



A Summary of the article:

From War Games to Lifestyle Choices: Analyzing Canadian PE Curriculum Policies through a Critical Lens.

Authored by Dianne C. Thomson and Lorayne Robertson. (awaiting publication)

Physical Education curriculum policies have been influenced throughout the years by history and society. In this paper, Thomson and Robertson review the literature on a range of approaches to physical education from traditional critical physical literacy models. The authors create a framework to use for the analysis of the policies in order to discover the dominant messages and themes in the PE curriculum policies. The findings from the analysis reveal that although most of the policies did set out with the goal of including critical approaches, these goals were not consistent with the learning outcomes.

WHY PE IS IMPORTANT



A person's health matters. Because we are living longer, being healthy and being able to enjoy our longevity by having a high quality of life is very important. As Thomson and Robertson explore in this paper, we learn our ideas about what health means and what it means to be healthy at school. However, looking through the curriculum documents, health, for the most part, is defined as having good "physical" health. As explored by the authors, there are many more factors that come into play.

Consider how the World Health Organization (WHO, 2013), defines health:

Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.



The authors found that most of the policies were still clinging to WWII era ideas about physical education. These policies emphasized team sports and individual achievement, supposedly preparing the students to be called up to for the army or sports teams. This simplistic notion of PE fails to account for students who are unable or who simply do not want to participate in traditional team sports.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Thomson and Robertson found that models of PE instruction centre on values, activity

choices, pedagogical approaches, or philosophical approaches. The authors gathered key phrases from the literature to create words associated with a specific curriculum approach.

KEY WORDS



Next, a database was created of the different curriculum policy documents and a search of the key words was performed. The results were verified by blind review and present a picture of pan-Canadian curriculum policy approaches to Physical Education. The framework used encompasses many of the PE theorists' approaches in three broad categories.

1. Traditional
2. Constructivist/Physical Literacy
3. Critical Physical Literacy

This framework created was intended by the authors to be used as a way to encourage dialogue on the topic of Physical Education policies and a way to make PE policies more relevant to today's society.

FINDINGS

Upon completion of the policy analysis, it was determined that all three approaches to PE teaching were present in PE policies across Canada.

TRADITIONAL policy approaches included Québec's curriculum policies, which were focused on team activities. New Brunswick, Alberta and British Columbia also reflect the traditional idea of fitness as a goal and traditional ways to measure students' progress to that goal.



CONSTRUCTIVISM/INTERACTIVE MODELS involving the importance of movement skills were more present in the provincial policies for Manitoba, Ontario, Newfoundland, and British Columbia. Constructivist approaches also focused on responsibility (personal and social) were evident in the PE curriculum policies.

CRITICAL PHYSICAL LITERACY was not apparent in the majority of the provincial documents. Saskatchewan and Ontario attempted to go beyond conventional thinking, but the follow-through into learning outcomes was not present.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A PE CURRICULUM?

Is it to enhance the lifelong holistic health of students? Is it to recognize complex determinants of health? Or is it to focus on mental or social wellbeing? As revealed through the policy analysis, these goals are not being fully realized in the current curriculum policies.

The learning policies aren't the only consideration; other policies such as use of space can impact health outcomes. Many schools have enormous baseball or soccer

fields, but few schools embrace a different type of physical activity, i.e. a garden or walking trails. There are many ways to encourage physical activity, but as can be seen from the analysis of the provincial policies, the majority of Canadian schools choose to focus on traditional team sports, to the exclusion of alternative methods of participating in physical activity (i.e. yoga).



Thomson and Robertson analyzed the curriculum policies for evidence of critical physical literacy and the empowerment of students. The results? Evidence did not support the presence of effective critical literacy in the policy documents. Although many bodies, including the World Health Organization, have confirmed how much more there is to a person's health; curriculum policies still reflect health as equalling fitness, and fitness as a product of individual responsibility and personal choice. The policies are missing a questioning, or an empowerment to question, PE policies in order to effect change. The authors intended to encourage a dialogue about PE policies to inspire knowledge mobilization across Canada; resulting in a questioning of the traditional approaches and a movement to fresh curriculum policy empowerment models.

Summary provided by Kelly Robertson (2013).

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