Physical Education in New Zealand: 
a Socio-Critical and Bi-Cultural Positioning

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Abstract
This paper briefly highlights the socio-historical context in which New Zealand has developed as a nation. In particular it examines how physical education's initial development was dominated by European thought and more latterly within a bi-cultural context where the needs of an inclusive society are considered. Implicit in this development are the State's imperatives for education, which over the last two decades have used a totally revised school curriculum as a key strategy in achieving its political and social agendas. To some degree physical education has been complicit in this. However with the relatively newly developed socio-critical physical education curriculum and the new senior school qualifications alternative ways in viewing the movement culture have become apparent. This, these authors argue, guarantees physical education immediate future.

Key words: Physical education, New Zealand curriculum, senior school qualifications, bi-culturalism.

Purpose
The purpose of this article is to:
Provide a brief overview of the socio-historical and cultural context in which schooling and in particular physical education developed in Aotearoa New Zealand;
Critically outline the recent curriculum developments in physical education in New Zealand including senior school qualifications.

Brief Socio-historical Background
European settlement of Aotearoa/New Zealand began soon after Captain Cook (British explorer) discovered it in 1769. However it was not until 1840 that a founding document (Treaty of Waitangi) between the British and Māori (indigenous people of New Zealand/Aotearoa) was formalised. A central tenet of the Treaty was the principal of a bicultural partnership between the British (Crown) and Māori. A partnership where equal rights, equal opportunities, shared power and decision making processes that respected that both Māori and Pākehā (New Zealander of European decent) cultures would exist [22]. Unfortunately for Māori, as tangata whenua (‘people of the land’, referring to those who are spiritually linked to the land) colonization, particularly through the education system, led to the marginalisation of Māori culture, language, customs, values and traditions. The loss of tikanga (cultural practices) including control over traditional Māori physical cultural practices conflicted with the Treaty arrangements and would impact on the New Zealand education system right through to the first decade of the 21st Century.

For this ‘young’ country, education in the form of schooling played a major role in its future development, both for Māori and Pākehā. Physical education’s role in the schooling process was important. Initially, physical education was placed in the school curriculum from 1877. Its presence in the total curriculum can be attributed to the need for physical training and fitness in readiness for possible military action to protect the British Empire [10, 27, 39] and to contribute to civilizing the indigenous people.

Notwithstanding the marginalization of Māori, by 1912 the physical education emphasis in the primary school had faded from its initial focus. However in the secondary school military training remained universal until the 1960’s. Educational justification for this approach stressed that training of this nature ‘would
improve young men’s physiques, teach them orderly habits, and give them a conception of the place of obedience in a well ordered life” [27, p.48]. This approach was promoted for both Māori and Pākehā alike. In addition to this emphasis, right throughout the 1900’s, the ‘education of the physical’ for Māori through subjects such as agriculture, market gardening, stock and poultry farming, overtly perpetuated an earlier belief that the civilisation of Māori could be best achieved through activities of a physical nature [20]. The initial categorization of Māori as overtly physical, unenlightened coloured people, and best suited for mindless physical roles simply reinforced the Cartesian philosophy of mind/body dualism and the European dominance in education [1]. Thus, the historical development of physical education in New Zealand was inextricably linked to the colonisation process, the political agendas and alliances, the need to have a disciplined and effective workforce and army [9] and to contribute to ‘civilising the natives’ [20].

More contemporary developments in New Zealand physical education have progressed along similar lines where the influence and maintenance of Western capitalism has played a major role. As Foucault [15] suggests capitalism quickly realized the importance of physical activity and body control and saw schooling as the ideal place in which this could occur. Physical education and sport in New Zealand have historically been used to achieve controlled and disciplined bodies in preparation for a work force in order to supply the labour markets of capitalism. As Kirk [24] reports the historical and contemporary schooling process was focused on achieving docility and utility. Docility in terms of learning obedience and utility in terms of teaching the students productivity – both of which are critical in the maintenance and development of efficient capital markets and the integration of the indigene. Kirk [24] further argues that little has changed in the 21st Century. Schools continue to regulate bodies and promote uniformity and in so doing become somewhat abstracted from the real life of the student. Foucault [15] had previously argued that:

“In the initial stages of capitalism body control took the form of mass military style exercise, but as capitalism has evolved into a corporate form, so too has physical education and sport, with an emphasis moving from external control of the body (and person) to individual accountability for health and fitness development”[9, p.227].

As many scholars, [6, 7, 10; 15, 23, 24, 41] argued, the role that physical education has played in controlling and disciplining the body has ensured that it has survived in contemporary schooling simply because of the perceived benefits to capitalism. Physical education in New Zealand has clearly been complicit, al-be-it unwittingly at times, in its pedagogical work of promoting economic order and contributing to the civilizing process. Even after 100 years of schooling, the imperatives of the State continue to guide, influence and even direct the nature of the school curriculum and physical education is no exception. This State involvement has continued with, at times, a seemingly indifferent commitment to the Treaty and the fostering of a bi-cultural society. While the State might set out its imperatives through initiatives in curriculum requirements the strategic importance of regulating the teaching profession becomes a central mechanism to achieving its future economic prosperity. The State’s need to stay connected to, set learning and achievement goals, direct the teaching profession and monitor its pedagogical work must therefore strategically involve accountability measures. One of these key measures takes the form of, what is to be taught in schools (national curriculum requirements) and physical education is part of this strategic accountability.

Physical Education Curriculum Development in New Zealand

Two decades on from the State’s rigorous and vigorous programmes of social and economic reforms New Zealand education continues to be under pressure to achieve economic efficiency. The reforms, which had their roots in the political and economic principles associated with the market ethos of economic rationalism, directly confronted the social democracy that had become a feature of New Zealand’s socio-political culture. Instead neo-
liberal views of the market where self-interest, competition and economic efficiency dominated political discourse [6, 8; 34]. The reforms saw the demise of the welfare state, where people’s expectations, since the 1930’s, to have access to housing, education, health services and employment had now disappeared. As Culpan [6] argues critical to the success of the reforms was the need to embed them in education, which served as the vehicle for psychological, social and structural change. The need to reform schooling in New Zealand was one of the State’s important agenda items. The New Zealand Curriculum Framework [28] consequently served as the blueprint for schooling in New Zealand and as the official policy for learning and assessment. This policy document identified seven essential learning areas which would be the school curriculum. Each of these seven essential learning areas was to have a new curriculum statement. Health and Physical Well-being (later to change to Health and Physical Education) was one of these essential learning areas.

The Ministry of Education released Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum (NZHPE) [29] at the end of the 20th Century. This document set out the learning requirements for all students in regards to health and physical education. It set out with the intention of developing a new teaching and learning paradigm for physical education [10]. In particular it set out to assist students in their understanding of the diverse meanings and practices associated with the physical and movement cultures [5]. Central to achieving this the developers of NZHPE set out to:

- “provide a broader vision for physical education where the culture of movement can be seen as a valued and legitimate educative practice;
- encourage the development of more holistic practices for physical education by making use of the critical and humanistic dimensions of learning;
- provide alternative visions about what school physical education could be, what it might mean to be physically educated and what knowledge, skills, attitudes and values are needed to achieve this in a holistic manner;
- capture the potential of physical education by providing a socio-ecological value orientation and anchoring it in social critique that acknowledges the inter-relatedness of science, social, moral and ethical dimensions;
- engender debate and discussion on possible alternative pedagogies;
- engender debate and discussion around hidden curriculum discourse such as healthism, competition, elitism, body construction, sport, and bi-culturalism;
- integrate an acknowledgement of both national and international cultural orientations and practices” [12 p.52-53].

Scholars [5, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12] have all contributed commentaries associated with the development of this document, its worthiness and its critique. While it is not our intention to review their arguments one of the common themes that does come through in their writings is that NZHPE and its revised counter-part The New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) [31] has a strong socio-critical orientation which draws significantly on a socio-critical humanist perspective. As Culpan and Bruce [12] suggest:

“Essentially the new curriculum sought to redress the dominant focus on the scientisation of movement and its corresponding emphasis on individualism which was philosophically woven into the previous national curriculum statement. As a result of this redress, a socio-critical stance of the type favouring critical pedagogy was promoted in this new context” (p. 4).

Central to achieving a move from a scientised technocratic view of physical education towards a more socio-critical perspective are the four underlying inter-dependent concepts which are:

“Hauora:
A Maori philosophy of well-being that includes the dimensions taha wairua (spirituality), taha hinengaro (mental and emotional), taha tinana (physical), and taha whanau (social), each one influencing and supporting the others.

Attitudes and values:
A positive, responsible attitude on the part of students to their own well-being; respect, care, and concern for other people and the environment; and a sense of social justice.

The socio-ecological perspective:
A way of viewing and understanding the inter-relationships that exist between the individual, others and society.

Health promotion:
A process that helps to develop and maintain supportive physical and emotional environments and that involves students in personal and collective action” [31, p. 22].

These along with the seven key areas of learning in NZHPE of Mental Health, Sexuality Education, Food and Nutrition, Body Care, Physical Activity, Sport Studies and Outdoor Education provide the basic conceptual framework from which programmes are developed.

In conceptualizing physical education in this manner Culpan [10] argues that there were a number of important constructs that need further explanation. Firstly he outlines how NZHPE draws significantly on the work of Arnold’s [2] conceptualization of learning in, through and about movement. In Arnold’s work the lived body becomes central to the notion of human embodiment where one’s mode of living, making sense of the world, and ability to move provides a consciousness that allows individuals to recognize their existence, and to explore their personal essence. In drawing on this, NZHPE positions movement as a rich and powerful mechanism for meaning making and indeed contributing to human development. The second construct of NZHPE that Culpan [10] argues as important is the emphasis placed on critique and in particular the attempt by the curriculum to communicate the importance of signaling that physical education is neither removed or isolated from individual existence or from the broader social, political, moral economic and cultural contexts of our times. By promoting this critique NZHPE is encouraging users of the curriculum to embrace a critical pedagogy (for a full analysis see Culpan & Bruce [12]). Indeed Culpan and Bruce [12] argue that by promoting a critical pedagogy physical education is better placed to promote:

“more meaning around physical activity, the importance of deliberate exercise, how people use, shape, and view their bodies, and how sport influences and reproduces power relations and privileges dominant groups in society” (p.50).

The third construct conceptulizing NZHPE is the importance of drawing together and making more obvious the inter-relationship of the physical, social, mental and emotional, and spiritual dimensions of well-being. As argued above, an individual’s sense of existence and meaning is inter-twined with the physical, social, mental and emotional, and spiritual contexts of their lives. This construct highlights that previous practices of focusing on the physical at the expense of social, mental and emotional, and spiritual dimensions essentially limited opportunities for students to process their experience in order to make and capture full personal and social meaning [26].

The fourth conceptualization of NZHPE focused on the fundamental need for the curriculum to be underpinned by a holism which, it is argued here, has largely been absent in previous documents. To promote a curriculum that acknowledges the inter-relatedness of the epistemological base of physical education, a holism that assists teachers and students to move beyond individualism and the individualist notions of self in order to recognize ‘the other’ was indeed necessary. Here the importance of a socio-ecological perspective [21] was adopted in an attempt to incorporate the inter-relatedness of self, others and society – both for the present and the future. The inclusion of a socio-ecological perspective provided the curriculum with a strongly recognizable philosophical position by which teachers and students could challenge constructs and assumptions within the discipline and expose the power relations (for a fuller analysis see Ministry of Education [30]). As Jewitt [21] and Culpan and Bruce [12] argue the central premise behind a socio-ecological perspective is that movement in all its cultural forms is not alienated, separated or isolated from its broader social, political, economic, moral and cultural contexts or relations. As Culpan and Bruce [12] state:

“Such influences affect how people view meanings and practices around physical activity
and how they exercise, use, shape and view their bodies. They also elucidate the competing interests that are evident in movement and how sport influences and reproduces power relations and privileges that dominant group at both individual and societal levels” (p.6).

An example of these conceptual constructs being manifested in NZHPE is in the statement: “Students will come to understand the social, cultural, economic and environmental factors that influence attitudes, beliefs and practices associated with sport. They will critically examine sport from the viewpoints of the school and society as a whole” [29, p.44].

Table 1. provides a useful illustration of the change that has occurred from previous physical education curricula to the NZHPE and its revised counter-part NZC. Given this significant epistemological shift in the conceptualisation of physical education in New Zealand new and diverse challenges have emerged.

Table 1. The Shift in NZ Physical Education (Adapted from Culpan and Bruce [12] p. 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scientised or Technocratic Model of Physical Education</th>
<th>Moving towards a Sociocritical Curriculum Orientation</th>
<th>Socio-critical Model promoting Well-being from a holistic sense using emancipatory pedagogies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previous NZ Curriculum</td>
<td>The epistemological and pedagogical shift</td>
<td>The ‘new’ Curriculums NZHPE (1999) and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The focus is on physical skill development. Physical education entirely focused on the physical aspects of movement.</td>
<td>Moving towards a Sociocritical Curriculum Orientation</td>
<td>The focus is on all aspects of the movement culture: i.e. learning in, through and about movement and taking into account the physical, social, spiritual and psychological dimensions of movements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health promotion is for physical health through physical activity and fitness development, generally on a narrow practical and performance basis.</td>
<td>Moving towards a Sociocritical Curriculum Orientation</td>
<td>Health promotion is conceptualised in its broadest sense, emphasising the holistic nature of health and well-being from a holistic and participatory perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programmes are dominated by movement orientations dedicated to sport. There is no time to explore other forms of movement. The cultural and spiritual considerations are ignored.</td>
<td>Moving towards a Sociocritical Curriculum Orientation</td>
<td>Movement is conceptualised in its broadest sense, with the significance, influence and functions of movement from both an individual and a societal perspective being studied. Cultural meanings are emphasised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching is characterised by the direct style: “This is how you do it”. Strongly positioned on the left side of the Mosston and Ashworth [32] spectrum. It tends to be gender biased and inequitable.</td>
<td>Moving towards a Sociocritical Curriculum Orientation</td>
<td>The teaching style is inquiry-based and reflective in nature. It encourages critical thought and challenges existing practice, and examines assumptions. It is emancipatory with a strong sense of social justice and equity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characterised by a very scientific view of movement, in which skills and fitness are measured for performance.</td>
<td>Moving towards a Sociocritical Curriculum Orientation</td>
<td>Ensures that the scientific, physical, social, economic, ethical and political dimensions of movements are explored and critically engaged.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Changing Nature of Physical Education

The diverse challenges emerging from the mandated curriculum have essentially focussed on the need for programmes in schools to move from a scientised technocratic orientation to one that is socio-critical in nature and emancipatory in action. No longer can school physical education programmes in New Zealand focus solely on performance aspects of diverse movement activities. No longer can physical education programmes’ legitimately promote the unproblematic discourse of physical activity=fitness = health. Instead physical education programmes needed to move beyond the gymnasium walls and liberate the subject from its entrapped scientised technocratic practices Culpan [6]. Physical education programmes are now expected to explore and make sense of the oppressive political and social practices within the movement culture. They are expected to be able to highlight the complex inter-relatedness of individual and community well-being and foster the links between theories and practice (praxis). Programmes are expected to be the catalyst in encouraging students into taking social action to address power inequalities and social justice issues within physical education and sport [5]. They are expected to acknowledge the intent of the Treaty and the role physical education plays in achieving a bi-cultural society [35]. The complexities in meeting these challenges, whilst significant, have resulted in change.

Physical educators in schools have had to foster a philosophical paradigmatic shift. This has been characterised by a gradual change in values, beliefs, actions. Essentially programmes have had to under-go a change in value orientation. Already significant progress has been made in this regard with a number of school programmes moving towards a balance between the movement sciences and the socio-cultural aspects of movement [25]. This has been accompanied by the subsequent need to change pedagogical practices [26]. These changes are, and continue to be, a considerable epistemological shift in emphasis and indicates that physical education is moving in the right direction. While this shift has occurred o some degree, teachers are still mindful that such shifts need to be made within a realisation that the practical elements of physical education still need to be taught. This indeed is a complexity that if not thought through and critically examined can actually create an impediment to progress. That impediment being, a ‘suck back’ into technocratic scientised behaviours emanating from 20th Century thinking.

Examples of such impediments or distractions have become evident with other government initiatives encouraging schools to take responsibility for talent identification for elite sport, physical activity-nutrition imperatives, the State holding schools responsible for the young people’s health and the anti social behaviour of some of our young people (for a full analysis of this see Culpan [10] and Gatman [16]. Safe guards to help resist the ‘suck back’ impediment have been characterised by the promotion of more coherent physical education pedagogies. Pedagogies that assist in moving from technocratic/scientised/ reproductive models of teaching physical education to physical education models that are more student centred, more productive, liberating and critical. Such models include: Moston and Ashworth’s [32] spectrum of teaching styles and games-based approaches such as play-teach-play (Graham [18]; the Teaching Games for Understanding Curriculum model [4]; the Tactical Games Model [19]; Game Sense [13] and Siedentop’s Sport Education Model [37]. All these make links to student centred, constructivist pedagogies and allow for the introduction of critical pedagogy using the work of Smyth [38].

Another significant shift in New Zealand physical education brought about by the change in curriculum orientation and the concurrent change in the State’s senior school qualification system is senior school physical education programmes.

Secondary School Physical Education Qualifications

Despite physical education’s important positioning in the total school curriculum over time, it battled for equal academic recognition and status, particularly at senior school level. In part its status, as a ‘second class citizen’
alongside subjects such as English, mathematics and science, is attributed to its lack of formal qualifications at the senior school level. However things changed and three decades ago its academic status improved with the introduction of senior school physical education which contributed to a national qualification. This was firstly introduced at year 12 and then later introduced at year 13. These qualifications were Sixth Form Certificate and Bursaries Physical Education respectively. While the implementation of the qualifications was positive for physical education two challenges still remained. The first was that there was still no nationally recognised physical education qualification at year 11. In effect this meant that there was little progression or spiraling of content knowledge from junior physical education to senior physical education. The absence of a spiraling curriculum meant that students moved from predominantly physical activity programmes at the junior level into heavily scientised physical education content at the senior level [17]. The second challenge was the domination of the sciences such as biomechanics, exercise science, nutrition and motor learning as the underpinning content of the senior school programmes [6]. This privileging of science over many other areas of physical education content such as the socio-cultural and social-history of physical education was problematic. Nowhere in a student’s physical education programme did they have the opportunity of studying aspects such as: sport as a valued human practice, its educative worth, the power of the sport media, race and gender inequalities in sport, sport philosophy, Olympism or bi-cultural considerations. Essentially, physical education in New Zealand, at this time, failed to fully deliver a holistic programme. This state of affairs, Lineham [25] argues, can be attributed to physical education’s quest for academic credibility through the sciences and society’s emphasis on sporting success. Thus, it is argued here the essence of what a ‘physically educated’ person may be was never thoroughly investigated and as a consequence was lost [25].

**Sixth Form Certificate**

In the 1980’s the Sixth Form Certificate qualification (year 12) was available nationally. The national course had a compulsory module and up to five optional modules drawn from the Physical Education Syllabus for Junior Classes to Form 7 with guidelines for Early Childhood [42]. Additionally schools could develop local courses based on the needs of their students. Sixth Form Certificate was internally assessed using Achievement Based Assessment to generate a final grade for students that ranged from one to nine. All courses had to be approved and moderated by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) [42]. The Sixth Form Certificate offering in physical education was typified by anatomy, exercise physiology, biomechanics, motor learning, sports nutrition and practical aspects such as aquatics, outdoor education and selected sports performance. At that time it mirrored a diluted university physical education course. While this programme proved to be extremely popular it was abandoned in 2002 and replaced by the National Certificate in Educational achievement (NCEA).

**University Bursaries/Scholarship Physical**

In 1992 Bursaries Physical Education and Scholarship became available to all schools. A national prescription was devised that required students to complete three modules of learning at year 13. The modules included a compulsory Lifestyles model and a choice of two others. Teachers followed internally assessment procedures in all tasks and again Achievement Based Assessment processes were implemented. Bursaries physical education was unique in that it was totally internally assessed while all other subject area had some form of external assessment. To establish national consistency in the assessment of each module a Common Assessment Task (CAT) was utilised. Each CAT specified what must be assessed for each module. The assessment tasks for the CATs and the marking schedule used to grade these tasks were submitted for the national moderation each year to establish consistent grading between schools [42]. The advent of this programme was a major innovation at the time. It
contributed to a student's overall eligibility to enter into New Zealand Universities, provided post-school study opportunities and career pathways in physical education and related areas. Like the Sixth Form Certificate programme it proved to be extremely popular and was abandoned in 2002 to be replaced by the National Certificate in Educational Achievement (NCEA).

National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA)

In 1999 the Ministry of Education decided to revise all senior school qualifications and establish a new system better suited for the 21st Century. As a result all existing senior school qualifications would be phased out by 2002. Panels of experts were established to cover the seven curriculum areas as specified in the Ministry of Education Curriculum Framework [28]. The task to the physical education expert panel was to create a matrix of Achievement Standards for senior school physical education and develop examples of assessment tasks and exemplars of student work for each Level One (year 11) Achievement Standard [42]. This process was later repeated for Level Two (year 12) and Level Three (year 13) Achievement Standards. A Scholarship examination was also developed for those students who were academically gifted. It was set at Level 4 of the National Qualifications Framework and was made available to year 13 students who chose to sit the exam [33]. In 2002 NCEA Achievement Standards were released at Level One. Levels Two and Three followed over the next two years.

The development of Achievement Standards across all subjects was an attempt to take the best of internal and external assessment and provide a unified, valid, manageable and academically credible qualification within the National Curriculum. The Standards were designed to demonstrate what students can actually do and understand. Credits achieved from successfully meeting the standard at either: Achieved, Merit or Excellence provided clarity to an individual's specific content knowledge and related skills. Students are awarded the respective credits for each standard they meet, with a total of 24 available for every approved subject area of which physical education was one [33]. In essence an Achievement Standard:
- "Specifies an outcome to be achieved,
- Specifies the achievement requirements for the awarding of credits,
- Provides the achievement criteria for the award of achievement, merit and excellence grades,
- Has tasks that are moderated nationally,
- Describes internal or external assessment that can be used to measure performance or competence in the areas being studied,
- Assesses curriculum based subjects with between five and eight Achievement Standards with a total of 24 credits at each level" [42].

In physical education's case Achievement Standards were designed to better assess, with greater accuracy, and consistency, the skills, attributes and understandings a physically educated person should have [42]. After debating the merits of external examinations and internal assessments the original expert panel successfully argued with the Ministry of Education for all physical education Achievement Standards to be internally assessed.

The range of Physical Education Achievement Standards from year 11-year 13 is known as The Physical Education Matrix and indicates the standards that may be used to assess content such as the socio-cultural, bicultural, science, physical performance and physical well-being aspects of physical education. In doing so they better reflect the holistic nature of and appropriate levels in, the NZHPE [29]. For physical education, having a nationally recognised and valid qualification at all senior years has certainly has raised the profile of physical education as a legitimate and credible academic subject. It has provided a seamless physical education programme from year 1 to year 13. Further to this seamlessness, the senior school qualification, NCEA, has further enhanced the importance of junior school physical education and reinforced the need for teacher to deliver the mandated NZHPE.

While NZHPE [29] and NZC [31] have been mandated for some time now, as expected, progress with these shifts in regards to school
programmes vary from school to school. Some shifts are rapid others pedestrian. Significant shifts have resulted in some school programmes, particularly at senior level focussing on raising student’s critical consciousness through the implementation of critical pedagogy [43, 12]. The establishment of the socio-critical perspective that integrates the praxis divide by examining and critiquing macro structures that influence movement culture practises within a movement context are now evident (Wright, 2004). This perspective provides rich and fertile learning material from which students can make meaning, reflect on that meaning making and then if necessary take social action. This is the critical action cycle that is articulated in NZHPE and NZC and is now becoming more and more evident in school programmes.

The curriculum orientation and the subsequent changes including senior school qualifications have received positive endorsement [5, 43]. The changes appear to be consistent with some other international trends, particularly in the UK and Australia [5]. However they have not occurred in the absence of strong criticism [8]. Two particular criticisms of NZHPE have focused on the documents socio-critical orientation and its bi-cultural content.

Critique of NZHPE

Sustained criticism was provided by the Education Forum who have a strong affiliation with a wealthy conservative group of business leaders calling themselves The New Zealand Business Roundtable. The Forum in their submission to the Ministry [14] questioned the epistemological base of the statement, its pedagogical possibility, the breadth and depth of what was being proposed, its manageability in schools, resource costs and assessment implications. To detail and explore each of these is beyond the scope of this article; however, some criticisms that have specific relevance and will be highlighted.

The Education Forum reported to the Ministry, that in their view, NZHPE did not make clear its theoretical foundations. They argued that although the foundations were unstated, other materials [6, 40] made it clear that the position taken was a ‘neo-Marxist/critical view of education’. The Forum [14] claimed the hidden agendas within the NZHPE were covert attempts at changing New Zealand society “an exercise in individual and social emancipation, and attacks of a subversive kind on existing social, communal, political and economic institutions, structures and practices” (p.5).

Given the Forum’s conservative and strong vested interest in neo-liberalism the criticisms are not overly surprising. The Forum argued that NZHPE needed a more appropriate orientation characterised by a pragmatism that would:

“produce a much more constrained and manageable remit for Health and Physical Education, and one that is more true to its particular and respected place in the school curriculum” (p.95).

They proposed that the real remit of health and physical education was Food and Nutrition, Physical Activity and Outdoor Education. The Forum expressed strong support for “the preservation and transmission of knowledge and culture” (p.ix) and strong opposition to the emphasis on educating for emancipation and change. This critique created vociferous debate and strong interrogation but given the significant support from scholars, teachers, community groups and an independent academic evaluation the Forum’s criticism did not provide achieve any forced change [8].

Another area of NZHPE which drew criticism was the bi-cultural component. Despite significant Māori input into NZHPE, in the spirit of the bi-cultural nature of New Zealand and the expectations of the Treaty, NZHPE was criticised for not necessarily meeting the needs of Māori [20, 35]. NZHPE claimed to be culturally responsive but Salter [35] noted that whilst NZHPE integrated Māori conceptions of health and physical education, the conceptions were Western interpretations that sanitized the beliefs, values and cultural practices that underpinned them. The conceptions failed to grasp their Māori meanings. To illustrate the point Salter [36] argued that for Māori, the concepts in NZHPE have far deeper meaning and understanding to that which is evident in the Western view. For Māori these concepts are lived experiences but simply ‘official knowledge’ for the Pākehā.
Salter [35] highlights the use of the key concept Hauora, which, when translated loosely, is associated with well-being. For Māori the term’s literal meaning is the breath of life interwoven with the cultural complexities of the spiritual, mental, emotional, social connectedness and richness of being human. Despite these powerful criticisms Burrows [5], whilst acknowledging the complexities inherent in the inclusion of Maori conceptions of physical education and health, argues that the presence of such conceptions opens the door for students in physical education and health programmes to explore holistic notions of well-being and to challenge dominant ways of thinking about and practicing physical education.

“Conceiving of well-being in such a holistic fashion disrupts conventional mind/body dichotomies, disturbs everyday understanding that health and fitness can be achieved through individual discipline and effort alone” [5, p. 112].

Burrows [5] further argues that the attempts to encapsulate a bi-cultural holism provides a useful ‘non vacuumed’ platform for critical inquiry into the diverse socio-cultural ways in which physical education and health knowledge is created, understood and practiced. In this regard Burrows [5] sees the amalgam of the socio-critical perspective and the bi-cultural component of NZHPE as harmonious innovations. She acknowledges that despite the criticisms NZHPE has certainly provided a new and alternative way in which physical education can be examined and practised. Drawing on this argument, this article proposes that the curriculum innovations over the last decade have served to position and secure New Zealand physical education future in the schooling process for years to come by highlighting its educative and social value.

Concluding Remarks

New Zealand’s education system of which physical education has always had an important presence has played a critical role in the development of the country. Historically, physical education’s role was essential in ensuring that our young people were physically capable, had orderly habits, learnt to be obedient and for Māori, New Zealand indigenous people, civilised into and integrated into European ways of living. This later point, although at odds with the Treaty of Waitangi, continued to exist for nearly a century. The rationale behind this was that New Zealand needed to be economically competitive and fully participate in Western capitalism. It is only in the last two decades, with the renaissance of Māori culture and strong political fractions insisting on adhering to the sentiments of the Treaty that a true bi-cultural focus consistent with the Treaty has begun to emerge. This focus has meant that the State takes an even more powerful role in education to ensure that its economic and cultural strategy could be achieved. These imperatives have been characterised by a school curriculum that takes cognisance of economic competitiveness and bi-culturalism. In physical education’s case, a curriculum was developed that put in place conceptualisations and constructs that changed physical education emphasis from scientised technocratic practices to a more socio-critical orientations. These orientations created opportunities and reinforced the need to use critical humanist pedagogies which in so doing have begun to assist learners to better understand and critique the movement culture and give them critical tools to locate themselves within it [12]. Of particular relevance here is the importance of bi-cultural contexts and the formal introduction of senior schools qualifications.

These events have meant that school programmes have had to change accordingly. As a result school programmes have had to re-conceptualise their orientations in order to meet the new socio-critical thrust of which bi-culturalism is unique, important and critical aspect. The change, it is argued here, has hopefully guaranteed physical education place in the national curriculum for years to come.
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Received: December 2010
Accepted: May 2011
Published: January 2012

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