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Education as discourse*

¹²
Defining Physical Education:
The Social Construction of a
School Subject in Postwar Britain

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Chapter 2

Curriculum History and Physical Education as Discourse

The Australian journalist and social critic, Phillip Adams, recently wrote an article on Clive Wearing, the subject of a British television documentary called *Prisoner of Consciousness*. Wearing suffered from a condition brought about by the 'herpes simplex' virus which destroyed a large section of his brain. As a result, he suffered loss of long term memory, and apart from a miscellany of competencies, could not retain information for more than a few minutes. Inspired by the documentary, Adams drew an analogy between Wearing's condition and the state of consciousness in society at large in an age of mass media.

There's a tendency to live, more and more, in a world of vivid, lurid immediacy, a present tense made more tense by the magnifying glass of the media. A present so powerful that it obliterates the past. That's simply something to be plundered for counterfeit nostalgia — its nothing but a quarry for pastiche music and 'fashion'. 'Now' becomes NOW, a succession of over-bright, hyped presents, more like sequins than sequence. . . We are constantly confronted and astonished by events without precedent or context, yet imagine ourselves to be well-informed. That's how we buy tired, second-hand goods like the New Age or the New Right and imagine them to be revelations. Our lives are feverish, superficial and, for all our wondrous communications technologies, ignorant.¹

Adams' comments could as easily have been motivated by the public debate in British physical education as the chronic amnesia of one unfortunate individual. The mere fact that contributors to the debate, both for the prosecution and the defence, could happily talk about 'traditional physical education' as if this was something that all sides acknowledged as a historical fact, was in itself revealing of our imprisonment in the lurid present. Team games were indeed traditional to physical education, but up until the end of the second world war only in the male and to a lesser extent female private schools of the upper classes, a group which constitutes a very small minority of the British population. Yet, in the space of a mere forty years, the appearance of potential alternatives to this form of physical education in state secondary schools is apparently sufficient cause to stimulate an outcry from a range of interested parties.

This apparent lack of a historical sensitivity can be particularly damaging in

terms of responding to new developments and events. Indeed, Musgrave² has argued that the recent upsurge in interest in what he calls 'curriculum history' has been marked by a shift in motivations from a need to simply understand the past, to a desire to participate more effectively in complex practical situations in the present. This point has been made forcefully by Goodson in his critique of the ways in which History of Education had traditionally been done in Britain.³ Goodson has suggested that while the institutionalized form of History of Education has been, like every other subject, far from monolithic, it has tended to retain what he calls an Acts and Facts flavour. In this form, History of Education deals mainly with institutionalized and formal 'developments' in education but rarely with the social detail of change, thus presenting historical information as at best a partial account of change, and at worst as inert and irrelevant to contemporary projects. The effect of this treatment of history in teacher education courses has been two-fold, first in terms of presenting history as of little concern to teachers' and schools' current needs, and second, by working back on the teaching of History of Education courses and resulting in their omission from teacher education because of this perceived irrelevance. Goodson has argued at some length to the contrary, that historical studies of the school curriculum form an essential component of any research effort that seeks to understand the ways in which contemporary efforts to bring about change can be accomplished, since without a detailed sensitivity to what he called the internal nature of schooling and its changing forms over time, attempts to effect change are likely to be unsuccessful.

Goodson has not been alone in his claim that curriculum history has immediate relevance to contemporary projects. In a recent and comprehensive review of curriculum history research, Seddon⁴ remarked that, following a period of neglect by curriculum researchers in the 1950s and 1960s, studies of the history of school subjects and pedagogy, and of the curriculum field itself, have proliferated in the 1980s. She claims that despite a degree of unevenness across countries in terms of numbers of studies and active researchers, the sub-field of curriculum history has now reached a stage of self-conscious reflection, in which issues of purpose, method and theory have begun to be worked through by exponents. As a result of this reflective effort, Seddon has been able to map a number of key issues which she has proposed as an agenda for future curriculum history research. In particular, she claims (following Kliebard and Franklin) that the substantive focus of this sub-field 'centres curriculum in the selection, organization and distribution of *knowledge*; sited in *educational institutions* and hence, implying that curriculum is oriented to *learners*. Additionally, it indicates that curriculum is the consequence of people's activity which constitutes social and political processes over time, that is, there is a relationship between *people and things*'.⁵ According to Seddon, this statement provides a useful means of identifying the central concerns of curriculum history as a sub-field of curriculum and educational research more broadly, though a number of other key issues continue to present themselves as in need of resolution by curriculum historians; she stresses especially the issues of the boundaries of curriculum history, the nature of historical research, and the place of theory in curriculum history as matters which are currently under debate by researchers in the field.⁶ Despite varying opinions on these matters among curriculum researchers, a common thread running through most of this recent curriculum history work has been the explicit use of

history to inform contemporary projects for change, and thus an acknowledgement that curriculum research is, as Reid clearly indicated,⁷ an inherently political activity that is interwoven with the pragmatics and practicalities of educating and schooling.

This more recent concern for the use of history to inform contemporary action is in sharp contrast to the ways in which history has commonly been done in physical education and sport. Most history in physical education has generally taken the form of the production of chronologies and narratives, descriptive accounts of events and the 'great men' behind them.⁸ These factual, untheorized chronological histories have brought to light much that is of importance and interest to anyone concerned with social and educational change, and in this respect, this work is valuable. However, John Evans and Brian Davies have argued that this kind of historical work has tended to project an unproblematic image of the development of school physical education as a single line of evolution from drill through physical training to the comprehensive programmes of today. They also have suggested that 'conflict and disagreement within the ideas and attitudes (towards physical activity, the body and sport) of middle class males or females, and between their aspirations and other social and ethnic groups', remain largely unexplored'.⁹ Thus, when it comes to using this information in the context of contemporary curriculum debate, we are faced with a number of difficulties. One of the most important is how we can make sense of the process of change on the basis of this kind of historical evidence. What, indeed, is this information evidence of? In order to answer this question, and to render this information of some use to combatants in contemporary struggles, we need to find a way of theorizing it, of making sense of the past in relation to the present.

By this, I am not suggesting that we raid the past¹⁰ in order to legitimate our current activities and aspirations. One example of this use of history is occurring in relation to the revitalised interest within the physical education profession in matters of health and fitness discussed in the previous chapter. Contemporary protagonists for a health-related orientation to the curriculum cite historical precedent as a means of legitimating their current concerns; 'physical educators', so the rhetoric runs, 'have since the earliest days of the subject's entry into the curriculum, had a major concern for health and physical fitness'.¹¹ As I will point out in Chapter 6, the dangers of such comparisons are that current social conditions and the interventive measures they inspire have changed a great deal since the late nineteenth century. Physical activity at that time was viewed as a response to fears for the physical deterioration of the race, and one component of health alongside adequate food, clothing and fresh air. This was a therapeutic use of exercise, an after-the-event cure, or at least treatment, for particular manifestations of poor health such as poor posture, pigeon chests and bad feet, created by the conditions of that time. The contemporary rhetoric linking physical activity and health is quite different. In the sedentary, consumer-oriented and leisured present, the concern is for prevention rather than therapy. Exercise is no longer seen as a compensatory treatment for illnesses brought on by deprivation, but rather as an integral part of modern lifestyle, as an antidote to overconsumption and its end-products. To cite one discourse in physical education as the precedent for another, out of time and context, is wholly mistaken. The similarities are noted without any acknowledgement of underlying differences.

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The point of importance is that if information from the past is to be of service to our contemporary ruminations, then our interest must have a more or less explicitly stated purpose. In other words, as curriculum researchers our interest in the past is not what I would characterize as a disinterested antiquarianism, but is instead an integral part of our contemporary projects. Within such a view, the central focus of this study is not the history of physical education; it might be described, more appropriately, as a study of the process of change. By understanding how physical education has changed, and how these changes articulate with broader movements in society, we will be in a better position to pursue our contemporary projects with a greater chance of success. The motivation for studying the past is intimately bound up with our understanding of the present and our vision of what the future could hold, and it is to gain greater control over our current circumstances so that we may better influence those in the future.

Social Change and Physical Education as Discourse

It is not just the down-side of our mass communications technologies that are to blame for the ways in which participants in the 1985–1988 public debate conceptualized physical education in the lurid present. All of our experiences as students and teachers in educational institutions encourage us to view school subjects as stable, unchanging categories of knowledge. Indeed, the school day is built around periods of activities, each discrete, with its own beginning and end, and with its own characteristics. In the primary school these curriculum categories are already firmly established in broad groups, such as language arts, computation, creative activities, by the end of the infant stage. By the time we reach secondary school, they have become even more refined and established to the point that each has its own specialist teachers, who teach grouped in specific locations in the school. And colleges and universities take this process further still by building their entire organization and administration around particular sets of subjects or disciplines. It is not surprising that we tend to think of curriculum categories as fairly settled and established subjects. Indeed, challenging the idea that subjects are stable entities is much the same thing as questioning the way in which we construct our professional identities as students and teachers.¹²

These ideas about the instability of school subjects are not particularly new. Michael F D Young and some of the other contributors to *Knowledge and Control*,¹³ published in 1971, are generally credited with introducing into contemporary educational discourse the idea that school knowledge is socially constructed, and moreover, while we are all implicated in this process, those people who have a disproportionately large impact on the construction of school knowledge are most often members of a group they characterize as the dominant class. Subjects are not rationally agreed bodies of established, neutral facts and ideas, but instead reflect the values and culture of, and disproportionately advantage, the people who create and perpetuate them. According to this New Directions view, this has effectively and practically meant failure at school for the majority of working class pupils, females and certain ethnic groups because school subjects are imbued with the values and culture of the white, Anglo-Saxon middle and upper classes, an influence which has marginalized and denigrated their own

working class, feminine and ethnic cultures. Research by sociologists dating from the 1950s seemed to provide empirical support for this theory, revealing that despite more egalitarian approaches to the organization of educational systems, such as the introduction of comprehensive schools and the abandonment of selection exams, working class, female and certain ethnic groups of pupils still found less success at school than their middle class, male, white counterparts.

Part of the project of Young and his colleagues was to show that since subjects are not absolute and politically neutral categories of knowledge, then educational practitioners could play an important part in defining what is to count as worthwhile knowledge. Critics¹⁴ argued, however, that their research failed to show how this might be possible, and their analyses offered only a naive possibilitarianism¹⁵ that underestimated the power of vested interests to control knowledge production and legitimation through, for example, the examinations system and its use by the tertiary education sector and industry as a means of sifting and sorting pupils for the job market. One critic, Ivor Goodson,¹⁶ has argued that Young and his colleagues failed to give names and faces to the dominant groups in society who are allegedly responsible for constructing school knowledge. This failure, by implication, leaves us none the wiser in terms of how we might overcome this domination.

Goodson's own work has attempted to remedy this shortcoming. He suggests that the focus of attention in understanding how school knowledge is constructed is to examine the actions of what he calls subject communities. These communities are not homogenous, but instead comprise amalgamations or coalitions of opposing and rival interest groups. Taking his lead from New Directions sociology of education, Goodson claims that school subjects are not monolithic, but instead consist of coalitions that are continuously shifting. The friction this movement creates among sub-groups within a subject community and between subject communities is motivated, according to Goodson, by the pursuit of material interests. He contends that there is a pattern in the evolution of a subject, through pedagogical and utilitarian concerns towards the ultimate achievement of academic status.

The material interests of teachers — their pay, promotion and conditions — are broadly interlinked with the fate of other specialist subject communities. The 'academic' subject is placed at the top of the hierarchy of subjects because resource allocations take place on the basis of assumptions that such subjects are best suited for the able students who, it is further assumed, should receive favourable treatment.¹⁷

An important element in the achievement of academic status, which Goodson equates with acceptance into the structure of public examinations, is the establishment of a university discipline base. From this base, specialist teachers can be trained and deployed in schools to further consolidate the status of the subject.

In attempting to give names and faces to the so-called dominant groups who construct school knowledge, Goodson concentrates our attention on those actors most directly involved practically in the fate of particular bodies of knowledge. In the process, he supplies us with much that is of substantive interest in discovering how subjects in the secondary curriculum, in particular, come to be what they are. His work has also usefully illustrated the point that school subjects

are not immutable, politically neutral bodies of knowledge, but are generated and take particular forms according to the practical interests of segments of the educational community. Goodson admits, however, that his concern for the activities of those involved practically and professionally in the development of school subjects has meant that he neglects in his own studies of Geography and Environmental Studies what he calls the structural origins of the climate of opinion that allows subject communities to get started in the first place. He makes the point that it is 'the structuring of material interest which provides the mediating mechanism between structural and interactional levels',¹⁸ but this insight does not allow Goodson to reveal who does this structuring, how, and for what purpose. He concentrates on what Stephen Ball¹⁹ has referred to as the 'relations of change', the actual activities that play a part in initiating change, and neglects to show how the 'conditions of change', the structural dimensions of society and of schooling create an appropriate climate of opinion that allows certain things to happen, to infuse and give form and substance to these relations.

Goodson claims that 'macro level changes may be actively reinterpreted at the micro level',²⁰ a comment which has led Kelly to point out that

Goodson's approach interprets 'political' interests in terms of the material interests at stake in factional conflict. The idea that knowledge is 'socially constructed', for Goodson, seems to refer to the fact that it is the product of social interaction. A more critical interpretation is required which sees the 'social' construction of knowledge in terms of the political interests of a particular social order. This demarcation lies in Goodson's interpretation of 'vested interests' as *material* interests of faction members, without accounting for socio-cultural interests along ideological lines.²¹

Kelly claims that the within subject focus of Goodson's work, and his preoccupation with material interests, lead him to neglect the ways in which broader socio-cultural forces intersect with the struggles of coalitions in particular sites, and so render him unable to explain the actions of individuals and groups which, on the face of it, seem to work against their own interests. Hence, Kelly claims, Goodson is unable to account for protagonists' actions which are underwritten by forces or motives other than the pursuit of material self-interest. He suggests that this neglect can be overcome to a degree by incorporating the notion of 'hegemony' into Goodson's analysis of inter-factional conflict.²² Kelly argues that this notion supplies a means of thinking about how the willing compliance of subordinate groups in their own oppression is won and inequitable power relations sustained, and so provides a dimension that is missing from Goodson's approach.

I agree with the general thrust of Kelly's claim that Goodson's concern to portray the relations of change within and between subject communities tends to focus his attention too exclusively on the interactional dimensions of power struggles, and in so doing leads him to understate the structured relations of power, even though I think his critique fails in places to do justice to the depth and innovativeness of much of Goodson's work. Goodson has attempted in his more recent work to answer some of the questions these objections raise, which he considers in terms of what he sees as the internal and external forces acting on coalitions' actions.²³ This characterization of internal and external forces does

broaden the focus of Goodson's work, and moves some way towards resolving the underlying problem which preoccupied Young and his colleagues in *Knowledge and Control*, which was to account for the ways in which the structure of knowledge in the school curriculum played a part in creating disproportionate levels of success achieved by middle over working class pupils (and we might now add, by boys over girls, and whites over blacks). But it still does not quite adequately provide a way of approaching this problem in the terms it has been characterized recently by some social theorists, who suggest that the process of change, the question of vested interests, and the nature of domination and subordination are immensely complex, contradictory and indeterminate,²⁴ or as one theorist puts it, power is generated 'with no-one directing it and everyone increasingly enmeshed in it, (where the) only end is the increase of power and order itself'.²⁵ This does not mean that Goodson's stress on the pursuit of self-interest is irrelevant to accounts of power, but that merely to attempt to integrate micro and macro forces cannot do justice to the dynamic and convoluted nature of the operation of power in the process of social change.

However, this underlying problem in social research is not confined to Goodson's work or the field of curriculum history, but has since the early 1960s preoccupied social researchers in a range of fields including education. Evans and Davies suggest that the proliferation of theoretical approaches in the sociology of education following *Knowledge and Control* has led to appeals for 'some form of a synthesis in theory...or method...capable of making the connections between consciousness, human agency, cultures and social structure'.²⁶ Attempts to achieve this synthesis have been far from simple or trouble free, since factionalism among social researchers has tended to exacerbate differences in emphases and to establish these differences as polarities in terms, for example, of macro *versus* micro, interpretivist *versus* structuralist paradigms, or of studies of the production of social relations *versus* the production of individual subjectivity.²⁷ While real differences of point of view do exist among researchers, it would be fair to say that many of the current binary oppositions in social theory which appear to be fixed are, in fact, analytical conveniences which are themselves socially constructed.²⁸ This being the case, these apparent polarities are open to reconstruction, and the coherence of any new theoretical construct viewed as a matter of its usefulness for the particular purposes the researcher has in mind.

The purpose of this study is to build on the key insight produced by the work of Goodson and others, that change in the curriculum is the product of struggle and contestation between rival groups, and to apply this insight to explain recent conflict over the aims, content and pedagogy of physical education in schools. In undertaking such a study, I have tried to accommodate the notion that the interests of these rival groups are constitutive of and constituted by prevailing socio-cultural conditions, by institutionalized practices organized around such characteristics of society as gender, race, and social class, and that the achievement of society — the capacity of individuals to live collectively as populations — is only possible by the convoluted circulations of power and its manifestation in institutionalized social relations.²⁹ The study is centrally concerned with the social production of physical education as a field of knowledge in schools, and with the ways in which the whole range of social practices this field

embraces, such as sport and games playing, exercising, dancing and so on, are represented by physical educators (and others with interests in physical education) to other members of society as coherent, meaningful and significant aspects of culture. More broadly, the study attempts to explore the part played by this field of knowledge and the meanings generated by and around it in the ordering and achievement of society, centred on the events surrounding the 1987 General Election outlined in detail in Chapter 1 and revisited in Chapter 7.

In order to examine how the meaning of physical education has been constructed in Britain during the postwar period, I have focused on the ways in which vying individuals and groups have represented their understandings of physical education. The consequence of such a focus has been to treat the actions of these parties as discursive formations, as linguistic systems which express their attempts to make sense of physical education.³⁰ Consequently, the notion of discourse is a key concept in this study. In its most basic sense, discourse refers to the ways in which people communicate their understanding of their own and others' activities, and of events in the world around them. In other words, it refers to the ways in which they speak about, in this case, school physical education, not only through what they say verbally, but through what they write and what they do; and also through the gaps or silences in their discourses, what they *don't* say, write or do. The notion of discourse allows ideologies, which circumscribe the activities of particular individuals and groups, to be explored, revealing on the one hand the extent to which broader social forces have made an impression on their consciousness, and at the same time indicating the ways in which these forces have been appropriated and put to use in practical situations. The focal point of this study is a range of discourses in physical education which communicate something of the meaning of physical education for the speakers of these discourses. The notion of discourse is, therefore, central to a study of the social construction of school knowledge, since discourses in themselves embody *definitions* of their subject, in this case school physical education.³¹

This way of viewing the actions of vying groups as discursive formations precisely locates such notions as ideology and hegemony as 'frameworks of thinking and calculation about the world'.³² Hall argues that ideologies appear in language, in 'the domain of meaning and representation', and in 'the rituals and practices of social action or behaviour which always occur in social sites'. He goes on to suggest that 'every social practice is constituted within the interplay of meaning and representation and can itself be represented. In other words, there is no social practice outside of ideology. However, this does not mean that, because all social practices are within the discursive, there is nothing to social practice *but* discourse...it does not follow that because all practices are *in* ideology, or inscribed by ideology, all practices are *nothing but* ideology'.³³ Hall's point is that all attempts to make sense of the world utilize language or language-like systems of signs, (in addition to written and spoken languages, music and mathematics would be two other commonplace examples), and so an analysis of social practices as discursive systems reveal the attempts to create meaning that are inscribed within them. At the same time, there are limits to this process. Every attempt to examine social processes, including this study, utilizes the same systems of representation it analyses, which means that *all* social analyses are in this sense ideological. Moreover, society cannot be understood by examining discursive

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formations alone, since social life has objective dimensions that exist beyond individual or collective comprehension; each person and each social group have, at any one time, only a partial knowledge of the world in which they live.³⁴

Discursive formations are generated out of social practices carried out in particular sites, in the case of this study, practices centred around the teaching of physical education in schools. However, these formations are neither uniform nor necessarily internally consistent. Hall points out that ideologies are systems of representation which 'operate in discursive chains, in clusters, in semantic fields', and that the fixing, or what he calls articulation, of one system to another is determined by prevailing conditions in any specific place and at any given time,³⁵ for instance, in Chapter 5, I will explore the process whereby one system of representation expressed by the notion of the games ethic was articulated with a number of other systems, one of which was the problem of teenage delinquency, another, national identity, (and etc.) to comprise the discursive formation of 'traditional physical education'.

Hall notes, in addition, that the existence of these chains of significations which make up discursive formations make it simplistic to talk about *the* dominant ideology. He stresses that there is interplay between chains, that they contest each other, they draw on common concepts, but then rearticulate and disarticulate them in specific sites and use them for specific, sometimes contrary, purposes. The concept of ideological hegemony, as it is worked through in the writings of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci,³⁶ provides a useful means of expressing this contingent, contested and constant process of struggle to utilise discursive formations to win consent from competing groups for social practices which advantage some factions of society over others. Gramsci's use of the notion of hegemony as co-extensive with the entire social process marked a significant break with previous uses of the term, and with static notions of particular ideologies linked too firmly to particular social class groups.³⁷ He suggests that in advanced capitalist democracies, inequitable power relations are not maintained in the main by brute force or coercion, but instead by the willing compliance of the oppressed in their own subordination. This compliance is achieved by the appearance of inequalities as part of the natural order of things, as fixed and unproblematic. Gramsci argues that in the complex process of negotiation and compromise that characterizes democratic class societies, hegemony is never total or absolute, and indeed the existence of oppositional or alternative discursive formations plays an active and constitutive part in the process. In this Gramscian sense of hegemony, Raymond Williams has pointed out that structured power relations and the inequalities that derive from these form part of people's consciousness at the level of commonsense and the everyday, and so are co-extensive with culture. For Williams

Hegemony... is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meaning and values — constitutive and constituting — which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute but experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives. It is, that is to say, in

the strongest sense a 'culture', but a culture which has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes.³⁸

Through this notion of hegemony, Williams is suggesting that power relations are manifest and expressed in and through social interaction, but not always and sometimes never at the level of conscious awareness and deliberate strategy. Furthermore, the contingent and processual nature of the hegemonic, as a constitutive part of the ongoing flow of everyday life, denies the possibility of a *dominant* ideology associated with a particular social group. As Hall suggests, the *actual* dominant groups in society utilise a range of ideologies to advance their own positions, but the chains of ideas and images which make up these ideologies are most often in general circulation in a society, and are reassembled by different fractions of society for different purposes. At the same time, as Hall stresses, the contingent nature of this process of fixing chains of ideas to each other to form discursive formations does not imply that there are no determining principles in the distribution of power and privilege. Social formations are, as he suggests, a structure in dominance,³⁹ with distinct tendencies and a certain configuration; power is perpetuated through generations and some social groups do, consistently, disproportionately occupy positions of privilege and influence over others. The precise nature of this structure in dominance is a matter for investigation, however, not reductive determination, since the distribution of power is dependent on a whole range of prevailing conditions and circumstances in any specific location at any given time.

Defining Physical Education: the Social Construction of a School Subject

The act of defining physical education is a social process, one which involves drawing on ideas in general circulation, and fixing these ideas in a meaningful configuration. This fixing, as an intrinsic part of defining the subject, is no arbitrary process. As I aim to show in this study, particular definitions of physical education have gained acceptance as the orthodox version of the subject, and these definitions have advantaged certain social groups over others at particular times in history. In the final chapter of this book, for example, I will try to show how the crisis surrounding physical education at the time of the 1987 General Election was able to be turned to the advantage of the Thatcher government and a number of other social groups. In this respect, no definition of physical education is politically, socially or culturally neutral. Every attempt to define the aims, content and pedagogy of the subject involves making sense, which in turn involves a selection and articulation of particular sets of ideas.

At the same time, there is no suggestion that this process is conspiratorial, or that some hidden hand is at work. I plan to show in the following chapters that no definition is ever uncontested, no matter how widely accepted and staunchly defended, nor entirely consistent in its outcomes or implications, no matter how carefully thought out. As Gramsci's notion of the hegemonic suggests, the presence of alternative and oppositional discursive formations to the orthodoxies of the day plays a constructive role in reformulating future definitions, even though their radical potency may be absorbed, fragmented or dissipated in the process.

Some groups may indeed consciously conspire to bring about certain ends, and these actions, as Goodson's work so clearly demonstrates, form an important consideration in understanding the social construction of physical education. But their plans can never anticipate and account for all circumstances and conditions they will encounter in the future, and it is with this process, of constant adjustment, struggle and *re*-presentation that this study is centrally concerned.

The book is organized around four chapters which draw on historical material, one chapter sketching some dimensions of British political, cultural and educational life in the postwar period which are of particular importance to physical education, and three chapters dealing in much greater detail and depth with specific aspects of physical education discourse. I have not attempted to undertake an exhaustive study of the entire postwar period for a number of reasons, one of which is that I do not believe the documentation of every fact and event, relevant or not, to be necessary to make the point the book is written to make. I have also tended to concentrate attention unevenly across the period for much the same reason, concentrating most often on the 1950s. While the text is constructed around chronological events for the most part, this was done for the sake of readability and coherence more than any slavish belief on the immutability of temporal sequencing. At the same time, each of the three chapters on physical education discourse deals with broadly overlapping waves of events and activities that flow from the early part of the postwar period, from the mid 1940s to the early 1950s in Chapter 4, through the middle part, from the early to late 1950s in Chapter 5, and on to the later part, from the late 1950s to the late 1960s in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7, I overview briefly the consolidation and elaboration of these themes during the 1970s and early 1980s, thus returning the analysis to the second half of the 1980s and a discussion of the new forces that are likely to be unleashed as a result of the recent public debate over school physical education.

As I have previously remarked, the major purpose of this book is to work through in substantive terms the social construction of physical education during this period, and to identify the emerging discourses that have come to form the underpinning structure of contemporary physical education programmes. In the process, I attempt to show that the activities and subject matter contained in these discourses are by no means neutral, self-evident or natural. The physical education programmes in place in the school curriculum today are the outcome of contestation and struggle between a range of competing groups' attempts to define the subject. In the process, the activities that make up programmes, the ways in which they are taught, and the reasons that are proffered for teaching them all contain the residue of these struggles, and reflect the interests of the contesting parties. These interests are not reflected in an equitable manner, however, since some parties, as we will see, have been able to mobilise resources which have not been available to others. Since physical education programmes in schools advantage some parties more than others, some children who experience these programmes in schools are, often unjustly, disadvantaged. Indeed, it is this problem that has concerned some sociologists of school knowledge since the publication of *Knowledge and Control*,⁴⁰ and has been at the root of the more recent debate over physical education, since some physical educators have begun to recognize that their programmes may be relevant to only a small proportion of their pupils.

Of the three chapters which focus on physical education discourse, two deal with the more readily recognizable aspects of the contemporary debate, competitive team games and the health and fitness orientation, while the third, Chapter 4, explores a transitional phase in school physical education during the 1940s and 1950s centering on the demise of gymnastics as the core of physical education. This chapter outlines the factors and circumstances surrounding this decline in influence in gymnastics, and the concomitant decline of a distinctly female influence in physical education. The debate over gymnastics reveals a fundamental rift within the physical education profession between female and male physical educators, a rift which has had lasting influence, and competing definitions of physical education associated with each party. The females championed educational gymnastics, which embodied a form of child-centred progressivism, while the males supported competitive gymnastics, which was embedded in the logic of scientific functionalism and drew on the new knowledge of skill development, biomechanics and exercise physiology. Chapter 5 shows how the male physical educators also promoted scientific functionalism in relation to competitive team games in the new mass secondary schools after the war, and investigates the installation of team games at the heart of male, and later female, physical education programmes. The invention of 'traditional physical education', with competitive team games at its core, took place during the 1950s as games superseded gymnastics and the influence of the male physical educators overcame that of the females. It was at this point, during the 1950s, that the most far-reaching reconstruction of the meaning of physical education took place. The dominance of the male influence was further consolidated in relation to the redefinition of the link between physical education and health, and elaboration of this issue forms the substance of Chapter 6. The new view of this relationship was encapsulated in the notion of physical fitness, which was constructed around the scientific knowledge of exercise.

Woven through the substantive concerns of these chapters are a number of other themes which were part of political, cultural and educational life in postwar Britain, and played an important role in shaping the form and content of these discourses in physical education. These themes are sketched broadly in the next chapter, and relate to issues such as the rise of mass secondary schooling, social class and egalitarianism, affluence and mass consumerism, and teenage delinquency, youth culture and the erosion of traditional values. These issues saturated popular consciousness and everyday concerns in a myriad of different and diffuse ways, and Chapter 3 is a selective attempt to highlight the major factors which appeared to have a decisive impact on physical education discourse. The values and expectations created during the social reconstruction of Britain after the second world war have had continued relevance for contemporary social life, and the account in Chapter 3 may provide readers with some useful points of orientation in terms of understanding the ways in which current political, cultural and educational trends are shaping physical education discourse now.

Notes

- 1 *The Australian Weekend*, August 19–20, 1989.
- 2 Musgrave, P.W. (1988) 'Curriculum history: past, present and future', *History of Education Review*, 17(2), 1–13.

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- 3 Goodson, I. (1988) *The Making of Curriculum: Collected Essays*, Lewes: Falmer Press.
- 4 Seddon, T. (1989) 'Curriculum history: A map of key issues', *Curriculum Perspectives*, 9(4), 1-16.
- 5 I have made a similar point about curriculum research more generally in Kirk, D. (1989) 'Curriculum research and educational praxis', *Curriculum Perspectives*, 9(4), 41-50; although in the case of curriculum history *per se*, Seddon is stressing the temporal dimensions of this process of the social construction of knowledge.
- 6 See for example Goodson, note 1, and Musgrave, note 2, for two informative discussions of these issues.
- 7 Reid, W.A. (1978) *Thinking About the Curriculum: The Nature and Treatment of Curriculum Problems* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p. 98.
- 8 With a number of notable exceptions in the work of for example Mangan, J.A. (1981) *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School*, Cambridge University Press; Fletcher, S. (1984) *Women First: The Female Tradition in English Physical Education, 1880-1980*, London: Althone Press; Hargreaves, J. (1986) *Sport, Power and Culture: A Social and Historical Analysis of Popular Sport in Britain*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- 9 Evans, J. and Davies, B. (1986) 'Sociology, schooling and physical education', in Evans, J. (Ed.) *Physical Education, Sport and Schooling: Studies in the Sociology of Physical Education*, Lewes: Falmer Press, pp. 11-37.
- 10 Young, M.F.D. (1975) 'Curriculum change: Limits and possibilities', *Educational Studies*, 1(2), 129-138.
- 11 See Anne Williams' historiography, Williams, A. (1988) 'The historiography of health and fitness in physical education', *PEA Research Supplement*, 3, 1-4.
- 12 See for example Bernstein, B. (1971) 'On the classification and framing of educational knowledge', in Young, M.F.D. (Ed.) *Knowledge and Control: New Directions for the Sociology of Education*, London: Collier-MacMillan, pp. 47-69; Bucher, R. and Strauss, A. (1976) 'Professions in process', in Hammersley, M. and Woods, P. (Eds) *The Process of Schooling* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul/Open University Press, pp. 19-26.
- 13 Young, M.F.D. (1971 Ed.) *Knowledge and Control: New Directions for the Sociology of Education*, London: Collier-MacMillan.
- 14 Bates, R. (1981) 'What can the new sociology of education do for teachers?' *Discourse*, 1(2), 41-53; Demaine, J. (1981) *Contemporary Theories in the Sociology of Education*, London: MacMillan.
- 15 Whitty, G. (1985) *Sociology and School Knowledge: Curriculum Theory, Research and Politics*, London: Methuen.
- 16 Goodson, I. (1987) *School Subjects and Curriculum Change* Lewes: Falmer Press; Goodson, I. (1984) 'Subjects for study: Towards a social history of curriculum', in Goodson, I. and Ball, S. (Eds) *Defining the Curriculum: Histories and Ethnographies* Lewes: Falmer Press, pp. 25-44, Goodson, I. (1985 Ed.) *Social Histories of the Secondary Curriculum: Subjects for Study* Lewes: Falmer Press; Goodson, I. (1988) *The Making of Curriculum: Collected Essays* Lewes: Falmer Press.
- 17 Goodson (1985), note 16, p. 360.
- 18 Goodson (1984), note 16, p. 43.
- 19 Ball, S.J. (1985) 'English for the English since 1906', in Goodson, I. (1985 Ed.) *Social Histories of the Secondary Curriculum: Subjects for Study* Lewes: Falmer Press, pp. 53-88.
- 20 Goodson (1983), note 16, p. 3.
- 21 Kelly, N. (1988) *Redefining Socio-Historical Analyses of School Subjects: An Appraisal and Extension of Ivor Goodson's Approach*. Mimeo, University of Queensland, p. 7.
- 22 See the exposition of hegemony below.

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- 23 See Goodson, I. (1988) *The Making Curriculum: Collected Essays* Lewes: Falmer Press, especially pp. 7-11.
- 24 Hall, S. (1985) 'Signification, representation, ideology: Althusser and the post-structuralist debates', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 2(2), 91-114.
- 25 In Dreyfus, H.L. and Rainbow, P. (1982) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* Brighton: The Harvester Press, p. xxii.
- 26 Evans and Davies, note 9, p. 29.
- 27 See, respectively, Hargreaves, A. (1985) 'The macro/micro problem in the sociology of education', in Burgess, R. (Ed.) *Issues in Educational Research: Qualitative Methods* Lewes: Falmer Press; Evans and Davies, note 9; Hall, note 24.
- 28 Fitzclarence, L. 'Media, Physical Education and the Problem of Binary Associations', Seminar, Deakin University, May 1990.
- 29 Turner, B. (1984) *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* Oxford: Blackwell.
- 30 Hall, note 24.
- 31 The methodological implications of the use of this notion of discourse as a focal point of the study have meant a heavy reliance on written and other documentary evidence in the form of scholarly articles, research reports, personal accounts and anecdotes, films and novels and a range of other records such as official statistics and secondary accounts such as historical analyses. No piece of evidence is treated simply, at face value, but is analyzed to yield its reflexive meanings. In other words, each source of information not only tells about something in particular, an event for example, but also reveals something about itself, its relationship to other accounts of the same event, the political persuasions of its author perhaps, or the intended impression the account is meant to convey. In this respect, each element in a discursive formation is analyzed in relation to other discursive formations in order to yield accounts that are thoroughly contextualized and so intelligible interpretations of the construction of physical education discourse in the postwar years.
- 32 Hall, note 24, pp. 99-100.
- 33 Hall, note 24, p. 103.
- 34 See, for a detailed social phenomenological account of the partiality of knowledge, Schutz, A. (1962) *Collected Papers Vol 1* The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff. See also Anthony Giddens (1979) *Central Problems in Social Theory* London: MacMillan, pp. 72-73 for an elaboration of this notion, in particular where he notes that individual consciousness is bounded in specifiable ways and that awareness 'shades off' beyond day-to-day activities. Giddens suggests that all social actors have 'some degree of penetration of... social forms'; however, he makes a useful distinction between discursive and practical consciousness, and argues that while people commonly know how to be competent social actors at the level of practical consciousness, they may be quite unable to express this understanding linguistically, an inability that in no way undermines their social competencies. This study is most concerned with the discursive dimension of consciousness, though it should be noted that there is no hard and fast division between discursive and practical, and that the act of committing thoughts, opinions and ideas to the written word contains both elements.
- 35 Hall, note 24, p. 104.
- 36 Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections From the Prison Notebooks* London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- 37 Williams, R. (1977) *Marxism and Literature* Oxford University Press.
- 38 Williams, note 37, p. 110.
- 39 Hall, note 24, p. 91.
- 40 See Whitty, G. (1985) *Sociology and School Knowledge: Curriculum Theory, Research and Politics* London: Methuen.

