



Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation

Response to ACARA: Request for feedback

Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education

Shape Paper

June 2012

The Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation appreciates the invitation from ACARA to respond to the Draft H&PE Shape Paper. Since the announcement of the development of the Phase 3 learning areas ACARA has paid ACHPER's views considerable respect and has encouraged our involvement in the process. We have been viewed as a critical friend and it is in this spirit that we provide the following comment and considered advice.

Members of ACHPER's National Board and Branches have contributed to this process. ACHPER branches with national encouragement have also responded through a series of state and territory based consultation forums that involved a considerable number of teachers.

ACHPER has also been involved in the ASC / sport industry consultation forum held recently in Sydney and the on-going, formative debate regarding the development of the Australian Government National Sport and Education Strategy to 'bring sport and education closer together' has real relevance for the Shaping Paper.

ACHPER has encouraged its members to respond as individuals, through school groups and formally through its branches

This response therefore does not highlight in detail, suggested changes to the propositions of the Shape Paper. Rather it focuses on some of the broader conceptual issues underpinning the Paper and makes some positive suggestions accordingly.

ACHPER appreciates the level of scholarship, thought and discussion that has gone into developing and refining the Shape Paper to this point and in particular the discussion and debate it has generated amongst our membership and the wider profession. We have continued to advocate strongly for ACARA to make this a truly world-class curriculum that will have meaning for students, teachers and parents.

ACHPER members and branches have been fairly consistent in their overall responses. This in itself is not un-remarkable and reflects a level of consensus across the country about what should comprise the H&PE curriculum. However, there are still issues that remain contested that ACHPER would like to bring to ACARA's attention.

We believe as ACARA does that it is important that writers are not faced with ambiguities or uncertainties when they undertake the critical, next stage.

It should also be noted that the issues/concerns identified by many ACHPER members focused on implementation and accountability issues regarding delivery,

time allocation, the diversity of school contexts and their capacity to meet the curriculum demands represented by the scope of the paper.

### **Strengths of the Draft Shaping Paper**

The following were consistently highlighted as strengths:

#### *Emphasis on the educational substance of H&PE*

- The proposition that the curriculum should highlight its educative role and not be seen as a “cure all” for the health problems of young Australians.
- Overall the Shape paper provides a solid framework for the development of curriculum in health and physical education.
- Members were in favour of the idea of inquiry based learning but feel that there needs to be further evidence throughout the Shaping paper.
- The proposed organisation of the F–12 Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education into appropriate bands and strands.

#### *Balance*

- The focus on treating health and physical education separately is a strength but creates the challenge of ensuring they strongly, not superficially relate. There has been a real attempt to balance the Strands. Some have argued that health is more represented and more extensively described in the Paper but some tweaking can fix this.

#### *The Bands*

- The two year band concept after the Foundation Year is well received and will provide teachers with flexibility to adapt and choose activities and approaches for particular year groups.

#### *The Strands*

- The five statements here (28-32) are to be commended. These really demonstrate the importance of the structure to be developed in the curriculum.
- The two strands appear to be easy to apply in planning and delivery however the balance of these two strands assumes strong explicit links between them. Writers will need to be clever to achieve this
- The Strands have been generally accepted because they simplify the organisation of the learning area. Some teachers are quick to point out that the scope and sequence must adequately reflect a balance of the two strands and not allow interpretations that might result in teachers thinking that they need to teach more Health and less PE or vice versa.

### *Flexibility*

- ACHPER branches in particular supported the premise that no particular physical activity *context* should be mandated within the curriculum.
- Teachers felt it was essential that the curriculum be flexible enough to allow for diverse settings and allocations of time and resources.
- A broad, flexible approach that allows for inclusive curriculum in the varied contexts and resources within schools.
- While we support these comments we would ask that consideration be given to the highlighting non-negotiable areas that are relevant in any learning setting.
- The NZ Curriculum does this well and we could do well to consider their approach here. Concepts of play, games, sport, aquatics, dance and recreation give some focus to the movement competence (physical literacy) concept.

### **What's missing?**

The Paper is very comprehensive. Given the impressive effort in covering all developmental bases in the Paper and the fact that numerous respondents, including ACHPER Branches, have provided detailed suggestions in relation to particular propositions, we ask the bigger - picture question here. Have all opportunities for taking H&PE forward in an exciting, new way been addressed?

1. There needs to be much more reference to the actual participation in movement forms.
2. Health educators have pointed to omissions particularly in regard to preventative health issues, gender and relationships. Indigenous health issues are understated too.
3. Is the 'aspirational' (and inspirational) aspect of personal achievement in and through H&PE evident? Is there enough reference to the notion of reaching ones potential?
4. Does resilience as a strong and essential curriculum issue appear across the scope of the curriculum?
5. Will H&PE address gendered health issues; lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender issues; sexuality education in a sequential manner?
6. Will children and adolescents have opportunities to discuss and sort through some of the age related issues that they face?

7. Is the role that H&PE education can play in the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians substantive enough particularly in regard to the importance of opportunities that this area offers indigenous students?
8. Can optimal times for dealing with certain critical health-related topics be highlighted? Is there a hierarchy linked to prevention before the issue becomes important in a student's life? Eg. drug and alcohol prevention before they leave primary school.
9. The idea of a school as a healthy environment with a health promoting purpose is under-stated and should be given further credence..
10. Are the behaviours linked to competing and striving for excellence in H&PE and sport and its implications adequately acknowledged?
11. Does the knowledge and skills paradigm over-ride these behaviours?
12. The document hints at what will be taught, how much will be taught and when it will be taught. Will direction to writers be strong and clear enough regarding optimal times or stages for certain topics?
13. Is the Evidence base complete?

### **Evidence base - an increasingly contested area**

Clearly the writing team has been well informed by literature across the bio-physical and socio-cultural sciences. However ACHPER would argue there is a notable lack of acknowledgement of the increasing body of research across the psychological, neuro-biological, cognitive, and behavioural sciences, particularly related to the contribution of physical movement to cognition and the development of learners.

ACHERP contends that the growing body of evidence emanating from these disciplines can help to shape the HPE learning area in a future-focused way that is more closely connected to the central aim of the Australian Educational Goals to support young Australians to become successful and confident learners.

The Educational Goals for young Australians espoused through the new Australian Curriculum states that all young people should be supported to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. Movement plays a key role in developing and attaining all of these Goals yet very little is said in the Paper about *how* movement impacts in positive ways on **learners**. Much more is said about *what* will be learnt through the learning area.

Learning in relation to adopting Healthy lifestyles is the predominant direction of the paper. This is not challenged per se and neither is the substantive evidence on which it is based. However the issue of movement as central to cognitive development / learning generally is skimmed over on the basis that the evidence is not unequivocal. ACHPER argues that there is sufficiently, strong evidence to require recognition of its growing importance. (*refer to appendix 1*).

### **Broadening the understanding and nature of HPE**

There is an opportunity not to be missed here. In the interest of not providing a curriculum that is more of the same, there is also an obligation to identify and acknowledge new fields and growing evidence that impacts on what H&PE teachers and schools might do in the future?

By infusing emerging research evidence from fields such as cognitive science, neuroscience, neurophysiology, and psychology the curriculum has the opportunity to better support H&PE in new times. Field based evidence shows the strong and significant impact that movement has on the neural system and functioning of the brain and is constantly being highlighted in news releases from schools across the USA and Canada. They describe teaching practices that use movement to enhance learning and improve academic, behavioural, and health performances in students at all levels. (*see appendix 1 for websites of a small snapshot of rapidly growing studies in overseas schools reporting similar results very recently is provided at the following websites*)

### **Daily Physical Activity as a legitimate curriculum concept**

The significance of Daily PA particularly in the early years and primary bands of schooling has not been adequately addressed. At the most it has been hinted at. This should be linked to the newly developed Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines (DoHA) and aligned with the propositions related to movement competence. While the Guidelines are researched and written on the basis of health-related impact, combining this argument with the emerging impact of physical activity on cognition and learning provides for a powerful evidence base.

### **Where is the wow factor?**

The Paper reads as a sound synthesis of the best of state and territory frameworks and we would want that to be captured. Most key beliefs and the values that H&PE professionals embrace are in some form evident within the Shape paper and that is also good. However, does it really take us over the horizon and describe what will lead to new ways of thinking and conceptualising H&PE for future learners or does it only synthesise and re-verbalise current curricula?

It is appreciated that compromise will characterize the writing process and that large state systems will seek to ensure their current thinking prevails. Will this mitigate against innovation as it threatened to in Stage 1 development?

H&PE should capture the excitement inherent in moving, playing, communicating, sharing relationships and maintaining health and these dimensions go across state lines.

While the Paper rightly expresses that H&PE cannot be a cure all for all of societies ills, it could be argued that the comprehensive nature and richness of text that follows is in fact just that.

Where is it within the Shaping paper for example, that students develop an understanding of themselves? Where is the meaning? Where is the joy-oriented, meaning-oriented curriculum (Kretchmar, 2008). Some of the potential outcomes of an experiential H&PE program appear to be over-shadowed by the knowledge and skills paradigm, as important as this is.

### **The strengths - based approach**

While this has been generally lauded there is concern about the strength of argument and the way this is described and perhaps not balanced well enough with the notion of preventative health. A more detailed explanation of the approach, the research underpinning it and how it applies is needed. This is a concept that on initial reading appears sound. However many of our health education members are becoming more circumspect about what this means for example in a low SES school where health risks abound.

### **Is there a case for Physical Literacy?**

While the Shape paper uses the term movement competence the question of whether we should be using the term physical literacy is pertinent. It is not a term without relevance and the fact that the concept of health literacy is promoted in the Paper raises the question why not physical or movement literacy?

Physical and Health Education Canada defines physical literacy as:

*Individuals who are physically literate move with competence in a wide variety of physical activities that benefit the development of the whole person.*

Just as literacy development in language arts facilitates an increased motivation to read a wide variety of literature, a physically literate student will be much more likely to participate in a wide variety of physical activities and will do so in ways that are

beneficial to themselves and to others around them. Such a foundation is not only important for students now, but serves as a foundation for participating in lifelong physical activities. ( Mandigo et al, June 2009, Position Paper Physical Literacy for Educators).

***Is ACARA satisfied that the concept of movement competence embraces this definition?***

Physical literacy focuses on the development of the whole child so its meaning is not just about the understanding and practice of physical activity, it also includes a child's knowledge and understanding of **why** physical activity is important and its resulting benefits, as well as the development of attitudes and habits to practice these skills on a regular basis (Whitehead).

If the term movement competence is to be used to embrace commonly held definitions of physical literacy this needs to be spelt out to demonstrate its connection with movement literacy. Given the strands are to be strongly inter-related it makes sense to consider the concepts of physical and health literacy in terms of common meaning to learners.

Based upon the UNESCO definition and recognition of literacy as a **basic requirement** for a person to be able to fully participate in society. Their *Education for All* goal states that “literacy is crucial to the acquisition, by every child, youth and adult, of essential life skills that enable them to address the challenges they can face in life...” (UNESCO, Education for All).

Literacy is not restricted merely to reading and writing. Literacy is concerned with how we communicate in society. It is about social practices and relationships, about knowledge, language and culture.

All of this has great relevance to H&PE and the General Capabilities.

**The educational role/context of sport**

ACHPER supports the recommendations of the ASC Sport Industry Consultation forum. While supporting the Paper's assumption that School Sport is an extra-curriculum activity and a legitimate outcome of H&PE we also acknowledge the need for strengthening the overall emphasis given to Fundamental Movement Skills, experiential learning and school community links. These areas are fundamental to the use of sport as an educative tool. We also believe that:

- Appropriately sequenced and managed sport experiences provide a strong context for learning and achieving in relation to the general capabilities.



- Increased reference to sport as a learning vehicle to enhance physical capabilities and its positive contribution to personal and social development can become a strength of the Paper.

### **General capabilities**

This is a major opportunity for H&PE. There is great potential to contribute to student learning and achievement in many contexts and across other learning areas. There is a need to re-state this connection in more depth.

It has improved markedly since the first draft but can still go further to address adequately the ways that H&PE can assist students to acquire the GCs necessary to become a successful and confident learner.

The propositions are still understated in terms of the capacity of H&PE to contribute to **all** GCs.

### *Numeracy*

- It is important to be careful not to pander to 'other's' expectations of academic justification as to the purpose of H&PE.
- H&PE is much more than a process of teaching mathematics through physical activity for example. What then is the educational purpose for health and physical education across these areas? The question for discussion here is: How does H&PE engender concepts of numeracy within it? Concepts of space and time are particularly movement-centric, for example.
- It is important not to use numeracy as a functional purpose for having PE in the curriculum.

### *Critical and creative thinking*

- Big improvement in examples noted since earlier draft
- Emphasis of role of H&PE here can still be strengthened.
- Important that writers understand the importance of H&PE to the GCs.
- Games making, creating and designing games. Understanding how creating movement is important for new thinking about movement.
- Personal and social capability – refer to Hellison's model and or components that could be made more explicit in here.
- Ethical behaviour – there is a substantial body of evidence here and as a profession we need to draw beyond the superficial. Sport education provides a perfect context here.

## **Further areas for improvement in the Shape Paper**

### ***Purpose, clarity and cohesion***

- This could be strengthened by elevating key issues and highlighting them across and within the bands of schooling.

### ***The Nature of the Health and Physical Education curriculum***

- The document strongly advocates for Health and PE to have an important role to play in the health and wellbeing of young Australians.
- There are huge number of propositions/statements that comprise the paper and at this stage some teachers are wondering how they can be transformed into a cohesive, sequential and useful curriculum.

### ***The coherence and appropriateness of the proposed scope and sequence***

- Perhaps a need to elevate critical, non negotiable issues from the body of text and highlight key features in each band of schooling (ie. 'brand' each stage).
- Often subtle differences in descriptions from strand to strand sometimes difficult to delineate exactly what the focus is.
- Many members stated that there was too much focus in points on health education, with little if any reference to outdoor education.
- Members were in favour of the idea of inquiry based learning but feel that there needs to be further evidence throughout the Shape paper.
- Clear lack of reference to sport is reflected too in the ASC response.
- Finally, there needs to be much more emphasis placed on experiential learning (the actual DOING, the participating) in movement forms.
- There is a lack of PE and movement specific language in the document and this should be addressed. There needs to be an overriding statement which includes the word physical in the document.

### ***Terminology***

- Within the document there needs to be consistency. An example is that in some sections terms such as behavioural, social and cultural are used whereas in others one of the previous terms may have been deleted, e.g. behavioural.
- Health education, health promotion, health literacy, physical literacy
- Physical activity and physical education convey very different meanings and purposes. We need to make sure that the physical activity is within physical education curriculum time and not rationalized as active transport, recess and lunch breaks.

## **Points of Tension**

ACHPER acknowledges that Outdoor Education and Home Economics have mounted some reasonable arguments around areas of H&PE that they 'cover off'. These include Nutrition, and some aspects of outdoor recreation including, aquatic activities, water safety. These and other health related issues could attract political and media interest.

ACHPER recognises that the Outdoor Recreation aspects of Outdoor Education comprise a rich part of the experiential learning of H&PE. It also recognises that healthy eating as advocated by Home Economics is a significant contributor to students leading active and healthy lives.

### *Safety*

Water safety and swimming in particular is not resolved in the Paper. What was once a non negotiable part of the primary school program is now either controlled by private providers and largely ignored by many schools. To say this is a system policy issue may simply disguise the reality that it was once a central part of the PE curriculum in schools across Australia.

Thank you.



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