

POLITICS, POLICY AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

To understand educational reform and the form that Physical Education (PE) takes on we need to understand how policy becomes practice and the nature of the political agenda at any particular time. The research problem focuses on the politics involved in the policy process within educational reform regarding PE as a school subject. The research was conducted by means of a literature study and therefore the methodology can be typified as qualitative research within the interpretative science paradigm. International issues on policy and politics related to PE was analysed to draw possible parallels to the South African context. An attempt was also made to determine why educational policy initiatives, since the establishment of South Africa's new democratic government in 1994, are not bringing any qualitative changes in the lives of the ordinary people. The ill health PE is suffering globally has two dimensions: a scientific crisis and a political crisis. Klein's (2003) argument rests in the first place on an analysis of the perceived frailty of PE at international level and secondly it concerns three trading zones which give rise to the state and status of PE. It is concluded that the academic content of PE not only depends on political engagements, theoretical points of view and institutional practices, but by embracing theoretical and practical issues in which content and context are moulded together.

Key words: Politics; Policy; Physical Education.

INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM AND METHODOLOGY

Education is the key to the future. Development and progress, good health, liberty, security, economic well-being and participation in social and political activities depend on education. In countries which have not attained a high socio-economic level these facts are indisputable. In the context of a balanced education, Physical Education (PE) and sport are integral parts (ICSSPE, 2003). South Africa's (SA) population composition reflects one of the most multi-ethnic, multiracial, multireligious and multicultural societies in the world (Goodey, 1989) which have unique implications for education and sport (Holdstock, 1991). One of the primary, universal and joyful expressions of our physical existence and our humanity is movement. However, we should never lose sight of the fact that the meaning of movement can never be separated from the cultural and, therefore, the political environment in which it takes place (Craig, 1991). In the words of Craig (1991:22):

Cultural change essentially requires an alteration in the traditional domains of meaning which people use to construct and understand the day to day reality of their lives. From this it is apparent that the reconstruction of Physical Education in South Africa will be at one and the same time, a political enterprise and a process that is based in people's cultural existence and ultimately, therefore, within the identities of those who teach and experience it.

In order to understand educational reform we need to understand how policy becomes practice and the nature of the political agenda at any particular time (Fisher, 2003). Kirk (2003) and Klein (2003) view PE as both a theoretical and a social construct. Globally the theoretical decisions chosen for official PE are not homogenous. The form PE takes on will be determined by the interests, values and aspirations of individuals and groups charged with the authority to design curriculum and, therefore, apart from being a theoretical and a social construct it is also a political construct (Kirk, 2003; Klein, 2003). PE is not a politically neutral activity (Fisher, 2003) for its subject status is essentially finalised by political interests (Klein, 2003).

The process in which policy becomes practice is in itself complex in the sense that a number of issues related to a variety of interests and pressures eventually affect the subject, what it is about and how it manifests itself in schools. These issues include the nature of the political agenda, the potential for tension between official expectations and the thoughts and beliefs of the institutions and individuals delivering it. Another issue is the flow of communication across the various agencies involved (Fisher, 2003). Policy is not merely imposed on any open or aspiring democratic society, but is progressed via open debate, consultation and negotiation. The principles espoused in the text are politically driven and should be understood as a specific political statement, embodying the political principles of the time (Tomlinson, 1997).

The research problem focuses on the politics involved in the policy process within educational reform regarding PE as a school subject. The research was conducted by means of a literature study in the field of education, PE and policy strategies. The methodology can thus be typified as qualitative research within the interpretative science paradigm.

In order to understand the situation PE finds itself in and to come up with possible developmental strategies for PE it needs to be investigated within the political realities of the day. In this regard international issues on policy and politics related to PE will be analysed to draw possible parallels to the South African context.

POLITICS AND POLICY

Klein (2003) believes that the ill health that PE is suffering globally has two dimensions. Firstly a scientific and secondly a political crisis. Regarding the scientific crisis Klein argues that, as yet, PE is less interesting than the other disciplines of sport science, even though the latter, which is a recently evolved scientific domain, is founded as academic subject matter in the foundations laid down by PE. In the 1990s sport studies escalated due to clearer definitions of objectives and methodologies whereas PE could not constitute an interesting object of study (Klein, 2003). Talbot (2003) believes that the dominance of sport science, despite PE being an older area of study, have positioned PE in a junior, or even deferential position. PE has lost high quality researchers to the sports sciences where it is easier to secure resources and where the career prospects are perceived to be much better (Talbot, 2003). This has also led to a growth in the allocation of sport science disciplines in all undergraduate programmes which meant that Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) programmes had to reduce their time devoted to movement content, curriculum, pedagogy and field experiences (Metzler, 2003). Competitive sport-oriented programmes (e.g., sports competition structures, sports talent development and provision of specialist facilities) are cited as

examples of best practice to the demise of broader pedagogical and didactic activities in PE (Hardman, 2003:30).

The same scientific crisis is found in SA. From the 1970s onwards national programmes were successfully implemented and the status of PE gained recognition in all but the former Black schools. By the latter half of the 1980s problems such as declining time allocation due to the emphasis on academic subjects, the view that extra-curricular sport can replace PE, a move away from specialist training for elementary school teachers, the academic discipline (theory) and the profession (practice) moving further apart, etc. escalated. This has created situations where PE, organised school sport, facilities and equipment have become practically non-existent.

The second dimension of Klein's (2003) argument is that PE is in a political crisis in the sense that within public educational policies PE has an ever-diminishing status and position. In many countries of the world PE is involved in conflicts and competition of which the result is confusion, but one thing is clear and that is that PE *does not constitute an object of interest for national public policies* (Klein, 2003:154). This is also true of the situation in SA (Van Deventer, 2002a).

In part Klein (2003) presents his argument according to two lines of analysis. In the first place his argument rests on an analysis of the perceived frailty of PE at international level and secondly it concerns three *trading zones*, which he believes, give rise to the state and status of PE within the international education systems (Klein, 2003:154). In the following section these trading zones will be briefly discussed in relation to other viewpoints as well.

International fragility

Although recent international studies (Hardman & Marshall, 2001; Hardman, 2003) show a progressive deconstruction of PE because of the gradual exclusion from school curricula Klein (2003) believes that this process was already underway some 25 years ago.

Past initiatives taken by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the International Council for Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE) are indicative of the efforts made to address issues related to PE and school sport (Figure 1). In 1959 UNESCO organised an international conference which is considered a landmark, since for the first time an international forum expressed its opinion regarding sport and its place in education (ED-76/Conf.205/col.4 in Telama, 2002:10).

In 1976 UNESCO initiated the First International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS I) held in Paris. At this conference an international strategy for developing PE and sport was initiated (UNESCO, 1999:1). Two years down the road UNESCO member countries highlighted the importance of PE and Sport by drafting the 1978 International Charter on Physical Education and Sport.

MINEPS II, held in 1988 in Moscow, again confirmed the aspirations of 1976 and of the PE Charter (UNESCO, 1999:1). However, the politicians realised that, due to several reasons, PE was progressively losing ground within school curricula. The illusions of the 1980s were replaced by disillusion of the 1990s (Klein, 2003).

In 1998 ICSSPE and its affiliates initiated the Worldwide Audit on the State and Status of PE in Schools. The whole process eventually culminated in the World Summit on PE held in Berlin in 1999. The intention of the World Summit was to reinforce the importance of PE as a life-long process by means of the Berlin Agenda that was adopted during this summit. This agenda served as a working document for MINEPS III, held in Punta del Este, Uruguay in 1999 (ICSSPE, 1999). The purpose of the Summit was primarily political, rather than academic with the intent to influence governmental decision-makers (Klein, 2003; Talbot, 2003), while MINEPS III placed PE on the world political agenda (Hardman, 2003).

Since 1959 dreams were dreamt, declarations were made and information was communicated to those in leadership positions while scientific research on the significance of physical activity has increased dramatically (Telama, 2002). However, PE seems to be the missing commodity in the school curriculum of many countries (Van Deventer, 2002a).

During the 1970s and 1980s there was growth in PE internationally, followed by a decline in the 1990s (Klein, 2003). Public policies during this period alternated between pedagogical humanism and political realism. The values, aims, objectives and subject content in, and for, the development of a form of human capital in society reveals the humanism side, while realism refers to time allocation, qualifications, partnerships and sports grounds with the perspective of economic efficiency. The evolution that PE finds itself in swings from humanism to realism (Klein, 1997; Klein, 2003).

Klein (2003:156) purports that the status of PE as a school subject is determined by three trading zones:

- The *theoretical trading zone* concerns the choice of values, the subject's matrix, the subject matter, aims, content and chosen physical activities. Commentators, ideologists and curriculum makers make these choices.
- The *political trading zone* brings the political officers, ministers and professionals to the PE stage. They are concerned with the state and status of the subject, time allocation, teacher education, the remuneration of workers, etc.
- The *institutional trading zone* involves the institutions, organisations and collective or individual actors involved in the definition of the boundaries of PE.

At a given time these three trading zones interact differently in a given state although they will be discussed separately (Klein, 2003). In the sections that follow the process that lead to the uncertain situation that PE finds itself in will be considered more precisely (Klein, 2003).

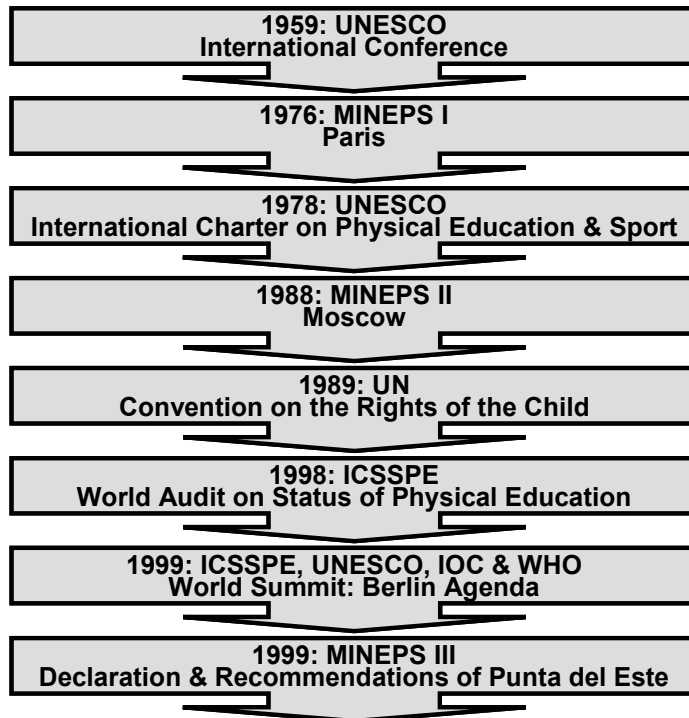


FIGURE 1. GLOBAL INITIATIVES

Trading-zones

The theoretical trading zone

Kirk (2003) views PE as a social construction and therefore a highly political process. PE is practised at a particular time in history and in particular places and therefore, the form that it takes on represent a selection from a range of possibilities. It is a highly social and political process in that the curricula reveals the interests, values and aspirations of individuals and groups responsible for the development thereof (Kirk, 2003).

Depending on the settings in which PE is instantiated the instructional discourse thereof takes specific and substantive forms and it is primarily concerned with making sense of the transmission and acquisition of knowledge in the physical domain. The *physical culture*, a range of discursive practices concerned with the maintenance, representation and regulation of the body, in part make up the *regulative discourse*. In contemporary Western societies it is centred on three highly codified, institutionalised forms of physical activity namely, sport, physical recreation and exercise. In relation to any particular teaching-learning episode pedagogic discourse is a means of describing how regulative discourse and instructional discourse relate to each other (Kirk, 2003:173-174).

Following Berstein, Kirk (2003:176) suggests that the *regulative discourse*, which in large is made up of the physical culture, embed the *instructional discourse* of school PE. The

discursive resources for constructing and constituting school PE, its subject matter, instructional strategies and forms of learning are provided by the communities of practice of sport, exercise and physical recreation.

To make sense of school PE teachers, learners and their parents, administrators and policy makers draw, though invariably differently and unequally on these discursive resources. In terms of the discursive practices of sport, exercise and physical recreation, PE has legitimacy for these groups of stakeholders. Through the legitimate peripheral participation of young people school PE reproduces the communities of practice of sport, exercise and recreation. We need to realise that this reproduction is never in the form of a one-to-one correspondence. It is rather always uneven, inequitable, contested and at times resisted (Kirk, 2003).

Through this way of thinking we can see that school PE rarely comes close to providing young people with opportunities for legitimate peripheral participation in physical cultural communities of practice. Although the communities of practice of sport, exercise and physical recreation provide school PE with its subject matter the physical culture has since the 1980s undergone rapid and accelerating change that have not been reproduced in schools. Therefore, the communities of practice that currently regulate, construct and constitute school PE either no longer exist, or else have become culturally obsolete (Kirk, 2003).

Kirk (2003) thus postulates that the crises in PE and the failures of educational reform are outcomes of this problem. In short PE is not able to reproduce the communities of practice that provide it with meaning and it fails to secure opportunities for young people's legitimate peripheral participation in these communities.

Klein (2003) also believes that in each educational system PE is the transmission of knowledge extracted from a physical culture, but that globally the values, contents and knowledge chosen for official PE differs. Curriculum design constitutes stake-holding around which a diversity of actors, ideologists and policy makers are gathered and all defend a theoretical point of view concerning PE as a school subject. In this theoretical space of PE there are mixed subject patterns, paradigms, theories and reasoning which is frequently competitive. Thus, in the words of Klein (2003:156):

The actual Physical Education frailty can be analysed in the light of controversies and compromises that appear in each national context, between several divergent subject matrixes and which contribute in the short term to instability.

The stability and clarity of the message according to social and political request determines the status of PE. Collective consensus with persuasive arguments can produce stability for PE (Klein, 2003). In order to build the subject matrix and define the relationship between PE and society the debate is essential in the long-term. However, continuous perpetual controversies and short-lived compromises in the short-term frequently provide the general public or the politicians with the impression of a theorisation's excess according to a pragmatic subject. Klein (2003) wonders whether these theoretical reflections are really necessary since misunderstandings often contribute to the de-stabilisation of the subject which is perceived as a space organised around an impossible quest for compromise.

Fisher (2003), however, believes that the agenda is really driven by sport in most countries of the world. Penney (in Fisher, 2003:141) states that the demands of elite sport increasingly

impact negatively on PE and that these interests can impinge upon or even override intrinsic educational interests. While the new South African government has to emphasise the redistribution of resources and broaden the base of youth participation it is equally, or even more, important to present a representative racial picture in high profile sports. To ensure favourable medal counts at elite sports competitions, the limited funds have to be allocated with these national priorities in mind. Against this backdrop the sports delivery network find it more economically and politically 'profitable' to promote elite sport at the expense of PE and 'sport for all' community projects (Burnett & Hollander, 1999:97). The same has happened in Australia prior to the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games (Kirk, 1997; Hardman, 2003). The same situation is found in England (Talbot, 1999). Many governments are led by politicians to provide substantial funding in the effort to establish some kind of national, political and cultural supremacy by seeking to win medals in Olympic and other world-level elite sport championships (Hardman, 2002).

According to Talbot (1997) PE survived in Britain's National Curriculum (NC) because of three parallel developments. Firstly, the strength of the sports lobby, secondly the health lobby and lastly the common approaches adopted by the various PE organisations.

In the case of Britain the sports lobby supported the claims of PE distinctive contribution towards the physical literacy of children, as well as the unique opportunity to learn the skills, knowledge and attitudes for later participation in sport and physical recreation (Talbot, 1997). In SA the same sentiment was espoused by the CEPD/EPU report of 1999. The report (CEPD/EPU, 1999:xviii) states that:

There does not appear to be a common understanding of the operational relationship between PE/HM [Human Movement] and sport among stakeholders, despite common consensus that PE/HM is the building block of sport.

Excellence in sport is by no means entirely negative. The development of Specialist Sport colleges at secondary school level in the United Kingdom (UK) and the emergence of a whole range of local partnerships to offer greater sporting opportunities for young people have boosted PE in many schools (Fisher, 2003). These schools are at the forefront of developments in PE and sport of whom all work with other schools to share their expertise, resources and good practice. This will ensure that locally a 'family of schools' are working together to provide training and support for teachers in secondary and primary schools and to maximise opportunities for children (Gilliver, 2003:13).

The political trading zone

What government decides goes into the curriculum plays a vital role in shaping the future provision of PE in schools (Penney & Evans, 1996). The institutional frailty of PE is determined not only by being a theoretical construction but also by being a political construction. Political agendas define time allocation, objectives and programmes for action by public power. Thus, the subject status of PE is essentially finalised by political interests. Political decisions hold a direct consequence on the frailty of PE as the subject status is favoured or reduced or in fact controlled by state or societal interests that outstrips the particular interests of the PE professional community. Political agendas determine the prominence of subjects in the sense that the subjects' ability to resolve concrete problems becomes the criterion for a discipline and is decisive for subject orientation (Klein, 2003).

It is thus clear that the status of PE will depend on negotiations conducted in the political trading zone and will largely depend on the broad-spread social request involving other actors who are able to contest the political decision (Klein, 2003).

The political evolution of the curriculum is one of the three critical points of PE in an international context (Klein 2002). This political evolution in contemporary society is often based on reaction to social circumstances in a complex relationship with professed ideological stances (Fisher, 2003). Klein (2002:9) refers to the *social request* for PE which stipulates that political institutions will strive to generate development when the request for PE is strong and when it is weak there is no urge to develop it. The health of the young population or the perceived poverty of the national sports teams may determine the strength of the request. The strength of the request may rest on a variety of reasons in many countries (Fisher, 2003).

It is believed that the former South African government viewed PE as an instrument to control its ideological agenda in the sense that in former White schools, PE encouraged a vigilant White militarism to prepare White South African boys for the total onslaught waged by Blacks and communists against White SA (Kloppers & Jansen, 1996; Kloppers, 1997).

What is worthwhile in PE, how it should be taught, who else should be involved, other than teachers and schools and the way it should be evaluated, is determined by the prevailing political agenda (Fisher, 2003). In the reform of education, and consequently PE, more radical examples are found. For example, the reunification of Germany gave PE a sudden and radical change of direction in many schools formerly located in the German Democratic Republic (Fisher, 2003). SA experienced a total onslaught on PE as a school subject which was replaced by Life Orientation, a learning area in the General Education and Training Band (GET) and a subject in the Further Education and Training Band (FET), with a completely different approach not only to content, but also to teaching and learning.

Recently, in terms of policy imperatives, the most significant influences have been the drive for accountability and value for money as well as the agenda generated around the demands of elite sport. In Sweden and in some of the *Länder* in Germany, for example, PE is located outside the main school curriculum. In these countries PE is delivered by local sports centres. This tendency is the manifestation of a number of issues including the need to reduce expenditure and free up curriculum time for supposedly more important subjects (Talbot, 1999; Fisher, 2003).

The Department of Education in SA has stated in numerous documents that the emphasis in educational policy is on mathematics, science and technology and not physical development. External agencies for the provision of physical activity programmes are also much part of the South African school landscape in some provinces, especially the Western Cape. Political rhetoric can play a major role in these developments. While these developments are taking place the value of PE and its importance to young people may be extolled (Fisher, 2003:141).

Bowe *et al.* (in Evans *et al.*, 1997:24) refers to the *state control model of policy* which distorts the policy process with its conception of distinct policy makers and implementers. In Britain it seems that the Working Group for the National Curriculum Physical Education (NCPE) was effectively *asked* to construct a curriculum with respect to its economic viability, rather than its educational desirability. We cannot ignore the way in which actions are framed by the

policy statements of more powerful others. In the case of Britain, as elsewhere, working groups neither have the authority nor the resources to contest the power of the central state (Evans *et al.*, 1997). The power of the state was also felt in SA during the drafting of the policy on the placement of PE and school sport during 2000. The whole process was abruptly abolished due to the curriculum review issue without providing any clear cut reasons (Van Deventer, 2002a). The power apparatus of the government makes it is very difficult, if not impossible, for parents [and academics] to pose alternative, counter-hegemonic strategies and proposals to the curriculum (DoE, 2000; Breidlid, 2003).

This vividly illustrates not only the tension between *ideal* intentions that the curriculum should be *broad and balanced* and *available to all children* and harsh economic realities, but also that policy making is a political process in which not all parties have similar capabilities to determine or privilege elements of a text (Evans *et al.*, 1997:28; Tomlinson, 1997).

Central Government is faced with an acute dilemma having created in the public mind the view that education is both a cause of and a solution to the nation's economic problems. It is confronted with the dilemma of how to provide, or at least appear to provide, more and better quality education for less economic investment. In this regard a key concept - *flexibility* - has emerged in Government texts and discourse on curriculum provision to obscure the limited commitments of the state to PE and shift the onus of responsibility for the provision of PE from central government to schools (Evans *et al.*, 1997:28).

A policy ascribing flexibility to a subject area sounds like good news. However, this *ascription* cannot be equated either with freedom from constraint or unlimited possibilities for teachers to engage in either policy making or curriculum development. *Flexibility* in a liberal discourse does signify possibility, but in reality a school's or teacher's capacity to act upon such *freedom* will depend upon existing levels of available (physical and human) resources which may vary considerably across the subject areas. This implies that schools and teachers are being issued opportunity without statutory support for their curriculum initiatives. This implies responsibility without power or a version of a classic para-professional dilemma (Evans *et al.*, 1997:29; Van Deventer 2002a).

Although the disengagement of the state has certain advantages and disadvantages delivery will depend on the competency of the local authorities. Speedy accountability to the request of schools could be an advantage, but the disadvantages seem to override the advantages. When School Governing Bodies are responsible for PE its position can be reduced, it can be outsourced to sports development personnel or decreased to make room for other subjects on the timetable. The relationship between subjects and political control enlightens the situation PE finds itself in currently (Klein, 2003). Klein (2003:162) states that:

Certainly Physical Education is finalised or de-finalised by political interests. But the fragility depends on the balance between several social and political forces. The 'fragile' or 'assured' status of Physical Education depends on the negotiations conducted in the political trading zone.

The institutional trading zone

Klein (2003) believes that PE as an institutional trading zone can lead to its frailty or assurance. The degree of institutional homogeneity will determine the status of the subject. He

purports that PE appears to be a contested territory of social and institutional agencies since it constitutes stake-holding between teachers, their representatives, their trade unions and associations, the senior or area inspection service, the officials, the working groups that have the task of conceiving a new curriculum, the minister and so on. In this sense there are as many viewpoints for PE as there are many institutional strategies.

In SA the Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis (FOTIM) has been institutionalised by the Department of Education to deal with the evaluation of curriculums of various programmes including PE at tertiary level in the Gauteng area. The first meeting of the Regional Programme Review Committee on Physical Education, Health Education and Sport Science took place on Friday 16 May 2003. At this meeting concern was expressed regarding the lack of PE in the new proposed school system and that the learning area Life Orientation does not incorporate PE in the way that it should. Many children are thereby underexposed to physical activity in schools (FOTIM, 2003).

The policy process should be seen as a chain in the sense that there are many *sites of action*. At these sites policy is interpreted, re-contextualised and issues referred backwards and forwards in the chain. It is critical to understand why individuals at any one site acted as they did (Penney & Evans, 1996:87; Fisher, 2003:138). It is also important to understand the ways and means by which particular discourses were included, excluded, privileged, subordinated in and from *texts*. Penney and Evans's (1996) observation showed that the issues of who is entitled to speak, when and with what authority in the policy process (Ball in Penney & Evans, 1996:88) are of vital importance in understanding changes in *policy* and *practice* in PE. Public representation is much less part of decision-making in so-called democratic societies than expected. The mythologies surrounding subjects and the long-held opinions of Ministers and civil servants are far more important in the arbitrary decisions taken, than reasoned and informed argument (Talbot, 1997).

In terms of the overall process institutions and individuals constantly manipulate systems to their best advantage to fulfil their own agendas and to influence future policy. Across this map of educational provision a considerable amount of political and pedagogical discussion and negotiation can flow. It is therefore likely that, even at the various points in the process, different interpretations of what PE is and what it should be doing are possible. In the policy making process the power that is widely distributed among different interests or pressure groups play an important part. These groups form what Evans *et al.* (1997:24,25) calls *issues communities* with the result that the policy process becomes *segmented* (Buachalla in Evans *et al.*, 1997:25). This pluralist view of policy is helpful, but it does not consider the issue of what power is and how the capacities of actors to influence policy are differently distributed within and between individuals and interest groups in the social system (Evans *et al.*, 1997, Tomlinson, 1997).

In this respect the perspective of teachers may be some distance from those of politicians as well as parents. The perspective of learners may even be further away in some respects (Evans *et al.*, 1997; Fisher, 2003). In the words of Evans *et al.* (1997:22):

The central state has seemed all powerful and the 'agency' of professional educators sadly missing from the arena of decision making.

Policy is potentially something that is made and remade at all sites of educational practice and therefore we have to exercise caution with the concepts of *making* and *implementation*. Policy is not developed at a single point in time by powerful *others* operating *somewhere* outside schools handing down policy for implementation by their subordinates. Inevitably at various *sites* of educational practice policies are always interpreted and in the process they may be adapted, adopted, contested and resisted as they are *put into practice* (Hill; Ball in Evans *et al.*, 1997:23).

Evans *et al.* (1997:26) purports that policy is not only a process. They see policy “also as a text constituted by discourses which emerge from and continually interact with a variety of inter-related contexts”. In this sense we need to ask ourselves how the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) and the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) of SA were constituted, what gives it its distinctive features, which discourses within it were given privileged status and which were marginalised or omitted (Penney & Evans in Evans *et al.*, 1997:26). We might reason why games teaching are so privileged in the curriculum and why a progressive discourse such as Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) did not receive more prominence. However, a textual analysis, which is vital for understanding the policy process, alone will not be sufficient to inform us of what PE in schools will become in future years. Particular texts and the discourses within them are never complete, since text is relayed from Government (or quasi-Government bodies) to agencies of sub-government and thence on to arenas of practice in schools which inevitably leads to a re-conceptualisation of policy. These efforts illustrate the unevenness and asymmetry of the power relations in the process, the different capabilities of actors to influence the content of a policy text and the explicit and the subtle way in which power is exercised (Evans *et al.*, 1997).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Klein (2003) adopts a constructivist approach which contends that the academic content of PE not only depends on political engagements, theoretical points of view and institutional practices. By embracing two central issues, (i) theoretical and (ii) practical, content and context are moulded together.

(i) Within MINEPS Assemblies and national Working Groups personalised knowledge is formalised that forges a common code for PE. This collective action is then extended to the whole community of actors associated with the formulative development by diffusion processes within a network. At the next level personalised knowledge is transformed into conventional knowledge. Typical conventional objects are the UNESCO Charter and the Berlin Agenda for Action. The last level presupposes accessibility to the national and international community. This entails universal written directions for use that bind political responsibilities, senior administrators and academic experts at each network level. What is needed is implementation throughout the network and not only to be in agreement on the values of PE (Klein, 2003).

The question of knowledge and power circulation throughout a network will determine the functioning of PE at international and national levels. The values and cultures of partners in the network can be divergent, but the mutual interest in PE binds them like the poles of a network. It is not necessary for all partners to find agreement for a definition of the common

interest (Klein 2003), but the collective dynamics should allow a perpetual adjustment (Derouet in Klein, 2003:166).

(ii) At international, national and local levels several processes are in interaction and it is necessary to examine the co-ordination of collective action in the PE network. The MINEPS Assembly constitutes the international pole that orientates PE. The professional community (including the politicians) of each country that elaborates and transmits the content of PE constitutes the national poles. Each school constitutes the local pole where the effective implementation or the negotiations between actors takes place. To suppose that the three levels are connected in a coherent network around a common general interest for PE is illusionary (Klein, 2002, 2003). This was illustrated in the 1990s by the break between the political engagements and effective decisions. Therefore, it is necessary to oversee the study of the evolution of PE at each network's point in order to observe effective practices and to develop vigilance on politically effective realisation (Klein, 2003).

Information should be produced to identify and anticipate the political, institutional and theoretical tensions before the emergence of a major crisis. This kind of information generation at international level can be performed by the Intergovernmental Committee for Physical Education and Sport (CIGEPE) and the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE). In Europe at continental level it could be the European Physical Education Association (EUPEA) and the European Network of Sports Science Higher Education Institutions (ENSSHE) Physical Education Committee. In order to observe national decisions it does, however, seem to be necessary to combine and co-ordinate initiatives (Klein, 2003).

A number of African organisations and associations could become key stakeholders for developing policy on PE and sport on the continent. These stakeholders could be the International Council for Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE) Regional Co-ordinator for Africa, the African Union (AU), the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa (SCSA), the National Olympic Committees (NOC), the African Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Sport and Dance (AFAHPER-S.D.), the African Women in Sport Association (AWISA), other professional associations, governments, tertiary institutions, the private sector and NGOs (Van Deventer, 2002b).

The present fragility of PE exposes current deficiencies in its nature and scope therefore, all of the observer agencies must precisely define a conventional object for PE. In the 1970s work on the aims and objectives of PE was important. Today the study about effective teaching and learning in PE curricula is most important (Klein, 2003). Klein (2003) recommends that the common values identified by MINEPS must be completed by preparing a book of exigencies for PE. By defining the content, methods and learning outcomes/competencies this book should state what is expected of children at the end of delivery of the curriculum. This undertaking should be done within the framework of ICSSPE where it can be directed and lead by experts in PE. As Klein (2003:167) states:

The sustained future for Physical Education pre-supposes a break with the institutional fragility and a definition of a collective adjustment embodied in a book of exigencies in the framework of relevant international agencies.

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