

## **Introducing the Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy 2012 Scholar Lecture**

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## **Abstract**

As the current Convener and Co-convener of the Physical Education and Sports Pedagogy (PESP) Special Interest Group (SIG) of the British Educational Research Association (BERA), we offer this introductory commentary on David Kirk's paper "*Making a career in PESP in the corporatized university: Reflections on hegemony, resistance, collegiality and scholarship*". This was presented as the Scholar Lecture during the 2012 BERA annual conference for the PESP SIG. We begin by outlining the overarching purpose of the PESP SIG and the associated activities of the PESP, including the 'Invisible College', a one day professional development workshop, which features the Scholar Lecture. Our aim is to situate David's Scholar Lecture within the PESP SIG – a group that has developed over the past fifteen years under the auspices of BERA. After this, we move to David's Scholar Lecture and highlight a number of points of tension that the paper raises for us.

**Keywords:** Corporatization; universities; physical education; academics; careers; new managerialism;

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## **The BERA Physical Education Sport Pedagogy Special Interest Group**

BERA is a member-led organization supporting research in education. It facilitates a range of activities throughout the year including an annual conference, specialist seminars, peer-reviewed journals and web-based resources. BERA also brings individual researchers together with shared interests through thirty SIGs. The PESP SIG was formed in 1999 and since then has grown to be one of the largest groups in BERA. The SIG embraces educational research in the areas of physical education and sport in schools; physical education teacher education, and continuing professional development for teachers and other professionals working in physical education and school sport settings. The group aims to provide a supportive environment for new and experienced researchers, and SIG activities seek to promote networking and encourage professional learning, including globally. Indeed we regularly attract scholars from Europe, Australia, New Zealand, the USA and Canada to our SIG, and likewise, UK based scholars often participate in annual conferences and activities hosted by partner educational associations and SIGs around the world.

As part of the PESP SIG activities an annual 'Invisible College' (pre-conference day) is organized, usually the day before the start of the main BERA annual conference.

The idea for the Invisible College was taken from our counterpart SIG at the American Educational Research Association (Research on Learning and Instruction in Physical Education SIG). The morning session of the Invisible College normally includes a Scholar Lecture and in the afternoon there are informal workshops facilitated by PESP scholars and those positioned more broadly within education. In addition, each year the PESP SIG presents the winners of three annual awards; the first two are connected to the journal *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* and

celebrate a ‘best paper’ and acknowledge a best ‘reviewer contribution’ from the previous year’s journal submissions. The third award is given to the Scholar for their lecture, recognizing their distinguished contribution to the PESP research community. The Scholar Lecture provides an opportunity for participants at the Invisible College to listen and debate a variety of issues pertinent to our PESP research community. The lecture seeks to advance scholarly thinking and it is usual for it to be published in either *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* or *Sport, Education and Society* journals. Previous Scholar Lectures have been delivered by Mary O’Sullivan; Jan Wright; Kathy Armour; Richard Tinning; Peter Hastie; Doune MacDonald and John Evans. Having briefly outlined the development and activities of the PESP SIG we will now introduce the 2012 Scholar Lecture.

### **The Corporatized University and PESP**

David’s 2012 lecture marks the 8<sup>th</sup> Scholar Lecture. The essence of his lecture is a concern with the global phenomena of the corporatized university and the implications for building a career within PESP. He draws on Steck (2003: 74) for his definition of the corporatized university:

The corporatized university is defined as an institution that is characterized by processes, decisional criteria, expectations, organizational culture, and operating practices that are taken from, and have their origins in, the modern business corporation. It is characterized by the entry of the university into marketplace relationships and by the use of market strategies in university decision making.

The impact of corporatization on our work is widespread; David summarises Steck’s eight major effects, including most notably from our point of view, the way in which the nature of academic work is changing from collegial to hierarchical, characterised

by managerism (or ‘new managerialism’ or neo-liberalism as it is sometimes known elsewhere), and the changing student-university relationship. The latter sees students become consumers, increasingly opting for courses able, to offer them, in their minds, a better ‘return’ for their investment with a position in the job market. As a result, it is suggested that interest in critical pedagogy and scholarship becomes much less likely than before - one of the key concerns for our work within PESP.

Sharing personal experiences from across his thirty-year career working in different universities internationally, David draws on specific episodes to illustrate how he has negotiated the challenges of corporatization. Positioning himself as an ‘optimistic’ resister, he describes how he has used strategizing, pragmatism, compromise, and above all collegiality and integrity at different times and in response to different pressures in his work at Loughborough, Deakin, and Leeds Metropolitan universities respectively. An important point for him is that our relationship to corporatization is ‘rarely unambiguous and clear cut’, a point to which we will return below.

Essentially, David argues for ‘scholarship-as-resistance’ and he goes on to provide a number of strategies for ‘surviving and thriving’ within the corporatized university.

His lecture stimulates a number of key questions. What kinds of higher learning are valued within a corporatized university? Can the tensions between the student as ‘customer’ and ‘learner’ be reconciled? What are the costs and benefits of confronting corporatization through scholarship-as-resistance? How can integrity in scholarship survive within the corporatized university? Whilst these and other questions are relevant to our PESP community, David’s lecture prompted us to reflect, here, on two specific points of tension. These inevitably reflect our own biographies, experiences and positioning within PESP. We will leave the various authors that follow David’s

lecture in the journal to present a full response to his work; here we have the more modest agenda of pointing to a number of ambiguities and/or silences in David's thesis where we would suggest further consideration and/or research is needed.

### **The Gendered Processes of Corporatization**

Whilst the effects of corporatization and the associated 'performative cultures' it promotes for PESP are felt globally (e.g. Evans, 2013; MacDonald, 2011; MacDonald, 2012), we agree with David that our relationship with them are best seen as ambiguous and far from clear cut. The effects of corporatization are experienced differently by individuals positioned across institutions, disciplines and research traditions.. As Davies (2003) cogently argues, resisting new managerial practices is not easy, particularly as they are designed to be seen as 'natural' and 'inevitable'. More importantly, not everyone is equally positioned in order to do this. Whilst David alludes to the ways in which, for example, flexible working practices, might differently impact on women, we suggest a more thorough analysis of the *gendered* processes of corporatization and their differential effects on women and men in PESP is warranted (see Acker and Armenti, 2004; Deem, 2003). Similarly, we know little about how the processes of corporatization have changed/increased over time, or how our younger colleagues who have known little else, experience and negotiate these performative cultures (e.g. Casey and Fletcher, 2012).

### **Disciplinary Cultures, Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) and 'Flying above the radar'**

Scholar lectures are designed to encourage debate and questioning, and in this regard, David's lecture delivered. One of the more controversial points of his lecture – if the questions from the audience after the lecture were any indication – was the defence of

his decision to move into the department of Human Movement during a restructuring at Deakin University, rather than remain with his education scholars. He argued that his work in PE was more likely to find a more favourable environment alongside kinesiology colleagues than those in education, a position he continues to advocate. Taken alongside his uncompromising view that PE pedagogues can ‘no longer fly below the radar’ and not engage in research and scholarly practice, it is not difficult to see how PESP scholars, particularly teacher educators located within schools of education might have felt somewhat besieged. How then should PESP scholars located within schools of education look to develop their (research) career? Recent research on becoming ‘research successful’ whilst working in the labour intensive area of teacher education points more to the determination and resilience of individuals, rather than institutional structures of support (see Murray and Mahony, 2011). All of this seems to fly in the face of David’s call for collectivism and collegiality - the implication being that PESP scholars working in teacher education should look to (re)locate themselves in kinesiology or suffer the consequences!<sup>i</sup>

It is important to return to the key point that David makes about individuals’ *ambiguous* relationships to the processes of corporatization. Whilst global in nature, the effects of corporatization are felt nationally and locally across what is, in the UK at least, a highly differentiated and unequal field of university education. Although the binary divide in the UK between universities and polytechnics theoretically disappeared in 1992, in practice the differences between the pre and post 1992 universities, particularly in relation to research, remains highly significant for individuals, including those in PESP. It is difficult to see how David’s suggestion that different types of scholarly work (drawing from Boyer’s work and including the

scholarship of teaching) *could* be treated with parity; others working within our highly elitist, research intensive institutions present a somewhat different picture (see Sparkes, 2007). It seems pertinent that BERA has chosen as one of its projects to celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, an exploration of the relationship between research and teacher education, particularly given the most recent policy changes in England at least that sees the role of universities is being dramatically downgraded (Research Intelligence, 2011; BERA, 2013).

David's optimism is admirable – and perhaps appropriate given that the Scholar lecture is often delivered to audiences of young academics - however a more nuanced analysis of university cultures and practices would reveal the deep inequalities existing between and within different institutions and subject cultures (including teacher education), and which significantly affect individual experience, and concomitantly, their power to resist.

In closing, we agree with David and others who have argued that a key way in which we can withstand the corporatization of university life and its 'anti-intellectual effects' is to foster an understanding of its processes and seek to 'denaturalise' it. Drawing on Richardson's work, Davies (2003: 102), for example, concludes that 'by making its assumptions and mechanisms visible, we open up the possibility of new cultural narratives or collective stories with transformative potential'. We suggest that David's Scholar Lecture provides an important impetus for us to begin that process.

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<sup>i</sup> It is ironic that one of us (Anne) did this some time ago, in an effort to find spaces to continue feminist praxis – see Flintoff (2013).