

On the front foot: An Australian Health and Physical Education (HPE) perspective

***Dr Timothy Lynch**

Monash University, Faculty of Education (Melbourne, Australia)

Keywords

Health and Physical Education, Health, Physical Education, Primary Education, Community Collaboration, Curriculum Reform, Sport, Schools

Abstract

When considering the theme ‘Towards building a new sport system’, it is important that as for any structure, there are strong foundations. Sport is a logical extension of a school’s physical education (PE) program (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992). Furthermore, research suggests that the optimum time for children to learn and refine their motor skills and to be introduced to positive PE experiences is during preschool and early primary school years. It is therefore argued that to build an ideal sport system, as suggested by the title, we need to ‘begin on the front foot’ through quality Health and Physical Education (HPE) implementation for children. More so, an ideal sport system requires an inclusive, developmentally appropriate and progressive infrastructure within schools that enhance success and opportunity, and ultimately health and wellbeing for all. This concept is supported by the inaugural ICHPER-SD world congress theme, ‘Child Health and the School’. The purpose of this paper is to share five essential guiding pillars from the recent Australian HPE curriculum reform; educative, strength-based, movement, health literacy, and critical inquiry (Macdonald, 2013). It is proposed that these pillars offer direction for building a sport system and are examined through investigating successful practical examples.

Introduction

Australia has a new national curriculum Framework for Health and Physical Education (HPE). The national curriculum was recently reviewed and “there was general satisfaction with the way this curriculum had been developed and the final result” (Australian Government, 2014). Also, the review “indicated strong support for the inclusion of Health and Physical Education (HPE) in the Australian Curriculum” (Australian Council for Health Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER), 2014). The HPE national curriculum is awaiting final endorsement by the Australian Government, however is being implemented by various schools around the country.

The HPE Framework document is an ‘ideal’ policy document (Hickey, Kirk, Macdonald & Penney, 2014), more specifically, it is a public incremental educational policy (Dinan-Thompson, 1998) that has gradually been enacted by Australian schooling systems over the last 20 years (Macdonald, 2013; Lynch, 2014; 2005). Policies are a matter of the ‘authoritative allocation of values’, the operational statements of values, or ‘statements of prescriptive intent’ (Kogan, 1975, p.55). The HPE national curriculum provides a flexible framework conceptualized as text (Penney, 2014). “Public policy is whatever governments

choose to do or not to do” (Dye, 1984, p.1). Text or written curriculum is defined by Goodson (1988, p.9) as:

- an important part of a consolidated ‘state’ system of schooling;
- setting ‘standards’ and defining statements of intent; and
- providing clear ‘rules of the game’ for educators and practitioners, parameters but not prescriptions.

The theme for the 56th International Council for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Sport and Dance (ICHPER-SD) Anniversary world congress and exposition is *‘Towards building a new sport system’*. The building of a new sport system and the building of an ideal HPE curriculum are interrelated, and both aspirations require a strong foundation. It can be argued that the success of a sport system within society begins with the success of HPE in schools where all children can be accessed. Furthermore, sport is defined as the logical extension of a school’s physical education (PE) program (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992). When quality HPE is deeply implemented, sport in society is subsequently enhanced. Success of policy implementation ultimately depends on teachers and students in schools (Gardner & Williamson, 1999; Lynch, 2014) where the text (policy document) meets the context (Penney, 2014). It is therefore argued that to build an ideal sport system, as suggested by the congress theme, we need to ‘begin on the front foot’ through quality holistic Health and Physical Education (HPE) implementation for children as early as possible (Lynch, 2011; 2013a). This paper will explore why the HPE Australian curriculum reform was necessary and how it has gradually been developed over the years. It will then investigate what implementation looks like in practice within both a school and Teacher Education program. The three underpinning themes are:

- Physical Education, Sport and HPE
- Gradually enacting the Health & Physical Education (HPE) ideal
- Text meets context (HPE & Sport)

Physical Education, Sport and HPE

As previously mentioned, the building of a new sport system and the building of an ideal HPE curriculum are interconnected, and both aspirations require a strong foundation. This connection is not new, in fact in Australia:

physical education began to be positioned towards the end of the 1940s as the ‘foundation stone’ for children’s participation in sport, as the site in which the skills required for sports participation should be developed, and for the first time making an explicit connection between school physical education and lifelong participation in physical activity (Kirk, 2014).

Hence, this relationship has been espoused over many decades. Research suggests that the best time for children to learn and refine their motor skills is the preschool and early primary school years (Branta, Haubenstricker, & Seefeldt, 1984; Commonwealth of Australia, 1992; Espenschade & Eckert, 1980; Lynch, 2011; 2014e), as these are also the “most formative years to establish a healthy approach towards physical activity” (Queensland Government, 2003, p.1). This phase of child development has the advantage that it is aligned with the child’s natural play structure and is likely to have fewer competing activities, therein allowing children more time to concentrate on developing their motor skills. The early detection of motor problems facilitates early intervention programs which can reduce many

physical and related emotional problems (Arnheim & Sinclair, 1979; Commonwealth of Australia, 1992; Hardin & Garcia, 1982; Haubensticker & Seefeldt, 1974; Johnson & Rubinson, 1983; Lynch, 2013b; Seefeldt, 1975; Smoll, 1974). Further, research indicates that active children become active adults, (Godin, 1990; Lynch, 2011; Raitakari, et al., 1994), thereby increasing the likelihood of more adult healthy lives. Likewise, inactive children become inactive adults (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992; Sport & Recreation Queensland, 2005).

In building a new sport system the focus should be on increased participation, and therefore all children need to be actively involved. This requires tailoring the curriculum to cater for all children's needs (Lynch, 2014b). Physical activity benefits the unskilled and obese youngsters also and they need to be given priority, as these children should discover suitable physical activities that they enjoy (Pangrazi, 2000). An inclusive approach in sport and physical education has also been espoused for many decades. In 1941 in an edition of the Victorian Education Gazette, Hamilton expressed the need for inclusive practice within Australia:

In one article titled 'Games Practice: its place and value in the school', Hamilton advocated the idea that games were the means by which *every* child could be given an interest in physical activity, not just the socially privileged. He proposed that children should be taught to gain satisfaction from seeing their own improvement in performance and not necessarily from competing. He argued for a humanistic approach to physical education where 'it must not be thought that the object of games practice is to produce champions in sport... There is a tendency in many large schools to concentrate on the instruction of the few already competent and gifted children allowing this limited number to represent the school in inter school competitive games... One of the chief aims (should be) to ensure that each and every child is given an opportunity to learn games and to become to some degree skilled in them. In this way he [or she] is assured of a healthy physical exercise with a definite motivating interest'. (Kirk, 2014, p. 109).

This is upheld by Pangrazi (2000, p.18), who shares "the fitness and activity program must produce an enjoyable and positive social experience so children develop a positive attitude towards activity".

Physical Education, in many countries throughout the world (including Australia), is an important learning area from the beginnings of formal schooling.

Generally speaking there is a greater focus on physical activity than health and wellbeing. Sport features strongly in this arena in most countries, including an emphasis on building character, self-confidence, and embedding values such as fairness and respect. (Australian Government, 2014).

What has gradually changed over the years is that the 'health' improvements through quality physical education have become more widely known and acknowledged. "This holistic approach is the very reason why the ultimate outcome of a child being physically educated is to be a healthy and a well person throughout life" (Lynch, 2013b, p.8). There are seven dimensions of wellness: physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, environmental and occupational which are all strongly connected (Robbins, Powers & Burgess, 2011). Pangrazi goes one step further stating that "there is no higher priority in life than health. Without it, all other skills lack meaning and utility" (2000, p.18). Within Australia 'Health' has been recognised in nomenclature of the key learning area and curriculum materials since 1994.

The following excerpt from the recent draft of the Australian curriculum, evidences the growing recognition of health. HPE auspices more than the physical:

In Health and Physical Education students develop the knowledge, understanding and skills to support them to be resilient, to develop a strong sense of self, to build and maintain satisfying relationships, to make health-enhancing decisions in relation to their health and physical activity participation, and to develop health literacy competencies in order to enhance their own and others' health and wellbeing. (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2012, p. 2).

Health and wellbeing as an outcome of physical education is also identified by state education departments. The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) key responsibilities inform outcomes that the Department strives to achieve within its birth-to-adulthood learning and development agenda. The first listed outcome for Children 0 – 8 years is; Children have the best start to life to achieve optimal health, development and wellbeing (Lynch, 2013d).

Focus areas that sit within the HPE umbrella in the new Framework include: mental health promotion, sexuality and reproductive health, food and nutrition, safety, drug use, respectful relationships, personal identity and sense of self, physical activity and fitness, games and sports, and aquatics and water-based activities (ACARA, 2012). All of which were also represented within earlier state syllabus' and curriculum materials (Lynch, 2014). When quality HPE is implemented, the whole child is educated. Subsequently, sport and physical education experiences should enhance success and opportunity, and ultimately health and wellbeing. This very concept was supported by the inaugural ICHPER-SD world congress theme, '*Child Health and the School*'.

Gradually enacting the Health & Physical Education ideal

Australia adopted a socio-cultural approach for Health and Physical Education in the last national reform, the National HPE Statement and Profile (Australian Education Council (AEC), 1994a; 1994b). "Indeed, Australia is one of only a few countries that combines the strands of health and physical education" (Australian Government, 2014). The 1994 Statement and Profile documents provided a foundation for the construction of a HPE syllabus document in each state and territory (Dinan, 2000; Glover, 2001). One of the theoretical intentions for devising the 1999 HPE curriculum materials was to help make both teachers and students more aware of the social and cultural forces that shape perceptions of this key learning area.

The socio-cultural approach recognizes that students are influenced by the different physical, social, cultural, political, economic and environmental forces affecting their well-being (Dann, 1999). A socio-cultural perspective "suggests the disciplines of social psychology, pedagogy, philosophy, sociology and history sit alongside the biophysical sciences of anatomy, physiology, and biomechanics to inform the learning area" (Macdonald, et al., 2000, p.6). This approach is inclusive and promotes social justice (QSCC, 1999a; 1999b):

The key learning area emphasizes the social justice principles of diversity, equity and supportive environments. These principles underpin the syllabus and guide curriculum design and delivery. They are embraced in the tenets of an inclusive curriculum which seeks to maximize educational opportunities for all students (QSCC, 1999c, p.1).

Policies are intended "to bring about idealized solutions to diagnosed problems" (Ball, 1990, p.22). The problem identified in the early 1990s related to the hidden curriculum and unwanted discourses relating to PE curriculum construction and delivery. Discourses such as

military, scientific, health and sport were underpinned by ideologies of sexism, elitism, healthism, individualism and mesomorphism (Colquhoun, 1991, 1992; Hickey, 1995; Kirk, 1992; Kirk and Twigg, 1993; Lynch, 2007, 2008; Scraton, 1990; Tinning, 1990; Tinning and Fitzclarence, 1992; Tinning, Kirk and Evans, 1993). The socio-cultural perspective was chosen to address these influences (Lynch, 2014; 2007; Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1992).

Although the 1994 National Statement and Profile have been enacted deeply within some localized contexts there are regions within Australia where the implementation has only been surface level (Lynch, 2014; Tinning, 2009) and this includes teachers' discourses and ideologies in HPE (Kirk & Macdonald, 2001; Lynch, 2014). "The lead writer for the new Australian HPE curriculum, Professor Doune Macdonald has referred to the very slow change in HPE nationally as curriculum change 'gradualism'" (Lynch, 2014, p. 509). This term represents a "gradual rather than immediate change in policy" (Macdonald, 2012) and suggests that various influences caused by discourses and ideologies within the key learning area are not consistently being addressed. Kirk reminds us that we need to continue on the journey of improvement, while "the notion of valuing the physically active life is a point of focus... it is also a complex, many-sided process that might move us towards a tomorrow that is better than today" (2014, p. 106).

There appears to be inequality when it comes to HPE amongst various Australian education sectors (Lynch, 2013d). A survey completed by 376 primary school principals from a cross-section of Australian Government schools (representing every state and territory, region and size) indicated that within small schools (less than 100 children) it was not possible or financially viable to have HPE specialists due to their rural, regional or remote location and/or their size. This was not the situation for large schools often located in metropolitan regions (Lynch, 2013d). This directly relates to the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008) and the recommendations of the Gonski Report, where all children are to have the same opportunities regardless of where they live or what school they attend (ABC, 2012).

Ewing (2010) states that up to seventy per cent of the differences in educational achievement in Australia can be attributable to the social background of students and that "the most important driver for a National Curriculum should be about equity and social justice and improved learning outcomes for our most disadvantaged and isolated students" (2010, p. 127). The socio-cultural approach HPE adopted in the 1994 Statement and Profile has been exemplary and led the present curriculum reform for all learning areas (Lynch, 2014b). Hence, the socio-cultural approach continues to act as the ideal underpinning the curriculum. Subsequent issues that require addressing relate to curriculum delivery and pedagogy. The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) draft shape paper for HPE accentuates one particular aspect of quality HPE; that it is 'developmentally appropriate'. Furthermore, it espouses having these experiences from the very beginnings of schooling:

to provide ongoing, developmentally appropriate opportunities for students to practise and apply the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary to maintain and enhance their own and others' health and wellbeing. (ACARA, 2012, p. 4).

Experiences of HPE within schools for all children should be a "developmentally appropriate educational experience designed to provide immediate and lifelong benefits" (Graham, Holt-Hale & Parker, 1998, p. 4). Australia's first 'Active Healthy Kids' Report Card on physical activity for children and young people (May, 2014) urged that the quality and quantity of activity is 'age appropriate'.

Enacting the text (written curriculum documents) has been problematic. Slow progress has been the result of limited time and effort within education systems' implementation and

evaluation stages of the curriculum change process. Also, due to a lack of policy change within certain states and territories in relation to teacher pre-service preparation (Lynch, 2014b). In the United Kingdom, “Research suggests that primary schools are, by themselves, unable to deliver quality early experiences, while the contribution of PE specialists in secondary schools may come too late to impact a majority of children in relation to their competence, perceptions and motivation.” (Kirk, 2005, p. 240). In Australia, some teachers have expressed their inability in knowing how to become an HPE teacher (Hickey et al, 2014). Hence, the last section of this paper gives practical examples of what the socio-cultural approach looks like in practice.

Text meets the context (School HPE & Sport)

There are five pillars guiding the recent Australian HPE curriculum reform. These are that it is educative, strength-based, movement focused, promotes health literacy, and uses critical inquiry (Macdonald, 2013). The five pillars are not necessarily new concepts within the HPE curriculum rather they are new in name. As discussed, the 1994 National HPE Statement and Profile have many similar approaches and ideologies that have been carried into the recent Australian HPE curriculum. As well as being underpinned by the socio-cultural approach, other text commonalities include (table 2):

Table 2 HPE curriculum document similar concepts

HPE Framework Socio-cultural approach	1999 Queensland HPE syllabus (derived from the 1994 Statement & Profile) Socio-cultural approach
Futures orientation	Futures perspective
Healthy School Environment	Health Promoting Schools (HPS)
General capabilities	Attributes of lifelong learners
Cross-curriculum priorities	Cross-curricular priorities
Focus on educative purposes	Focus on learning – Understanding about learners and learning (outcomes)
Strengths-based	HPS - curriculum, school organization and partnerships with family and community services.
Critical inquiry	Inquiry-based approach (learner centred)
Movement	Physical activity as a medium for learning
Health literacy	Lifelong health promoting behaviours

Two programs that model the five pillars (educative, strength-based, movement, health literacy, and critical inquiry) and how the national HPE curriculum can be successfully implemented into schools include the ‘Best Start – A community collaborative approach to Lifelong Health and Wellness’ (Figure 1) (Lynch, 2014a; 2014d; 2014e; 2013c; 2013e; 2012) and the 2006 Teresa Carlson Award winning primary school ‘St. Elizabeth’s Case Study’ (Lynch, 2011).

The ‘Best Start’ program, developed over four years, has embraced a strengths-based approach which “supports a critical view of health education with a focus on the learner embedded within a community’s structural facilitators, assets and constraints, and is enacted through resource-oriented and competence-raising approaches to learning” (Macdonald, 2013, p. 100). Underpinned by the ‘futures oriented’ community collaborative curriculum perspective, Best Start enables experiential learning where the curriculum is relevant, engaging, contemporary, physically active, enjoyable and developmentally appropriate for all stakeholders; namely university pre-service teachers (Table 3), local primary school children

and classroom teachers. Community collaborations have involved pre-service teachers teaching local children across six schools (Prep – Year 6) involving swimming and water safety lessons (EDF2611), modified games (EDF1600), various sport sessions (netball, basketball, soccer, cricket, football, tee-ball) and implementing tennis ‘hot shots’ (EDF3619). The Best Start program creatively optimises the resources available within the community as well as the wider Victorian and Australian communities. The collaborations involve pre-service teachers teaching HPE lessons to children across six local schools, thus marrying theory with practice. Lessons provide ‘hands on’ practical, experiential learning and teaching for the university pre-service teachers, quality physical activity experiences for local primary school children and professional development for classroom teachers.

Table 3 Student Evaluation of Teaching Unit (SETU). This unit made a positive contribution to my experiences during the fieldwork/ practicum.

**more than 15 enrolments and 10 or more completed surveys*

Units involving community collaborations	EDF 1600 2011 HPE in schools	EDF 1600 2012 HPE in schools	EDF 1600 2013 HPE in schools	EDF 1600 2014 HPE in schools	EDF 2611 2011 Swimming (offered biennially)	EDF 2611 2013 Swimming (offered biennially)	EDF 3619 2012 Sports/ Tennis (offered biennially)	EDF 3619 2014 Sports/ Tennis (offered biennially)
Positive contribution to practice 5 – strongly agree 1 – strongly disagree	4.79	4.30	4.70	4.67	4.30	4.75	4.72	4.75

St. Elizabeth’s Case Study implemented the HPE syllabus using an ‘whole school’ approach, which involved the collaboration and co-operation of whole school staffs. The recommended minimum time allocations required to provide students with opportunities to demonstrate the core learning outcomes for all three strands was 1.5 hours per week (QSCC, 1999c). A Health Promoting Schools framework was adopted to represent the shift away from disease prevention towards a more holistic social view of health, as depicted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) Ottawa Charter for health promotion (BCE, 1999, p. 3). “The Health Promoting Schools Framework offers a suitable approach because it encompasses a range of influences internal and external to the school environment” (O’Dea & Maloney, 2000, p.4). The model comprises three overlapping elements: Curriculum, teaching and learning; School organization, ethos and environment; and partnerships and services, which “need to be considered as a whole rather than as separate entities” (Australian Health Promoting Schools Association, 1996, p.1).

The HPE specialist teacher led with confidence. He was qualified in Health and Physical Education, he had been professionally developed in the 1999 Queensland HPE syllabus and curriculum materials, and he advocated HPE as a key learning area. While the HPE specialist was only responsible for reporting on the Physical Activity strand (40 minute lessons) he incorporated the Health and Personal Development strands into his lessons whenever possible. ‘Health’ was embraced and advocated in the everyday life of the school (not just during class time) and involved the distribution of sporting equipment at breaks, establishing community partnerships for sharing facilities, managing health and personal development resources, organizing programs to be conducted by sporting organisations, school safety rules and coordinating inter-school sports. Communication was a school strength and it appeared to be helpful that all teachers had an understanding of curriculum expectations and strand responsibilities (whole school approach). Teachers were also confident in connecting the HPE curriculum with other key learning areas during planning or implementing in separate health or personal development lessons.

Best Start

A community collaborative approach to Lifelong Health and Wellness



Teachers of tomorrow implementing Health & Physical Education (HPE) lessons for the children of today.



- Six local rural primary schools
 - Churchill Primary School
 - Hazelwood North Primary School
 - Thorpdale Primary School
- Churchill North Primary School
- Lumen Christi Catholic Primary School
- Yinnar South Primary School

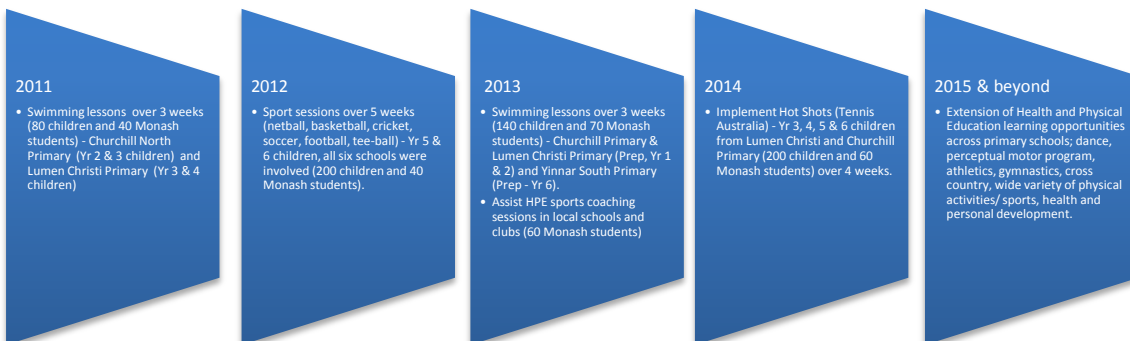


Figure 1 'Best Start' (Lynch, 2014c).

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper is to encourage continued gradual development of HPE in Australian schools and to prompt international consideration of implementing the health component within PE, through HPE. Examples of two HPE programs which evidence success are discussed. When considering the theme ‘Towards building a new sport system’, it is important that as for any structure, there are strong foundations. It is argued that physical education has long been the ‘foundation stone’ for children’s participation in sport and that HPE enables improved ‘holistic’ development.

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