and ultimately what will it look like at the end of that path. Third, I identify research areas needed to focus more or less on physical education and PETE. Lastly, I explore more specific part of the research and practice agenda, including research questions, aspects of physical education and PETE practices that warrant special attention, and barriers to conduct such studies. This article is expected to provide information about the status and the future of PE and PETE in the US that Indonesian readers could value it as lesson learned.

The Current Pathway: PE on the Crossroads

David Kirk in his book *Physical Education Futures?* (2010) stated that looking at the future may need to look back what has been in the past. This statement provides me with the frame that physical education has been enduring survival from extinction because of the ability to navigate itself in the messy map of social, economic, and political situation. For example, in around the time of world wars physical education thematic discourses were related to having certain type of body needed for wars and economic crises. PE was navigated towards this discourse with specific content on gymnastics with pedagogy of the discipline. Another example is, however, the current context away from war situation. Nowadays, the culture of consumerism has impacted on the obesity crisis, especially the out number of obese children. With the predominant pragmatism ideology, US physical education has been very smart in positioning itself into obesity discourse and has been gaining safe spot so far. With this contemporary discourse of PE in the US, I will try to foresee the future of PE.

For me, PE in the US will, in Kirk's account, be more of the same. There are couple reasons for this statement. *First*, as long as the discourse (obesity) remains the same, the claim that PE as a tool of combating obesity will still persist. This is the nature of pragmatism focusing on how thing fits and functions to a larger system rather than to change it radically. I am quite informed on how many innovations of PE are from the US. There are, however, rarely PE scholars who innovate PE but in a distance with pragmatism ideology. In addition, US society tends to ask for what the immediate outcomes from your type of PE whereas revolutionary change takes a lot pain and the results may not be immediate. *Second*, Kirk (2010) echoed Lawson's (2003) idea that the destiny of school physical education and the status of PETE are intimately intertwined. Physical educators in the higher education are busy to fight their corner on the academia. One of effective weapons includes gaining academic status and prestige by scientification of PE through incorporating more courses pertaining to hard sciences such as biomedical, biomechanics, anatomy, and physiology. Although these courses take up curriculum spaces used to provide students with experiences directly related to teacher's knowledge (Shulman), they equip students with knowledge on obesity related diseases, the causes, and the preventive exercise. Students graduated from PETE program will go into the profession and teach the content and the way

they train in the college. Unfortunately, Kirk (2010) argues that PE teachers in the US would likely be reluctant to take part of a big change if not a radical change.

In addition to obesity discourse, sports in the US are at the center of the cultural heart. PE is pragmatically considered as an educational site where youngsters are prepared to participate in sports. This is aligned with Laker (2003) even though I personally do not fully agree with the idea of culturally relevant PE, but more culturally critical PE. Indeed, Kirk (2010) provided with ample information on how the idea of idea (id2) of physical education-as-sport-techniques is deficient. For example, the bright side of sport may be as much as its dark side. Sport sociologists have long been concerned with sports as arenas in which social inequality and inequity (e g. gender bias and inequality, racism, discriminations) take place. Without careful pedagogical approach, teaching sport content in PE can perpetuate social injustice. Another example includes the critics by O'Sullivan, Locke and Siedentop (1992) upon the outcomes of PE in terms of helping students physically active for lifetime.

PE is expensive. Therefore, other possibility includes school policy to use business organization to run PE in the schools. This prediction has been provided by scholars such as Tinning. While it has not come to pass, some schools in Australia and UK began to work with profit oriented organization to provide PA in schools. US may be soon.

The Future of PE in the US

I understand myself as an advocate of critical theory in education and physical education. This theoretical influence will play out in my suggestion about the path PE should take. Accidently, Anthony Laker and David Kirk are two of PE scholars with theoretical tent that is the same as the tent I position under. In suggesting the future of PE, however, I have some arguments that what they proposed as futures may not really be the future.

In exploring the proposal of the future of PE, Laker (2003) claimed to be grounded on situated learning theory and Jewett's value orientations. He argued that PE should help students to move from peripheral physical activity participation to more legitimate participation, being at the center of sport community of practice. The way he developed his proposal is also aligned with all value orientations including disciplinary mastery, self-actualization, learning process, social reconstruction, and ecological integration. With this in mind, Laker (2003) proposed a scenario for the future of PE. His proposal consists of three elements with specific proposed contents and pedagogies for each element. These elements are the future for elementary, middle, and high school physical education. In the elementary level, it will be the foundations featuring non-locomotor, locomotor, and manipulative skill content with the pedagogy of motor skills. Other instructional models such as teaching games for understanding (TGFU) and first levels (self-responsibility) of Hellison's responsibility model are proposed (Hellison, 2011). Hence, the middle school level will be a further development for students being literate, enthusiastic, and competent sportspersons. At this point, his proposal consists of contents and pedagogies that help students to move toward more legitimate participation. The content includes sports, health related fitness and outdoor-adventure pursuits. The pedagogical approaches are Sport Education (SE), later levels (social responsibility) of Hellison's, and cultural studies approach looking at, for example, access to physical activity in the community. The last level is for high school students where recreational nature should take place with critical thinking pedagogical approaches.

I would not suggest the path of PE to be the same way as Laker's in a number of reasons. *First,* I would argue with Laker (2003) in the way that much of what he proposed is, however, not the future of physical education. Instead, some of them are already practiced. What is new from Laker is that he has

successfully restructured students' experiences in PE in a sound chronological development. *Second*, his may be authentic but he failed to include thorough social, economic, and political "calculation" in his futuristic possibility. *Third,* although his proposal includes three phases, he actually provided only one single path instead of multiple possibilities as the rapid current communication technology has widened the range of what will possibly happen in future.

On my thirst of the futures of PE, Kirk (2010) proposed three future scenarios. These scenarios are short-term, long-term, and extinction. The first scenario is as I outlined in the earlier question. At this point, Kirk's proposal is the continuity of what is happening right now, which is PE is dominated by physical education-as-sport-techniques and obesity discourse. The second scenario involves radical changes with critical theory as the theoretical underpinning. The last scenario is the extinction of PE as results of academization of school PE and PETE.

I believe that PE in the US should take the second scenario suggested by Kirk (2010). Like Kirk, I do not want to see predominant sport-based program in PE. The id2 of physical education-as-sport-techniques has replicated the social practices of sport in PE including marginalization and discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, class, and race. There are abundant studies in PE settings about those social issues reported in journals such as Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy, Journal on Teaching of Physical Education, and Sport, Education, and Society to name a few. Sport-based program should be minimized from its domination. If it has to be the path, sport need to be seen and done differently in terms of social justice. Teaching PE is potentially powerful for empowering students to be agents of change in sport. In addition, sport participation does not always become elite athletes. For example, there are various roles in sports ranging from referee, supporter, journalist, official, and coach. Teaching PE does not have to be directed toward developing skillful players and students can certainly take other roles. SE is an appropriate pedagogical approach to teach PE in the future. In other article, Kirk considered that SE is aligned with critical pedagogy.

In addition, I advocate contemporary PE to change its path from physical education-as-sport-techniques to physical education-as-physical-culture. There is wide range of the forms of physical culture. Taking mainly sport-based programs for PE is closing the gate of possible forms of physical culture students will participate. Therefore, the outcomes of PE for lifelong physical activity will be jeopardized. Today's youth physical culture is not the same as individuals who are currently teaching PE. Some examples of current physical culture include aerobic and fitness, outdoor and adventure pursuits, skateboarding, BMX, yoga, and martial art. For me, there should be strong alignment between PE and physical culture.

For PETE, I do not want to be trapped in the debate of whether PE should be profession or discipline. Instead, I am in line with Lawson's (2007) idea of defining PE as a field by reconstructing "core curriculum" in the teacher education program. I propose that teacher education program should take a risk to significantly reduce the courses related to biomedical sciences. The curriculum space available should be more for courses that help student develop content knowledge through physical activity classes and pedagogical content knowledge through more meaningful teaching practicum. Equally important, there should also some curriculum space filled out with courses that help student to understand the political and social natures of teaching and education so that their pedagogical decisions will be part of bigger efforts to make more just society.

Furthermore, I would like to see at the end of the path that PE teachers will teach other than sport-based content. If they have to, they will carefully plan their teaching with the purpose to help students becoming critical of current sport practices. Additionally, sport-based program will not be understood in a

narrow fashion focusing merely on technically skillful players. At the end of the path, I would see students learn more on tactical understanding in a thematic way including tactics for net/ wall, invasion, fielding, and target games. These thematic tactical skills guarantee the lifetime physical activity since the understanding of those tactics can be applied across various sports within each tactical theme. Also, I would like to see students in the gymnasium learning how to be literate, enthusiastic, and competent sportspersons by taking different roles in the sporting process. All of these learning processes require student to be personally and socially responsible. Finally, I would like to see a change that predominant pedagogical models for sport-related program will truly be based on students' interests articulating SE, TGfU, and TPSR.

I would also like to see the end of the path where students learn various contents such as Health Related Fitness (HRF). HRF at this point, however, does not only cover principles and procedures to be physically fitness but it also includes critical understanding on how discourse of body has shape what Tinning said as the cult of body leading to the marginalization of certain shapes of body. Another content to be taught includes outdoor and adventure pursuits. The difference between outdoor and adventure education is that the former takes place in open environment with real risk while the later takes place in well-developed area with perceived risk. Kirk (2010) argued that outdoor and adventure activities are expensive and the location and time table do not permit to be delivered in school contexts. I, however, disagree with him as helping students to develop skills and motivation necessary for outdoor pursuits does not always need expensive equipment. There are a lot of initiative games that does not require equipment at all. In addition, PE teacher will need to take a radical change by lobbying school administrators to ask to use last week of school calendar for a final expedition culminating outdoor education content during the semester/ school year. Other contents include yoga and martial art. However, these contents should emphasis their origin where physical activity is combined with spiritual transcendence. This is way different from the tendency in the Western societies where martial art has been treated as sport with strong competitive aspect on it.

At the end of PETE path, I would like to see college students majoring in PE will need to take meaningful core requirement classes considered to help prospectus teachers develop content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge. All of these knowledge bases to teaching should aspire to socially critical education and pedagogy.

Research Areas on Physical Education and PETE

There are three areas in terms of structural levels including policy, program, and practice. Some three decades ago, there were urgent needs to see what is going on in the gym recognizing research was more focused on how external factors of teaching influence student learning. Since then, research on effective teaching has been growing to dominate PE studies. Now such studies have been saturated. There are other urgent needs to see how PE programs are develop and PE policies related are processed. These areas are worth investigation considering the radical change of PE needs understandings on program development intended for social justice. I also remember Judith Rink's speech in the 2009 NASPE conference delivering the important of PE people to be part of political games if they want to see PE to be existed. This requires more than enough literature providing conclusion on the status of PE in the policy and how it plays out.

There are also areas related to theory, methodology, and representation. The predominant research on teaching PE is anchored in behaviorism. The assumption underlying behaviorism is that teacher behaviors impact student learning. No matter how innovative an idea of teaching (e g. student centered), research using behaviorism assumed

a top down approach with student as a passive recipient. I propose PETE scholars to expand the area of their research with theories such as constructivist, constructivist, and critical theories. Methodologically, research in PE is dominated by quantitative methodology. There should be a balance in the literature that utilizes a qualitative approach and celebrates multi-paradigms. This is especially true for those advocating critical theory with critical inquiry as their paradigm. In terms of representation, JTPE needs to begin to see other alternative of research representation. There is no way to publish studies in the form of poetry, short story, or performance text. If one advocate postmodernism as her/his paradigm, alternative representations align with it.

Specific Research/Practice Agenda and Barriers

There are some essential research questions about physical education and PETE that deserve investigation. Some of examples include: (1) What are the characteristic of current prospectus students of PETE?; (2) How does power operate in PE and PETE?; (3) How can content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge be delivered meaningfully so that they help teachers to not only be technically competent but also to be socially responsible? Such questions may be apparent in other continents, such as European and Australian. However, they seems to be real agenda in the US.

In addition, there are specific aspects of physical education and PETE practices that warrant special attention with regard to the research agenda in the US. First, PE scholars may want to focus on the characteristics of prospective PETE students including motivation, forms of physical culture they engage, career aspiration, ideology, and values and beliefs. Second, power differential are apparent in the teaching process both in school PE and PETE. Attention needs to be given to the area of teaching since it probably aspects that students learn as well as perpetuation of social in justice. Third, hidden curriculum becomes major attention since it is not explicitly presented but powerful in the teaching and learning process. Unfortunately, much of the hidden curriculum in PE and PETE represent social injustice including the dark side of the id2 of physical education-as-sport-techniques.

There exist barriers having impeded research in the areas considered to be most important. In this article, I also offer change to overcome such barriers. Ideologically, pragmatism is too dominant. Change needs to be done by deconstructing predominant ideology. This is not an easy task and it requires working with other areas beyond PE and education. At this point, PETE scholars need to go out their box and begin to see other alternative ideology. Knowing only what is going on in the gym would not help at ll.

Furthermore, the academization of PETE encourages research to be more scientifically sound using qualitative approach. There is no place for qualitative research if PETE is said to be a discipline. There should be change by celebrating multi approaches of inquiries without undermining the status of PE in the academy and this is in the hand of PETE scholars.

Tenure requirements to publish in well accredited journals. Unfortunately, most accredited journals are dominated by editors with highly interest on behaviorism and qualitative methods and traditional research representation. Alternatively, journal like JTPE should involve people with strong background in alternative theories and qualitative methodology.

Finally, funding is critical. But there is always political agenda behind research funding. Research agencies want to see what PETE scholars do will have certain results. It then drives research questions, methodology, and dissemination. However, there are other funding agencies from other areas that are willing to give their money for alternative research. These agencies look invisible so PETE researchers need to be astute in looking such funding.

CONCLUSION

The first part of the article explores the future of physical education in the United States based on what is on the current path. PE in the US on its current path is on the dominant discourse of obesity. It will still continue until years to come and the form of PE may change to be more instrumental than educational; that is as a tool to combat obesity. Second, path physical education and PETE in the US should take is to make PE more educational involving many of current innovations in teaching PE. These innovations accommodate the most leading theories in education. At the end of the pathway, PE should be less sport-dominated. Third, there are research areas needed to focus more or less on physical education and PETE. These areas include structural levels (policy, program, and practice) and the ones related to theory, methodology, and representation. Finally, the article presents more specific part of the research and practice agenda, including research questions, aspects of physical education and PETE practices that warrant special attention, and barriers to conduct such studies. Indonesian PE scholars can take this article as a valuable lesson if they want to look at the current status of PE in Indonesia. They can also begin to look at the research agenda that they might not be aware of and can take them as their own research agenda if needed.

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