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## A response to Anmol's future trends and challenges facing physical education: Social, cultural, and psychological considerations

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### Abstract

Anmol (2015) recently presented a number of trends and challenges that Physical Education and Sport Sciences will likely face now and in the future. In the following review and response I attempt to accomplish two things. First, at the beginning of each section, I will make it clear that in principle I concur with most everything Anmol suggests with respect to the trends, challenges, and according to my read of the study, the opportunities the field of Physical Education could capitalize on and consider in the coming years. Second, I attempt to append and apprise three of Anmol's theoretical positions from a socio-cultural and psychological vantage point. Also, I will do so from a Western and American perspective, although, I am confident the theory I lay out below will inform the field of Physical Education broadly. The three areas include; curriculum, technology, and physical literacy.

**Keywords:** Physical Education, Curriculum, Popular/Youth Culture, Physical Literacy

### Introduction

It has long been postulated that Physical Education and Health classes can be of benefit to students and wider society for a variety of reasons. These include, but are not limited to: increased or sustained bio-medical health; exposure and education to and in meaningful and joyful physical activities, that are part of an active and healthy lifestyle; and the social, psychological, and emotional benefits one can accrue from participation in pro-social forms of physical activity. Unfortunately, however, as Anmol (2015) <sup>[1]</sup> suggests, the field of Physical and Health Education has struggled to deliver such benefits in places and moments for a variety of reasons (e.g. unqualified teachers, inadequate facilities and equipment, large class sizes, etc.). Kirk (2009) <sup>[3]</sup> theorized that the field of Physical Education is on the verge of a "seismic shift" that will be precipitated by a "crisis" moment, very akin to Anmol's (2015) <sup>[1]</sup> coming "reality check." While Anmol's reasoning for this crisis moment partly focuses on the issues raised above, Kirk's (2009) <sup>[3]</sup> rationale lies in the perceived disjuncture between contemporary Physical Education and the social, cultural and psychological needs and desires vocalized and demonstrated by youth, especially adolescents. Below, I will take up Kirk's socio-cultural and social-psychological framework and apply it to Anmol's treatment of curriculum, technology, and physical literacy, and for the most part, at the secondary level.

### Curriculum: Relevance, Well-Being and 'Meaning'

Anmol (2015, p.59) <sup>[1]</sup> *broadly and generally* suggests that, "Today, more than ever, the physical education curriculum needs to be linked to the overall well-being of children and youth as they matriculate through the curriculum," and as Anmol suggests much of this challenge, or failure, might be laid at the feet of the teacher. I could not agree more, but would like to go a little further. In the United States (U.S.) it is widely believed that the 'best' teaching takes place at the elementary level. This is backed by anecdotal accounts, and the results of systemic research (e.g. Ferry, McCaughtry, & Kulinna, 2011; Prusak, Pennington, Vincent, Beighle, & Morgan, 2010) <sup>[4, 5]</sup>. Thus, I will concentrate on the secondary level (middle and high schools). While Anmol's broad proclamation regarding curriculum was never defined or qualified, one can assume that it has to do with technology, physical literacy,

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and perhaps other renderings of curriculum. This is where I would like to be more specific in terms of relevance and to do so from a socio-cultural and psychological perspective. What has become clear from recent research is that a sport dominant curriculum is at odds with the incredibly diverse and evolving physical activity culture of adolescents and wider society in the United States of America (U.S.) (Ferry & McCaughtry, 2013, 2015; Ham, Kruger, & Tudor Locke, 2009) <sup>[6, 7]</sup>. In the U.S. researchers have found that the teacher holds an incredible amount of power over what gets included in the curriculum, no matter what any set of standards, adopted curriculum, teacher, or administrator suggests. Far from being neutral forms of movement to be learned and understood, physical activities are imbued with socio-cultural meaning, resulting in emotional and psychological dispositions that heavily inform how one identifies (Kleiber, Walker, & Mannell, 2011) <sup>[9]</sup>. Indeed, researchers have found that secondary Physical Education teachers' choices for including content and physical activities in their curricula is heavily informed by *their own* social and emotional connections with physical activity (Ferry & McCaughtry, 2013) <sup>[6]</sup> and are incredibly resistant to teaching any content that would make them emotionally uncomfortable or threaten their identities (2015). This method of choosing content is in the self-interest of the teacher, and not the student. This is problematic at best, and immoral at worst (Ferry & McCaughtry, 2013) <sup>[6]</sup>. To conclude, I suggest that any reference to creating a relevant curriculum that is beneficial to youth, especially adolescents, needs to keep in the mind the socio-cultural dimension physical activities hold, as well as the resultant psychological and emotional identities that can be fomented. Doing so will increase the likelihood of Anmol's call for a curriculum of relevance and positive and meaningful outcomes.

### **Cultural Dimension of Technology: Popular Culture and Adolescents**

Anmol (2015, p.59) <sup>[1]</sup> states that, "Quality Physical Education is the most effective and inclusive means of providing all children, whatever their ability/disability, sex, age, cultural, race/ethnicity, religious or social background." I completely agree and would add social class/socioeconomic status to that list. Issues of socio-cultural diversity, however, are absent in Anmol's characterization of the role that technology might play in the Health and Physical Education Curriculum. Anmol (2015, p.60) <sup>[1]</sup> holds much cautious hope for the realistic, and almost sure role, that technology will play in Physical and Health Education now and in the future. Anmol states, "Applications in health and physical education pedagogy are available and can be applied to enrich and enhance curricular offerings in most school settings. Numerous technological applications focused on promoting physical activity and fitness are available and easily accessible." Anmol also suggests this will not be an inherently easy task, "However, application of various technologies will require new student and teacher competencies and practices." Yet at the end of the day Anmol calls for, "Physical and health educators [to be] challenged to become more responsive to a technology-driven environment that provides enhanced opportunities for learners well beyond the walls of the traditional classroom setting." I concur. As they become less cost prohibitive, evolve in their functionality, and continue to become ingrained in wider society, electronic devices and applications should give us all reason to be confident that technological advances will allow us to streamline fundamental pedagogical approaches as well as open the door for new ones yet to be imagined. There is indeed

reason to hold out hope for the benefits of technological integration, regardless of the growing pains that may result. What I would like to suggest is that Anmol's treatment of technology as a benign tool to facilitate teaching misses an important socio-cultural and psychological dimension that most all technology holds. To begin, electronic social media communications *and the devices themselves* are cultural artifacts that hold certain degrees of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) <sup>[10]</sup>, from which adolescents gain or lose status (Danesi, 2015) <sup>[11]</sup>. Technological devices are conduits to other realms of corporate popular culture that is designed to gain and hold attention of adolescents, no matter how short or long. They also provide easy access to content that adolescents find 'cool' and 'relevant' for themselves and their popular/peers (sub)culture(s) (Danesi, 2015) <sup>[11]</sup>. Adolescents primary use for these devices is to engage with music, movies, fashion, television, social media, sharing, speaking, tracking celebrities, etc. (Danesi, 2015) <sup>[11]</sup>. The point is that first and foremost these devices and applications are extensions of how adolescents 'fashion' themselves and their peer groups. Technology then is first and foremost *not* about school or traditional learning; it is about culture, identity, many other things *first*. To integrate technology surely holds potential, but we need to be wise, proceed cautiously, and keep the findings above in mind when designing instructional strategies and curriculum around and through technology, because students may or may not buy in, or create a whole host of additional problems. As an anecdote, I 'interviewed' my twelve-year-old daughter about technological integration in Health and Physical Education. Her first reaction was confusion. Then concerns over her privacy. Then that of "actually moving." She then tacked off a lot of issues that might arise that have been documented in journalism and research literature; students using it as a 'crutch' and not thinking through a task or problem, the need to monitor social media use, people playing games, cheating, security breaches, and the potential need for new infrastructure expenditures for a field that already sees strained budgets, wasted instructional time (which we have so little of already), and resistance from both teachers and students alike (Cuban, 2003) <sup>[12]</sup>. Technology certainly holds potential to enrich in and out of school learning as Anmol suggests. Yet when designing curriculum around such tools, we all need to keep in mind *how youth view, identify with, and use technology*, so as not to create lessons and activities that are irrelevant or unengaging. Here we not only need to think as teachers and professors, but also (to a degree) as business marketers.

### **Physical Literacy: The Affective Dimension**

Throughout Anmol's (2015) <sup>[1]</sup> well-reasoned examination of the challenges and trends facing our field I see a clear bias toward the psychomotor and cognitive domains, which in and of itself might not be surprising; human movement and activity is, after all, the foundation of our subject area. It is one that is positioned to make a unique contribution to the education of the whole child, and I am not about to suggest otherwise. I do, however, find the absence of any explicit or implicit contribution that quality Health and Physical Education can potentially make in the affective domain to be reductionistic, and results in an incomplete definition of physical literacy. For example, Anmol never makes explicit mention of the affective domain, and no key words that might be associated with this domain appear in this study. Also, Anmol (2015, p.60) <sup>[1]</sup> cites this definition of physical literacy before going on to suggest a need for Health and Physical

Education teachers to be leaders and form partnerships with outside agencies in order to leverage and share resources, “The aim of Physical Education is to develop physical competence so that all children are able to move efficiently, effectively and safely and understand what they are doing.” SHAPE America (2016) <sup>[14]</sup> (the leading professional organization for Physical Education professionals in the U.S.) has a very similar definition of physical literacy that focusses on physical skill and knowledge, with the added dimension of motivation, which one could assume points to the affective domain. Yet even this is reductionistic and does not fully capture what can be accomplished in the affective domain as it applies to physical activity participation (broadly, i.e. viewership) and in non-physical activity domains. SHAPE America (2016) <sup>[14]</sup>, however, also has two standards (four and five) that are firmly planted in the affective domain, suggesting it has significant importance to being a truly physically literate person. To become motivated or the steward of a physical activity community (ies) has been the focus and mission of many researchers (Fox, 1997; Siedentop, Hastie & van der Mars, 2011) <sup>[15, 16]</sup> and both are worthy goals to be worked toward. What’s more, many theorists envisioned and have facilitated physical activity education as an ideal place to learn personal and social responsibility (Hellison, 2011) <sup>[17]</sup> so one can be responsible in physical activity settings, *as well as a pro-social citizen in wider societal circles*. Researchers have positioned the affective domain as an ideal place to educate for cooperative and communicative competencies, to learn how to personally challenge oneself, to take risks, to demonstrate leadership, to express perspectives (and listen to those of fellow students), to become reflective, to embody pro-social and responsible personal behaviors, to show empathy and understanding, to think beyond the activity itself and identify the social dynamics that are at play during or after participation, from which conclusions and solutions can be drawn and applied to both physical activity settings and ‘non’ physical activity settings (e.g. work, school, peer interactions, family, personal behaviors and dispositions, and one’s relationship to wider society and the planet) (Panicucci, Constable, Hunt, Kohut & Rheingold, 2003) <sup>[18]</sup>. Are these not dispositions that we would want for all of our students? One could argue that (outside of obesity, and chronic biomedical and psycho-social conditions associated with physical activity) many of the world’s problems do not have much to do with the psychomotor or cognitive domains as they apply to leisure time physical activity pursuits. I would argue, at no other time in history have we had both experts and blueprints for how to address a variety of societal ills and potential failures, but have failed to do so on a number of occasions. Reading any number of outlets, scholarly or otherwise, it is hard not to see that people are ‘anxious’ and are; expecting another global economic collapse (Stiglitz, 2010) <sup>[19]</sup>, continued war throughout the Middle East, Africa, the Ukraine, and other places around the world (Jarecki, 2008) <sup>[20]</sup>, worried about global warming/climate collapse and related projected food and water crises (Magdoff & Tokar, 2010) <sup>[22]</sup>, international human rights abuses, human trafficking, racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, socio-economic inequality (Krugman, 2009) <sup>[23]</sup>, and the list goes on. These issues will surely require the expertise of a variety of professionals if they are to be addressed, let alone ‘solved.’ These issues are, however not just matters of applying technological and rationalistic know-how; they will also require moral, ethical, and political competencies, and bold and wise leadership. They will require a higher level of the very affective dispositions outlined above.

And with the right instructional strategies, curriculum, and pedagogical competencies, they can and should be addressed in any Health and Physical Education program that calls itself quality. To round back to Anmol’s call for linkages to agencies and organizations, as well as bold and effective leadership (I would suggest bold and effective leadership falls firmly in the affective domain), it seems to me that if the affective domain is not a part of the theoretical framework, then it is likely to reason that partnerships will likely be with organizations that do not address the affective domain either. Furthermore, what does seeking partnerships with agencies in order to access and share resources for ‘talented’ youth for the purpose of preparing for ‘competition’ mean for teaching affective pro-social dispositions that are so badly needed in our society(ies)? Our field clearly needs an injection of resources, and we will need to continue, and even increase, mutually beneficial partnerships. Our guiding curricular value orientations will surely impact what organizations we seek and/or agree to work with. I merely suggest that a broad conceptualization of the affective domain be included in such frameworks in order to truly address the whole child (Loland, 2006) <sup>[2]</sup>.

### Conclusion

To conclude I have attempted to address Anmol’s view of what challenges and trends we as Health and Physical Education professionals will face in the coming years. I hope readers will see that I do indeed support and affirm many if not all of what Anmol (2015) <sup>[1]</sup> covers and addresses in this study. As a U.S. citizen and university scholar, I have attempted to add some specifics to certain topics from a social, cultural, and social-psychological perspective in the hopes of offering a different vantage point from which to view these trends and challenges. I, like Anmol, see much that needs to improve and be addressed now and in the future, and that these changes and adjustments will require wise, effective, and bold leadership. I, also like Anmol, see much hope and potential for Health and Physical Education to gain the recognition we deserve for the important contributions the field makes to school education and wider society.

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