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ARTICULATING A MERLEAU-PONTIAN PHENOMENOLOGY OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION: THE QUEST FOR ACTIVE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT IN HIGH-STAKES EXAMINATION AWARDS.

Abstract

In an earlier paper some of the conceptual and curriculum coherence challenges of linking practically based experiential learning with authentic attainment in high-stakes examination awards in physical education were analysed (Thorburn, 2007). Problems often existed for students in deriving subject knowledge understanding from tasks where there was a lack of personalised engagement in learning. Due to weaknesses in previous cognitive attempts to adequately describe intentional activity, this paper argues in preliminary fashion that articulating a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology of physical education could improve the methodological basis for linking students' lived-body experiences with the acquisition of an increasingly detailed subject knowledge, provided that learning intentions are clearly identified and achievable. The situation in Higher Still Physical Education (HSPE) in Scotland is reviewed as one curriculum example where teachers could, despite current problems, more authentically deploy phenomenology informed methodologies in order to improve the authenticity of students' learning experiences and assessment results.

Philosophy Curriculum Pedagogy Assessment

ARTICULATING A MERLEAU-PONTIAN PHENOMENOLOGY OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION: THE QUEST FOR ACTIVE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT IN HIGH-STAKES EXAMINATION AWARDS.

Introduction

My years teaching examination awards in high school were characterized by students asking whether it was ‘real physical education today’ as they entered the department (Thorburn, 1999, p. 19). If classroom based sessions were ever considered necessary then students’ engagement was invariably poorer than for practically based sessions in Games Halls and the like. Classroom sessions were by implication lacking in reality as they did not match students’ basic expectations of what physical education was essentially about. It was as foreign as music education without sound. In later years when completing field research into the quality of students’ learning and assessment experiences in examinations awards, students again confirmed a clear endorsement for practical learning environments. Thorburn and Collins (2006a) found in six sampled schools, that all students (n=97) preferred practical lessons with follow up homework tasks to classroom based lessons with no homework. Encouragingly, there remains a clear student commitment for active personalised engagement in practical learning environments.

In Scotland, attempts to integrate high levels of practical activity with high levels of subject or propositional knowledge learning, which is predominantly assessed through language based written assessment answers, has proved a problematic policy for many teachers to deploy (Thorburn and Collins, 2003; Thorburn and Collins, 2006a). As such, Thorburn (2007) encourages policy makers and teachers to review conceptual as well as pedagogical and assessment matters when seeking to link experiential learning to authentic attainment in more coherent terms. Such a review is clearly merited within physical education given that ‘high-stakes’ examination awards (Ayers et. al., 2004, pp. 141) are now a major component of curriculum discourse and a prominent part of the lives and careers of many teachers (Green, 2005).

However, McNamee (2005) has noted a reluctance to carry out wide ranging conceptual reviews of physical education to date resulting in curriculum often being defined from a 'predominantly dualist position that tends to view our bodily aspect as of only comparatively minor importance' (Whitehead, 1990, p. 3). This is perhaps unsurprising given that many contributors have responded directly to the writings of Peters (1966) and Hirst (1974), two leading philosophers of education, who contrasted the benefits of subject knowledge imperatives with other areas of school based socialization, which while generally of worth do not contain the same capacity for reflection that is considered vital for human growth. In curriculum terms, Hirst (1974) identified different forms of knowledge, which are capable of promoting illuminative reflection as they link directly to different theoretical or intellectual modes of enquiry. Overall, this philosophical position places physical education (and, indeed many other practically-based subjects) in an awkward position, as it effectively highlights that while physical education can make reasonable claims for inclusion as part of schooling (Barrow, 1981) it lacks sufficient educational warrant to merit inclusion as a high-stakes examination award.

Thus, given some periods of unease within the physical education profession regarding curriculum status and credibility (Armour and Jones, 1998), it is perhaps to have been expected that counter arguments to those of Peters and Hirst (e.g. Reid, 1996a; Reid, 1996b) have often argued for a corrective to the prevailing discourse rather than exploring other feasible and more complimentary philosophical options (McNamee, 2005; Thorburn, 2007). Consequently, there has been a relative lack of forethought about how curriculum could meet wider societal expectations of physical education, as well the aspirations of teachers and students, through coherently merging experiential learning with subject knowledge imperatives in ways which lead to authentic rather than contrived assessments of practical performance and subject knowledge occurring. This is surprising given the acknowledgement by McNamee (2005, p. 16) that a less restricted account of education, which has

‘the capacity to open up the possibilities of living a full and worthwhile life’ is widely anticipated, not least in Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2005).

In addressing these ambitions the paper begins with an explanation of how the writings of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty could potentially articulate a more coherent philosophy of lived-body experience, as the rational basis for active engagement and authentic assessment in high-stakes examination awards in physical education (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1968). This is followed by specific reporting on how the Scottish experience could conceivably, despite current teaching, learning and assessment difficulties (Thorburn and Collins, 2003; Thorburn and Collins, 2006a) yet meet these ambitions provided that teachers are supported and encouraged towards attempting to use the ontological potential contained within course arrangement documentation to a greater extent than at present.

At two key points in the article the normal flow of explanation and analysis is interspersed with a conceptual critique which focuses, firstly, on how previous cognitive-based attempts to adequately describe intentional activity in skills and knowledge acquisition has created problems in our understanding of motor learning and, secondly, on how there is a need for clarity and increased specificity about curriculum learning intentions if a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology of physical education within high-stakes examination awards is to productively develop.

Phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty and Physical Education

The promise of phenomenology for physical education

Phenomenology ‘is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view’ (Smith, 2005, p. 1). The essence of an experience is its intentionality; the meaning of events, the meaning of embodied action including kinesthetic awareness of one’s movements and the importance of sensations as they are experienced by the body. Phenomenology as a discipline

within continental European philosophy dates from the first half of the 20th Century; Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty being key figures in the historical development of phenomenology. What characterize phenomenology based investigations are attempts to describe reality fully, as it is presented to our senses (Heidegger, 1962). These approaches can eliminate preconceived ideas and replace them with analysis of specific learning intentions, for example, performance aspirations in different sporting activities.

For Husserl (1931) phenomenology contained the potential for experiences to provide the basis for a rigorous methodology, which could lead to specific forms of experiences (thoughts, perceptions, feelings) linking to associated subject knowledge meanings to achieve learning goals. Therefore, for explanations of experiences and learning, what is required initially is a first-person ontology where rich narrative description is used to ‘classify, describe, interpret and analyse structures of experiences’ (Smith, 2005, p. 5), and where repeated familiarity with similar types of experiences enables the language links between experiences and knowledge to become increasingly sophisticated and refined. Supported by suitably framed pedagogical approaches this could effectively enable personal experiences to become integrated with subject knowledge imperatives.

An introduction to Merleau Ponty

The French philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) explored in most detail how the experiences and motility of the body plays a crucial role in perception as well as speech and language, and is of particular interest to physical educationalists, as it contests that lived-body experiences should not be separated from cognitive learning. Rather, Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 110) in his most influential text ‘Phenomenology of Perception’ (originally published in 1945) describes the holistic nature of the ‘body-subject’ and outlines how this provides a way of conceiving relations between the body and the world, which avoids over privileging the role of cognition and under-representing the centrality of the body in human experience. Thus, rather than being bound in by the dichotomies of

reason / emotion and mind / body, Merleau-Ponty articulated instead a concept of lived space, where the body-subject's experience is referenced through movement and language. While there is some recognition of the socially constructed nature of experience, it is the pre-reflective knowledge (experiences) of the body that enables meanings to develop. Consequently, knowledge is not something to be understood in a dry and detached way, but rather 'sensed' or felt as the result of active engagement (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 216). As Whitehead (1990, p. 5) notes 'The real value of the capacities of our embodied dimension is not realised in isolation from our surroundings but in intimate relationship with them'.

For clarification it is important to note that Merleau-Ponty and other philosophers of phenomenology when writing about 'the body' are essentially referring to the 'lived body' rather than the 'physical body'. The earlier German language used in many phenomenological writings enabled linguistically the lived body (*Leib*) to be separately described from the physical body (*Körper*); sadly an option which is unavailable in the English language, where only one standard term (the body) exists. Consequently, it is important that justificatory accounts of the merits of physical education, which are informed by phenomenology avoid the pitfall of treating the human body as only a physical body that is 'investigated from the theoretical and experimental perspective of natural science', rather than conceiving of the body as a living body 'with its inner life and point of view' (Hanna and Thompson, 2003, p. 24).

Pivotal to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception were two interlinked critical notions; the intentional arc and maximum grip. The intentional arc refers to the tight links between the body and world, whereby as skills develop and improve 'finer and finer discriminations of situations paired with the appropriate response to each' situation occurs (Dreyfus, 2002, p. 367) as a maximal grip or 'muscular gestalt' (Voe, 2005, p. 172) is used to refine movement responses. Within the world of sport specifically, Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 169) provided an account of how players movement

responses relate to the spatial contours of the soccer field and notes that each ‘manoeuvre undertaken by the player modifies the character of the field and establishes new lines of force in which the action in turn unfolds and is accomplished, again altering the phenomenal field.’ In this way, play reflects ‘dialectic of milieu and action’. On such an account of knowledge and experience Merleau-Ponty formed the view that the problems between a conscious mind and inert body can be overtaken. Thus, in effect as Hughson and Inglis (2002a, p. 6) note ‘the body *is* the subject and the subject *is* the body’.

Overall for Merleau-Ponty, the contrast between experiential learning (empiricism) and the study of forms of knowledge (intellectualism) required to be reconsidered in ways which no longer excluded each other. If such ideas were adopted then a middle ground could inform future curriculum construction and ‘resolve the problems generated by the ontological divide which has characterized Western dualism since the time of Plato’ (Dillon, 1997, p. 34). Consequently, education should recognise the importance of experiential learning, and try to resolve pragmatic difficulties about how the essence of personal explorations can be captured within the assessment systems which currently operate for many subjects.

Problems with previous cognitive attempts to adequately describe intentional activity in skills and knowledge acquisition

In all of this though there is the dilemma in high level sport that too much thinking might be detrimental to skilful performance; a situation where the simplicity of performance and a focus on the immediacies of perception-action coupling can become over complicated by trying to remember past performances or anticipate future performances. As Sutton (2007, pp. 767-768) notes in the context of cricket ‘*Having* such batting skills and embodied memories, and being able to employ them, is utterly different from *knowing* about them, or being able to describe them, or even

remembering your earlier experience of them ...'. Put simply, absorbing yourself in the moment is preferable in sport at least to memorising past performances or imagining future performances.

However, Dreyfus (1991) in developing a phenomenology of expertise argues that as we experience phenomena in performance, varied experiences become meaningful as they are part of our bodily background knowledge and this is deeper and more elaborate in nature than mastery of the 'inferential procedures' (Reid, 1996b, p. 98) associated with merely conforming to the laws and rules of activities. Therefore, the 'cognitivist assumptions that human beings are carrying out rule-governed or programme-based information processing' (Voe, 2005, p. 171) requires review. Thus, Dreyfus seeks to combine the insights of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodiment with dynamical approaches in cognitive science where the extent to which 'expertise is so completely cut-off from conscious or articulable influence' (Sutton (2007, p. 768) will continue to be the subject of related research in neuroscience and motor learning as well as phenomenology. However, specifically with regard to how bodily background knowledge can accommodate the rule governed characteristics associated with classical cognitive accounts of learning, Dreyfus argues that coping skills and deliberative action are the foundation of intelligibility and an 'opening onto the world and the things in it' (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 68). And, while there may be debate about how much of proceduralized learning evident in skill acquisition is the result of conscious or unconscious information processing, some authors have nevertheless started to consider more fully how 'underlying procedures and knowledge can be (at least partially) accessed with the right methods, such as verbal self-report protocols or thought sampling in which experts describe what they are doing and why' (Sutton, 2007, p. 769).

Thus, Dreyfus (2002) argues, following scrutiny of Freeman's (1991) assessment that skills can be learned on the basis of experiences and the strength of neural network signals, that successful learning does not require to be bound to previous cognitive bound definitions of mental

representations. In developing his views Dreyfus (2002) was heavily influenced by the original writings of Merleau-Ponty, which outline how the intentional arc and maximal grip are important components of experience that improve coping skills and which are enhanced by deliberative and sensitized practice. Thus, expert performance in a sporting context is represented by regular and sustained practice, which leads to a superior memory of how skills are completed. By way of example, Dreyfus (2002, p. 378) outlines that when viewing a picture in an art gallery that ‘there is an optimum distance from which it requires to be seen, a direction from which it vouchsafes most of itself: at a shorter or greater distance we have merely a perception blurred through excess or deficiency’. The body’s ability to move and sense the optimum viewing distance is enhanced by our getting a maximum grip on the situation and by finer and finer discriminations (intentional arc) aiding refinement. In a sporting context, as the body implicitly moves towards achieving an optimal relationship with the environment there is merit in exploring how these types of relationships can yield an accurate phenomenology of how movements are experienced, performed and evaluated rather than relying on previous input and output accounts of information processing (Voe, 2005).

Pursuing these lines of conceptual enquiry is particularly important within high-stakes examination awards in physical education, as most versions of awards are based on integration between skills and knowledge, or between performance and analysis and performance (QSA, 2004; SQA, 2004). As such, students require the capacity to demonstrate as equal as possible a mix of practical ability and critical thinking at pre-tertiary level. For these reasons quite how best to ensure that regular and sustained deliberative practice can transfer to richer autobiographical reporting becomes vital in achieving integrated learning aims and, consequently, the next part of the article will consider in greater detail these types of issues when constructing curriculum.

Implications for the construction of curriculum discourse

To some extent the strengths of a Merleau-Pontian approach for describing activity experiences and explaining how practices are complicated adds to the methodological challenges posed when construction curriculum. Put simply, by ‘seeking to set out modes of embodied experience, a Merleau-Pontian approach can founder of the rock of its own ambition’ (Hughson and Inglis, 2002b, p. 7). In addition, the language complexity of explaining phenomenology, plus the lack of sport related research studies adds to difficulties involved in translating aims into coherent curriculum planning (Kerry and Armour, 2000). Thus, quite how to articulate carefully ‘the appropriateness of particular terminologies for the representation and comprehension of particular life-worlds’ (Hughson and Inglis, 2002b, p. 1) requires attention, and it is helpful in this respect that Inglis and Hughson (2000, p. 1) have explored the potential of soccer to yield ‘empirical occurring instances of soccer play which could be described as being aesthetic in quality’ through ‘formulating a philosophical vocabulary for describing the movements of players’ on the field of play (Hughson and Inglis, 2002a, p. 2). In effect, the authors tried to understand players’ movement through language, while recognising that the phenomenon of movements is essentially non-verbal in character. Hughson and Inglis (2002a, p. 2) note that:

Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of corporeal movement is arguably a profound contribution to a very vexing problem, both within the philosophy of sport and philosophy more generally: How can one capture the evanescent qualities of corporeal experience within the categories of language.

Hughson and Inglis (2002a) thereafter attempted to design a phenomenological model for exploring the triadic relationship framed by the student (body-subject), the nature (form) of activities and associated subject (propositional) knowledge. Hughson and Inglis (2002a, p. 8) add that ‘It is axiomatic of the above phenomenological relation that each part is a component of a totality’. Change in one area effects changes in other areas, and as such, students’ performance abilities will affect relationships to activities and to subject knowledge. For example, in swimming a more able

practical performer will develop a greater feeling and sensitivity for water and will consequently understand kinaesthetic feedback about performance in a more refined way. A less able swimmer would explore the same relationship but in a less sophisticated way. Thus, swimmers of different individual abilities can be incorporated within the same class and taught effectively, provided the relationship model sketched by Hughson and Inglis (2002a) is retained and the phenomenological perspective for learning is secured. Any elaboration on subject knowledge which lacks personal performance insights based on experiential learning would be very different to those which included these types of references.

Accordingly, applying a Merleau-Pontian perspective on learning would endorse in a pragmatic sense popular initiatives such as Teaching Games for Understanding (Bunker and Thorpe, 1982) where as students begin to demonstrate an improved grasp of the movement, shape and flow of games, reflective performance analysis would focus on occurrences arising during games.

Specifically, within a high-stakes examination awards context, Thorburn and Collins (2003) when reviewing teachers' decision-making enjoyed hearing how one teacher described a recent teaching episode where:

I did a lesson recently in basketball. I did a couple of things which had been borrowed from rugby on how to break down a zone defence in rugby about hitting spaces aggressively, how you put people into spaces, not the ball necessarily but people into spaces. Then we talked about the link to a structure, which was a 2-1-2 zone and then we did a couple of drills, just to get a feel for it. I could see communication starting, I could see students noising it up, I could see the zone starting to move and the game take shape depending on where the ball was and I thought that's quite good, and I still get that buzz.

The enjoyment arises from recognising that the above description captures something of the spirit of experiential learning and is informed by many of the acknowledged characteristics of teaching

expertise; for example, taking calculated risks (Brown and McIntyre, 1993), showing flexible control (Griffey and Housner, 1991), setting appropriate student goals (Leinhardt and Greeno, 1986) and possessing a detailed knowledge of sporting activities (Amade-Escot, 2000). Clearly without such expertise the Merleau-Pontian inspired attractiveness of students' actively engaging with the learning process is likely to founder due to the extent of the methodological problems posed with possible mind-body dualism concerns re-emerging (Thorburn and Collins, 2003).

In addition, in offering advice on securing the intended phenomenological perspective on learning and capturing the essence of students' active engagement in the learning process, Hughson and Inglis (2002b, p. 5) advise that reporting must 'not fall into the trap of utilising language that conveys a false impression of jerky, stop-start forms of motion.' Hence, for a swimmer describing the nature of propulsive movements and breathing patterns, and their consequent effects on streamlining would be preferable to more leaden accounts of isolated parts of stroke technique, for example. Hughson and Inglis (2002b, p. 5) indicate that a distinctive feature of the more able performer is the ability to exhibit 'very high levels of kinetic economy', and this should be evident as well in subsequent language based accounts of active engagement in activities.

As such, when teaching swimming the overarching aim would be to provide experiences which help students increase their understanding of floatation and of being at one with the water. These experiences should enable the nature of swimming to become clear, and for students to experience the efficiency benefits of flowing co-ordinated movements and controlled energy output with only modest water disturbance occurring. Thus, just as Peters (1973, p. 240) argues that an educated person should be able to 'connect up these different ways of interpreting his experience so that he achieves some form of cognitive perspective', so it should be in an examination award context, that adequately focussing curriculum time on these types of fundamental performance (body-subject) experiences would be required, prior to moving to more formal modes of analysis to do with timed

swims, stroke assessment and comparisons with model performers. Incorporating students' water-based perceptions about the nature and demands of swimming should enable insightful elaborations about performance to develop. And, in due course making these types of connections should be complimentary and feasible, for as Best (1995) has reminded us when discussing the aesthetic in sport, it is economic and efficient methods of performing skills which should be aspired towards as concision and fluidity are the hallmarks of excellence in performance.

In trying to improve understandings about the nature of performance, critiquing the value of deliberative practice as a device for generating improvement is also required, and with these ambitions in mind it is noteworthy that within medical communities, programmes for the education of doctors have recently tried to blend experiential learning with more theoretical approaches (Claxton, 1997). The intention is that by including discussion as part of teaching and learning, students can begin to comment on their 'hunches' and 'feelings' about what works best. In these environments 'the intuitive component of diagnosis either helps to limit the range of possibilities, so that a more manageable analytical approach may be adopted, or it leads to the early generation of hypothesis' Brawn (2000, p. 158). Pursuing 'intuition' and 'manageable analytical approaches' through deliberative practice appears to endorse in rationale terms teaching approaches such as the cycle of analysis provided that time to cultivate the language of performance and for authentic learning to occur is duly recognised (SQA, 2004). In addition, such a tight methodological focus reduces the risk of students generating fabricated or imaginary versions of experiences.

Phenomenology and a justificatory critique for high-stakes examination awards

Prior to outlining some of the assessment implications for a curriculum framed on such a basis it is worth interspersing this account by briefly considering the value of developing this form of perspective on the world. Because, of course, to overtake the blunt criticism of McNamee (2005, p. 9) that 'to argue for the educational value of physical education on the ground that the playing of

games conferred a wide ranging cognitive perspective on the world would be barking up the wrong tree' it is necessary for physical educationalists to think both critically and imaginatively about the values and logical basis for high-stakes examination awards in physical education and to ensure learning aims are clearly stated.

This is why it is perceived as advantageous within the phenomenological account sketched, that learning aims are intended to compliment rather than contradict prevailing educational discourse through complying with the requirement to verify attainment through language-based assessments that involve in many cases students constructing written extended response answers. In these environments, there is a need to ensure that the learning aims associated with integrated learning are authentic rather than contrived in nature and do genuinely contribute towards the achievement of high levels of attainment. This is a particular concern currently in Scotland where to date the advised learning medium - practical workshops which are built around critical and imaginative practice (SQA, 2004) - require to be carefully assembled, as it is only relatively recently that these types of learning environments have had to cope with the additional loading of being deployed within high stakes examination awards (Thorburn and Collins, 2003).

However, the phenomenological route outlined here is not the only route possible, and within an increasingly global and culturally pluralistic world, other writers might like to theorize about other viable philosophical options. In this way the pitfalls associated with the relative narrowness of a liberal curriculum based on the philosophies of Peters (1966) and Hirst (1974), which tends to be of value and benefit to only some in society can be avoided (Carr, 2003). In any event, there may well be a premium in future years on awards which can make learning personalised, but which contain the antecedents of study that are clearly desirable within tertiary education, such as learning which is authentic and not rote driven, and that contains deliberative practice, perseverance and challenge. Consequently, interested writers in the philosophy of physical education would do well to articulate

how best these types of ambitions could naturally and feasibly occur in ways which best suit particular cultural contexts. By way of example, the planned links between Kirk's elaboration about 'intelligent performer' (Kirk, 1983) and Arnold's three dimensions of movement (Arnold, 1979) appear well advanced in examination awards developments in Queensland, Australia (QSA, 2004), and could yield further developments, particularly with regard to how the learning benefits of integration are evident in both practical as well as written tasks.

Implications for the construction of curriculum assessment

Returning to main thrust of the article regarding how a Merleau-Pontain phenomenology of physical education can be articulated within an high-stakes examination award context, the next consideration is how experiences that are corporeal in nature can be placed in discursive frames and use as the basis for autobiographical remembering. Rather disappointingly, Hughson and Inglis (2002b, p. 7) recount how an interview with a famous and particularly talented soccer player revealed that 'he seems rather at sea in a life-world where words are the phenomena to be orientated towards, not soccer balls' and a similar situation would clearly be a problem within most current versions of high-stakes examination awards worldwide (QSA, 2004; SQA, 2004). Merleau-Ponty was addressing these types of issues upon his untimely death in 1961, and his last work 'The Visible and the Invisible' (1968) attempted to purge dualistic categories of body and mind, and the logical extension of these attempts if carefully pursued might have helped reduce the ontological dilemmas raised by the Hughson and Inglis (2002b) example, where there is a clear imbalance in the performance and language attributes of the soccer player identified.

Thus, the apparent first task is to recognise the distinguishing characteristics of an experientially based autobiographical writing approach, and then analyse the criteria by which students' learning can be measured following practice. Hughson and Inglis (2002b, p. 8) pose three initial questions,

which if satisfactorily answered, could be adopted as the assessment criteria for the valid discursive frames required. The questions asked are:

- Does it tell us anything new about the life-world (student experience) being investigated?
- Does it capture well the detailed features of a form of life?
- Does it miss out or misrepresent phenomena that for other reasons we might take to be important in the particular context under scrutiny?

Phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty and Higher Still Physical Education in Scotland

HSPE is a high-stakes examination award for 16-18 year old students that is characterized by a practical experiential rationale which aims to improve levels of practical performance and analytical understanding; an integrated curriculum link that is reflected in the near equal assessment weightings for practical performance (40%) and analytical abilities (60%) (SQA, 2004). However, since the first version of HSPE began in 1999 it has proved difficult for students to demonstrate as high a level of analytical competence as practical performance competence. Thus, despite pleasing evidence of high uptake, only modest levels of attainment have been realised relative to other awards at higher level. For example, in 2006, despite the high overall pass rate (81.6%), very few students were able to achieve the highest possible grade 'A' award. Analysis of results from the 33 other higher level awards, which had more than 500 participating students indicates that on average 30.1% of all students achieved an 'A' award, while for PE the figure was only 16.6%. This was the third lowest of any of the awards being considered with only Information Systems and Drama recording a lower percentage of 'A' award passes (SQA, 2006a). Thus, despite being the eleventh most popular higher level award, there is only modest evidence of its appropriateness or benefit for tertiary education until the overall profile of student achievement improves at the highest award levels possible. Furthermore, the nature and demands associated with written assessment instruments does not appear in itself to be responsible for poor student achievement. Thorburn and Collins (2006b) compared oral and written assessment instruments and found that contrary to

teacher attributions, students did not achieve higher marks through oral rather than written examinations; in fact the contrary effect was found.

What appear needed therefore are a range of assessment instruments that can suitably authenticate experience. Fortunately, there appears to be a feasible link between the assessment criteria for discursive frames highlighted by Hughson and Inglis (2002b) as necessary for authentic assessment and the grade related marking criteria which have been devised for each of the four outcomes in analysis and development of performance to denote high, medium and lower levels of competence (SQA, 2006b). Specifically, it is necessary (Outcome 1) for students ‘to provide a clear and detailed record, description or explanation of a performance’ as the basis for achieving high marks for their opening analysis of a performance and for later capturing and discussing the subject knowledge imperatives associated with experiences (Outcome 2 & 3), and for ensuring that experiences are not misrepresented (Outcome 4). In short, the nature of experience becomes the main assessment vehicle for describing analytical processes and for making connections as appropriate with relevant subject knowledge (Table 1).

<Insert Table 1 close to here>

However, even if there is conceptual coherence between the rationale and the assessment criteria for HSPE, there remain subject knowledge and pedagogical issues to consider if the quality of teaching and learning to improve. Thus, despite the ambitions of the rationale, the lack of detailed advice on teaching and learning, which is theoretically underpinned by related research (Brewer and Sharp, 1999) has contributed to difficulties in ensuring that lived body experience ‘is given epistemological ascendancy as an avenue of access to the real world’ (Kerry and Armour, 2000, p. 7). Nevertheless, this paper contests that it remains plausible based on current understandings of the brain and the body to proceed in the ways advised (SQA, 2004). This is despite the problems encountered, to date, where the inability to offer sympathetic and transformative rather than

transmissive forms of professional development (Thorburn, 2006) has often resulted in ‘a shaving off of higher-order and critical thinking and a lowering of cognitive demand and intellectual depth’ (Luke, 2006, p.123). Overall, these circumstances have contributed towards the learning and assessment problems which exist as well as adding to concerns about the worthiness of HSPE for entry to tertiary education programmes (Thorburn and Collins, 2003; Thorburn and Collins, 2006a).

Conclusion

This paper has attempted, in preliminary fashion, to articulate a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology of physical education as the ontological basis for trying to more effectively integrate students’ lived-body experiences with the acquisition of increasingly detailed subject knowledge within high-stakes examination awards. From a Merleau-Pontian perspective, the integrated learning intentions underpinning different worldwide attempts at enabling physical education to become fully accepted as a high-stakes examination award is based, for the present, on a feasible philosophical notion, and one which appears to have the capacity to overcome much of the methodological conservatism associated with narrowly following the strictures of mind-body dualism.

Furthermore, attempts to improve skills and knowledge through more fully understanding the nature of performance and the benefits of deliberative practice in sharpening analytical enquiry should, when combined with a greater recognition of the distinguishing characteristics of an experientially based autobiographical writing approach, manage to address many of the pedagogical and attainment problems experienced in awards like HSPE to date. Thus, within a more productive learning and assessment environment, where the integration of performance and subject knowledge is presented as natural and feasible, and where language is used to cultivate feelings and knowledge, there is an opportunity for many of the authenticity issues surrounding students learning and assessment experiences to be substantially improved upon (Thorburn, 2007).

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Table 1: The links between the key assessment questions identified by Hughson and Inglis (2002b) and the marking criteria and grade related criteria devised for the assessment of Analysis and Development of Performance in Higher Still Physical Education.

Hughson and Inglis (2002b) questions	Analysis and Development of Performance Marking Criteria	Higher Still Physical Education - Grade Related Criteria (Higher Level)
Does it tell us anything new about the life-world (student experience) being investigated?	Outcome1: Analyse a performance in an activity	Candidates should be awarded high marks if they give a clear and detailed record, description or explanation of a performance. Candidates should be awarded half of the marks available if they give a satisfactory record, description and explanation of performance. Candidates should be awarded low marks if their record, description or explanations are limited in scope and/or unsatisfactory in detail.
Does it capture well the detailed features of a form of life?	Outcome2: Use knowledge and understanding to analyse performance	Candidates should be awarded high marks if they demonstrate a clear and detailed understanding of relevant key concept knowledge and its application when analysing and developing performance. Candidates should be awarded half of the marks available if they demonstrate an understanding of relevant key concept knowledge and its application when analysing and developing performance. Candidates should be awarded low marks if their understanding of relevant key concept knowledge and its application when analysing and developing performance is limited in scope and/or unsatisfactory in detail.
Does it capture well the detailed features of a form of life?	Outcome3: Monitor a programme of work	Candidates should be awarded high marks if they give clear and detailed suggestions about programmes of work that are likely to lead to performance development. Candidates should be awarded half of the marks available if they give satisfactory suggestions about programmes of work that are likely to lead to performance development. Candidates should be awarded low marks if their suggestions about programmes of work are limited in scope and/or unsatisfactory in detail and are unlikely to lead to performance development.
Does it miss out or misrepresent phenomena that for other reasons we might take to be important in the particular context under scrutiny?	Outcome4: Evaluate the analysis and development process	Candidates should be awarded high marks if their evaluations include a detailed discussion of the effectiveness of analysis and development work undertaken. Candidates should be awarded approximately half of the marks available if their evaluations include some discussion of the effectiveness of analysis and development work undertaken. Candidates should be awarded low marks if their evaluations include a limited discussion of the effectiveness of analysis and development work undertaken.

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