Physical Literacy and defining “Quality Physical Education “

Sport NZ have recently adopted physical literacy as an approach to recognising and responding to the needs of people of all ages to encourage participation in physical activity and sport in a variety of ways, places and spaces throughout life. The advent of this concept and Sport NZ’s physical literacy framework, which will be available in early 2016, is not intended to replace nor impact the place of physical education in schools. However the introduction of physical literacy will no doubt, initially at least, create some confusion amongst many in the sport, recreation, and education sectors as well as the wider community.

In the past few years there has been a proliferation of external organisations delivering what they consider to be quality PE in primary schools, with little if any serious attempts by many schools to critically assess the appropriateness of these external providers, nor the schools legal responsibilities and obligations to students and parents, when they allow or engage external providers in schools.

It is important therefore that we as educators, are clear about the place of PE in the development of young people and importantly what quality PE looks like, and who is entitled to deliver PE in schools. We also need to better understand the links between PE, sport and recreation under a physical literacy framework. To this end PENZ will be delivering workshops throughout 2016 and beyond, for all stakeholders in the education, sport and recreation sectors, to explore what physical literacy is and how it links to PE.

In order to strengthen the place and understanding of what PE is in schools, PENZ, with the assistance of its University Advisory Group (UAG), decided that it would be helpful to define what PE, and in particular what ‘quality PE’ is. A statement in the New Zealand Curriculum (pg 23) read;

“In physical education, the focus is on movement and its contribution to the development of individuals and communities. By learning in, through, and about movement, students gain an understanding that movement is integral to human expression and that it can contribute to people’s pleasure and enhance their lives. They learn to understand, appreciate, and move their bodies, relate positively to others, and demonstrate constructive attitudes and values. This learning takes place as they engage in play, games, sport, exercise, recreation, adventure, and expressive movement in diverse physical and social environments. Physical education encourages students to engage in movement experiences that promote and support the development of physical and social skills. It fosters critical thinking and action and enables students to understand the role and significance of physical activity for individuals and society.” (NZC pg. 23)

While useful for educators, this statement does little to demystify or explain what quality PE looks or feels like to those people not employed in the school education sector. PENZ has therefore adopted the following draft statement in an attempt to help define and bring clarity to what PE is for the wider education, sport and recreation sectors.
Quality Physical Education utilises effective pedagogies, focuses on movement and its contribution to learning and the holistic development of individuals and their communities.

Strengthening and sustaining quality Physical Education necessitates;

1. Comprehensive conceptual understanding of The NZ Curriculum (2007) and the corresponding Health and Physical Education learning area
2. Inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogies
3. A range of planned learning opportunities within a programme that are enjoyable, authentic, progressive and have clear learning intentions.
4. Learning experiences that embrace hauora and meet student needs
5. Student centered programmes that foster creative, critical thinking and action
6. High expectations for student learning
7. Teaching by qualified registered teachers

PENZ invites your thoughts and feedback to this draft statement. Submissions can be made by email to feedback@penz.org.nz