



**It is time to advocate for our profession: A critical perspective on current initiatives**

‘Let’s not get caught napping’ (Tozer 2020, 13)

Carol Hawman (editor of PE Matters) left us wondering after the last edition of PE Matters, when she stated, ‘if physical education is about enabling pupils to be active for life (now and in the future), to what extent are we equipping them with the knowledge and understanding of how to do that?’ (Hawman 2020, 6). We were left, as a social justice movement, thinking how do we ensure that all students despite ethnicity, race, gender, language, ability, and the intersections of each oppression are equipped with the knowledge and understanding on how they can be active for life?

During the global pandemic that we find ourselves in, we have been obliterated with messages about keeping active ‘for now’ and quick activities that get us moving. While largely well-intentioned, we have been cautious of such initiatives and how equitable they are. As a collective, we were also struck with Tozer’s view in the last edition of PE Matters: ‘let’s not get caught napping’ (Tozer 2020, 13), specifically in reference to shaping our profession and discipline in meaningful ways that we believe are most helpful to our young people and society. With both of these important voices in the field in the back of our minds, we were drawn to highlighting and critiquing the practices that we see as detrimental to our professional work and movement for a more equitable physical education for **all** students.

As an example, one particular critique has been a televised national initiative to get students ‘fit’. To keep the initiative integrity let’s call it ‘Project HITT,’ the Trainer for the initiative, unique to others in the field has claimed to be the nations ‘new physical educator’. The Trainer is a well-known personal trainer and produces high-intensity workouts. Don’t get us wrong, as adults, we are advocates of all types of movement that spark our personal interests. However, when these initiatives are simply translated into videos with little/no modifications that are not developmentally appropriate for children or those with a disability, we question the inclusiveness of such practices and media stunts. We also question what and how it is accepted that personal trainers, not held to the same Teaching Standards (DfE, 2011) as the rest of the profession, are suddenly legitimate and accepted advocates for the discipline. Furthermore, as physical **educators**, we find the simplistic promotion of physical activity in the name of physical education detrimental to the subject. Physical activity is a useful mode of delivering physical education

but when delivered in certain ways it is not educative. To support, we have a simplified visual to help with the definitions. AfPE also has a more detailed version of their own on the website.

Physical education is progressive formal learning that takes place over the course of a student's education. It is educative through working in social, psychomotor, affective and cognitive domains. It can use a range of physical activities for lesson time. Body and environmental literacy is part of physical education.

Physical activity includes all movement activities, such as martial arts, circuit training, parkour, and swimming. Students should seek to take part in movement forms they enjoy and they can/should range over the span of a child's life as they develop.

School sport includes sports that take place beyond the formal curriculum time. For example, rugby or gymnastics club. Students can still learn through this mode, but learning is more informal in comparison to physical education.

It has been suggested that the public are not aware of the purpose of physical education and how it should contribute to a young person's education (McCullick 2013). McCullick (2013) suggests that it could be the ideologies of the obesity 'epidemic' that have influenced opinion and the continued discourse to raise fitness levels in physical education. Our simplified definitions diagram outlines the difference between physical education and physical activity. However, we recognise that it is unfortunate that physical activity has successfully been globally presented as physical education for decades. In specific reference to Project HITT, it has had over 15 million views after just one week, we have to acknowledge that this could have a long-term negative impact on our subject and its perceived value. It would appear that as a nation, this virtual form of schooling and sculpting of the body has provided the answer to our current 'inactive' population. We suggest that participation and advocates are reflecting a neoliberal society and ideals. In its simplest form, Project HITT has performative outcomes and these outcomes have become our driving force. We wonder, could the viewing numbers be misconstrued as having a positive impact on increasing participation and thus reshape what is valued as physical education? Important to consider is the fact that viewing numbers don't necessarily give a true picture; schools, as well as households, have been joining this platform as a substitute for physical education. A family of four or classroom of 25 counts as one viewing.

The neoliberal ideology of the initiative contributes by each person that partakes becomes responsible for their own actions, taking onus for their health, working towards a 'healthier' waistline and all without the physical presence of a teacher. Thus, embracing the self-imposed, individualistic, surveillance orientated, neoliberal ideals as detailed in Evans (2014). This reductive form of 'physical education', with a 'one size fits all' approach is not educative, equitable or safe. The suitability of the exercises is also of concern; high-intensity exercises such as those incorporated require adequate footwear, space and an understanding of the body to ensure the safety of all. This is something that has been advised virtually

and again, it is the responsibility of the individuals; as the target audience are children, this flags a major health and safety oversight.

As a collective social movement, we were contacted and reached out to others to get their thoughts/experiences on Project HITT which are detailed below:

**Governor: Anonymous**

*My concern about The Trainer in Project HITT is that his physique, lifestyle, brand etc is unrealistic and unobtainable for most children and young people. Praising and admiring such celebrity bodies can contribute to poor body image and actually threaten wellbeing. This could be physical; avoidance of or excessive exercising. It could be emotional; anxiety, depression, eating disorders.*

**Parent: Anonymous**

*Kids (9, 8 and 8) have been doing Project HITT every morning. Boy 9 is not a sporty kid in the traditional sense, but enjoys being active if it's playful and fun. He had some tears when getting really out of breath and feeling the burn on the first and second sessions, but fared better on the third. It would be great if the sessions had a few minutes of mindfulness or education about the connection felt between the body and emotions when 'working out'. Kids like 9 need to be supported to develop positive relationships with exercise, and The Trainer's approach is great but perhaps could reach all types of kids better with more consideration of the cognitive-affective.*

**Parent: Henry Dorling**

*Direct criticisms of the Project HITT 'PE' sessions have been fairly prevalent within the PE community on social media and beyond, mostly regarding the use of the term 'PE' and the misleading use of this to describe the particular style of exercise sessions and the potential damage this may bring to the perception of what 'PE' looks like in general public spheres. However, of more immediate concern has been the potential health and safety issues of this DIY style home-based physical activity aimed at children who perhaps have had little experience of high-intensity workouts, and equally for those parents who have limited understanding of age-appropriate physical activity and the potential impact of poor technique and pushing their physical capabilities too far.*

*This week I had to visit the minor injuries clinic at our local hospital. The appointment was needed for my 8-year-old daughter who had unfortunately gashed her leg on a piece of metal. (Incidentally, she had taken part in day 1 of the Project HITT's 'PE' session but was not impressed stating, 'It wasn't much fun...I didn't understand most of it.') Anyway, we went through to see the Nurse and as we sat down to assess her leg he said, 'not another Project HITT injury is it...? I've had 6 already this week!' I was a bit taken aback but perhaps not surprised that already in the space of three days these high-intensity interval training sessions had already started to negatively affect the people that were taking part in them in an attempt to be 'healthy.' Perhaps it is no surprise when kids are watching the Trainer be like Spiderman and he is literally jumping on and climbing up the walls...! On a serious note, it is worrying that for all the Trainer's good intentions, the Trainer may be inadvertently adding to the NHS burden rather than easing it, which at this unprecedented time, is surely not a good thing.*

**Teacher of PE: Joel Weston**

*The Trainer's idea of PE lessons doesn't sit well with me for one main reason. Having the audacity to label moving around in your living room as 'PE' is insulting. It completely discredits the work we do as PE teachers and devalues our subject. PE is a subject that allows students to: - develop life skills - learn about the human body - understand the benefits of a healthy, active lifestyle - build confidence and ability in a number of different sports None of these are achieved by jogging on the spot, in front of a camera.'*

We do not wish to take away from the fact that, due to the popularity of this phenomenon, Project HITT announced that profit will be put back into public services. This is a fantastic contribution especially as we are aware more than ever the strain that our healthcare system is under attack. However, "capitalism evolves in response to the needs of people in a time and place" (Zuboff, 2019, 31). Thus, while profit and revenue made will go to public services in immediate effect during COVID-19, the external monetary rewards of such initiatives will continue to repay the Trainer and other private enterprises for years to come. Capitalism, in which our society is married to, enables individual entrepreneurs and businesses to thrive in times of crisis because the needs of people require them. Such discourse creates the largest disparities in society and the divide between the privileged and under-privileged far greater. The rhetoric of specific brands/individuals continues to thrive due to loyal supporters and consumers. Which is why we must, as interested parties in physical education be able to critique, problematise, and reflect on where and what our profession is advocating for and as Tozer (2020, 13) said 'let's not get caught napping'!

To conclude, whilst we can appreciate and praise the effort and interest that these workouts have sparked and we acknowledge the potential increase in physical activity that the nation may be experiencing right now; fundamentally, activities of this nature are not grounded upon education and have not been planned or thought out towards younger children or those with a disability. It is noted that raising the concern of the sessions being called physical education, when they are actually defined as physical activity, is being petty, especially in the situation the country is in right now. However, at this time, when educating our children at home is at the forefront of parent's minds, it is imperative that we drive home our profession's identity – one that we have been trying to succeed with for decades now. If we do not and we allow "exercise" to be what the country sees physical education as, it raises concerns to what impact this could have when schools go back to "normal". The delivery of physical education in some countries, such as the United States has already moved towards a more physical activity, health-based offer. Secondly, and arguably of most immediate importance, is the safety of those participating. The activities created, and within our example above, are based upon adult HIIT exercises and are not altered to suit younger children or those with a disability. Following the advice of an adult personal trainer for a child's physical activity could have, and has already been seen to have, damaging consequences.

Therefore, our recommendation for what we can do in limited movement spaces is to:

- Listen to this podcast on what we can do while at home: <https://anchor.fm/shrehan-lynch/episodes/HPEatHome-ebnei2>
- Take part in activities that are meaningful to children and young people that get them outside and moving in ways that are age-specific such as chalking:



- Andy's wild workouts on BBC are age-appropriate and linked to animals and fun things for children to be engaged with: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06tmmvz>
- Research health-based physical education, that teaches about critical approaches to health: <https://peandsportvlog.wordpress.com/2015/10/15/vlog-18-health-based-pe-in-practice/>
- Get advice from others on how to make our physical education educative
- Create resources on physical activity workouts to make them educational

#### Authors Note:

We are eternally grateful to the contributors of this article, sharing your words allowed us to share a wider perspective. If any readers would like to share their opinion or learn more about critical perspectives and equitable physical education, please email us: [bamepeuk@gmail.com](mailto:bamepeuk@gmail.com) or follow us on Twitter: @BAME\_PE. We would love to our extend conversations surrounding quality physical education.

There may be shortcomings, factual errors, mistaken opinion that are included in this article, as authors we take responsibility for the article written and apologise profoundly for these.

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