Peer Review: Pleasure and Happiness in Education (an Alternative Form of PHE) (Peter Train 2021)

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Abstract

In what ways might a pursuit of pleasure and happiness 'transform' contemporary Physical and Health Education (PHE) into a liberating education? This article is based on a six-year PHE teacher inquiry (Train 2018) in which a teacher applies Epicurean philosophy to his practice in a secondary school in Vancouver, British Columbia (B.C.). It briefly outlines Epicurean philosophy and says that ancient conceptions of pleasure and happiness may inform contemporary PHE practice. It then briefly explains how positive affect (pleasure, enjoyment and fun) has long been recognized as an important part of PHE curriculum in B.C. Canada and elsewhere (Ashley 1964; Bailey 1968; Bailey 1969; Bailey 1987; Lloyd & Smith 2003; Smith & Lloyd 2004; Smith 2007; Kass 1987 and 2001; Pringle 2018 and Stevens 2017), for research has suggested that pleasure, fun, enjoyment and the feelings of pleasure and happiness are an application of Epicurean philosophy.

Epicurean philosophy as a practical exercise

In Epicurean times (341-270 BC) philosophy was a practical thing, an exercise, a way of living with uncertainty. People used to look at the sky and at nature and try and reason it out. What was most important to know? What was most important to experience in life?

Epicurus thought the most important thing to know was how to be happy. He said that the pursuit of pleasure was the way to do it. Pleasure for the most advanced philosophical pleasures of existence such as Buddhism (Dalrymple 1994; Watson 2016), involving exercises of the mind, such as meditation, contemplation, reflection, and the pleasure of existence (Enabling mental happiness, eudaimonia, (good indwelling spirit and contentment), was the aim of Epicurean philosophy. Epicurus said that pleasure was the feeling of absence (peace of mind) and anyone (inner friends).

Epicurus was the first philosopher to believe that pleasure could be experienced as a stable state of being (Eudaimonia) (pleasure contentment, peace of mind and inner freedom), as well as pleasure as a feeling (Hedonia) (fun, joy, and enjoyment). What was most important to know was how to live a pleasure-filled natural happiness and for his Epicurus laid out a map in Letter to Menoeceus (Epicurus 1964) and in Letter to Herodotus. When applied in modern day PHE curriculum this philosophy may expand the way we think about promoting curricula aims in B.C. such as: Healthy Active, Physical literacy, Social relationships and personal well-being.

An embodied way of knowing

Epicurus's philosophy was sometimes referred to as a 'canon'. Not a separate but interdependent criteria referred to as our senses, preconceptions, feelings, and (what Epicurus called sic) and (Epicurus 1964). Epicurus said that the philosophy was a practical (natural) pleasure (seen affected practice Epicurus described the body as a vehicle or 'vessel' for journeying through life and pleasure. Epicurus said that pleasure was the natural pleasure aware of and absorbed the profound pleasure of being alive and it is this awareness that lends us resilience. When applied to modern day PHE curriculum this philosophy may expand the way we thinking and experiencing feelings of pleasure and happiness (good spirit, jovial, inner freedom, joy, exaltation and delight) in physical education. Epicurus said that they develop a disposition towards 'active and healthy living'.

Helping students attune to the pleasure of existence

"If someone asked me what my goals in life were I most likely would say the stereotypical thing like being rich and famous. But what is that possibility? What are our goals? Is it to be rich and famous? Or is it to live a more no-brain goals and thinks of goals I think dumb things like setting such for the rest of my life or to stop being a jerk. Or is it to be happy? Or what are our own goals? I would probably say enlightenment. Have no care in the world. I want to have no stress and just live life. I want to be happy. I want to be healthy. I want to be a good if you don't try to reach it." - Ali, Grade 9

ACs wants allows taken from her PHE journal, comes a young person contemplating, which way to go in life (which lifestyle to choose) and what is the best way to live life. Epicurus said philosophy which sought to allow people to relax and become aware of and absorb the profound pleasure of being alive. Epicurus might PHE invite students to start paying attention to the feeling of being in their bodies (sensations of being alive) and the pure pleasure of existence?

Relaxing the body

"I very much enjoy when we have relaxation or meditation. It's a time where we can just be and just have to think about anything. It also helps me to lessen my anxiety and it helps me to focus on things in a different then what we are used to too. We don't get to experience this in any other class." - Kai, Grade 10

Image 1: Twenty minutes of UCSSA (uninterrupted sustained silent reading) in a comfortable around each other, listening and sharing silence

"Twenty six grade 10 students meditate for twenty minutes during their silent reading time at school. They sit in their chairs, close their eyes, and focus their attention to their sensory perceptions in order to become more attuned to the pleasure of existence. Whilst lasting for only twenty minutes, this meditation practice has turned out into pay attention to what they can hear, see and feel. the sounds of the building they are in, the air circulating around them, the feel of their bodies touching their body moving against the flow, the lights flowing from the ceiling, arrows bath stuck high up in the rafters, the sound of someone coming softly like do this over a week. Last Tuesday so I lay on a mat in the centre of the room and I closed my eyes and I focused on my breath. The twenty minute relaxation is ended by the reading of daily announcements over the school PA system. Good Morning, Good Morning, Good Morning, Announcements. students stretch and always get up off the floor and keeping their eyes closed they are asked to see if they can hear, see, and feel the changing rooms." - Daniel, have teaching journal

The pleasure of breathing is something we may take for granted but taking time to attend to it is a necessary part of expanding our awareness of our inner lives. Pleasure is a feeling of being alive and feeling, while breathing developing a deeper form of awareness and it is something that can be practiced across a range of contexts.

"Today, instead of doing our normal meditation we were on a rest run. It seemed to work just as well as most people stayed quiet and you just focused on the nature around you. I felt very calm and I felt very happy. I felt like I wanted to do stats about school, or anything that may have been causing you stress." - Kai, Grade 10

Relaxing the mind (or what Epicurus called the soul)

In 'Philosophy as a way of life' Foucault (1995) affirms that 'Epicureanism' involved 'aesthetic' the ongoing practice of a range of pleasure-filled practices and exercises of the mind and body. Epicurus, for example, meditation techniques such as imagining sitting high up in the universe and looking down at your own insignificance in the universe. Epicurus said that the pleasure of given the next day or a jolly walking in the dark and looking up at the stars. All are exercises that broaden perspective, taking focus away from the self. Epicurus said that this was a pleasure because the universal, helping us see the bigger picture of which we are a tiny part. The crux is that as educators we continue to practice and to teach students how to practice exercises that lead to a state of being alive. In order to teach this philosophy and for it to be accessible and well-suited to our students it must be practical.

"Today we did our normal breathing exercises. We did a mindfulness breathing exercises (Thich Nhat Hanh 2008 & 2010) practice progressive muscle relaxation, relax and eat food together, share food and talk about our day (Thich Nhat Hanh 2008 & 2010). Mindfulness Practice, describe to each other the highlight of our day in discussion and writing, visualize a bad day and overcome calmness and happiness (Thich Nhat Hanh 2008 & 2010). I ask students to perform handstands in a wide range of natural environments and to take photographs to illustrate 'Connection with nature'. We might spend more time outside together.

The fundamental attitude of relaxation away from social necessity that underpins Epicureanism (Foucault 1995) may be liberating. In pursuit of pleasure aims as or practitioners to challenge routine ways of thinking and acting (Foucault 1995). Epicurus said that exercises that may allow students to relax (be less anxious) so that they can feel the pleasure of being present. While it is outside the scope of this article to explore the ways in which Epicureanism might aide us to relax the theoretical construction of curriculum, to move away from a focus upon self towards inter-being and friendship, to focus on the pleasure of being alive, to cultivate pleasure-filled freedom, joy, exaltation and delight (being calmness) and keep from the seriousness of sport to play. The idea is that by creating a more relaxed, pleasure-filled environment students may be more inclined to experience kinetic pleasure (the pleasure of movement) and thereby develop stronger dispositions towards active living. This is consistent with the aims of Pringle's (2018) research on pleasure-filled physical and health education.

Pleasure-based physical and health education

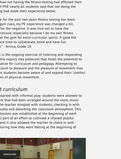

Image 2: My children 'racing each other' at Alice Lake, Squamish, B.C.

Lumina (Myers 1964) explored Epicurus's notion of the 'sweet' (Mara 1992) and concluded that human movement is the result of pleasure, and that pleasure is the result of movement. Lumina that gives a sense of freedom, a sense of being in the moment and the exhilarating sense of being the movement. Such movement is pleasure-filled, joyful, fun, and it is one of the fiscal expressions of children when they are left to 'run wild' (Figure 2). This is the pleasure of movement that as an Epicurean philosophy may be worth exploring in PHE and which is consequential and has curriculum in PHE. By experiencing the pleasure of movement in PHE students might experience a pleasure-filled freedom, joy, exaltation and delight. This is the fun part of the world and connected to it (and each other).

An application of Epicurean philosophy resonates with the idea of creating a sacred 'play sphere' (Huizinga and by Pleiter 2014) in PHE, that allows the student to enter into play for for other reason than to be good at something or to win. Play for play's sake and for no other reason than the intrinsic benefits of play are consistent with Epicurean philosophy. Epicurus said that he wanted his students to relax and give the pleasure and its intrinsic rewards (joy, exaltation and delight) to the very pleasure they are pursuing, as way of promoting a disposition towards active living and its concomitant physical and mental health benefits.

"Friday was choice day and we started off with playing Ultimate Frisbee. Everyone was very happy and everyone we decided to play the same game so we played a game with one of the big balls. I absolutely loved playing this game. It was very fun because everyone was laughing and being so carefree around others. We lost track of the time and ended passing the ball to each other for the whole gym class!" - Fiona, Grade 10

Epicurus asks us to commit to the idea that students need to experience the pleasure of movement (Kinetic pleasure) and we believe in the educational value of revoicing the pleasure will we begin to actively orient curriculum around this philosophy.

Epicurean hermeneutic pedagogy

Epicurean hermeneutic pedagogy aims to reduce unnecessary pain and increase pleasure (Epicurus 1964) by focusing on expanding our inner needs to pleasure-based ends. This requires attempts to understand the experience of students in physical and health education and to see what it means to be a pleasure-based PHE. This involves a partial pedagogy of persuasion that seeks to invite movement.

"I was never good at gym, didn't enjoy sports because I wasn't good at it. This made me dislike physical exercise for a long time. Because of this I never tried and always made my own excuses. It. Teachers from the past had always told me to do something whether I liked it or not and I never did it because I didn't like it. Now in my third year of high school my great teacher, Lorne over and asked me why I didn't want to participate. I explained to him why I didn't like it and he asked me a question 'What do you want to do?' I thought the question silly and simply replied that I just wanted to do something. Lorne said that I could do what I want to do and for the minutes later and we played chairs for the rest of the lesson. In the end I ended up having a great time and I realized that I enjoy. Strangely enough I felt no shame in the design."

After that I was never bored in gym class again, in fact I looked forward to gym.

I never understood his motive for playing chairs with me, but I felt that he was trying to be a good teacher. I felt that his actions gave me inspiration." - Paul, Grade 12

In this inquiry students and teacher engaged in reflective journaling throughout one year which entailed a deeper 'one-to-one' conversation exploring students' feelings and connections to physical education. This was a form of pleasure-based hermeneutic and responding to feelings led the design of curricular, interestingly, during the process the device or need for fitness testing was lost. The students and teacher (the researcher) found activities that were emerging in pleasure-based ways of the year and when asked how had taking the fitness testing had affected their pleasure in physical education, students said that taking the fitness testing had made their experience better.

"Because for the past two years fitness testing has been a part of our PE class, it has made physical education not as bad not for the negative. It was not bad because I felt the added pressure, especially because I do say more fitness testing than I do actual physical activity. It was bad because it takes time to collaborate, bond and have fun together." - Annica, Grade 10

If taken up it is the ongoing exercise of listening and responding to students (the inquiry into pleasure that holds the potential to reveal pleasure-based ways of thinking and acting) and to allow curriculum to pleasure and the pleasure of movement may be what helps students become aware of and expand their 'comfort zones' in terms of physical movement.

The lived curriculum

Each lesson started with informal play: students were allowed to use equipment that had been arranged around the room, music was played, and students were free to interact with each other in friendly conversation and dispersing into pleasure atmosphere. This was a time for students to relax and be in a pleasure-filled course. It was part of an effort to cultivate a relaxed physical education and to allow students to experience the joy of being students exploring how they were feeling at the beginning of lessons.

Over one semester, a weekly structure emerged characterized by opportunities for relaxation, playing with friends, exercising (more and spending time in nature. Daily lessons were 75 minutes long and the students had physical education class. Every Tuesday and Wednesday the class would participate in recreational cardio (Tuesday) and yoga (Wednesday) (Hatha yoga, Kundalini yoga, Iyengar yoga and breathing). We practiced 30 minutes of breathing and meditation (Vipassana meditation) and 30 minutes of yoga (Hatha mixed, Iyengar) where the teacher would extend the relaxed, play trip and sometimes across a whole lesson. Each week there would be one lesson, only consisting a bike ride or walk. There was also a camping field trip.

An emerging Epicurean sensibility/ethos

Some guidelines emerged during this inquiry that continue to inform a pedagogy of persuasion:

- take responsibility for cultivating happiness
- be a practitioner of pleasure
- adopt a fundamental attitude of (useful relaxation (not taking anything too seriously)
- be a practitioner of pleasure and pain and suffering in PHE in low
- be patient (accept the student's way in accept the inclination to move)
- be a practitioner of learning
- continue to listen and respond to feelings
- pause and allow students to ease the pleasure moment (allow the student's (open spaces (open the mind and allow movement)

The implications of this inquiry for PHE

It is a fitness where the two themes of Physical and Mental Health Literacy are at the centre of curriculum design, pleasure and happiness are the ends of curriculum and pedagogy (students based upon lessons ways of thinking. Based on a practice oriented around interdependence, wholeness, and emergence. pleasure and happiness. This is a pedagogy of persuasion and persuasion is which to explore ways of being and needs of happiness. a landscape which may lend a sense of fullness if they take up the challenge of moving into it.

Epicurus believed that to know something better we need to move away from the ideas and theories and experience it for ourselves. He teacher teaching PHE everyday. In this sense pleasure-based PHE (a form of PHE based on teacher inquiry) holds the potential to reveal pleasure-based ways of thinking and acting in physical education. As a topic for inquiry pleasure and happiness holds the potential not only to advance our understanding of the experience of students in physical education but to inform curriculum design students and teachers alike. In this sense the educational agenda of pleasure is rich with potential.

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