



Response to ACARA

Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education

April 2013

Background

ACHPER is the lead professional association for teachers and kindred educators in the health and physical education learning area and related fields.

ACHPER's branches and individual members vary in their interest and interpretation of the H&PE curriculum. It is almost impossible to achieve a singular, representative ACHPER position apart from some consensus on key principles, intent and purpose. ACHPER members come from all jurisdictions and the tertiary sector where state preferences of previous curriculum framework experience have a strong influence. One thing is certain and that is that ACHPER responses will be backed by a commitment to achieve a quality, inclusive, modern curriculum.

In being mindful of the diversity of local, state, national and international commentary around this document ACHPER has taken counsel from members with considerable background in curriculum design, development and assessment. ACHPER has spoken to members in the tertiary sector and those who undertake senior government management responsibility for curriculum development, assessment and reporting. ACHPER has encouraged its members to respond as individuals, school groups, regional groups and formally through its branches. This reflects the stated aim for the H&PE curriculum that it should be for all Australian students and teachable by all Australian teachers.

This response does not therefore attempt to put forward a single, homogenous, representative view but rather comments on the basis of structure, presentation and language used as raised by a sample including board members, and state branch members in primary, secondary and tertiary sectors. It focuses on some of the broader conceptual issues underpinning the Paper and makes some positive suggestions accordingly. It also picks up on some of the comments made by a sample of National Sporting Organisations.

Comment

As was consistent with the first draft of the Shape Paper, ACHPER appreciates the level of scholarship, thought and discussion that has gone into developing the document. We recognize the challenges and constraints faced by the writers. We have continued to advocate strongly for ACARA to make this a curriculum that can lead the way and will inspire and motivate students, teachers and parents.

In responding to the first Draft we stated that we believed that it was important that writers were not faced with ambiguities or uncertainties when they undertook the critical, next stage. We now need to apply that statement to the recipients of the document. We are certainly well aware that many non – specialist/generalist classroom teachers, who will be expected to carry the load of delivery in primary schools, will not understand clearly what it is exactly they should select and try to fit in to their school day.

It should be noted again 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.

Points for Attention

1. Is there really a need to embrace the term world class?

Comment

- There is no basis for real comparison as to what is world class. Whose world would we be referring to? Should we more aptly ask, “is it the best possible curriculum for Australian students”? At this stage we would strongly suggest ‘not quite’.

2. The nature and importance of the learning area

Comment

- The nature and importance of the learning area is well espoused, concise and clear and the writers have done a good job in the time allowed and in juggling the inevitable political agendas and constraints.
- Writers should be commended for avoiding the privileging of any state based curriculum models in their work. It is also good to see the explicit nature of the Federal Minister for Education’s release highlighting the news that First Aid, swimming and water safety and bullying were to be the core has been ignored.

3. The Rationale and Aims provide a clear and coherent introduction to the document.

Comment

- Writers have done well in their attempts to integrate the Movement/PA and Health strands and to identify valuable HPE experiences. But is the integrity of each strand maintained and described clearly enough (given we are really talking about a Health strand and a Physical Education strand)?

4. The concept of a *strengths – based approach* remains contested

Comment

- The people we have consulted have had more time to digest and consider the strengths based model and while it does present what could be seen as a noble ideal – many still see it as a loose concept, promoted on an aspirational basis that might not reflect the totality of students and schooling in 21st Century Australia. It appeals to some as the correct message to be putting forward in the H&PE syllabus but it does not warrant the significant support it seems to have.

5. The Strands, Key ideas and Contexts

It seems people have accepted the Strands as utilitarian organisers that allow Health and Physical Education to be developed separately through the contexts provided and in an integrated way as well.

The key ideas, three for each of the strands, set clear broad themes for how the document should be developed.

Comment

- It would help to represent the relationship of the key ideas in both strands (p4 and 7) in a visual form. This is the curriculum in a nutshell and should be represented accordingly.
- It is recommended that a better sequence of movement contexts on p 8 would be to reverse 2 and 3.
- The notion of 'contexts' chosen to represent each of the strands is a good idea but while some are clearly contexts others could be interpreted more as topic headings. For example is 'Alcohol and Drugs' a context or is it a topic or an area of learning?
- If we are going to talk about contexts in the introduction to bands (P 14-16) why are they suddenly unlimited. Can you invent a new context and ignore others? Just how binding and important are the contexts provided?
- ACHPER believes that the number one context is the existence of a healthy school environment and policy framework and this should be elevated in importance.
- The statement that "the order and detail in which content is taughtare programming decisions for teachers" could be misleading. Surely there is a recommended sequence in the early years, for example, when we are concerned with building blocks of movement and building confidence and relationships through play?

6. Does the Scope capture and highlight what is fundamentally important?

Comment

- The comprehensiveness of the document could dissuade rather than persuade some teachers to embrace and deliver it. There are just so many things to be learned and experienced in a limited exposure. Classroom non-specialist teachers have to cope with an excruciating complexity of content descriptors and achievement standards.
- There is a broad conceptualisation of the learning area with basically nothing left out. Every stakeholder can write itself into the curriculum but it might also be possible for individual

teachers to write themselves out of parts of it? ACHPER questions whether this was the original intention?

- It still tries to be everything to all stakeholders in H&PE, although some sport stakeholders might disagree. Sport as an educational phenomenon is certainly underplayed and writers seem to have gone out of their way to avoid too many specific references to it. We should be cognisant of the fact that a learning area called *physical education and sport* exists in many parts of the world. Has the integration of physical education with health caused us to diminish that relationship? Given the reference to sport as a key aspect of Australian culture it seems incongruous that the curriculum would not provide a stronger and clearer place for it.

7. Content descriptions

Comment

- The knowledge, skills and content that relates to each of the strands is reasonably clear as the document develops but the concepts, detailed descriptors and expectations covered in band 9/10 for example exceed those within most jurisdiction's senior school studies. The sheer volume of content expected to be taught (with some sense of deep learning) in the primary years is too much.
- ECE teachers are already drowning in phase 1 subject content – will this H&PE curriculum inspire and motivate them or just plain scare them?
- There are content descriptions with achievement standards to be constructed to cover all that is in the H&PE universe. In doing so writers have not exploited the uniqueness of H&PE experiences and what this can bring to other learning areas and to personal and social capability development. There are too many descriptors and achievement standards to teach effectively and as a result it does not adequately capture and highlight what is fundamentally important.
- Some of the content descriptions are well phrased and clearly useful while others are not and seem to reflect multiple learning outcomes mixed with suggested activities (eg.3.6 first dot point). This will be problematic for generalist classroom teachers in particular.
- It is recommended that a thorough audit of the descriptors be undertaken.

8. General Capabilities

More can be done to demonstrate explicit links to the General Capabilities and the Cross curriculum priorities.

Comment

- The potential for H&PE to enrich learning through the General Capabilities is acknowledged in the document. The examples provided in the General Capabilities section are sound but it is

important that teachers have many more explicit examples of where in the content descriptors they can emphasise them.

- The same applies for the Cross curriculum priorities.

9. Guidelines and planning considerations

Comment

- These need to be given more attention. They do not convince as guidelines and may well be in the domain of support materials or jurisdiction initiatives.
- There are some good points lost in the narrative and need to be better organised to have immediate visual impact.

10. Language

Comment

- All curricula suffer from trying to appeal while based on 'discipline language'. The challenge of avoiding this perception is great. A curriculum that is too language rich in discipline terminology and requiring many words to describe elements of it can defeat its own purpose.
- The language and expression used must be reviewed and improved in the key ideas and contexts section in particular and in many of the content descriptors. Clarity is everything.

11. Education and Sport

Comment

- The links between education and sport are well documented and could well be brought more into the open in the document. For many teachers sport provides a familiar context and a starting point for teaching in H&PE. Sport as a context for developing general capabilities is understated too.

Reflection

It is perhaps timely to reflect on the outcomes of the first focus group meeting of 'experts' in Sydney, where twenty leaders and 'experts' in H&PE gathered in the ACARA offices to discuss and advise on issues pertinent to an Australian Curriculum: H&PE. ACHPER was pleased to be well represented at this meeting that agreed on some broad principles for the design and function of the new H&PE curriculum and framed some clear points to be avoided. Participants flagged some of the simple lessons learned from previous curriculum experience over the years across Australia.

1. Avoid trying to be everything to everybody and trying to save the planet.
2. H&PE has been notoriously guilty of making exaggerated claims related to improving the health and well being of students particularly given the reality of the impact that the average 60 minutes per week might have.
3. Keep it manageable.
4. Ensure it is lean and focussed. All states have common themes and strong alignments about what is common or essential, build from this.
5. Write the best curriculum we can for students first, teachers second.
6. Conceive of a curriculum without trying to fix worst case scenarios (eg: obesity epidemic) in the hope we will have a justification for H&PE.
 - Make the Health skills and the Physical Education skills overt and clear on the basis that lifelong health and activity is the critical purpose.
 - Build in critical inquiry processes
 - Avoid including knowledge to satisfy the far ranging health promotion ideals of the range of stakeholders who will want a seat at the table
 - Don't attempt to create a race of super athletes
7. Promote Active learning in the classroom and the playground. Use Arnold's model and other recognisable, researched and sensible models.
8. Plan with the end point of schooling in mind rather than build on thick layers of expectations in each year to the point where the content and expectations become too demanding and unrealistic. All states have succumbed to this at some point in the development of their Curriculum frameworks. The country is littered with examples of curriculum learning outcomes in documents that most students never achieve. The old adage 'death by a thousand outcomes' is still a concern.

The current state of the document is not altogether consistent with the consensus from this meeting.

The Paradoxical Nature of the Curriculum

If only curriculum was just about what to teach!

The interplay between students, teachers and the curriculum content is paramount to successful learning outcomes and unfortunately, through no fault of the writers they are only dealing with one of the cornerstones of sound curriculum. Pedagogy and approaches to teaching likely to be successful can only be hinted at and there is no mandate for adequate time allocation to meet the achievement standards. So ACARA and the writers are on a 'hiding to nothing'.

We can argue with some justification that H&PE should be the least 'content driven' of all learning areas (along with the Arts). Look at the huge scope of the learning area and breadth of descriptors in the document.....it would appear we are one of the most content driven. Should we be happy with this?

Teachers bring content to life by the way they go about their teaching. When only writing a 'content curriculum' we are forced to ignore what we know about teaching and learning and the conditions to enhance it. The ICSSPE 2010 Position Statement on Physical Education, for example makes that point well.

“...recognise that good quality physical education depends on well qualified educators and scheduled time within the curriculum, both of which are possible to provide even when other resources like equipment are in short supply”.

The curriculum is less about what is taught and more about the way we do it. We have allowed such a content rationale to flourish and it has become the tail that wagged the dog in a curriculum area that is so unique and rich in opportunities for varied pedagogies, student interaction and communication and the development of personal and social capabilities.

That is why for example ACHPER applauds references to critical inquiry and experiential learning through different movement forms. That is why we support the teaching of sport as a key concept within H&PE and as an important context for learning and developing roles and responsibilities. Including games and sports in the curriculum because they are legitimate physical activities is only part of the picture. They provide a wonderful context for learning as does the role of Dance, Outdoor Recreation and Food and Nutrition within this curriculum.

ACHPER is pleased to see some emphasis on health related fitness as part of a fitness education (not fitness testing) model. This part of the curriculum needs re-vitalisation and redirection in an increasingly complex digital environment that equates to sedentary behaviour for young people. More attention to the impact of Social Media as an influencer and a learning tool is recommended.

Further Comment

1. The Health content seems to have adequately incorporated the concept of Health literacy but there is still reticence to adopt the term physical literacy. Previously ACHPER raised the need to embrace the notion of Physical Literacy and not just Health Literacy. A clear positioning of this concept, as the Canadians have done would significantly improve balance and key messages about active learning in the curriculum.
2. The Movement Strand has been modified and possibly compromised slightly by using Arnold's model of 'in, through and about' in a different way. This is not a major criticism.
3. Clearly the most concerning aspects of the document centre on its language rich content and the concerns teachers have that it might not be possible to deliver it given the likely time allocation and other constraints. This point is picked up strongly in the HOD WA paper.
4. While it is understood that ACARA has no mandate to go beyond the provision of content, teachers think of curriculum as something that must be teachable and deliverable. They want to respond to the recommended scope and content but the first question asked is can it be realistically managed?
5. Now ACHPER understands that state jurisdictions will take the Australian curriculum and 'tenderise' it to fit local needs, priorities and policies regarding time allocation and school implementation. It is understood that NT for example, has some very unique needs and will certainly need to consider local and regional priorities. But is the overall effect of this across the country going to mean a reversion to a situation whereby we have 8 curriculums again and the ACARA version becomes the ninth by default? Hence the unique and authoritative nature of the Australian Curriculum: H&PE in determining some common core experiences is paramount.

Conclusion

Proposed Actions

It is important that ACARA uses the time between now and Nov/December wisely. Hopefully sufficient numbers of teachers and colleagues, academics and community members have contributed to the consultation process and provided their feedback. ACHPER has identified that there will be differences of opinion on issues such as the relative 'coverage' of the strands, how well they are integrated and the substantive content assigned to each band.

Work needs to be done to make the document more succinct, provide a better focus on some priority concepts and topics in each band of learning rather than providing an elaborate smorgasbord and platform of possibly un-manageable achievement standards.

There should be less descriptors and an audit of the examples/elaborations is required to ensure they are relevant and consistent in the way they are presented. It is acknowledged that support materials will play a huge role in helping teachers make the transition from the curriculum to the classroom and playground and to the General Capabilities and across curriculum learning.

Teacher assessment should be based on deep and meaningful observations of fewer achievement standards and not be assigned to quick ticks of too many of them.

The H&PE draft is not a bad piece of work per se but ACHPER argues it is not yet adequate. We committed some years back to supporting the crafting a *great* document for our kids. It should be aspirational, yes, but first and foremost it must be understandable and teachable by all teachers in all settings. Overall we believe the document can be made into a more realistic and appealing piece. It does not require a major re-write, rather a refinement and focus on some of the 'essential' elements of the curriculum.

ACHPER branches are thankful for the opportunities to be involved in video - conference sessions and members tell us the process with the education and health jurisdictions have been productive. ACHPER is here to support the work of ACARA and the writers and will continue to be a critical friend in both senses of the word.

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