

# A Catholic education perspective on the importance of the HPE curriculum in schools

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*In society sport often connotes a religious reference. Sport as a medium for learning is directly related to the curriculum key learning area of Health and Physical Education (HPE). Essentially it is a logical extension of the physical education program (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992). The unique 'learning in, through and about movement', nature of HPE enables a focus on the physical dimension. Hence, sport interacts intimately with the strand 'developing concepts and skills for physical activity', embedded in the Queensland HPE syllabus. In the physical dimension students can be presented with many practical and social experiences that require living and reflecting upon Catholic religious traditions and gospel values. Therefore, it is argued that within Catholic education, the HPE learning area is strongly connected to the Religious Education curriculum. By investigating how HPE can be utilized as a medium to promote the eight distinctive Catholic qualities identified by renowned Catholic educator, Groome (2002), the learning area's importance within the Catholic school context and connection to Religious Education can be further recognised. It is argued that connecting these two Catholic education key learning areas is a role that both the HPE learning area and teacher have willingly assumed and one that has become more significant in recent times.*

## Introduction

Sport is often related to religion. Although contemporary Australian society has been influenced by a secular shift (Hughes, 1999), most members of the public acknowledge religious reference through sport. Many even find it a comforting reminder of their faith. The 'Sign of the Cross' regularly made by Australian cricketer, Matthew Hayden, is one such public manifestation. The role sport plays in religious revelation is not only experienced by famous, elite or professional sportspersons, but includes all participants of physical activities who are prepared to extend their faith into all aspects of their life. The potential for Catholic religious permeation at the 'grassroots' of sport, amongst the young physically active students within Australian primary schools' physical education lessons, particularly within Catholic education will be examined.

## Is God an umpire?

Within Catholic education the HPE curriculum documents are strongly connected to the Religious Education curriculum material. Under the HPE umbrella, physical education sits alongside health education, outdoor education, home economics, and religious education (Macdonald, 2003; Macdonald & Glover, 1997). Specifically, the HPE strand *Enhancing Personal Development*

is also an essential curriculum component embedded in Religious Education within Catholic schools. "Within the Catholic Christian tradition, personal and social development focuses on the lifelong journey towards wholeness as a person created in the image of God and one who contributes to the common good" (Brisbane Catholic Education, 2003, p. 60). HPE is a fundamental learning area in a Catholic primary school as it recognizes the various dimensions of health, which develops the students' physical, social, emotional, mental and spiritual growth (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 1999b; Hutton, 1999).

Although HPE caters for all aspects of an holistic education, the nature of the key learning area does enable a focus on the physical dimension. Can Religious Education in a Catholic school cater for all aspects of a holistic education without connecting curriculum with the HPE learning area? It is unlikely, for the physical dimension enables many opportunities for interactions of a religious nature (Brisbane Catholic Education, 2003). In the physical dimension students are presented with many practical and social experiences that require living and reflecting upon Catholic religious traditions and gospel values, that is, experiential learning (Mavor, 1997). "HPE provides students with unique opportunities to enhance

their knowledge and skills, to make informed decisions, to plan strategies and to implement and evaluate actions in relation to healthy human functioning" (p.40). The Catholic Christian tradition provides 2000 years of reflection and teaching on Jesus and requires constant referral to as growing and renewing occurs. The four gospels in the bible provide insights into Jesus and his mission, the challenge for Catholics is to live according to the values that Jesus models (Brisbane Catholic Education, 2003). "The Catholic school has at the heart of the curriculum, the values contained in the gospels" (Kealey, 1985, p.14). Therefore, HPE plays an important role in the promotion of Catholic tradition and gospel values, which ultimately enables authentic human and Catholic Christian development.

### **Catholicism: Physical 'Club History'**

The connection between HPE and Catholic Religious Education has not always been as strapping as it may ideally appear in contemporary education. Although, "throughout history, physicality has been closely linked with religion literally and symbolically" (Macdonald, 1998, p.86) there has been longstanding tension between the traditional Catholic anxiety and 'guilt' about the flesh and the enthusiastic adoption of physical activities by many Catholic schools. In 200 B.C. ascetic doctrine promoted self-denial and the abandonment of worldly pleasures. Consequently, physical activities was considered a hedonistic diversion, unchallenged until the Renaissance and then again by the rise of muscular Christianity in the mid 1800s (Macdonald, 1998).

Strong support for physical activities has come from many key figures throughout the history of the Catholic Church, including: St. Paul; Clement of Alexandria; St Dominic; St. Thomas Aquinas; Pope Pius II; St. Ignatius; Pope Pius XI; Pope Pius XII; Aristotle; Pope Paul VI and the present Pope John Paul II (Feeney, 1995). However, despite this strong support, one cannot assume that the historical domination of the asceticism ideology is not present in the curriculum, albeit in the hidden curriculum, of contemporary Catholic education. Therefore, a faith that has often portrayed the body and the physical side as a representation of temptation and weakness in humanity cannot be expected to immediately embrace physical learning as significant.

### **HPE: playing by the rules**

To investigate the degree of importance of the HPE learning area within the Catholic education context, the context needs to be firstly examined. By probing the essential common features that identify Catholics or ultimately make Catholics Catholic, the HPE learning area's suitability and necessity within the education system can be recognized. This investigation is designed to answer the analogy of whether or not the HPE learning area plays by the rules within the Catholic education context?

What does the Catholic education context consist of? The role of the Catholic School, described by the Director of Brisbane Catholic Education, David Hutton, is "to provide the opportunity to experience in an active manner the key elements of Christian life: liturgy, prayer and service" (1999, p.19). Authors and academics have various philosophies of what these key elements include but it is

Thomas Groome, regarded as one of the most influential contemporary Catholic religious educators (Holmes 2004; Groome, 2002), who has been chosen to provide the framework for analysis. Groome's work on Catholic qualities is supported and commended by Hesburgh (President Emeritus, University of Notre Dame), Shaughnessy (religious educator), McNamee (Institute for Christian Social Thought, University of St. Thomas), McBrien (Professor of Theology, University of Notre Dame), Kennedy (religious author), Johnson Borchard (religious author), Cunningham (Professor of Theology, University of Notre Dame) and Leach (religious author).

Professor of Theology and Religious Education at Boston College, Thomas Groome (2002) identifies eight distinctive Catholic qualities:

- the sense of sacramentality (finding the infinite in the finite),
- feeling of community,
- appreciation of human potential,
- appreciation of fallibility,
- concern for justice,
- concern for the unfortunate,
- reverence for tradition,
- conviction that care should have no borders.

By identifying how physical activities in schools, through the mediums of sport and HPE, can promote these different Catholic qualities, correspondingly the HPE learning area's importance can be further recognised within the Catholic school context.

The '*sense of sacramentality*' can be achieved through all life experiences which fundamentally have the capacity to lead us to God (Catholic Education Commission- NSW, 1993). This quality relates directly to the spiritual dimension which can be experienced through the engagement of the HPE curriculum. It is the "sense of connection to phenomena and unusual events beyond self and usual sensory and rational existence; a sense of place within the universe" (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 1999b, p.26). The nature of HPE offers opportunities that increase the sense of sacramentality through movement, skill and physical fitness where God's influence and design are apparent (Catholic Education Commission- NSW, 1993). This phenomenon has the potential to be experienced through sport, as reminisced by Australian swimmer Rebecca Creedy during her national swimming trials for the 2000 Sydney Olympics. "I was asking for a lot of help and I really needed it and I did have a strong sense that someone was helping me." (McGirr, 1999, p.8). Also, Australian Ballet identity Steven Heathcote shares his support, describing dance as deeply religious and spiritual (Hughes, 2002). Hence, it can be argued that if the '*sense of sacramentality*' can be experienced by some of Australia's elite athletes then why not also by children within Catholic primary schools, where similar yet modified physical activity encounters can be provided? An increased awareness of the possible presence of such a Catholic quality can be brought to the students' attention by providing quality instructed HPE lessons.

The potential for promotion of this Catholic quality through HPE is reinforced by the Catholic Church, evident

in an excerpt from the Vatican Council II- The Conciliar and Post Conciliar documents:

*The Church values highly those other educational media which belong to the common patrimony of men and which make a valuable contribution to the development of character and to the formation of men/women. These it seeks to ennoble by imbuing them with its own spirit. Such are the media of social communication, different groups devoted to the training of mind and body, youth associations, and especially schools.* (Flannery, 1988, p.730)

The key learning area of HPE relates directly to the educational media being referred to by the Vatican Council II, as this key learning area is a media of social communication, it involves learning within the mind and body and it is for all youth to enjoy within Catholic schools.

A 'feeling of community' is developed through 'lifeskills', more specifically the 'Enhancing Personal Development' strand incorporated in the HPE syllabus. This enables provision of social and citizenship skill development, both of which are embedded within the social dimension of the curriculum documents (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 1999a). The social dimension of HPE includes the "relationships with others, ethnic customs, interpersonal and communication skills and sense of belonging" (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 1999b, p.26). For it is through community that the self is developed (Higgins, 2001). Tim Lane, a popular Australian sports personality, endorses the notion of community in sport, "When we went to the footy, I experienced a sense of family unity" (McGirr, 2001, p.17). Therefore, if community can be promoted through the physical activity medium of sport then it can be assumed that promotion is possible within the HPE learning area.

Community is vital if we are to have active and fulfilling lives as Christians, valuing ourselves, each other and all of creation. It is essential within Catholic philosophy that these values be developed within the growing student (Catholic Education Commission-NSW, 1993). Physical activity through means of HPE and sport enables the development for both personal and group fulfillment within the community:

*Teamwork offers excellent opportunities for individuals to develop the values of loyalty (supporting each other, win or lose), fair play (learning to play by the rules of the game), generosity (putting the needs of the team ahead of individual interests), friendship (a way to meet new people) and a spirit of cooperation (learning how to work with others in order to accomplish a specific goal).* (Hoffman, 1992, p.253).

The fostering of community through sports is supported by the head of the Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II. He has stated that physical activities develop a lively and mutual appreciation and sincere respect between people and the abilities and gifts that they possess, which ultimately enhances friendship (1982).

The third and fourth qualities shared amongst Catholics according to Groome (2002), are an 'appreciation of human potential and fallibility.' The nature of physical activities through the medium of HPE and sport continuously provide opportunities that can remind students of challenges that are set as goals or are confronted as obstacles. Australian

athlete Nova Peris-Kneebone shares her feelings about this in saying, "I believe our prayers are answered but in a number of ways. You win for a reason, you lose for a reason, you get injured for a reason" (McGirr, 2000, p.15). The achievement and failure of goals and the overcoming or shortfall of obstacles, consummated through HPE and sport, enables better than other curriculum areas, the appreciative construction of human potential and fallibility.

Physical activity allows students many opportunities to test their physical and mental limits, to explore their understanding of self. The medium of sport, which is used in the teaching and learning of HPE "draws out of the human person some of one's noblest qualities and talents. The participant must learn the secrets of one's own body, its strength and weaknesses, its stamina and its breaking point" (John Paul II, 1982, p.8). HPE ideally commences a lifetime of well-being, maintained through physical activities of various levels. Consequently, this introduces students to the notion of commitment, dedication and confrontation of challenges. Pope John Paul II addresses this theory of challenges met through the nature of HPE:

*One must develop through long hours of exercise and effort the power of concentration and the habit of discipline, learning how to hold one's strength in reserve and to conserve energy for that final moment when the victory depends on a great burst of speed or ones last surge of strength* (John Paul II, 1982, p.8).

Sport and physical activities can enable a realisation of talents, strengths and weaknesses, possibilities and limitations, self discipline and improvement (Hoffman, 1992). It does this through cooperating and competing not only amongst individuals or teams, but within oneself. "Competition encourages a desire for continual self-improvement so that one is not satisfied with the status quo" (Hoffman, 1992, p. 255). The cooperation and competition within oneself is fundamentally based on self improvement.

The fifth and sixth qualities that Catholics share are a 'concern for justice and the unfortunate' (Groome, 2002). These qualities are developed in HPE through physical activities as:

*The necessary competition, far from being a motive of division, is seen on the contrary to be a positive factor of dynamic emulation possible only in a framework of mutual relations accepted, measured, and promoted* (John Paul II, 1979b, p. 5).

Not only are mutual relations accepted but respect for one another's diverse abilities is developed and permeates through sports assisting the student to grow as an exemplary citizen and a good Christian (Hoffman, 1992).

A 'concern for justice and the unfortunate' is evident in the HPE curriculum documents' commitment to social justice. Within the curriculum material "the principles of diversity, equity and supportive environments are highlighted" (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 1999a, p.3). The Reclink Football League in Melbourne manifests social justice through sport. This is a competition for those who are homeless and unemployed. This league offers the players something to live for and motivates them to have another shot at life (Ferris, 2001). This is one

example of how sport can provide the development of this Catholic quality and exemplifies the possibilities for the HPE learning area to do the same.

The seventh quality shared amongst Catholics (Groome, 2002) is a 'reverence for tradition.' The Catholic Christian tradition requires constant referral to and calls us into new ways of growing and renewing through everyday living experiences (Brisbane Catholic Education, 2003). In the physical dimension students are presented with many practical and social experiences that require living and reflecting upon Catholic religious traditions and gospel values. The HPE key learning area enables opportunities for the revelation of the gospel messages, which is to live as Jesus did. One example may be encouraging team mates rather than ridiculing, which manifests the golden rule found in Luke's gospel, 'Do to others as you would have them do to you' (Luke 6: 31; Catholic Bible Press, 1987). Hence, sports/ HPE and the Gospel message enhance and complete one another (Hoffman, 1992).

The eighth and final quality that makes Catholics Catholic is the conviction that 'care should have no borders' (Groome, 2002). Caring exists within the first-aid, emergency safety procedures and personal development aspects of the learning area. However, physical activities also can promote respect and care for others through teamwork and competition. The values of loyalty, fair play, generosity, friendship and a spirit of cooperation are all aspects of care (Hoffman, 1992). Care is essential as "to realize our potential demands a commitment to the people, events and things of our world, in them, we believe, God may be found" (Catholic Education Commission-NSW, 1993, p. 75).

### **Teamwork: Religious, health and physical education.**

The relationship between HPE and Religious education in Catholic schools has in recent times become more significant due to the increasing role Catholic schools have adopted in providing students with an experience of Church. In Australian society an increasing proportion of Catholics are becoming nominal members of their Church (Hughes, 1999). The numbers have fallen and continue to do so (Hughes, 1999). Hence the numbers of children within Catholic primary schools who have no religious affiliation is increasing rapidly (O'Shea, 2000). The role of the Catholic School, described by Hutton (1999, p.19), is "to provide the opportunity to experience in an active manner the key elements of Christian life". Physical activities in Catholic primary schools, through the mediums of the HPE learning area and sport, have outstanding potential to develop the eight distinctive Catholic qualities identified by Groome. Furthermore, they have the advantage that is affiliated with the child's natural play structure (Grace, 2000), this is most important as "the early physical learnings form the basis for all other learnings" (Kealey, 1985, p.1).

For many students today, the Catholic school is often their only experience of Church (Puttock, 2002). Therefore, the role religious education and HPE play and their relationship within the Catholic school has increased in recent times. Subsequently, the HPE specialist teacher

has assumed the responsibility of contributing 'hands on' learning experiences that connect the HPE and religious education curriculum. This role occurs often subconsciously by the Catholic HPE teacher and therefore, exists without acknowledgement. The implications of this are that the importance of the HPE specialist teacher and the importance of the HPE curriculum within Catholic education are often undervalued and the learning and teaching potential of this key learning area is often not fully utilized. The religious role of the HPE curriculum in a Catholic context would be enhanced by introducing in every Catholic primary school, a HPE qualified specialist Catholic educator who can provide consciously planned (Tinning, 1986) and quality instructed HPE/Religious Education connected lessons. For this to occur the HPE specialist would require the ability to direct the students, for the teachers' "individual moralities shape the choices they make and the conflicts that concern them as they function as moral educators" (Joseph & Efron, 1993, p.217). Without quality instruction or if HPE is insensitively taught, it is more likely to have a negative influence on learners than a positive one (Tinning, Macdonald, Wright & Hickey, 2001). The immense potential for learning through movement requires further recognition within Catholic schools. Additionally, the significance of the HPE learning area needs to be common knowledge amongst educators, administration and employing authorities.

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## Author Notes

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## ACHPER - Strategic Planning

In the last Edition of the *Journal* reference was made to the process being undertaken to develop ACHPER's 2004-2008 Strategic Plan.

In this edition the Board has released some more detail with a view to publishing the approved Plan in the final 2004 edition and on the ACHPER website.

The 2004-2008 Strategic Plan was developed collaboratively by the National Executive and Staff of ACHPER under the guidance of the Board.

The Plan includes a number of belief and value statements that define our core business and activities. The following are indicative of our vision and purpose as an organisation.

### ACHPER Values:

- Its members and branches
- Quality service
- Diligent governance
- Collaboration with partners and branches

### ACHPER's Code of Practice

- We seek to be an accountable, caring and respected organisation
- We are determined to be professional, approachable, helpful and informative
- We expect to be recognized and appreciated for our expertise, advice and influence
- ACHPER's "Brand" will reflect what our whole organisation stands for and does. This includes branch activities, our quality resource materials and products, involvement in managing projects supported by outside funding and our representation on National and State level Advisory Committees to Government.
- Our impact and influence will be demonstrated through updated policy and position statements on the critical issues relevant to our core functions, our members and our clients.

### Future Directions - Key attributes for the future

ACHPER's Directional Philosophy is based on growth and continuing improvement and reflects its purpose to promote active and healthy living for all Australians.

### It will achieve this by:

- building a broad-based reputation for excellence in all of its core functions
- expanding and renewing its advocacy and policy work
- extending its membership
- supporting its membership through professional development, resource development and research

### In the ensuing years, ACHPER will:

- maintain its position as the leading organisation in the provision of systems/operations that support the development and maintenance of 'active and healthy living' for children and youth
- increase its recognition from relevant government agencies for its expertise, innovation and creativity
- develop further strategic partnerships with kindred bodies that enhance our standing and stability and provide a wider base for the achievement of our goals
- develop mutually beneficial relationships with private sector organisations that provide funding for the achievement of ACHPER's goals
- Continue to identify and demonstrate effective professional practices

We will continue to involve ourselves in relevant project work.

ACHPER will continue to provide quality curriculum resources through its Healthy Lifestyles Bookshop; publish journals and magazines through its Active Graphics publishing arm and provide ongoing professional development activities through its branches and networks.