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John Dewey, Subject Purposes and Schools of Tomorrow: A centennial reappraisal of the educational contribution of Physical Education

Abstract

This historically-themed critical paper reappraises selective progressive education writings by John Dewey in relation to two questions: firstly, how was physical education organised and taught in the Gary Schools, a programme Dewey widely praised in *Schools of Tomorrow* and secondly, how might the educational aspirations of Dewey benefit current subject purposes in physical education. This exercise highlights points of disconnection between the ideas of Dewey and areas of practice in the Gary Schools and the modest engagement Dewey's theorizing has had in informing the educational contribution of physical education over the last century. Both points are problematic in pursuing progressive education agendas and the latter point highlights the continuing need for a more convincing educational account of physical education to be advanced. The paper concludes by arguing for a Deweyan and Merleau-Pontian informed account of physical education which is primed by embodied learning and social and moral development.

Key words: John Dewey, physical education, progressive education, Gary Schools, subject purposes

Introduction

Between the mid-1890s and mid-1910s the emphasis in schooling in the United States of America (USA) shifted from serving rural and agricultural communities to revitalizing education in new industrial towns and cities (Cohen, 2002). Supporting this expansion was a wish by progressive educators to modify teaching methods, provide greater freedom for children and professionalise teaching (Reese, 2013). During this time, as Westbrook (1991) and Ryan (1995) attest, John Dewey was the most influential and prolific author advancing the benefits of a properly constructed progressive education which fully engaged with the tensions of merging a focus on personal growth and wider societal development. However, as Dewey's writing output was so copious - Fesmire (2015) calculates that Dewey's legacy consists of around 8 million words, housed variously in over six hundred articles and thirty-two books - there is a need to identify research intentions which enable a specific focus to take place. Thus, following, Kliebard (1986, p. 31) who notes, that it was between 1896 and 1905 when 'we get a fair picture (from Dewey) of how his curriculum would work in practice' key writings from this period such as *Interest in Relation to the Training of the Will* (Dewey, 1896/1973), *My Pedagogic Creed* (Dewey, 1897/1973) and *The Child and the Curriculum and the School and Society* (Dewey, 1899/2008) are reviewed. Thereafter, Lagemann (1989) identified that after leaving the University of Chicago in 1905, Dewey's educational-related writing became more wide ranging following his move to Columbia University. This is evident in texts such as *How We Think* (Dewey, 1910/2007) and *Democracy and Education* (Dewey, 1916/1980), a text Fesmire (2015) considers the best overall expression of Dewey's general philosophy.

During this period, Fallace and Fantozzi (2015) also considers that *Schools of Tomorrow* (Dewey & Dewey, 1915/1980) merits review as the divergent progressive education examples cited portray Dewey's philosophical ideas in action rather than relying on theoretical prescriptions. Furthermore, the more one reads into *Schools of Tomorrow* (Dewey & Dewey, 1915/1980) the

more comprehensive the examples become with the schools of Gary, Indiana (a new steel making city on the southern shores of Lake Michigan) described and discussed in greatest detail (Cremin, 1961). Under the thirty-year tenure of William Wirt, the first superintendent of schools in Gary (1907-1938), the Gary Schools Plan cultivated the idea of the school as an embryonic community that reflected the occupations of life and which provided extended opportunities to learn in ordinary classrooms but also in playgrounds and gardens, gymnasiums and swimming pools, special drawing and music studios, science laboratories, machine shops as well as libraries and assembly halls (Bourne 1916/1970). Providing attention to work, rest and play were managed through a departmentalised system which involved children alternating between classroom based subjects and classes requiring more specialist facilities e.g., manual training classes for the younger children and vocational programmes for older students (Author, 2017a). Physical education was a prominent part of the Gary Schools Plan. Hammer (1918) reports that the time allocation in the elementary years was more than double that of the average American city with 'a child going through the Emerson, Froebel, or Jefferson schools having on the average 2,697 hours in physical training and play' (p. 6) This represented 24% of school time, a figure considerably above the 11% norm in American schools.

At this time, there was a wider tension evident between administrative progressives and pedagogical progressives in American education. Administrative progressivism was a conservative-orientated movement which reasserted the dominance of elites in society and the freedom of the individual. By contrast, pedagogical progressivism focused on improving the conditions of the poor through the efforts of those working directly in schools and through implementing programmes which benefitted the disadvantaged (Cohen & Mohl, 1979). Labaree (2005) considers that what came to characterise the development of the Gary Schools Plan in the later years of Wirt's tenure as superintendent was a predominant focus on administrative progressivism rather than pedagogical progressivism. These findings highlight in a contemporary context the challenges of sustaining and advancing pedagogical progressivism in subject teaching at a time when neoliberal-based privatisation reforms consider that better outcomes can be achieved when greater choice is available and where forms of schooling can be purchased according to ability, faith, gender and legal status (Courtney, 2015). As Gard (2015) notes, the tendency among most physical educationalists towards economic liberalisation has largely been one of concern on the basis that greater privatisation will lead to widening inequalities and fewer opportunities for students from poorer backgrounds. Under these arrangements, some physical education-related opportunities might be an available choice for some students rather than an educational entitlement for all students (Author, 2017c).

In light of these concerns, the paper reviews how contemporary Deweyan-informed tensions between personal growth *and* social development can benefit from a historically-framed reappraisal of the educational contribution of physical education. This approach contains the capacity to merge subject specific issues and themes with wider ongoing debates about the tensions between administrative and pedagogical progressivism in education. In these respects, using the Gary Schools Plan as the focal point for initial review is merited due to the important national and international position the plan held for shaping theory and practice developments in education a century ago. This position also reflects Biesta's (2012, p. 581) view that philosophy for education should not become to 'self-absorbed or self-referential but needs to engage with educational matters and things that matter educationally, rather than just philosophically.' On

this basis, what is needed is a considered approach to research ‘where we do not immediately claim to know where the division between conservative and progressive ideas lies’ (Biesta, 2012, p. 591) but where evidence examined can analyse carefully what is at stake in terms of contemporary education.

These aspirations are further addressed on the basis that Dewey’s philosophical ideas on education are not static, but dynamic and dependent upon evolving circumstances and contexts. That said acknowledging certain contextual points in advance is also advisable e.g., it is highly likely that John Dewey only authored Chapters, One, Nine and Eleven and the beginning of Chapter Seven of *Schools of Tomorrow*. The remaining descriptive chapters focussing on connections between schools and the communities they serve and with education in democratic settings were most likely written by John Dewey’s daughter, Evelyn Dewey. These descriptive chapters contained for the one and only time in John Dewey’s writings frequent references to ‘learning by doing’, a term which subsequently became problematic in capturing the nuances of Dewey’s overall theorizing (Fallace & Fantozzi, 2015).

The relationship between John Dewey’s theorising and how physical education was organised and taught under the Gary Schools Plan

During Dewey’s years at the University of Chicago, where he opened the Laboratory School for piloting progressive education ideas, Dewey was trying to reconcile conservative debates on the benefits of imposing mental discipline with contrasting arguments favouring learning experiences that were more engaging for children. Dewey did this through elaborating on how learning should take place in areas which were beyond children’s immediate areas of interest or within pre-identified areas. In mapping out this position, Dewey (1896/1973) contrasts how ‘it is absurd to suppose a child gets more intellectual or mental discipline when he goes at a matter unwillingly (p. 423) while also being concerned that ‘life is too serious to be degraded to a merely pleasant affair, or reduced to the continual satisfaction of personal interests’ (p. 424). For Dewey (1896/1973) interest requires to be active and objective and subjective so that interest can be seen as an ‘outgoing activity holding within its grasp an intellectual content, and reflecting itself in felt value’ (p. 432). To achieve this state requires immediate interest to merge with mediated interest, so that voluntary attention (the mean) merges with the idea or object (the end) (Dewey, 1896/1973). Pursuing this line of reasoning made Dewey wary of constraining the richness of mediated experiences by detailing the subjects which require specific curriculum time, as ‘the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which defines a single process’ (Dewey, 1899/2008, p. 11). As such, Dewey’s position was that the traditional overemphasis on subject-matter limited the child’s interest and ability to contextualize information, and where progressive intentions often undervalued educators’ role and abilities.

The Laboratory School and most other progressive school examples in *Schools of Tomorrow* (Dewey, 1915/1980) relied on private funding, favourable staff/student numbers and generous facilities. By contrast, the Gary Schools Plan was different both in terms of size (1000 students by 1908 and 3000 students in 1911) and through being part of public education. In Gary, schools were becoming world famous through their integrated focus on work, play and study (Reese, 2013) with many teachers and social reformers, nationally and internationally (and including Evelyn Dewey), interested in visiting the schools (Levine & Levine, 1970). In June 1914, Evelyn Dewey spent two days at the Gary Schools and drew upon these experiences in *Schools of*

Tomorrow (Dewey & Dewey, 1915/1980). Following their more detailed and lengthy observations in 1915 and 1916, Bourne (1916/1970) and Flexner and Bachman (1918/1970) completed evaluations of the Gary Schools Plan, the latter being supported by seven specialist reports, one of which was on 'Physical Training and Play' (Hammer, 1918).

At this time, Dewey's pedagogical intentions were informed by the part the teacher plays in prompting enquiry and constructing group dialogue, so that children can take on greater responsibility for their learning as well as engaging in decision-making that helps them to improve their skills in exercising agency. Dewey recognised that this was difficult to achieve but to make progress teachers required to interact with children's needs and capacities, especially when problem-based activities were part of shared learning and when there was a willingness to communicate experiences and findings (Dewey, 1916). Central to Dewey's educational thinking was the idea that project-based enquiry could interest and motivate children to engage with the knowledge needed to embark on and sustain a process of continually reconstructing experiences. Thus, what was required are outcomes (ends) where children 'recognize they have something at stake, and which cannot be carried through without reflection and use of judgement to select material of observation and recollection' (Dewey, 1916, p. 139). Therefore, for Dewey (1916, p. 137) 'interest is an educative development which leads to considering individual children according to their specific capabilities, needs and preferences' and where self-determination pursued through the metaphor of growth can explain the link between education and a democratic and participative way of life. Jonas (2011) considers that Dewey's writings from the mid-1890s through to the mid-1910s moved from seeing a relatively direct connection between interest and impulses to a position where interests could signpost how desires and the needs of children could foster personal growth via enhanced subject-related engagement. This is evident by comparing some of the assertive statements Dewey made e.g., 'the true centre of correlation on the school subjects is not science, nor literature, nor history, nor geography, but the child's own social activities' (Dewey, 1897/1973, p. 448) relative to his later statements e.g., 'what is needed is not an inventory of personal motives which we suppose children to have but consideration of their *powers*, their tendencies in action, and the ways in which these can be carried forward by a given subject-matter' (Dewey, 1913/1969, p. 62). By this time, Dewey is clearer on the relationship he perceives between experiential learning and engagement with content knowledge when trying to make learning socially relevant and personally meaningful for children (Author, 2017b).

Physical Education and the Gary Schools Plan

A review on the Gary Schools Plan indicates that the extent to which physical education was able to capture children's enthusiasm for learning and foster their problem solving and decision making capabilities is open to doubt. Part of the problem is due to the opaqueness of the reporting e.g., Evelyn Dewey (Dewey & Dewey, 1915/1980, p. 324) notes that, 'the students are not really interested in the formal group exercises, and ... go through with them under compulsion and so lose most of the benefit', before noting that to counteract the lack of students interest 'swimming pool tennis courts, and apparatus are largely substituted' (p. 324). This reporting can be read two ways: it could be conceived of as offering children a broad range of practical activities in order to secure their interest and benefit their physical development. Alternately, it could be argued that the focus on increasing activity choice is a rather superficial one relative to cultivating a deeper experiential engagement in activities. Furthermore, children's

limited interest in the formal group exercises highlights the challenges of linking Dewey's ideas on merging experiential learning with content knowledge in order to make learning socially relevant and personally meaningful for children. Evidence of the theory and practice divide is apparent through noting that the optional opportunities for children to have extended access to practical facilities through choosing additional 'application' periods which reflected their particular interests were only occasionally taken up by children (Dewey & Dewey, 1915/1980)

Exploring tensions such as these were rarely investigated by Bourne (1916/1970) in his review of the Gary Schools. Dewey was an intellectual and philosophical hero to Bourne, to the extent that his enthusiasm for the Gary Schools needed constrained editorially by his publisher (Houghton Mifflin) who cautioned him to be less eulogistic until the findings of the Gary Plan have been robustly tested (Author, 2017a). For example, Bourne (1916/1970, p. 72) considered that 'application' periods were an 'opportunity for expression through activity' and in a Chapter on 'Curriculum: Learning by Doing' Bourne celebrates how children are 'an equal and democratic citizen of his school community, learning whenever and wherever he can' (p. 120). An omission in Bourne's (1916/1970) uplifting account of the Gary Schools is mention of physical education; a perhaps surprising finding given its time prominence in the curriculum. Apart from standalone sentences such as 'athletics teams and sports of various kinds are connected directly with the gymnasium work and organised play' (Bourne, 1916/1970, p. 139) there is barely a mention of physical education in relation to progressive educational ideas which are capable of fostering children's growth.

By contrast, the subject specific evaluation of physical education by Hammer (1918, p. 17) raises a number of pedagogical concerns, most notably that 'snappy, vigorous work' was not insisted upon. Hammer (1918) describes by way of detailed observation that:

... a class of boys in the Emerson school reports for gymnasium at 2.15 o'clock. They come down the hall 68 strong, ranging from the third to the tenth grade, and pour into the gymnasium. A few have stopped on the way at their lockers to get their gymnasium shoes and leave their coats, but most of them come without any change of clothing. The teacher tosses a basketball or two to them, and a merry scramble begins. Some 'shoot baskets,' others pass the ball, and others 'rough-house' in the center of the floor. In a corner provided with mats informal wrestling bouts may be staged, a few may climb ladders or practise on the bars, and all the while boys, big and little, run from place to place, shout, trip, punch, and indulge in a general mix-up ... Ten to fifteen minutes before the end of the period, the instructor blows his whistle for attention, assembles the group in class formation, and puts them through some formal exercises with more or less uniformity and individual participation. (pp. 20-21)

Furthermore, when teachers/instructors did take more interest it tended to be on an exclusive rather than inclusive basis e.g., in after school day clubs in activities such as basketball and baseball, where attention centered on the training of a few team players relative to the rest of the student body (Hammer, 1918). Similarly in athletics, inter school meets featured relatively few competitors with Hammer, (1918, p. 24) considering that 'the situation would be greatly helped by a system of group athletics, whereby all the students of a class or a grade would compete with corresponding groups in other schools.' Therefore while Hammer (1918) is sympathetic to the challenges of teaching the large class sizes observed, he is perplexed by the limited priority afforded to children's interest and activity choice, and the excessive time afforded to free play as

it stifles working towards excellence and achievement. Only occasionally was better quality teaching evident, as in swimming where children were in smaller groups of 25 students and taught in a way which added 'zip and interest' to activity (Hammer, 1918, p. 22). Compounding these problems was subject departmentalization with the fifteen physical education teachers tending to work quite independently of each other with the overall supervisor finding it difficult to standardise instruction. Thus, while the Gary Schools emphasized the education of the whole child, in practice, 'the execution of the plan falls too far behind the conception and intention' (Hammer, 1918, p. 35). Arguably, the mismatch between intentions and outcomes was further compounded by the uneven time allocations which existed, where despite the prominence of physical education in the elementary years, provision in the high schools years was much more modest with their being instances of late comers who graduated without having had any physical training whatsoever (Hammer, 1918). Furthermore, time was often taken from physical training and play for other activities and student's absences from class were often high. This was predominantly due to the optional attendance available to students, who were able to pass on the second of their application periods if they wished.

At the time of the Flexner and Bachman (1918/1970) whole Gary School report, Abraham Flexner was a member of the General Education Board in New York and was in favour of extending the Gary Schools Plan to New York schools (Levine & Levine, 1970). Yet, while Flexner and Bachman (1918/1970) believed that the Gary Schools attempted to put into practice democratic theories in education, ultimately the project was considerably hampered by poor organisation and lax educational supervision. These factors led to the vision of the plan falling short in its execution and to Flexner believing that greater administrative rigour was required relative to progressive experimentation. These findings deeply affected Flexner and marked the 'evolution of his own position from moderate progressivism...to unrelenting antiprogressivism' (Cremin 1961, p. 160).

Relative to a Deweyan perspective on education, it is evident from a physical education perspective that many features of Gary Schools Plan cause concern - the disjointed and poorly coordinated teaching programmes, slipshod student attitudes, high student numbers, a narrow view of sporting excellence, time wasted on play or unremarkable introductory level teaching and not making more of the extended educational possibilities available. Therefore, the extent to which physical education was a contributor to Wirt's increased reliance on efficiency and administrative progressivism is worthy of further research, and possible to do given that Wirt 'kept almost everything that crossed his desk, including correspondence, reports and publications' (Cohen 2012, p. 245) with his primary data being available to review at the Lilly Library at Indiana University.

The issue for the present however is whether a more detailed engagement with Dewey's work could prove more beneficial for contemporary physical education than it proved under the Gary Schools Plan. In this light, can physical education contribute to the type of integration Dewey had in mind, where the school is a miniature community which can foster individuality at the same time as enriching the social community? The argument advanced in this paper is that physical educationalists should consider how Deweyan and Merleau-Pontian notions of experience and habit can be taken forward relative to the broader aims of schools and relative to the more variegated arrangements which now govern education. If successful, progress could

contribute towards meeting Standal and Aggerholm's (2016, p. 278) request that a 'virtue ethical discussion of the habits of physical education warrants further studies.' However, making such gains is likely to be dependent upon greater forms of professional engagement being available for teachers, for as noted in the Gary Schools Plan, physical education teachers tended to work in a fragmented and rather disjointed way with little indication of sharing best practice ideas (Hammer, 1918). Accordingly, this issue is also discussed in due course.

John Dewey and contemporary subject purposes in physical education

Subject contribution to school and community

Evaluations of physical education as part of the Gary Schools Plan reveal challenges which are consistent with many contemporary subject reviews. Furthermore, as Park (1969) notes, in the intervening century there has only been an occasional engagement with Dewey's theorizing, even though a number of Dewey's core ideas have significance for physical education. For example, from the outset Dewey (1899/2008, p. 80) acknowledged that what 'we want is to have the child come to school with a whole mind and a whole body, and leave school with a fuller mind and an even healthier body.' This broad intention was supported by the more specific belief that experiences have an active and passive phase, and that a balanced education requires regard for active phases where the child has the chance to express himself on the environment (trying) and where the learning environment impacts on the child (undergoing). As Dewey (1916/1980, p. 146) states, 'Experience as trying involves change, but change is a meaningless transition unless it is consciously connected with the return wave of consequences which flow from it.' This line of thinking requires noting the significance of the body, as 'the body is, of necessity a wellspring of energy' which requires meaningful active experiences in order to nurture personal growth (Dewey, 1916/1980, p. 147). Without recognition of this, the neglected body will without knowing how or why become impatient and unruly. This becomes problematic for teachers who are often tasked with emphasising that a 'premium is put on physical quietude; on silence, on rigid uniformity of posture and movement ... in a context where ... bodily meaning is divorced from the perception of meaning' (Dewey, 1916/1980, p. 148). To avoid experiences which are mis-educative teachers should construct learning environments at times in the school day which can effectively lead to higher levels of active engagement. In the parts of *Schools of Tomorrow* (Dewey & Dewey, 1915/1980) which John Dewey authored, a more positive elaboration on how physical education might be conceived and enacted within a broad general education is provided. Dewey & Dewey's (1915/1980) writings elaborate on the intention to fully connect physical and mental growth between children and the object of learning, as:

... physical growth is not identical with mental growth but the two coincide in time, and normally the latter is impossible without the former. If we have reference for childhood, our first specific rule is to make sure of a healthy bodily development. Even apart from its intrinsic value as a source of efficient action and of happiness, the proper development of the mind directly depends upon the proper use of the muscles and the senses. (p. 214)

Further evidence of these intentions is noted when it is stated that:

... modern society realizes that the care and growth of the body are just as important as the development of the mind; more so, for the latter is dependent upon the former, so schools will become places for children to learn to live physically as well as mentally. (p. 317)

From the 1920s to the 1950s in the USA, in part recognition of Dewey's ideas, a new holistic-informed physical education was developed in order to foster democratic citizenship and move the subject on from the restrictions of various systems of gymnastics teaching. Wood and Cassidy (1927) describe how teaching arrangements should focus on integrating the needs of the child (physical, mental, social and emotional development) with a knowledge base drawn from biology, physiology and sociology, and be primarily taken forward through projects which children had an active role in designing. These programmes remained popular until the 1950s by demonstrating their relevance to motor development and through being grounded in theories of social relationships (Ennis, 2006). However, they then began to fall out of favour, as did the works of Dewey in general due to concerns that in tough economic times, a more instrumental approach to education was required (Ryan, 1995). This was typified by military-informed concerns that educational standards in the USA were very poor in comparison with other western countries, especially in mathematics and science.

Since then Dewey has been a more occasional influence on curriculum design, for example, some authors such as Jewett (1980) have explored how connections between physical education and general education could be strengthened through a purpose-process model based on personal meaning. However, despite some recent attention to this area e.g. Fletcher, Ní Chróinín, Price & Francis (2018), even these types of programmes have been relatively scarce with much more attention being focused on developments in games teaching and models designed to improve students' sense of personal and social responsibility (Ennis, 2006). Thus, there remains a need for greater clarity in thinking through how personal meaning can become part of subject purposes *and* the extent to which physical education can be a suitable learning context for initiation into a range of worthwhile social and cultural practices, which as contextually appropriate emphasise the health enhancing benefits of physical activity. In this way physical education could promote itself as a worthwhile individual and societal endeavour, worthy of curriculum time and which avoids undue fragmentation and distortion under choice-driven and increasingly privatised schooling arrangements. Progress on this basis could connect contemporary physical education with a democratic way of life that contains free and full interactions between social groups and is supported by varied mutual interests that are 'useful and liberal at the same time' (Dewey, 1916, p. 142).

In responding to this type of call, Author and Co-author (2013) reappraised the contribution of John Dewey later writings on how the interrelated principles of continuity and interaction could position learning between what might otherwise be cast as traditional and progressive teaching approaches. The principle of continuity outlines that learning is a fluid process which needs to connect with previous learning experiences so that experiences can be reorganised to add meaning and enhance the child's capacity to direct future experiences (Dewey, 1938). Interaction, points to the transaction between an individual and the environment whereby objective conditions make up the aims and content of the experience and internal conditions refers to each child's unique mental map of the world. For physical educators this entails creating learning experiences that engage with students' prior interests and experiences and builds on these in order to bring something new to learning, so that students can extend their learning habits, values and knowledge dispositions. If successful, engagement in practical experiential learning should 'produce habits of emotion and intellect which would procure a worthy cultivation of leisure' (Dewey, 1916, p. 138). Such thinking would involve ensuring that

students' engagement and autonomy in learning were suitably to the fore in planning discussions about how best to cultivate habits and values. Dewey's thinking on how habits can become educational is informative, for while habits can be acquired through training with little thought or reflection, habits can also when sufficiently adapted and extended become of educational value. What matters is how carefully habits or skills are framed in relation to the wider goals and context of education. Progress in these types of ways can overtake concerns that the often obligatory nature of students' involvements in subjects like physical education can make it difficult to measure degrees of engagement and evidence of impact.

Standal and Aggerholm (2016) have also reviewed key aspects of Dewey's work in order to inform debates about how habits, skills and embodied experiences can contribute to physical education. Drawing upon Dewey and the phenomenological writings of Merleau-Ponty, Standal and Aggerholm (2016) teased out how habits properly conceived can engage with emotional as well as intellectual attitudes and enhance students' sensitivities in meeting and responding to embodied experiences. The authors indicate however that the proverb 'learning by doing', with which Dewey is often problematically associated, compounds matters as it highlights that there may be a conflict between habits which help keep students engaged in activity and problem solving inquiry that requires students to stop and think. To help ameliorate these types of concerns, Andersson and Garrison (2016) through focusing on Dewey's later career notions of embodied imminent meanings, have advanced a concept of body pedagogies which aims to illuminate the continuity between different kinds of meaning by focusing on qualities, feelings, selective attention and habits. Under this focus these phases of experience can help learners to acquire a feel for movements, pay selective attention to the right aspects of kinaesthetic and environmental qualities and acquire the benefits of habit through practice. Furthermore, the holistic pragmatism of Dewey and the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, highlights that nourishing personal growth requires challenges and problem solving tasks in order to cultivate a deep engagement with practical activity. On this basis, as many contemporary authors in physical education make clear e.g. Kirk (2010), Kretchmar (2006), there is little promise for introductory-based and non-progressive pedagogical practices, of the type Hammer (1918/1970) found evidence of in the Gary Schools a century ago. As such, physical education should not be repeatedly drawn towards superficial teaching which fails to help children learn and grow through effort, perseverance and problem solving - in Deweyan terms of becoming fully active and engaged in learning.

In trying to make learning more embodied and meaningful, Author and Co-author (2017) recently drew upon on Dewey and Merleau-Ponty to analyse conceptual conflicts between individual pursuits and the demands of communal life (as reflected in the broader ethos and culture in schools). Merleau-Ponty considered that the holistic nature of the 'body-subject' should be seen as a way of conceiving of relations between the body and the world which avoids over privileging abstraction and cognition and under-representing the centrality of the body in human experience. Thus, rather than being bound by the dichotomies of reason/emotion and mind/body, Merleau-Ponty articulated a concept of lived space, where the body-subject's experience is referenced through movement and language. Consequently, knowledge is founded upon integrated perceptual experiences which reveal ever more of the world as we live and experience life (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

In terms of making these types of conceptual matters clearer from a pedagogical perspective, Quennerstedt, Öhman and Öhman (2011) have also drawn on Dewey and deployed his later career writings on transaction as a methodology for investigating how richer and deeper learning in physical education can take place once concerns over body and mind dualisms are overtaken. Quennerstedt et al (2011) consider that what makes Dewey's thinking particularly useful is viewing learning as transactional process based on elements of continuity existing alongside elements of change in which humans and their environment obtain their meaning. This is preferable to considering that learning is predetermined or autonomous. As such, meaning is 'indissolubly connected to the relations that are created in and by action' Quennerstedt et al (2011, p. 162). In school programme terms, Author and Co-author (2017) also recognised that embodied learning approaches would have difficulty accommodating personal preferences in a whole class context. Therefore, the authors extended their thinking on how the goods of practice in physical education could merge with the diverse aims and intentions informing school culture and ethos. These ambitions are topical in relation to contemporary accounts of administrative progressivism and pedagogical progressivism, where the field evidence is that social efficiency has continued to trump social reform over the last hundred years (Author, 2017c).

Education and teacher professionalism

In trying to support teachers' role and abilities, Zhu, Ennis and Chen (2011) found through an ethnographic case study of one teacher implementing a constructivist-informed physical education curriculum, two particular challenges of note: firstly, school contextual constraints limited subject gains and secondly the teachers' personal values were at odds with those of the curriculum. This latter factor impacted considerably on the teachers' decision making. The authors concluded that implementing a 'complex constructivist curriculum not only requires a teacher with willingness to change, but also requires the teacher to believe in the value of the curriculum, and to be supported in their efforts by classroom teachers and school administration' (Zhu, Ennis & Chen, 2011, p. 98). After a four-year struggle with these challenges, the case study teacher concerned stopped teaching the planned constructivist curriculum and reverted to a recreational multi-activity curriculum, of the type which has been criticised by so many in physical education e.g. Kretchmar (2006).

To lessen these types of professional concerns (which may also have contributed to the mismatch between the expectations for physical education under the Gary School plan relative to the pedagogical practices which were often enacted), Armour, Quennerstedt, Chalmers and Makopoulou (2015) advocate adopting a Deweyan perspective for providing more effective professional development for teachers. The authors are critical of many aspects of current practice as they insufficiently focus on thinking differently about improvement and the complex nature of learning and teaching. The authors call for a more layered analysis based on a 'mix of embodiment, individual experience, culture and power that are at the heart of everyday practices...' (Armour et al, 2015, p. 804). On this basis, teachers are never finished teachers but are always practicing to become an ever better teacher, in a context where the ever changing nature and dynamism of contemporary physical education is framed by bodily experiences which are embedded in the meaning-making process. Moreover, reflecting Deweyan intentions, where immediate interest can merge with mediated interest in learning and improvement, Armour et al (2015) considers that forms of professional development can only be regarded as educative if they promote an enthusiasm for further engagement in learning. This is most likely to occur

when the main focus of development is on the detail of practice itself i.e. embedded and contextualised, and where learning is active and dynamic, on-going and continuous.

Conclusion

This historically-themed critical paper has raised some demanding questions about the extent to which some of Dewey's main curriculum planning and pedagogical ideas have relevance and traction relative to the purposes and pedagogical practices of contemporary physical education. Concerns about Dewey's legendary status in progressive education are not uncommon, for example, Boostrom (2016) considers that there is much more evidence of Dewey being cited rather than read. However, as others such as Ryan (1995) have recognised, engaging with Dewey, while vague and awkward at times has at heart a belief in the capacity of education to foster personal and societal growth, of a form which is more aspirational and imaginative than the formulaic schooling arrangements that often define students learning experiences and where the teacher is more of a technician than a professional. Supporting this line of thinking, the paper conducted a centennial reappraisal of the Gary Schools Plan, a progressive public school which Dewey championed and which had higher levels of physical education than typical. And, while aspects of Wirt's Gary Schools Plan may have been a helpful counterpoint to the predominant criticism Dewey faced i.e., that many of his ideas were prone to excessive and misconstrued child-centred influences when put into practice, as far as the specifics of physical education are concerned there is little educational encouragement to be found. This might be asking too much relative to the large class sizes and newness of the Gary school setting. However, it remains likely that observations by John Dewey himself might have led to a more accurate and critical perspective on Wirt's accomplishments being made in ways which could have benefited educational research over the last century (Westbrook, 1991). In reviewing the relevance of Dewey relative to current concerns about the educational contribution on physical education the paper discussed encouraging evidence of an increased engagement with Dewey, especially when considered in conjunction with Merleau-Pontian notions of experience and habit. Progress on this basis is considered helpful in advancing arguments about how physical education could connect more closely with the diverse aims and intentions shaping personal growth and the culture and ethos in schools.

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