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Continuing the Conversation with Ward et al. (2022): Some Thoughts on Different Approaches to Epistemologically Grounded Questions

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ABSTRACT
This paper is a comment to Ward et al. (2020) on the irresponsiveness to a previous paper in which we elaborate on a phonetic perspective on pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) in physical education. In our previous paper, we point to what we see as limitations in PCK-work in physical education. In their response, Ward et al. (2022) argue that we have misrepresented their research as well as the behaviorist epistemology. In this comment, we acknowledge distinctions in PCK-research that were not captured in our original paper. We also argue for why our understanding of the PCK-research was based on interpretations rather than a case of misrepresentation. Further, we argue for the constant acknowledgment of ideology in research. Finally, we discuss the need for clarity regarding the meaning of performance when viewed as content knowledge.

KEYWORDS
Physical education; pedagogical content knowledge; epistemology; misrepresentation; ideology; performance

In their piece “Correcting the record: A response to Backman and Barker (2020)” (this issue), Ward et al. (2022) respond to our paper “Re-thinking pedagogical content knowledge for physical education teachers – implications for physical education teacher education” which was published in Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy. We are grateful for the opportunity to engage in further discussion about what it means to conduct research on physical education teacher knowledge, a discussion in which many Quest readers have considerable investment. We also believe that points raised by Ward and colleagues touch upon the existence of different epistemological perspectives within the field, a topic of ongoing interest to physical education scholars (Kretchmar, 2008; Tinning, 2015).

We want to begin by underscoring the insights into teaching and teacher education that the work of Ward and colleagues have provided. We have found the Shulman-inspired work on content knowledge (CK) and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) in physical education particularly useful. In our own research (Backman et al., 2019, 2020, 2021; Nyberg et al., 2020), we have drawn widely and fruitfully on Ward’s and his colleagues’ work. As Ward et al. point out in this issue, despite some substantive differences in our positions, there are a number of fundamental issues on which we agree. These include the proposition that multiple research perspectives are needed on physical education teacher competence, and that critique is an essential and productive
feature of academic discourse. That said, there are some issues raised by Ward et al. that we feel are worth commenting on. In this short “response to a response”, we would like to briefly clarify our stance and some of the points we made.

Ward and colleagues label our paper as a “misrepresentation” of their work. We refute this. It was never our intention to purposely or deliberately miscredit (see Henning, 2017; Resnik, 2001) the work of Ward and colleagues or mislead readers. Our aim with the paper was to add a new perspective to contemporary discussions of PCK in physical education and physical education teacher education (PETE). To achieve this aim, we provided a review of PCK literature and an interpretation of what we saw as four key assumptions underpinning much of this literature. We acknowledge that there are distinctions that we did not capture in our review and which Ward et al. describe in detail in their response. Still, we stand by our interpretation, namely that current PCK research based on behaviorist principles relies on a technical logic rather than a practical logic (Cooke & Carr, 2014; Jones, 2017). It is on the basis of this distinction that we believe our paper adds something new.

In our paper, we claim to contribute to ongoing discussions about PCK in physical education. Ward et al. draw attention to several studies that we missed in our review, suggesting that examining these studies would have helped us to develop a more comprehensive, nuanced understanding of current PCK issues. While we accept that we missed Kim et al. (2018) useful investigation of the influence of CK on PCK, the other studies that are mentioned (Chang et al., 2020; Kim & Ko, 2020; Stefanou et al., 2020) had not been published at the time we submitted the final version of our paper. It would thus have been difficult for us to benefit from the insights provided in this research.

In two places in their piece, Ward and colleagues stress that they “place an understanding of teaching and learning ahead of ideological battles” (p. 13). We have two reflections here. The first concerns “ideology”. We believe that it is ingenious to think that teaching and learning can exist outside ideology (Apple, 2018). In our view, all educational research is ideological, regardless of its orienting theoretical perspective. For us, Ward and colleagues’ response emphasizes a need for physical education scholars to continue to reflect on the influence of ideology on their theoretical, methodological, epistemological, and ethical choices, regardless of the issues they are trying to understand. The second reflection concerns the term “battle”. Ward and company assert that our paper is meant as an epistemological misrepresentation of behaviorist inspired research. We accept that critique can be interpreted as taking part in a battle, especially when critique has taken aggressive forms in the past (Kretchmar, 2008; Tinning, 2015). Yet when we wrote the paper, our intention was not to demonstrate the weaknesses of PCK, but rather to raise other aspects of teacher competence that we felt deserved attention. We certainly did not set out to attack current PCK research. In one respect, we sincerely regret that our paper was interpreted as a misrepresentation, in another, we are concerned that framing our critique as upholding an ideological battle shuts down possibilities for further dialogue.

Finally, and in the interests of bringing the discussion back to PCK, we would like to raise an issue that is still unclear to us. As we have understood the Shulman-inspired work in physical education, Common Content Knowledge (CCK) is a form of teacher knowledge which includes performance in sports and physical activity (see for example, Iserbyt, Ward, & Li, 2017; Iserbyt, Ward, & Martens, 2016; Ward, 2009; Ward, He et al., 2018; Ward, Kim et al., 2015). Yet from the response of Ward, Ayvazo et al. (2022), it is not clear whether this is the case. Ward, Ayvazo et al. (2022) maintain that “there is an over-emphasis on content
classes teaching performance of motor skills over CCK” and that “more time must be devoted to CCK and SCK and that less time should be devoted to a focus on performance” (p. 9). In summarizing their position, Ward, Ayvazo et al. (2022) claim that “while we believe teachers should be able to perform some of the content they teach, they do need to know CCK” (p. 9). Our question is: does this mean that performance for a physical education teacher is something other than CCK? Put differently, what does performance in physical education mean in relation to knowing CCK? While a deeper elaboration of this topic is beyond the scope of this paper, these questions can hopefully stimulate further debate.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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**References**


