

## **Health & Physical Education Specialist Teachers: What should Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) Primary Principals look for?**

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The Health and Physical Education (HPE) key learning area within Catholic Education was given significant status during the release of the 1999 Health and Physical Education Syllabus documents coinciding with the adoption of the third enterprise bargaining agreement (EB3). EB3 entitled Catholic primary classroom teachers to 120 minutes of release time per week (Catholic Education Employing Authorities in Queensland, 2000). Release time is usually provided for classroom teachers by employing a specialist teacher. It seems to be a popular choice for many schools to employ a Health and Physical Education teacher so that both demands, to implement the Queensland Health and Physical Education documents and to provide 120 minutes of release time, could be met. Furthermore, Catholic schools educate approximately one in five school students in Australia (Australian Education Union, 2003; MCEETYA, 1995) and there has been increased effort and pressure from the Federal and Queensland Governments to increase physical activity within the community to help combat the growing health concerns surrounding students' sedentary behaviour. Employing a HPE specialist teacher is given further impetus with the introduction of a Prep year in 2007. So what qualities should Primary school principals search for and expect in a Health and Physical Education specialist teacher?

In order for the HPE curriculum to fulfil a role in developing lifelong participation in healthy activities, it is imperative that a quality HPE curriculum be implemented in schools (Queensland Government, 2003). "Improving the quality of physical education in schools is the best-documented intervention approach to promoting physical activity in youth" (ACHPER WA Branch, 1999, p. 9). Research data from a national survey in the United States of America of students Years Four to Twelve revealed that enjoying physical education was one of the most influential factors for encouraging participation in physical activities outside school (Sallis, Prochaska, Taylor, Hill & Geraci, 1999) and that if opportunities for physical activity were denied during school time, children would not voluntarily catch up on physical activity (Dale, Corbin, & Dale, 1999). A quality HPE school program plays a dominant role in the development of the child from the early years of primary school and improves the likelihood of lifelong participation in physical activities.

The notion of a quality HPE program was defined and endorsed by the Senate Inquiry (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992). One recommendation from the Senate Inquiry was that all children be provided with quality sporting opportunities, requiring "as a matter of priority, all physical education programs be conducted by, or under the supervision of, qualified physical education teachers, particularly at primary school level" (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992, p. xxi).

Hence, having a quality HPE program in the primary school requires regular access to a specialist physical education teacher, for “several Australian studies have described the lack of qualifications and confidence of classroom teachers to deliver PE programs, [is] mainly due to inadequate teacher training” (Morgan & Bourke, 2005, p. 7), a finding also supported in a study conducted within Brisbane Catholic Education (Lynch, 2006). Teachers can influence, for good or ill, students’ views about the value of physical education (Solmon & Carter, 1995), particularly students’ beliefs about physical activity (Lee, 2002).

The development of children’s fundamental motor skills occurs in the early years of the primary school and is influenced by both environmental and genetic influences (Branta, Haubenstricker & Seefeldt, 1984; Gallahue, 1989; Malina, 1981; Malina & Bouchard, 1991; Rarick, 1981; Walkley, Holland, Treloar & Probyn-Smith, 1993). Genetic influences affect students’ motor performance and depend on factors such as heredity, trainability, age and maturation (Pangrazi, 2000). Unlike genetic influences, the environmental factors are variable and capable of being influenced by the teacher of physical activity and include: opportunities to practise, interest in the child’s activities shown by significant others, and quality instructions (Espenschade & Eckert, 1980; Gallahue, 1989; Seefeldt, 1975; Singer, 1980, Walkley et al., 1993). A study by Kelly, Dagger, and Walkley (1989) found that when children had a HPE specialist teacher for PE they performed significantly better on fundamental motor skills than students who received supervised activity time only. This study further suggests that the physical education teacher can control the environmental influences that help promote a quality HPE lesson. Quality HPE “should be a developmentally appropriate educational experience designed to provide immediate and lifelong benefits, important benefits that are typically only taught in physical education classes” (Graham, Holt-Hale & Parker, 1998, p.4). The best time for children to learn and refine their motor skills is in the preschool and early primary schools years (Branta, Haubenstricker & Seefeldt, 1984; Commonwealth of Australia, 1992; Esenschade & Eckert, 1980). With Queensland primary schools introducing a Prep year in 2007, extra impetus was added for the delivery of quality HPE programs within primary schools.

Quality instruction is a vital aspect of any HPE program, yet other aspects to consider during the design and development stage of a program are enjoyment and fun for the participants (Garcia, Garcia, Floyd & Lawson, 2002). If children enjoy learning through movement they develop optimistic views about being physically active (Henderson, Glancy & Little, 1999) and they “will be predisposed to engage in it” (Garcia, et al., 2002, p. 3). Therefore, the way a program is implemented is paramount to it being enjoyable and successful.

It is suggested that teachers should “think through the mind of a child” (Morgan, 2005, p. 16) to make games and HPE lessons fun. This is given further impetus from Pangrazi, who states, “the fitness and activity program must produce an enjoyable and positive social experience so children develop a positive attitude towards activity” (2000, p. 8). Suggesting that a quality HPE program be fun and able to be

enjoyed by all is underpinned by the 1999 Queensland HPE syllabus' socio-cultural approach, imbued as it is with strong social justice principles. The three principles of social justice in the HPE syllabus are promoting equity, acknowledging diversity and creating supportive environments (QSCC, 1999a).

Consequently, 'fun' and 'participation' elements need to extend to all children, in a class of diverse student interests and abilities. The provision of quality school HPE is not just for those children who excel in sport or in the competitive arena, but also for those who prefer individual activities such as bike riding, bush walking or swimming: "we need to offer something for all of them" (Boss, 2000, p. 5). Physical activity benefits especially the unskilled and obese youngsters who need to be given priority, as these children need to discover suitable physical activities that they enjoy (Pangrazi, 2000). This approach to HPE is described as the 'new PE' (Boss, 2000) with an emphasis in the neo-HPE curriculum which requires teachers to adopt a socially critical perspective "for understanding 'new kids' and the context of 'new times'" (Tinning, 2004, p. 251). Contemporary HPE teachers need to incorporate critical pedagogy into their teaching practice (Tinning, 2004):

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

Inclusive programs can be implemented by "assigning open-ended tasks that allow children to progress as far as they can individually, and modifying traditional team sports so that teams are much smaller and everyone gets more opportunities to practise skills" (Boss, 2000, p. 4). This replaces the relay races or large groups with minimal equipment, where many children are spectators waiting for their turn (Boss, 2000). Subsequently, classes require sufficient equipment to enable this new pedagogy to be enacted. It was a recommendation of the Senate Inquiry that funding for HPE be comparable with other key learning areas (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992).

Schools play a vital role in the promotion and development of physical activity across a wide range of sports with a diversity of children. "Only schools currently provide an environment where children can experience and learn about a full range of physical activities and choose those to which they are best suited" (Moore, 1994, p. 24). Hence, for quality programs to be implemented in the primary school it is essential that schools have sufficient equipment and facilities for this to occur. Because of the skills and expertise necessary to implement these programs, specialist HPE teachers are preferred, as some teachers "view physical education as a release from the classroom and 'real work', rather than an integral aspect of children's education" (Clarke, 2000, p. 7).

Success-oriented PE is an example of the current paradigm shift occurring in HPE, moving away from a traditional 'assessment of children's fitness levels' approach.

Pangrazi describes this shift thus: “the challenge for helping others enjoy a healthy and active life is to move the focus of instruction from physical fitness toward physical activity” (2000, p. 18). This shift influenced the development of the new Queensland HPE curriculum documents (Glover, 2001). In a study by Morgan, Bourke & Thompson (2001) the findings in relation to the core of quality HPE reinforces the need for children to participate in regular, developmentally appropriate and enjoyable physical education programs. Pangrazi lists the essential components of a quality PE program as:

- Being guided by content standards (outcomes);
- Student-centred and developmentally appropriate;
- Having physical activity and motor skills forming the core of the program;
- Teaching management skills and promoting self discipline;
- Promoting inclusion of all students;
- Emphasising learning correctly rather than outcome;
- Promoting a lifetime of personal wellness; and
- Teaching responsibility and cooperation, and promoting diversity

(2001, p. 18).

It is common knowledge that “not every PE program is a quality program. Some are little more than organized recesses” (Graham, Holt-Hale, & Parker, 1998, p.6), which

not only fails to achieve many of the outcomes it espouses under the rhetoric of enhanced health, fitness, skill and self-esteem, but often exacerbates the very problems it seeks to overcome. It is argued that where PE is poorly or insensitively taught, it is more likely to have a negative influence than a positive one (Tinning, McDonald, Wright, & Hickey, 2001, p. 181).

As a consequence, HPE teachers need to be able to deliver quality HPE lessons across the three strands of: Physical Activity, Health and Personal Development. This involves the teacher having knowledge and understanding of the various pedagogies that exist in HPE and an awareness to choose the most appropriate for each particular learning experience (Tinning, 1999). This often involves choosing critical, socially just pedagogies rather than the traditional dominant science and performance-based pedagogies for HPE, which focus on technical outcomes in movement. Throughout the history of HPE curriculum in schools have been underpinned by the ideologies of sexism, elitism, healthism, individualism and mesomorphism (Colquhoun, 1991, 1992; Hickey, 1995; Kirk, 1992; Kirk & Twigg, 1993; Scraton, 1990; Tinning, 1990; Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1992; Tinning, Kirk & Evans, 1993). Critical, socially just pedagogies necessitate teachers being trained and educated in this mode of teaching (Tinning, 2004) which again favours the employment of trained specialist teachers.

Offering Health and Physical Education as a specialist key learning area is beneficial for students within schools. However, it does not assure the implementation of a quality HPE program. Within Catholic schools principals play a major role in the success of the implementation of the HPE program as they are directly responsible for supporting the

development, implementation and monitoring of the curriculum (BCE, 2006). Furthermore, principals decide whether or not to employ a HPE specialist teacher and ultimately who that person will be? This is an extremely important decision to be made and one that requires a great deal of thought and effort, carefully considering teachers' qualifications and experiences.

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