

# Precarity, the health and wellbeing of children and young people, and pedagogies of affect in physical education-as-health promotion

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There has been a striking increase in the prevalence of health and wellbeing issues among children and young people in parts of the world since the 1990s. Mental illness in particular appears to be rising. Many believe the COVID pandemic has made this crisis even more acute, particularly for those children and young people who were already suffering from mental illness. A decade of austerity following the 2008 global recession and the running down of social and health services in countries such as Britain have undoubtedly contributed to this emerging crisis, as has increases in income inequality in some of the world's largest economies. In addition, there is growing recognition of the detrimental health effects of indeterminate and unstable employment conditions among the adults in children's and young people's lives, which some authors have linked to precarity. Precarity is a concept that links work practices often associated with the so-called 'gig economy'<sup>i</sup> of zero hours and rolling short-term contracts with poor health and wellbeing among workers and their families. While precarity often involves poverty and multiple-disadvantages among particular groups in societies, it is not limited to these populations and is increasingly affecting disparate groups who are becoming members of what Standing (2016) describes as the Precariat, a 'new dangerous' social class.

Schools have been identified as important sites for promoting social justice (Anyon, 2014) though they are also vulnerable to capture by interests that seek to preserve and further entrench an unequal and unjust status quo (Apple, 2013 ; Ball, 2017 ; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Bernstein, 2000). Within this context schools in many educational jurisdictions have a responsibility for children's and young people's health and wellbeing. Increasing over the past two decades, school physical education has been identified within educational policy and scholarly advocacy as an important contributor to this task, as programmes are reconfigured by the notion of physical education-as-health promotion (Kirk, 2018). This development has accelerated in tandem with the increasing prevalence of precarity. The focus of this paper is on the possible response from physical education-as-health promotion to the increase in mental health issues among children and adolescents and to the rising influence of precarity more general. The position defended in the article is that physical educators can only face the educational challenges posed by the growing precariousness of society if they recognize the urgent need, in a perspective of inclusion and social justice, to consider the inseparability of affect and the power to action by pupils at the very level of the content of their teaching.

I begin this task with some consideration of the increasing prevalence of mental illness among children and young people. I note that precarity is often omitted as a consideration within some of this literature, and so explore this connection between precarity and health and wellbeing of children and young people. Next, I consider briefly the shift towards physical education-as-health promotion during precarious times, and propose critical pedagogies<sup>ii</sup> of affect as a response to precarity. I conclude the paper by reflecting on the preparedness of schools and teachers for precarity, noting three major challenges to the task

of taking forward critical pedagogies of affect. These challenges are the school's implication in the neoliberal project that lies behind rising precarity, the organisational arrangements of secondary schools which act as barriers to sustainable innovation in physical education, and the unpreparedness of specialist teachers of physical education to practice pedagogies of affect.

### **The increasing prevalence of mental illness among children and young people**

The OECD (2018) observed that mental illness is the largest category of disease among children and young people. They also state that around half of all mental health problems begin by the age of 14 and three-quarters by the mid-20s. Moreover, mental illness is at least as prevalent among children and young people as it is among adults. In a review of reports on mental health of 4-25 year olds over a 19 years period between 1995 and 2014 in Britain, Pitchforth et al. (2019) found a six-fold increase in the prevalence of mental illness in England, and more than double between 2003-2014 in Scotland. They describe these increases in prevalence as 'striking'.

We should note that these figures predate the COVID 19 pandemic. In an update on the impact of the pandemic, the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition reported in 2020 that 83% of children and young people with pre-existing mental health problems surveyed by the organisation Young Minds said that their problems had worsened. They also noted a National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children report on a sharp rise in number of calls to their Childline service between January and April 2020. Two in five young people caring for a member of their family were estimated by Young Minds to be experiencing a mental health problem.

The closure of schools during the lockdown period of the pandemic in Britain meant that there was limited capacity for teachers and health workers to recognise which children and young people were experiencing mental health problems, with restricted access to support services generally (Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition, 2020). Domestic violence also increased during the lockdown period, which exacerbated already difficult situations for many children and young people. Job losses, and the uncertainties of the British government furlough scheme, were additional challenges for families that came with the pandemic.

In seeking to explain the increased prevalence of mental illness among children and young people in Britain, particularly since the Global Recession of 2008, Pitchforth et al. (2019) note that higher levels of reporting may be due to a decrease in the stigma associated with mental illness, which they see as a positive development. Nevertheless, they point out that other factors are also at play. These include high levels of use of social media by children and young people and the potential for cyberbullying, an issue addressed also by the OECD (2018) report. There was also, in the decade that followed the recession, an increase in austerity and the running down of many social and health services. This has led in turn to a considerable increase in socio-economic inequalities. The Equality Foundation (<https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/resources/the-spirit-level>) which builds on the work of Wilkinson and Pickett's (2009) book *The Spirit Level*, reports that the prevalence of mental illness is higher and child wellbeing is worse in countries with the highest levels of income inequality such as Britain and the USA.

While it is clear that a number of factors together provide a context for the increasing occurrence of mental health problems among children and young people, precarity is not mentioned in any of these reports.

### **Precarity and health and wellbeing of children and young people**

This is a significant omission, because precarity is closely associated with a decline in health and wellbeing, and mental health in particular. Precarity is a concept that links the forms of indeterminate and insecure work associated with the so-called gig economy, the uncertainty, unpredictability and insecurity such practices engender, and poor health and wellbeing of both workers and members of their families. The associations precarity describes first appeared in the 1980s as neoliberal priorities such as the 'free-market' within capitalist economies began to become mainstream in the policies of governments (Klein, 2007). This commitment to the free-market fundamentally changed the nature of work for many, in the form of neoliberal practices such as zero-hours and rolling temporary contracts, and an onslaught on trades unions that led to the erosion of representation and protection for workers. Pierre Bourdieu was early to recognise the reach and destructive power of these practices.

It became clear that precarity is everywhere today. In the private sector, but also in the public sector, which has multiplied temporary and interim positions, in industrial enterprises, but also in the institutions of production and cultural diffusion, education, journalism, media, etc., where it produces effects which are always more or less identical, which become particularly visible in the extreme case of the unemployed: the deconstruction of existence, deprived among other things of its temporal structures, and the degradation of the whole relation to the world, time, space, which ensues. Precarity deeply affects those who suffer it; by making the future uncertain, it forbids any rational anticipation and, in particular, this minimum of belief and hope in the future that must be had to revolt, especially collectively, against the present, even the most intolerable. (Bourdieu, 1997)

This account by Bourdieu highlights the importance to human wellbeing of, at least, the appearance of certainty and predictability, of being able to plan ahead and to anticipate future events. The importance of these 'temporal structures', so commonplace in everyday life to the extent that they are taken for granted much of the time, is revealed starkly when they are disrupted. His commentary suggests that ruptures in temporality due to insecure work contribute, no less, to a 'destruction of existence', of what it means to be human (Bourdieu, 1993).

The prevalence of precarity has increased since the 1990s in Britain and many other countries of the Global North to an extent that sociologist Guy Standing (2016) has argued a new social class has formed of people living in precarity, called the Precariat (combining precarity and the proletariat, an underclass). Standing sees the Precariat as a *class-in-the-making*, however, and echoing Bourdieu's comment about an inability to 'revolt ... collectively', not as a *class-for-itself*. Berlant (2011) argues that membership of the Precariat veers wildly, cutting across a broad spectrum of society including many types of work and a wide variety of people, making identification with each other, necessary for collective action, difficult if not impossible.

They all share one characteristic though, which is reduced health and wellbeing linked to insecure work. Standing argues that members of the Precariat also share what he calls the 4

As of precarity: anger, anxiety, alienation and anomie. While poverty and other forms of deprivation often feature among the Precariat, these are not sufficient conditions in themselves for the existence of precarity. In countries of the Global North a widely held belief in the 'good life' has been dominant, that hard work and good behaviour will be rewarded by a satisfying and successful career, emotional intimacy and a stable and predictable life. Berlant (2011) suggests that, as precarity becomes more prevalent, this belief for many is now a fantasy. That individuals continue to subscribe to this view of the good life is, she argues, a form of 'cruel optimism', since it is no longer possible to guarantee these outcomes. At the heart of precarity and cruel optimism is the spectre of mental illness.

The concept of precarity thus offers, in addition to proposals by Pitchforth et al. (2019) and others, a further useful explanation of the emerging mental health crisis among children and young people, particularly when they are members of households where their parents and other adults experience insecure and unstable work. Furthermore, the arrival of the COVID pandemic brings an intensification of precarity to those already, pre-COVID, experiencing it, while introducing many others to uncertainty, unpredictability and fear and to their detrimental effects on health and wellbeing. Taken together, these factors suggest that we should view precarity seriously as a means of better understanding poor mental health among children and young people as we consider ways in which to respond to this increasingly prevalent health problem.

### **The shift towards physical education-as-health promotion during precarious times**

Physical education's role has been increasingly, over the past two decades, re-cast as a central contributor to the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Arguably, this development represents a shift in the configuration of school physical education pedagogy, what I have elsewhere called the idea of the idea of physical education, or the ID<sup>2</sup> (Kirk, 2010). From the mid-twentieth century, a multi-activity, sports techniques-based approach dominated physical education programmes (Kirk, 2010). This more recent ID<sup>2</sup> emerging over the past twenty years might be described as physical education-as-health promotion (Kirk, 2020). Some recent examples include the Australian (National) Curriculum, where the subject is known as Health and Physical Education (ACARA, 2015), as it is also in the Canadian State of Ontario (Ontario Public Service, 2015). In Scotland, physical education is located within a larger curriculum area called Health and Wellbeing, which alongside literacy and numeracy is a cross-curricular priority (Education Scotland, 2017). Even where the title physical education is retained, health forms a significant part of the rationale for its place within curriculum documents and policies (eg., SHAPE America, 2014; Ministry of Education Singapore, 2017). In addition to these national curriculum developments, there has been no shortage of advocacy for a health focus in physical education over the past two decades nor indeed examples of forms of health-based, related or optimizing physical education (Haerens et al, 2011; Harris, 2005; Metzler, et al., 2013). In each of these cases, of curriculum policy and scholarly advocacy, physical fitness and physical activity have been two common and prominent concepts that make the connection between physical education and health.

Indeed, both physical activity and physical fitness belong to a pathogenic view of health promotion that informs much of the contemporary interest in health in physical education within curriculum policy and development. As a childhood obesity crisis has emerged, the disease-specific nature of much pathogenic health care has become evident, solidified around health-related or optimizing physical education's role in promoting physical activity. If exercise-is-medicine and physical activity-based physical education 'the pill not taken'

(McKenzie and Lounsbury, 2009), then the diseases they target and seek to prevent are obesity and cardio-vascular disease. This preventative deployment of physical activity and physical fitness in physical education-as-health promotion has resulted in a specific focus on 'moderate to vigorous physical activity' as the 'gold standard' for physical education lessons, a development that potentially drastically impoverishes physical education programmes.

### *A salutogenic view of health in physical education*

Antonovsky (1979) offers an alternative to this pathogenic view of health promotion through his theory of salutogenesis. Antonovsky begins with the observation that pathogenic approaches to health promotion assume a homeostatic state is required for health. He argues, on the contrary, that human beings live in heterostasis, not homeostasis. No-one is ever completely healthy at any given point in time, but is more or less healthy. Antonovsky asks, how do we use health promotion to help people to remain as close as possible to the 'health-ease' end of the health-illness continuum and away from the 'dis-ease' end? He asks how we identify *salutary* factors that actively promote health rather than factors that merely reduce or manage risk of illness.

His research on stress and coping informs his response. He argues that those individuals who cope best with challenging events in their lives have access to what he calls Generalized Resistance Resources (GRR). GRRs can take many forms, depending on the nature of the challenge an individual or community faces and the type of resource that is effective in coping with or overcoming the challenge. He asked what GRRs have in common across many different contexts and discovered that they typically "fostered repeated life experiences which, to put it at its simplest, helped one to see the world as 'making sense', cognitively, instrumentally and emotionally" (Antonovsky, 1996, p.15). This insight led him to understand that the strongest salutary factor for health was what he called 'Sense of Coherence' (SOC), where individuals and communities are able to see the meaningfulness, comprehensibility and manageability of their situations. Antonovsky argued that the strength of the SOC was decisive in moving towards health-ease and away from dis-ease. For Antonovsky, moving people towards health-ease requires the implementation of programmes that support and strengthen SOC amid and within the complexity of everyday life.

Salutogenesis has begun to influence thinking about health in physical education. For example, McCuaig, Quennerstedt and Macdonald (2013) and McCuaig and Quennerstedt (2018) have investigated the application of a salutogenic approach to the development of the Australian HPE curriculum. In this context, they argue that a salutogenic perspective allows curriculum developers to promote a 'strengths-based' in contrast to a pathogenic 'deficit' approach to health. Pedagogically, this work has emphasized, consistent with the SOC, problem-solving through inquiry, the identification of resources and assets for healthy living, and empowerment and self-determination by listening and responding to the voices of children and young people.

These research and curriculum development projects informed by salutogenesis are first steps in offering an alternative to the currently dominant pathogenic perspective on the relationship of physical education to health. The dominance of the pathogenic view is evidenced in the widespread use of the concepts of physical fitness and physical activity as the links between physical education and health in curriculum policy and scholarly advocacy. These concepts place an emphasis on the physical (in terms of movement efficiency) and physiological (cardio vascular functioning and lean body mass). While this emphasis is, in philosophical

terms, necessary, it cannot be sufficient in an age of precarity. The central place of SOC within salutogenesis would appear to contrast precisely with the situation of living in precarity. As the work of precarity researchers has shown, to live in precarity is to lack a sense of meaningfulness, comprehensibility and manageability when faced with challenging life situations.

### **Towards critical pedagogies of affect as a response to precarity**

While much of the policy and research literature in physical education has emphasised the contribution of physical activity and physical fitness for health, some has also recognised the importance of affective learning in relation to motivation, resilience, interest, caring, enjoyment and valuing (Haerens et al. 2011). In Scotland, for example, the national curriculum contains Personal Qualities as one of four Significant Areas of Learning, which includes motivation, confidence and self-esteem, determination and resilience, and respect and tolerance. Teraoka (2020) found that teachers were effective users of this area of learning in secondary school physical education programmes in Scotland, though they were hindered to an extent by the continuing dominance of a multi-activity, sports technique-based curriculum.

Within this dominant configuration of physical education, the affective domain *is* recognised. Most often though this recognition amounts to a view of learning in this area as a hoped-for by-product of teaching for sport-related technique development rather than as a planned-for intention. To speak of pedagogies of affect is then to posit learning in the affective domain as an intended, planned-for aspiration of physical education programmes. In light of the challenges precarity presents, not only in relation to health and wellbeing, but also to social justice and equity, physical education's response to precarity needs to include a critical dimension.

I define critical pedagogies for school physical education as the organization and alignment of curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment in ways that render physical education inclusive, fair, and equitable as an embodied experience for young people, in order to empower them (Kirk, 2020). I use the term experience here consistent with Dewey's (1938) principles of continuity and interaction. An experience is educationally beneficial when it affords continuity that leads to further growth of the individual. Interaction refers to the relationship between an individual in terms of their capabilities, intentions and desires, and the immediate environment. According to Dewey, it is the teacher's responsibility to create a learning environment in which an individual's continuity of experience is possible.

Critical pedagogies seek to trouble the normative order of physical education experientially and thus embrace queerness in order to challenge forms of 'straight pedagogy'. According to Standal (2015) and Fitzpatrick & McGlashan (2017) straight pedagogy ignores difference (in its many forms) and seeks to mould bodies to conform to particular (dominant, and sometimes inappropriate) ideals. Given the pernicious effects of precarity on mental health and wellbeing, I propose critical pedagogies of affect as a point of focus and emphasis, as a specific response to precarity.

While embodied experience (which is holistic, with action, thought and emotion irreducible) is of central importance to physical education, sociocultural critique can be used also to trouble the normative order of the physical cultures of society in ways that equip young people to see beyond the obvious, to raise awareness through conscientization, and to expose

inequitable and oppressive practices. These three capabilities form the conditions for the enactment of the meaningful content knowledge that constitutes critical pedagogies of affect. One of the criticisms of critical pedagogy from poststructuralist positions is that it is insufficient to merely *be* critical, and essential to also *do* critical. Critical pedagogies of affect may be empowering because through them young people become disposed to question the taken-for-granted, to care about injustice and unfairness, for themselves and others, and to be bothered to take action.

This focus is also appropriate to a salutogenic concern for Sense of Coherence (SOC) (Antonovsky, 1979). Coherence is one of the casualties of precarity. For life to make sense, some degree of self-direction, self-awareness and self-understanding is important. SOC applies equally to collectives as it does to individuals. Thus, a concern for the self needs to be matched by a concern for others, and indeed communities for individuals. The abandonment by governments of their responsibilities for the welfare and wellbeing of some of its population, particularly those living in precarity, is one of the shameful consequences of their embrace of neoliberal practices (Judt, 2010). In a democracy, governments that give up on those who struggle to care for themselves should be held to account by their citizens. But, in order to do this, people need to care enough to exercise their right to vote, and this disposition has been seriously eroded in some of the democracies of the Global North (Runciman, 2018). Helplessness, alienation, and feelings of hopelessness feed this crisis in democracy. Thus, pedagogies of affect seek small wins (Weick, 1984) to assist young people to build and maintain a SOC in their everyday lives. The medium of physical activity, the queering of straight pedagogy, and a focus on embodiment in physical education are of crucial importance in this process because the self-body-world connection (Hellison, 1978), physical competence, and physical fitness can be reconsidered as Generalized Resistance Resources that help maintain the SOC and thus to move children and young people towards the health-ease end of the health-illness continuum.

### ***Critical pedagogies of affect for physical education: examples of response to precarity***

In this section I provide three brief examples of approaches to physical education I consider to be critical pedagogies of affect, Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (Hellison, 1995), various forms of Sport Education such as Sport for Peace (Ennis et al, 1999) and activist approaches to working with adolescent girls (Oliver and Kirk, 2015) and socially vulnerable children and young people (Lugueti et al., 2017). In all three examples, affective learning aspirations are of central concern. All three are learner-centred in the sense that children's and young people's voices are encouraged and facilitated, and what they say to adults is responded to respectfully. Each has a different focus, and so is more effective in some contexts and not so much in others. None of these critical pedagogies of affect by themselves can inoculate children and young people from the detrimental effects of living in precarity. But they do provide teachers with tools to help young people reflect on and critique, individually and together, the possible sources of their anger, anxiety, alienation and anomie. None of these critical pedagogies of affect seeks to solve the root causes of precarity. Instead, the research evidence in each case shows that in the right hands, of skilled, sensitive and empathetic teachers, they can tackle the intermediate causes, in Hellison's (1995, p.8) words, "including the need for skills in and a disposition toward social competence, problem-solving, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future".

The Teaching for Personal and Social Responsibility model is widely recognized as a means of providing young people living in disadvantaged and underserved communities with access

to learning life skills, with sport and physical activities as a medium for this work (Poza, Grao-Cruces & Perez-Ordas, 2018). Exemplifying the strategy of small wins, Hellison (1995, p.94) cites a superintendent of schools in California who identified three levels of causes of social problems, root, intermediate and immediate. Hellison claimed he was focused on intermediate causes, “including the need for skills in and a disposition toward social competence, problem-solving, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future” (Hellison, 1995, p.8). He saw Teaching for Personal and Social Responsibility as one small contribution to resolving root causes such as poverty, racism and lack of opportunity, but only as one of many pieces in a larger puzzle. Teaching for Personal and Social Responsibility is framed within a ‘social problems perspective’ which reveals Hellison’s awareness of the bigger picture, while throughout his 1995 text he uses the word empowerment frequently. Hellison’s writing conveys his uncertainty, caution, and pragmatism in a way that suits Teaching for Personal and Social Responsibility well as one response to precarity.

With his focus on lifeskills education through physical activity, Hellison (1995) developed five levels of responsibility. Level zero is irresponsibility. Level 1 is respect, where a student may not be participating but at least is not interfering with the right of others to play. Level 2 incorporates level 1, and also involves a willingness to participate and work under the teacher’s supervision. Level 3, self-direction, is where students show respect and participate, and can also work on their own program without the teacher’s direct supervision. Level 4, caring, incorporates levels 1, 2 and 3, and in addition the extension of a sense of responsibility beyond themselves, to assist and support others. A fifth level is where caring is transferred beyond the gym, into a young person’s everyday life.

Hellison’s goal was for the young people he worked with to internalize this structure of personal and social responsibility. The levels were posted on the wall of the gym, and regular reference made to them. Students were encouraged to use them to self-evaluate, and they thus create a vocabulary for sharing how they feel about themselves and others. In order to embed the levels, Hellison employed a number of strategies, including awareness talks, levels-in-action built into the physical activity content of lessons, individual decision-making and group meetings to respond to in-lesson incidents, and reflection time, usually at the end of the lesson, led by the teacher.

The physical activity content of Teaching for Personal and Social Responsibility lessons is important in a number of ways. First, Hellison (1995, p.1) argued physical activity settings are well-suited to personal and social development because “they are very emotional, interactive, and, for some kids, attractive (...) kids ‘show more of themselves’ in physical activity settings”. For young people experiencing alienation, this is crucially important. Second, different forms of physical activity offer different opportunities for this work. Basketball was included because young people want to play, volleyball because “it is more cooperative than most other team sports”, and fitness activities because these can be individualized (Hellison, 1995, p.53). Third, even though the program’s primary purpose is personal and social development, Hellison argued that teaching of these activities had to be competent in order to be credible, as much for stakeholders as for students. And fourth, the Teaching for Personal and Social Responsibility framework, with its five levels, has to be integrated into the physical activity content in every lesson. Hellison estimated he made that connection around 70% of the lesson time (Hellison, 1995, p.52).

Sport Education was developed by Daryl Siedentop and colleagues (1994) through school-based experimentation in the 1980s and early 1990s. While this approach has been widely

researched in physical education, it is probably not, at first glance, associated with critical pedagogy. As Hastie, Martinez de Ojeda & Calderón Luquin (2011) note, however, fair play is one of the structural features of Sport Education. Another structural feature is inclusion, where all students are members of a persisting group (a team) for the duration of a season<sup>iii</sup>. Communication, cooperation and positive social interaction are, therefore, essential aspects of Sport Education. A third structural feature is a learning aspiration that students become enthusiastic players (as well as competent and literate), and as such is concerned with personal and social development, attitudes and values.

Ennis et al. (1999) developed a critical pedagogy called Sport for Peace on the basis of the Sport Education model. Following extensive ethnographic fieldwork over a period of years in urban high schools in a school district on the East of the United States of America (USA), this research team chose six high schools and ten teachers to implement Sport for Peace. The schools were serving a predominantly African-American population with between 45-60% receiving free or discounted lunches. Ennis et al. noted the schools had a proportion of disruptive and disengaged students.

Sport for Peace adopted the structures of Sport Education, but built in additional components such as strategies for conflict resolution that could be taught to and used by students. Teachers were also taught strategies for sharing class management and content decisions with students. The program was implemented in three phases. In phase 1 teachers provided their own baseline by teaching a normal unit. In phase 2, they received seven hours of staff development to learn how to use Sport for Peace. In phase 3, they implemented the program of up to 45 lessons in a block design. Teachers were encouraged to design programs that they felt best met the needs of their students, while adhering to the structures and principles of Sport for Peace.

Summarizing their results, Ennis et al. noted considerable change in both teachers and students between the phase 1 unit, which involved teaching and class management typical of traditional curricula, and the phase 3 implementation of Sport for Peace. They reported that students felt affiliation with their team and described it like a family. “Similar to a family environment, they felt responsible to their teammates, showed them respect as individuals, and developed a sense of trust that is unusual in these urban schools” (Ennis et al., 1999, p.280). A shared responsibility for learning emerged which featured trust and respect. Ennis (1999) reported, additionally, that girls benefitted from Sport for Peace, with a sense of ownership for the program through team affiliation, authentic cooperative team environment, and what the students called ‘second chances’, where mistakes did not result in a failing grade or other negative consequences. Ennis also shows that Sport for Peace required boys to change their behaviour towards girls. They were required to share ownership of sport and cooperate with girls. By subtly manipulating the Sport Education structures of rewards, boys quickly came to see that success for their team required all team members to be included and supported to be the best they could be. Coeducation is an important feature of Sport for Peace, where boys as a typically dominant group in physical education classes are required to experience and learn about equity and inclusion.

Kim Oliver has developed an activist approach to working with girls in physical education over 25 years (Kirk, 2020, pp. 164-177). For example, Oliver, Hamzeh & McCaughy (2009), co-created a curriculum with girls, as Oliver sought (in Giroux’s words) ‘integrating critical analysis with social transformation’. Oliver was interested in girls as agents in their own right who with appropriate support could create change. The purpose in this next activist

research project was to “understand 5th-grade girls’ (Elementary, 10-11 years) self-identified barriers to physical activity and to work with them to find ways of negotiating those barriers so as to increase their physical activity participation”. (Oliver et al., 2009, p.93)

Oliver and Hamzeh worked together with 10-11 year old girls from two elementary schools in the state of New Mexico in the 2005-6 academic year. Both schools were located in poorest county of New Mexico. One school, the older of the two, was 94% Hispanic, with poor facilities. The more modern school was 84% Hispanic, with a good environment for physical education. The researchers selected girls for the project who their physical education teachers considered were inactive or disinterested in physical activity. Four girls from the older school were invited to participate, and six from the newer school, with a mix of Mexican-American, Hispanic and White girls. Oliver and Hamzeh met each group for 45-60 minutes, three times per month from August to May (Oliver et al., 2009).

Oliver utilized personal biographies, photos taken by the girls, and individual and group analyses of the photos to identify issues that influenced their participation in physical activity. Building on these data, the researchers next co-created with the girls ‘a physical activity curriculum of possibilities’ that negotiated and eliminated barriers to their participation. Oliver and Hamzeh planned lessons on a week-by-week basis, informed by data/ experience from the previous lesson.

A feature of Oliver’s methodology of working with girls in physical education has been long-term immersion in the field. It is through this process that she has been able to form strong relationships with the girls and to be able to see beyond surface appearances. A case in point was the core construct in this study, ‘girly girls’. This notion emerged early in the fieldwork, introduced by the girls as an explanation for their physical inactivity. Oliver et al. noted that this girly girl identity was fluid, and that the girls performed it strategically to serve their own purposes. The researchers’ initial analysis was in line with their understanding of the theory around gendered embodiment. On the one hand, it was a performance deployed to get their own way, and was rarely questioned because it fitted the culture of heteronormative femininity in this part of New Mexico. On the other hand, since it was a normalized discourse, teachers were disinclined to look beyond it. A breakthrough in the study came when Oliver and Hamzeh began to see that this girly girl identity was mobilized only when girls felt uncomfortable with what they were being asked to do. They wrote: “we began to hear how the girls used their girly girl language of embodiment as a way to express additional barriers that hindered their physical activity participation” (Oliver et al., 2009, p.102).

Working from this insight, rather than refusing the legitimacy of the girly girl concept, Oliver et al. instead embraced it. They invited the girls to make up games and activities that girly girls could play. It is at this point Oliver et al. assisted the girls to move beyond the critique of the barriers they experienced to focus on transformation.

When we began focusing on *what could be*, by acknowledging the girls’ desires to be girly girl, and invited them to create games that girly girls would enjoy playing, the barriers they identified were no longer the problem. Once the games became about enacting their subjectivities without outsiders’ (...) judgment, then not wanting to sweat or mess up their hair or nails really did not matter anymore. It was as if the moment we acknowledged their desire to be girly girl and worked *with* them to co-create games *for* them that the content of the games they created actually contradicted many of their self-identified girly girl barriers (...) Had we pushed the girls to critique or resist being girly

girl, we believe they would not have responded favorably because they showed no signs of not wanting to be girly girl. Further, such a move on our part may have positioned them as deviants within their culture. (Oliver et al., 2009, p.107)

This is a crucially important insight into the nature of critical pedagogy in physical education. Oliver and her colleagues reveal the delicate tension at the heart of this work, on the one hand supporting students' to experience something new while not imposing their own solutions. Not only does this form of critical pedagogy require great sensitivity and anthropological insight from teachers and researchers, it also requires an ethic of care, to do no harm in the name of social justice.

### **The preparedness of schools and teachers for precarity**

Schools in countries of the Global North are, however, ill-prepared for the rise of precarity and the health and wellbeing challenges it brings. They are, after all, important custodians of the notion of the good life. Their existence rests on the belief that hard work and good behaviour will lead to academic achievement, a primary gateway to a rewarding career and all of the trappings of stable, continuous, well-paid and predictable work. In Berlant's (2011) terms, at a time when precarity is increasingly prevalent, schools continue to promote the cruel optimism that the good life is available to all of their pupils. In the 1970s, Paul Willis (1977) was able to argue that for some working-class boys school was a place for learning to labour, as he explained how 'working-class kids get working-class jobs'. One of its primary effects, intended or not, was to reproduce social inequity and injustice and thus to maintain the status quo that protected privilege and affluence. For those children and young people whose families have the right mix of economic, cultural and social capital, there will be resources at home and in their social networks that will assist them to pass through this academic achievement gateway as well as helping them develop resilience to set-backs and unanticipated events. For those living in precarity, however, there may be no such resources beyond the school. If, through the marketization and commercialization of education, the school itself is drawn into the neoliberal project (Ball, 2017), we may see

A process of abandonment of a genuinely educational contract with these young people. Instead of being educated so they may develop mentally, morally, or aesthetically, they become educationally neglected, hidden, overlooked, dismissed, pitied, and quite literally de-valued. (...) School has perhaps become a site of precarisation for all individuals through its increasingly emphasised bonds to an unstable labour market, but for the students at the centre of the present investigation this is beyond question. (p.175) These kinds of students used to be able to learn for labour (...) But what are they to learn for when there is no sustainable and sufficiently well-paid commodified labour left? Is it learning for marginality? (Dovemark and Beach, 2016, p.187)

Dovemark and Beach's account of special programmes for 'manual' pupils in Swedish high schools, young people who are ill-served by the competitive academic curriculum that dominates secondary school, is replicated in many other countries of the Global North. This situation of the school and its complicity in the neoliberal project is just one of several challenges of which we must be aware in considering how physical educators might respond to the ill effects of precarity.

A further challenge is the two institutional coordinates of schools of time and space, typically expressed as the timetable and the classroom (Kirk, 1998). These two institutional

coordinates, particularly in the secondary school, lie at the heart of the school's smooth operation. They appear to suit the higher profile academic subjects of the secondary school in particular, on which schools' prestige rests, especially those whose primary purpose is to lead pupils through high stakes examinations and on into university courses.

In most of Britain's education jurisdictions, the time and space coordinates are expressed for secondary school physical education in the form of up to three individual lessons of around 50 minutes per week, or sometimes a double lesson and a single. These timetable allocations are coordinated with available teaching spaces, in secondary schools taking the form of 'classrooms', such as the gym, playing field, fitness suite, swimming pool and games hall. As many advocates for alternative forms of physical education have found for the past 50 or more years, these organisational arrangements, coupled with class sizes of 30 or more pupils of mixed abilities and interests, make anything other than the much-maligned multi-activity, sport-technique based form of physical education very difficult to implement and sustain. Indeed, multi-activity, sport technique-based physical education is the logical and sensible outcome of these organisational arrangements (Kirk, 2010).

Some activities in physical education fit these timetable and classroom arrangements well. But others do not. For example, the Sport Education pedagogical model requires a sport season of up to 12 or more lessons, when units of work within the multi-activity, sport-technique-based approach rarely run for more than six (Kirk, 2010). An activist approach to working with girls includes a Building the Foundation phase where girls sample different activities each lesson, which plays havoc with traditional timetabling arrangements (Kirk et al., 2018). AD Munrow, at the time Director of Physical Education and the University of Birmingham, recognised this problem with the school's time and space coordinates in the early 1960s as physical education began to secure a place in secondary schools in Britain.

Any headmaster must feel somewhat bewildered at the prospect of time-tabling a 'subject' the requirement for which may vary between twenty minutes on a squash court, an hour on the track, an hour and a half on the pitch and two days in the local hills or estuary... The headmaster who is sympathetic to a catholic concept of physical education is still confronted by a total timetable in which every other subject is accustomed to fitting tidily into the units of single or double periods: and these are the subjects on which his school is primarily judged. (Munrow, 1963, p.273)

On the basis of this argument, there is a strong case for physical educators to abandon secondary schools where the majority are located and to relocate to primary schools (Kirk, 2005). The location of physical education specialists predominantly in secondary schools in many education systems globally rests on assumptions about children's movement development that may no longer apply. One example is the notion, reasonably valid prior to the 1980s and 1990s for the majority of children, that they arrive at the secondary school with similar levels of experience of sports and games obtained mainly in the primary school. From the 1980s and due to the spectacular growth in the availability of mass community sport experiences for children since the 1980s and 1990s in many parts of the world, this assumption is no longer valid. Children come to secondary school physical education with a wider range of experiences and expertise in physical activity than they did prior to these decades. However, the assumption that most pupils need to be treated as 'beginners' in physical education at the age of 12 and the onset of secondary school continues to exert a strong influence on the ways in which programmes are configured in the lower secondary school (Kirk, 2005).

While primary schools have timetables and classrooms too, they do not have the subject specialists in each area, nor typically do teachers seek to lead children through high stakes examinations, even though in some countries there are testing regimes in place. There is much more flexibility around the organisational arrangements of primary schools compared with secondary schools that could benefit forms of physical education-as-health promotion. This radical step would then open up space for a rethink about how secondary age pupils might best be provided with support to benefit their health and wellbeing, including forms of embodied movement experience that have a close relationship to young people's active and lifelong leisure pursuits.

In tandem with such a step would be the challenge of marshalling evidence of the many benefits that are claimed for physical education but are rarely demonstrated (eg. Harvey & Jarrett, 2014; Hastie et al. 2011). This could be one strategy that is used to then persuade school leaders that physical education requires different timetable and (possibly) space arrangement from some other areas of the school curriculum. Evidence-based arguments will be vital to securing the organisational arrangements that allow physical educators to realize the full potential of their subject.

But here we meet a third challenge, which is specialist teachers' preparedness to work with young people living in precarity. Giving the increasing prevalence of precarity, there is a strong possibility that most physical education teachers will in the course of the next decade encounter and teach young people living in precarity. While poverty, ethnicity and multiple-disadvantage are not necessary conditions for precarity to exist, they nevertheless feature regularly alongside indeterminate and unstable work. Thus, poor, multiply-disadvantaged and Black and ethnic minority young people will be disproportionately represented within the Precariat. The Anglophone research into the occupational socialization of physical education teachers reveals that most are White, academically successful, very able-bodied and affluent. Flintoff, Dowling and Fitzgerald (2015), for example, showed that the numbers physical education teachers from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds was regularly around 3% in England compared with around 25% of the pupil population in schools. Similar data has been reported by Flory (2016) for parts of the USA. Flintoff and Dowling (2019) claim that the physical education profession is both 'White-washed' and 'colour-blind', dominated by White people and unaware of issues of ethnicity and poverty.

Unsurprisingly, when early career physical education teachers meet their pupils in urban schools in the USA, they are often shocked and surprised (Flory, 2015). They certainly almost always lack appropriate and sufficient preparation to work within precarious communities, and have relatively high attrition rates. The conditions for occupational stress are clearly evident in these situations, though for teachers who remain in teaching stress levels are reported to be relatively low (Lee, 2019; Markela et al., 2014). Lawson, Kirk and MacPhail (2020) have argued recently, though pre-COVID, that rising to meet the teacher professional learning challenge is now a pressing and essential task. If radical reform of physical education teacher education was required prior to the pandemic, as the prevalence of precarity was rising, it may be that it is needed even more urgently now. A shift from secondary to primary schools mooted above could provide an opportunity to radically rethink the professional preparation of physical education teachers while providing the possibility of earlier interventions in children's lives with regard to their health and wellbeing.

## **Conclusion**

My purpose in this paper has been to consider physical education's response to rising precarity. The context for this exploration is a 'striking' increase in the prevalence of mental illness among children and young people over the past two or more decades. I argue that precarity is a factor in this emerging crisis since it links indeterminate and unstable employment with detrimental health and wellbeing among workers and their families. Another contextual factor is a shift in the configuration of school physical education as a field over the past 20 years away from a sports technique base to physical education-as-health promotion. In considering this shift, I noted a strong emphasis on physical activity and physical fitness, and the allied notion of 'moderate to vigorous physical activity', within a pathogenic concept of health promotion concerned with the prevention and management of risks to health. I also offered an introduction to salutogenesis as an alternative theory of health promotion. Through its central concept of Sense of Coherence, salutogenesis appears to provide an important match with the effects of precarity on people's lives, which, according to Bourdieu (1993, 1997), destroys the temporal structures essential to everyday existence. My argument is that the current pandemic has accentuated and intensified the experience of precarity for those already living within it while extend some of its effects, in particular uncertainty, unpredictability and instability in everyday life. In both cases, there is an assault on people's Sense of Coherence and thus their health and wellbeing.

I offer the notion of critical pedagogies of affect as one possible response by physical education to the rising prevalence of precarity and the associated emerging crisis in children and young people's health and wellbeing. Pedagogies of affect such as Teaching for Personal and Social Responsibility, Sport for Peace and activist approaches seek with intent to facilitate learning in the affective domain in ways that will strengthen children's and young people's Sense of Coherence. Critical pedagogies seek to provide forms of physical education that are inclusive, fair, and equitable as an embodied experience for young people, in ways that empower them. Critical pedagogies of affect pursue social justice outcomes primarily through a focus on children's and young people's holistic learning.

Having laid out this agenda, I argue that schools and teachers may currently be ill-suited and prepared for this task. My proposal that physical educators seek to break with the secondary school and relocate to the primary education sector is in recognition of a range of issues (Kirk, 2005), but not least the obdurate challenge the time and space coordinates of school organisation, the dominance of high prestige examination subjects, and the 'White-washed' and 'colour-blind' nature of the physical education teaching profession present. Physical education scholars can assist in this process of rupture and reformation by providing through research what works and why, in ways that will convince school leaders of the value of physical education-as-health promotion in a time of precarity.

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<sup>i</sup> “Gig economy: a way of working that is based on people having temporary jobs or doing separate pieces of work, each paid separately, rather than working for an employer” (Cambridge Dictionary on line)

<sup>ii</sup> Pedagogy in this paper refers to the interdependent, interacting and irreducible elements of teaching, learning, curriculum (or knowledge) and assessment.

<sup>iii</sup> A season in Sport Education is modelled on a typical season in a sport, such as soccer, with pre-season training and friendly matches, a round-robin competition, and a climax in the form of finals. In Sport Education, a season comprises at least 12 lessons and may include more. This is in contrast to the multi-activity, sports-technique form of physical education with its short units of work based on no more than 6 lessons.