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### Creating thriving and sustainable futures in physical education, health and sport

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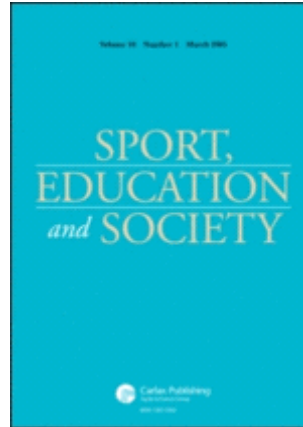
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**Creating thriving and sustainable futures in physical education, health and sport**

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## Sport, Education and Society: Special Issue

### Creating thriving and sustainable futures in physical education, health and sport

#### Abstract

The idea for this Special Issue, 'Creating thriving and sustainable futures in physical education, health and sport' arose from the Association Internationale des Écoles Supérieures d'Éducation Physique (AIESEP) World Congress in Edinburgh, 25-28 July, 2018. The quadrennial World Congress welcomed an international audience of over 400 delegates from 40 plus countries to critically consider some of the demanding issues and resurgent possibilities for productive engagement in physical education, physical activity, health and sport. Early career researchers and established scholars alike presented and discussed their research on ways in which physical education can thrive in schools and also articulate with wider societal objectives for increasing physical activity, enhancing health and encouraging sporting participation and achievement. In doing so, the World Congress sought to explore how physical education could make the most of policy and practice opportunities through exploring and critiquing contrasting conceptual visions and by reviewing the pedagogical possibilities for improving student outcomes. In exploring the overarching conference theme, the World Congress had four sub themes: physical education, policy engagement and economic liberalism; empowering practitioners and supporting professional learning; transformative learning and teaching in physical education and sports pedagogy and innovative perspectives on physical education, physical activity, health and wellbeing and sport. There are two papers from each sub theme in the special issue: one paper from each keynote lecture and the other from paper presentations which were particularly well-received for their relevance and incisiveness by congress delegates and members of the Scientific Committee. Collectively, the papers investigate a range of questions and utilise a range of methodological approaches for exploring the critical issues raised. Our editorial aspiration is that these papers can stimulate further professional discussions and inform future research agendas.

**Keywords:** physical education; learning; pedagogy; innovation; policy engagement; empowering practitioners; physical activity; health and wellbeing

#### Introduction

At times, even getting on the front foot in critically considering how to create thriving and sustainable futures for physical education in relation to health and sport can seem a task in itself. Concerns exist about subject intentions (Kirk, 1988), coherence of supporting arguments (McNamee & Bailey, 2010), and of physical education and sport pedagogy related anxieties becoming largely unresolvable amidst a sense that 'our field has stalled' (Armour, 2014, p. 853). However, while recognising that a perception of crisis discourse surrounding physical education may continue to exist, the overarching theme at the AIESEP 2018 World Congress was that the

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3 occasion provided an upbeat and vibrant context for critically reviewing how thriving and  
4 sustainable futures for physical education, health and sport could be created and to some extent  
5 recreated. Therefore, the World Congress sought to advance arguments for active engagement in  
6 physical education and health and sport as a positive and enhancing contributor to a flourishing  
7 life. In this light, the World Congress engaged with questions, insights and perspectives which  
8 could sustain more thriving and buoyant futures. In mapping out this position, the Scientific  
9 Committee tried to articulate an intention which recognised that understanding and appreciating  
10 our field is altogether a finer grained and more nuanced matter than considering that physical  
11 education and health and sport is either in crises or not in crises, or that, for example, a strengths-  
12 based perspective on experience and social engagement is automatically the way to progress  
13 without appreciating the complexities of how such intentions might be enacted.  
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28 Moreover, there is a need to recognise that some of the most lucid and longstanding voices in  
29 supporting our subject area are very often the same authors who are most insightful in  
30 highlighting the improvements which are merited in various areas of professionalism and  
31 practice, see for example, Kirk & Macdonald (2001), Armour & Yelling (2007).  
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40 In all of this, a key question for change agendas in education is how can you promote a sense of  
41 constructive disruption without unduly alienating the very professionals charged with enacting  
42 reforms and building sustainable improvements? For as research from policy enactment in  
43 schools makes clear, at least some degree of compatibility with teachers' beliefs and practices is  
44 pivotal to progress (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012). One of the bolder recent attempts to engage  
45 with a collective research-practitioner agenda is from Lawson et al. (2018) who sought to initiate  
46 an international-informed, evidence-based, outcomes-driven redesign of physical education. A  
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3 central tenant of their work is that research and development needs to dovetail coherently with  
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5 evidence of impact on policy and practice. Time will tell whether Lawson et al.'s (2018)  
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7 redesign principles are enacted in bold and imaginative ways and what the implications are  
8  
9 thereafter for professional learning. That said the similarity of the reform and improvement  
10  
11 agenda being taken forward by Lawson et al. (2018) and the AIESEP 2018 World Congress  
12  
13 theme and sub themes, suggests that there is research momentum and interest in trying to create  
14  
15 thriving and sustainable futures for physical education, health and sport. Framed by the four  
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17 conference sub themes, the papers in this Special Issue outlined below reflect some of the most  
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19 compelling critical ideas and findings from leading authors who presented their papers during  
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21 four warm and mostly sunny days in July, 2018 in Edinburgh.  
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### 28 **Physical education, policy engagement and economic liberalism**

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30 For many established professionals working in schools, the more settled arrangements which  
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32 characterised the beginning of their careers are likely to have undergone marked changes in  
33  
34 recent years. For physical education and related developments in health and sport in schools, has  
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36 become ripe as a context for privatisation and the outsourcing of delivery to private services.  
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38 This shift has been accompanied by a decline in central and local government involvement in  
39  
40 many aspects of educational provision (Macdonald, 2014). The change in the funding and  
41  
42 management of education is likely to impact on how schools are conceived and network with  
43  
44 each other, and of how teachers may need to adapt to more overt performative work cultures. In  
45  
46 this light, Sperka and Enright (2018) consider that given the untested nature of many of the  
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48 assumptions endorsing the outsourcing of provision in schools, there is a need for further  
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3 research enquiry which benefits educators in understanding in greater detail the ramifications of  
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5 privatisation-related developments.  
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10 Given certain key events in the history of education, these appear wise words. A century ago  
11 there was a struggle for control of American education between pedagogical progressives with a  
12 deep interest and concern for child-centered education and administrative progressives who  
13  
14 wanted to reconstruct the management, organisation and curriculum of schools (Labaree, 2005).  
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16 The progressive vision lost out in the struggle for control of schools in the United States of  
17  
18 America (USA), the utilitarian trumped the more romantic perspective and pedagogical  
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20 progressivism has often failed to influence the practice of learning and teaching in schools ever  
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22 since. Thus, education became largely geared to social efficiency rather than social renewal. A  
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24 concerning adjunct to this account is that the remaining stalwarts of pedagogical progressivism  
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26 often ended up working in schools of education in Universities. Thus, lecturers in practice often  
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28 faced the compromising dilemma of preparing student teachers to teach in schools to which they  
29  
30 were not ideologically well disposed. Over time, this created an unfortunate fissure and lack of  
31  
32 trust between academics and practitioners. This historical episode suggests that changing how  
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34 schools are envisioned, funded and managed may have a range of consequences, some intended  
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36 and some unintended; and the unintended consequences can affect the detail of everyday  
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38 schooling practice as well as the nature of how theory and practice are conceived by academics  
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40 and practitioners alike.  
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51 Meg Maguire et al., in their thought-provoking and pertinent empirical-based paper, *Policy,*  
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53 *Contextual Matters and 'Unintended Outcomes': the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc) and its*  
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3 *impact on Physical Education in the English secondary school*, analyse many of the policy-  
4 related complexities influencing curriculum coherence and subject status. In doing so, the  
5 authors carefully detail some of the areas of disconnection between policy assumptions and  
6 policy-related concerns in schools, most notably, that at a time of wider societal unease over  
7 health and wellbeing among young people that the positioning of physical education under the  
8 Ebacc is a marginal and unhelpful one. The authors call for a much greater critical resistance to  
9 traditional academic subjects occupying a privileged position relative to physical education in  
10 curriculum arrangements, as the former is considered more vital in terms of knowledge  
11 significance and contribution within high-stakes testing regimes. On this basis, the authors call  
12 for a reconfiguring of physical education that focuses on subject values and better support for  
13 teachers. The teachers surveyed and interviewed in the paper acknowledged these concerns  
14 through their reporting on subject positioning under Ebacc arrangements noting an associated  
15 decline in student numbers and the perceived distortion to subject contribution as knowledge  
16 acquisition was favoured over practical led learning. This reporting dovetails with key aspects of  
17 related literature in the field, which cites the challenges of subject matter and pedagogical change  
18 within a high-stakes assessment context that utilises language-based examinations in order to  
19 measure knowledge driven attainment, and where the generation of results can be used thereafter  
20 for comparing teacher and school effectiveness (Casey & O'Donovan, 2015). There are new  
21 findings as well, for example, in noting how the popularity of physical education has enabled  
22 initial teacher education providers in England to offer additional places provided students agree  
23 to study another subject as well. Arguably, this could result in physical education occupying a  
24 rather ignominious position, whereby the subject in itself is considered as being low in terms of  
25 subject status but quite useful nevertheless for attracting much needed new entrants into  
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3 teaching. Maguire et al., conclude, in ways redolent of the disconnection between the  
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5 administrative progressives and the pedagogical progressivists a century ago, by calling for a  
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7 reconceiving of education in England which in terms of physical education focuses on a broader  
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9 view of subject aims and provision and which engages with wider populations and citizenries in  
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11 supporting new thinking.  
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17 Leigh Sperka and Eimear Enright in their paper *'And if you can't hear us?: Students as*  
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19 *customers of neo-HPE'* seek within the complexities of neoliberal ideologies and associated  
20  
21 interventions in schools, to capture something of students experiences during a partially  
22  
23 outsourced Cardio Tennis unit in one independent co-educational secondary school in Australia.  
24  
25 There is an urgent need for such research, the authors noting in their scoping review of 31 studies  
26  
27 on the outsourcing of health and physical education that only one included student-generated  
28  
29 data. Through utilizing selected theoretical ideas on pedagogic voice and control by Bernstein,  
30  
31 the authors analyse some of the most prevalent structural and interactional aspects of practice.  
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33 Most notably, they explore the shared school and external teaching set up and of how students  
34  
35 perceived this arrangement in terms of their engagement in learning. What was found is that  
36  
37 students found their teaching episodes rather modest in meeting their needs as consumers of  
38  
39 education. There was little, for example, by way of teaching that fostered citizenship, engaged  
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41 students as co-producers in learning and where students had a greater role in educational decision  
42  
43 making. Thus, what emerges is a rather pale version of democracy in education. One particular  
44  
45 benefit of the research is to highlight that teachers need to tease out further the pedagogical  
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47 implications associated with working in a context where they are often positioned as an  
48  
49 intermediary between visiting coaches and students. Progress here is necessary so that  
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3 professional boundaries do not become unduly blurred and where the educative nature of  
4  
5 physical education can be assured and concerns over de-professionalism suitably assuaged. More  
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7 widely the authors are alert to the irony they are highlighting i.e., that by seeking to improve the  
8  
9 quality of outsourcing support on students learning experience it may unintentionally widen the  
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11 gap between independent and state school physical education provision.  
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### 15 16 17 **Empowering practitioners and supporting professional learning**

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19 Pivotal to physical education sustaining improvements and thriving in the future will be  
20  
21 supporting the professional capital of teachers and early career scholars. However, as an  
22  
23 intention, this aspiration is far from straightforward to achieve. The rather fragmented nature of  
24  
25 teacher education provision for physical education within university schools of education,  
26  
27 combined with a wide array of professional development options for practicing teachers, bears  
28  
29 testimony to some of the challenges ahead. In this context, it is often difficult for those providing  
30  
31 professional support to step back from the immediacies of their situation, and to scan further  
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33 ahead and more widely in understanding and defining the context of their career-long personal  
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35 grand challenge.  
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42 Mustafe Levent Ince through his paper on '*Supporting learning of practitioners and early career*  
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44 *scholars in sports pedagogy*' has set out on just such a journey. Following the six-fold  
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46 identification of the importance of: learners' specific needs; the socio-ecological impact of  
47  
48 learner characteristics on educational context and policy; stakeholders' ideals and aims; creating,  
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50 sustaining, and supporting local and global professional learning communities; being future-  
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52 oriented in educational decisions, and being data-driven in practice, Levent engages with the  
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3 societal complexities of supporting professional learning in Turkey. This involves recognising  
4 the current social and geographical challenges which exist and where a young rising and  
5 increasing city-based population places considerable strain on providing educational equality and  
6 enhanced learning opportunities within a centralised education structure. In analysing and  
7 discussing the six identified areas of importance, the paper merges research led findings with  
8 Bronfenbrenner's (1979) multi-level social-ecological thinking in a physical education and sports  
9 pedagogy context that recognises the interrelated complexities of curriculum aims, teaching time,  
10 students' reporting on subject contribution and the possibilities for transferability of learning in  
11 physical education. In doing so the paper recognises the specifics of national circumstance,  
12 where professional learning opportunities are infrequent, modest and only occasionally relevant.  
13 While improvement is always to an extent a work in progress and never a settled ending,  
14 Levent's paper highlights the possibilities of improvement when stakeholders can share the same  
15 goals and create together future-oriented supportive learning communities.  
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35 Okseon Lee et al., considers the *'Landscape of Secondary Physical Education Teachers'*  
36 *Professional Development in South Korea'* and highlights a range of issues that detract from  
37 effective professional development and the capacity of policy to innovate practice. Teachers  
38 preferring collaborative networks are instead experiencing a range of packaged products that  
39 superficially impact practice with modest alignment to more contemporary curriculum goals. As  
40 such, policy appears to be a driver of short-term, decontextualized and pre-packaged professional  
41 development that yields a 'tips and tricks' type learning for teachers. The consequence is that  
42 professional development appears to be somewhat ineffective in meeting the expectations of a  
43 changing curriculum through innovating practice. The authors outline an opportunity for  
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3 professional development to be reimagined so it can better meet the desire of teachers for novel,  
4 relevant and practical content that invites interaction, and collaboration over time.  
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### 10 **Transformative learning and teaching in physical education and sports pedagogy**

11 At the heart of teaching that is educative in purpose, sits the notion of transformation. Dewey  
12 (1933) suggests that as a consequence of reflective inquiries into experiences that confuse,  
13 disturb or perplex us (an indeterminate situation), inquiry is aroused, reflection is incited and  
14 transformation occurs. Dewey did not suggest these disturbances were cognitive, but rather were  
15 embodied, sensory and felt (English, 2013). Sensed at a point of incongruence with the world as  
16 it was encountered in lived experience, it was the transformation of self and the uncertainty of  
17 the world encountered through lived experience that Dewey considered important.  
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30 Mikael Quennerstedt, in his paper from the Cagigal Lecture at AIESEP, draws on Dewey and  
31 others to suggest that transformation is about the meaning of experience in relation to a future  
32 unknown or as yet undecided, that can lead to the growth of further experience due to open-  
33 endedness, uncertainty and the creation of new beginnings unique to the individual. Quennerstedt  
34 highlights concerns with starting with the activity first or the ‘what’ (invasion game, fitness,  
35 etc.). When the ‘what’ is prioritized it is inevitably followed by the how (e.g. Teaching Games  
36 for Understanding) with a retrofitting of the ‘why’ last of all (cooperation, fitness, tradition).  
37 Quennerstedt argues this leads to a kind of role playing in the name of physical education and  
38 pre-packaged sameness that for many can be mis-educative. Quennerstedt instead argues that the  
39 way forward for physical education is to focus on the art of teaching where the purpose is  
40 prioritised (i.e. social justice) to give direction to the content and how it is presented. Amongst a  
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3 range of pedagogies that are potentially educative, Quennerstedt points to pedagogies of  
4 becoming, hesitation, discovery and inquiry that generate uncertainty, lead to reflection and  
5 generate learning, with a view that the child is always in the process of becoming physically  
6 educated. Quennerstedt also suggests a pedagogy of meaning where there is a focus on  
7 meaningful experiences and making new or revised meanings from experience.  
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17 In a more practical exploration of pedagogy of meaning, Stephanie Beni et al.'s paper '*A focus*  
18 *on the 'how' of meaningful physical education in primary schools*' explores through a self-study,  
19 features of physical education practice that can support meaningful physical education. For  
20 Quennerstedt, the art of teaching is relationally positioned between the learner, the teacher,  
21 school community and society with the core question of 'why' driving the 'what' and the 'how'.  
22 Beni et al., focus on the 'how' by reviewing pedagogies that support meaning and in doing so  
23 provides relevant insights into challenges and opportunities for teachers. Not least is how  
24 teachers cannot control for the unique beginnings students arrive at learning 'with'. In calling for  
25 a broader definition of competence that encapsulates the cognitive, social and the motoric, the  
26 authors see a need to widen the 'why' of physical education to align better with personally  
27 relevant learning. It is perhaps no surprise that meaningful pedagogies are tied to student voice  
28 and a degree of open-endedness. Here, Quennerstedt frames what Beni et al. find, namely that in  
29 guiding the 'how', a purposive focus on meaning helps provide a license to move away from  
30 'what works' instrumentally, towards bringing something unexpected to the experience. The  
31 pedagogy of meaning that Quennerstedt refers to and that Beni et al., attempt to deliver, is one of  
32 lifelong learning and can be considered in this light relative to Dewey's indeterminate situations.  
33 From Quennerstedt's perspective, this is a position from which students can deliberate, inquire  
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3 and use perceptive actions to solve problems more intelligently; a viewpoint which is open ended  
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5 and geared towards different directions and different outcomes rather than towards fixed  
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7 predetermined homogenous ends.  
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### 12 **Innovative perspectives on physical education, physical activity, health and sport**

14 One of the dilemmas highlighted in the earlier part of the Introduction is that physical education  
15 needs to premise change agendas on coherent and plausible perspectives that are well theorised  
16 and which clearly reflect societal needs and the lives and preferences of young people. This  
17 position also broadly mirrors Lawson et al.'s (2018) advice that research and development  
18 requirements need to dovetail with evidence of value, impact and outcome. Thus, there is a need  
19 to create fresh ideas on physical education, physical activity, health and sport which is based on  
20 empirical and conceptual research, and which is founded on high standards of disciplinary and  
21 interdisciplinary rigour. In this way, progress can match Carr's (2003, p 57) requirement that  
22 while academic theory is also genuine theory, normative inquiry or excessive speculation 'is less  
23 evidently (or strictly speaking) any form of theory at all.' Therefore, while pursuing plural aims  
24 is inevitably complicated (e.g. while digital technologies and wearable monitors might encourage  
25 physical activity and promote social negotiation and renewal they can also be used for health  
26 surveillance and for supporting societal efficiency), there is a need for aims in our field to be  
27 critically discussed and reviewed. In this way, our field will be better positioned to engage with  
28 new global sensitivities which dictate the need for education systems to more obviously reflect  
29 how greater fairness, access and equality of opportunity are evident throughout schooling, and  
30 which also dictate that students will not be disadvantaged due to ability/disability, social  
31 circumstance, race, gender and many other forms of social injustice and discrimination.  
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3 Similarly, it is highly likely that the changing lifestyles and interactions of young people with  
4 their age group through social media will require greater insight and research findings to help  
5 support their engagement with health related information (Goodyear et al., 2018).  
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12 In terms of understanding our field better, Laura Azzarito's paper '*Look to the Bottom*': *Re-*  
13 *writing the Body Curriculum Through Storylines*' highlights the ways in which neoliberal  
14 education in the USA serves to disadvantage Black youth and other ethnic-minority groups. In  
15 doing so, the paper challenges the idea that the USA has become race-neutral, and draws  
16 attention to the way in which the notion of colour-blindness serves to make whiteness invisible,  
17 while also highlighting the visibility of ethnic minorities through their underachievement and  
18 deficits. Azzarito claims that neoliberal education has neglected the institutionalised issues of  
19 social inequality and instead views racism as an individual problem which neglects and silences  
20 the institutionalised social inequalities present in schools. Furthermore, neoliberal priorities in  
21 education, for example, control, completion and accountability do not sufficiently consider  
22 social, cultural and economic differences. These control mechanisms not only deepen social  
23 inequalities, but also have a negative impact on young peoples' identity construction. Moreover,  
24 Azzarito highlights that this situation exists in relation to the 'health gap', where a culture of  
25 deficit thinking has acted to control the body, and where the normative cultural of health and  
26 fitness is based on white, middle-class bodies and bodily practices. From this perspective, the  
27 bodies of Black and ethnic-minoritized students are 'othered', inferior, even bad, with few  
28 positive identity positions for them to take-up. It is against this backdrop that Azzarito presents  
29 the Body Curriculum and suggests that schools have a responsibility to create spaces where  
30 Black and ethnic minoritized students can understand and develop their own culturally relevant  
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3 sense of self. Within this curriculum, boys and girls are encouraged to read, name and deal with  
4 the media's white-derived representations of fitness and health. They are encouraged to defy  
5 ableist, racialised, classist and heteronormative norms and see 'difference' in a positive guise  
6 through their storytelling experiences. As such, students can produce 'counter-stories' where  
7 they express their experiences of the body in a culturally relevant and meaningful way. This  
8 approach encourages teachers and students to see how the intersecting roles of, for example,  
9 race, class and gender affect embodied identity. Azzarito concludes by stating that white, middle-  
10 class students can also benefit from such a curriculum, as it enables them to learn from culturally  
11 diverse experiences and see the world through difference lenses.  
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26 In the final paper, *Postfeminist biopedagogies of Instagram: Young women learning about*  
27 *bodies, health and fitness*, Maria José Camacho-Miñano et al., explore the ways in which young  
28 women from three Spanish schools engage with Instagram, a photo and video sharing social  
29 network, and the impact this engagement has on how they learn about their bodies, health and  
30 wellbeing. Given the gendered nature of this field, it brings together work on biopedagogies  
31 (Wright, 2009) and postfeminist sensibilities (Gill, 2007) to draw attention to the complexities of  
32 the young women's experiences. In doing so, the authors illuminate the tensions that young  
33 women face in a context that seems to empower them to make decisions about how to be, yet at  
34 the same time, disempowers them so that they are incapable of making health and body choices  
35 beyond a desire for a normative feminine body. Findings from focus group interviews and face to  
36 face follow-up interviews coupled with the authors post-structural discourse analysis revealed  
37 the ways in which content on Instagram reached young women and the impact it had on their  
38 subjectivities. For example, the authors found that the young women were repeatedly exposed to  
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3 images of other people's bodies and exercise practices, images that were 'laden with  
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images of other people's bodies and exercise practices, images that were 'laden with  
fitspirational rhetoric'. Such images seemed to shape their perceptions of what a female body  
should (and should not) look like, with a slender, toned and curvy body highly valued. The  
young women in the study were aware that many of the posts on Instagram were too perfect,  
superficial and fake, yet still desired such bodies. Pleasure did not come from engaging in  
exercise, but by being successful in cultivating the visual effect of the body. This research  
contributes to our understanding of how young women engage with and learn from Instagram,  
and indicates that, although engagement with social media can be informed and critical, it is not  
always positive. Furthermore, given the rapid rate at which digital learning spaces are evolving  
the authors call for further research which can help understand digital learning in a variety of  
different cultural and socio-economic contexts. They also suggest that schools and teachers  
should review ways to develop digital literacies and critical digital pedagogies so that social  
media might become a space where young people can resist dominant discourses around health  
and the body and learn about alternative ways of being.

Collectively, the papers in this Special Issue underscore how the nature of physical education  
and health and sport provision are changing in an increasingly dynamic, digital and connected  
world. A range of pressures, that include market pressures and the burden of realising policy  
gains, can lead to disconnections that are often manifest in simplistic response-driven approaches  
or in losing sight of the values and meanings that underpin teaching/coaching, learning and  
participation. Yet, as the papers in this Special Issue show, there exists a healthy imagination for  
challenging potentially reductive impositions and for highlighting how innovations which focus  
on values and meaning can play a constructive part in giving voice to teachers and students



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3 interests and aspirations in education. Taken forward on this basis, the papers in this Special  
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5 Issue play a part in emphasising the importance of an education of the body in future education-  
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7 related national and international thinking.  
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