

Secondary Physical Education Teacher Education in Papua New Guinea

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Introduction

Physical Education is a compulsory subject in Provincial High Schools throughout Papua New Guinea (PNG). However, many schools do not teach an effective programme of comprehensive physical education. This article will briefly review the current teacher education programmes in physical education, and how attempts are being made to improve the problem of poor physical education instruction in schools.

Brief History

Following self-government and independence in 1975, physical education was removed from the curriculum of secondary schools and from the Goroka Teachers' College (GTC), the institution primarily responsible for all secondary teacher training at that time. Seward (1987) records the reasons for its removal as being:

- Poor teacher attitudes
- Climatic conditions
- Lack of facilities and equipment
- Poor promotional chances for physical education teachers within the schools. (p.12).

Following a UNESCO consultant's review (Miller 1978) of physical education and sport throughout the country for the new National Government, physical education was progressively returned to secondary schools, in grades 7 to 10, from 1982 to 1985.

Few schools, however, could boast of having a qualified physical education teacher on their staff. To provide the schools with trained physical education teachers, the newly established National Sports Training Institute (located in Goroka, and opened in 1979 in response to Miller's

Physical Education and Sport: Report Prepared for the Government of Papua New Guinea) offered to teach interested students basic units in physical education and sports skills. The staff comprised expatriate sports coaches and volunteers. GTC accepted the offer on the condition that NSTI be totally responsible for developing and providing its own resources and courses. This condition remains, with the Institute (now the National Sports Institute) continuing to follow the university's evolution and development.

In 1982 the GTC formally ratified its student teacher training arrangement with NSI, and its first cohort of two-year trained diplomates graduated from the College, with physical education as the non-core subject of their two required teaching subjects.

Current Programmes

In 1994 the Faculty of Education of the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) was formally transferred to Goroka Campus (formerly GTC). In line with the transfer, the basic education programme was upgraded to a four-year degree course. The first year of this programme was 1995. The final cohort of three-year diploma students will graduate at the end of 1996, and the first BEd pre-service degree students will graduate at the end of 1998. However, in line with the need to upgrade practising diploma qualified teachers to degree level, a small number of teachers is being admitted to do one- or two-year BEd in-service upgrades. NSI will take its first group in 1997, and so may see its first BEd (PE major) graduates at the end of that year.

Student Group

Physical education is taught only up to Grade 10 level in provincial high schools in PNG. Although a broad range of movement education activities is presented in the current syllabus (Department of Education, 1987), the actual instruction is little more

than sports instruction. At worst the lessons timetabled for physical education may be taken over by more academic subjects, or a ball may be given to the students, but no teacher is present. Consequently, prospective physical education teachers have often applied for admission to the physical education course with inadequate prerequisites. This undesirable situation, however, is improving in a number of ways. For example, students with Grade 12 Certificates, with good passes in science subjects, are now enrolling for the degree courses. Where this is coupled with a history of keen involvement in physical activity such as in school and community sports, this has provided a satisfactory compromise.

More recently, students who have undertaken secondary education in Australia and New Zealand, and who have studied physical education and health to grade 12, have enrolled in physical education. They are better qualified to handle the level of the physical education course at NSI, and generally excel in it.

Physical education students from NSI are usually among the top graduates at the Goroka Campus, especially in the Professional Studies and Teaching Practice components, and this quality is one that the lecturing staff, despite difficulties of resources and support, seeks to maintain.

One difficulty that often confronts physical education students on teaching practice or in their first year out on placement, is the prevailing attitude of many school administrators that physical education is of little importance (Kanawi 1995). Yet in the truly committed physical education teacher, this has motivated determined efforts to make the teaching of his/her subject more meaningful and effective, and therefore more enjoyable for the students.

Contextual Relevance

Any subject included in the curriculum will achieve meaning and success if it is clearly pertinent to the needs and interests of the students, and the community. In other words, it ought to be contextually relevant.

Too often, the first impression held of physical education in PNG schools is of school children kicking a soccer ball around the field, a group of girls playing volleyball by themselves, or of boys copying the winning tries and bruising tackles of last weekend's rugby match.

'Quality' physical education looks beyond sports that are introduced by expatriate groups and colonialists, and looks to acknowledge and promote traditional society and culture by including activities that have been practised within the region for generations and years prior to the arrival of foreigners and their foreign knowledge and values. Many movements in traditional games and dances are relevant and appropriate to the developmental stages of growth and maturation of young children (Seward 1987, Kinavai 1991). Further, the western games that have been adopted or imposed too early upon young children at inappropriate readiness levels by unqualified teachers (Gallahue and Ozmun 1995), see them encounter problems of coping physically and emotionally with oversized adult equipment, dimensions and rules. Confronting these issues which prevail throughout PNG is an important principle of instruction and reflection at NSI.

Each NSI lecturer is required to address and apply the importance of this issue throughout course development and delivery. It must be undertaken consciously because currently none of the staff has been a teacher in a PNG high school. Neither is there any local person with adequate qualifications in physical education ready to take on lecturer responsibilities at NSI.

It is also important to celebrate traditional movement and dance, by experiencing it as a first year student in the foundation course called Fundamental Human Movement. A selection of traditional dances is taught to the students, who come from across the country, and from Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, by an instructor from PNG's famous Raun Raun Theatre in Goroka. Basic balance, locomotor skills and related movement skills are also taught along with gymnastics and Foundational Movement Theory. The content and methodology, however, is intentionally purposeful and directed to the PNG context. All

subsequent subjects are based on this foundational unit.

Conclusion

For physical education to maintain and accelerate its momentum, apart from its academic importance, it needs to be perceived by its students as relevant and interesting. Too often physical education is given lowest priority and considered inferior to, and of a lesser purpose than the so-called "academic" subjects. The importance of physical education to health, quality of life, and to the promotion and celebration of society and culture, has been greatly neglected in PNG's history of schooling. It is hoped that current endeavours at the teacher education level will progressively improve this situation to the point that it receives the recognition it deserves.

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