

# Teachers' knowledge and teaching of Olympism within physical education in New Zealand

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## Abstract

The aim of the research, which was conducted as part of a Master's thesis, was to provide an insight into physical education (PE) teachers' knowledge and teaching of Olympism, in New Zealand (NZ) secondary schools. Despite the philosophy of Olympism being integrated into *The New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC) (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2007) through the four underlying concepts of the Health and PE Learning Area (Culpan, 2008b; Culpan, Bruce & Galvan, 2008; Thorn, 2010), there is little research on this topic. An interpretive, mixed-methods methodology was used. This included a short online survey followed by semi-structured interviews. The findings showed that the participants had heard of Olympism and had a general understanding of it; however, they were unable to give a concise definition. They identified that they taught Olympism implicitly through a variety of teaching methods and models. The research highlighted that Olympism does have a presence within PE; however, considerable work needs to be done to ensure that Olympism education is consistent and effective. This article suggests focusing on pre-service and in-service teacher education, updating resources, and developing a daily lesson framework to improve the teachers' knowledge and teaching of Olympism within NZ physical education.

## Keywords

Physical education, Olympism, New Zealand, Olympic education, Pedagogy.

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## **Introduction and purpose**

The philosophy of Olympism was first introduced to NZ physical education in 1999 through the Health and PE Learning Area in the NZC (MOE, 1999). Following this introduction the MOE collaborated with the New Zealand Olympic Academy (NZOA) to produce resources including *Attitudes and Values: Olympic Ideals in Physical Education, Years 9-10* (MOE, 2001) and *Olympism: Attitudes and Values in Physical Education, Years 5-7* (MOE, 2004). In addition, the NZOA provided professional development workshops to support teachers in teaching Olympism within PE. Since the integration in 1999 there has been little research conducted in this area to identify what teachers' know about Olympism, if they teach it and how they do this. The purpose of this article is to discuss the findings of the two key research questions that guided this study:

- 1) What do PE teachers (secondary) know about the term Olympism?
- 2) What do PE teachers (secondary) know about the teaching of Olympism in PE?

This article will also make suggestions about how the teaching of Olympism within PE could be improved in the future.

### ***Backgrounding Olympism***

Olympism is a philosophy of life created and promoted by Frenchman Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937) (International Olympic Committee [IOC], 2017). Coubertin believed that moral character could be developed through sport, and that the philosophy of Olympism could be used to do this (Muller, 2000; Parry, 2007). He thought that education was vital for physical, mental and emotional development, and that education should be at the centre of the Olympic Movement, rather than the Olympic Games (Naul, 2008). Coubertin believed that education through sport was a way to address problems that were occurring within society (Muller, 2000). Despite Olympism being associated with the biggest sporting event in the world there is no clear and concise definition (Arnold, 1996; Bale and Christensen, 2004; Da Costa 2006, Parry, 1998; 2006). However, this research used the following working definition and refers to each of the four bullet points as the Olympic ideals: By blending sport with culture and education, Olympism promotes a way of life based on:

- the balanced development of the body, will and mind;
- the joy found in effort;
- the educational value of being a good role model for others;
- respect for universal ethics including tolerance, generosity, unity, friendship, non-discrimination and respect for others (adapted from the IOC, 2017).

Scholars agree that moral character can be developed in, through and about movement (Arnold, 1979; Binder, 2001; 2005; Muller, 2000; Martinkova, 2012; Naul, 2008), and Arnold (1996) specifically identifies the practice of sport as a 'valued human practice'. However, he advocates that for the goals and objectives of Olympism to be achieved the concept of 'sport as a valued human practice' needs to be taught as part of a curriculum by trained professionals. Bronikowski (2003; 2006) and Binder (2005) suggest that the development of moral character is more effective within a PE setting where individual and group problem solving takes place. Olympism links directly with PE and sport, therefore identifying PE as the ideal setting to explicitly teach it (Bronikowski, 2003; Parry, 2006).

The teaching of Olympism is often referred to as Olympic education; however, it does have multiple meanings. (Binder, 2005; Culpan & Wigmore, 2010; Lenskyj, 2012). Grupe (1997, p. 240, as cited in Naul, 2008) defines Olympic education as a "particular sporting education that is essentially and orientated towards fairness, solidarity and peacefulness" (p. 106). Despite this definition having an ethical and moral underpinning, this type of Olympic education often has a cross-curricular approach. It can also be 'apedagogical' and have the tendency to focus on learning about the facts and figures of the Olympic Movement (Culpan and Wigmore, 2010, Teetzel, 2012). Culpan and Wigmore (2010) argue that this type of Olympic education described is not going to achieve the goals of Olympism. Instead Culpan and Moon (as cited in Culpan, 2010) use the term Olympism education and define it as "a culturally and critically relevant, experiential process of learning an integrated set of life principles through the practice of sport" (p. 181). This research draws on this definition when discussing the teaching of Olympism and refers to it as Olympism education. However, a change of name and definition does not ensure that Olympism is being taught effectively. Kohe

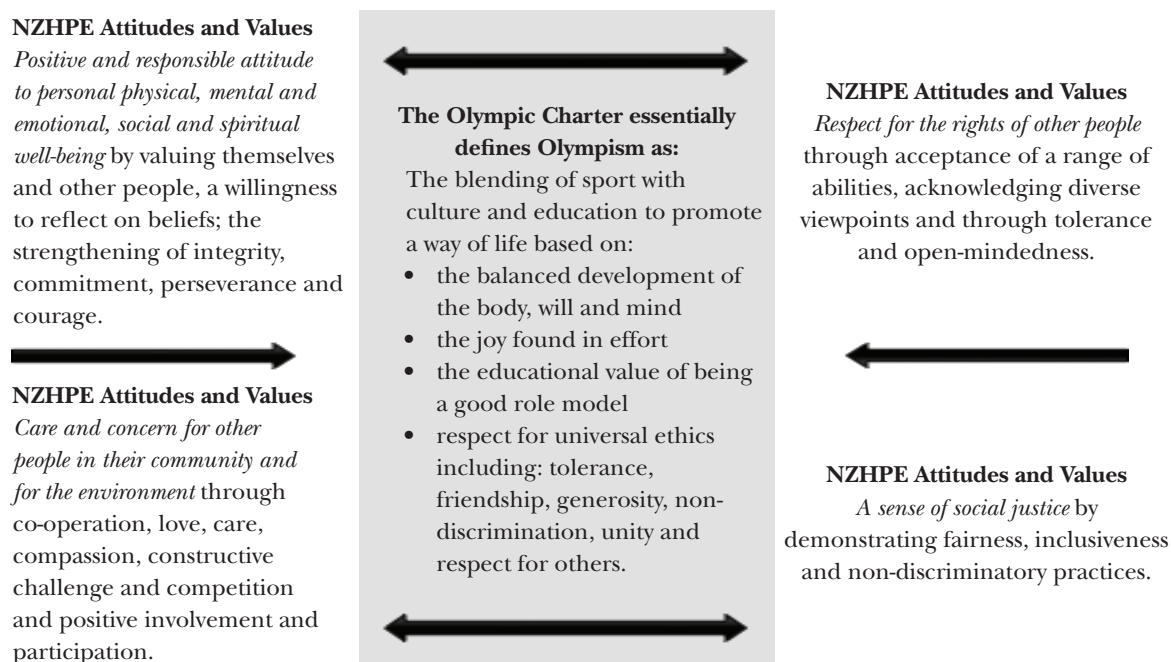
(2010) suggests the following issues with Olympism education: a lack of pedagogy, difficulty in teaching some values associated with Olympism, and a lack of understanding of Olympism education. He suggests that by linking Olympism education to PE curricular some of these issues could be alleviated. Culpan (2008a) believes that it is important to teach Olympism education through PE and sport programmes, rather than across-curricular. This is because Olympism was designed to be taught through the ethical practice of sport rather than passive classroom programmes.

### *Olympism and the NZ Curriculum*

The NZC (MOE, 2007) is an example of a PE curriculum integrating the philosophy of Olympism (Naul, 2008). The NZC (MOE, 2007) consists of eight learning areas, with PE falling under the Health and PE Learning Area. The Health and PE Learning Area has four underlying concepts. They are Well-being (Hauora), Health Promotion, a Socio-ecological Perspective and Attitudes and Values.

These concepts underpin the learning outcomes of the curriculum. It is through the four underlining concepts that the philosophy of Olympism is integrated into the curriculum, and specifically through the concept of Attitudes and Values (Culpan, 2008b; Culpan et al., 2008; Thorn, 2010). The specific links between Olympism, and Attitudes and Values can be seen in Table 1. Culpan and McBain (2012) state that the NZ physical education curriculum aspires to “contextualize PE within a set of attitudes and values consistent with the lived philosophy of Olympism; promote pedagogies that are of a socio-critical kind; and engender awareness and debate around the discourses associated with healthism, the body, sport and sexuality” (p. 96). The Health and PE Learning Area of the NZC (MOE, 2007) has a strong socio-critical and cultural approach (Culpan, 2007), therefore encouraging teachers to embrace critical pedagogy.

**Table 1. Harmonious link between the Attitudes and Values of NZHPE and Olympism through movement**



Source: (Culpan, et al., 2008, p.3)

Culpan (2007) suggests that Olympism education is in its early stages of existence in NZ, and that previously any attempts have been sporadic, lacked formality and a specific pedagogy. However, Culpan (2008b) states that Olympism education in NZ has increased considerably since the philosophy of Olympism has been introduced to the curriculum (MOE, 1999; 2007), resulting in it becoming more accessible to all children in NZ schools.

## Methodology

This research used an interpretive mixed-methods methodology. An interpretive methodology enables researchers to explore and understand the meanings of a person's experience (Markula & Silk, 2011; Tinning & Fitzpatrick, 2012). By using this methodology, the researcher attempted to understand each individual's knowledge of Olympism and their experiences teaching it. A humanist paradigm was also drawn upon. Firstly, because humanism sits well within interpretive research, but secondly, because it has strong links with the philosophy of Olympism (Arnold, 1996; Binder, 2001; 2012; Culpan, 2001; 2007; Culpan & Wigmore, 2010; Martinkova, 2012; Parry, 1998).

Humanism is a philosophy that focuses on the development of the 'whole' person, but specifically their social and emotional wellbeing (Hellison, 1973). This is similar to Olympism because it focuses on the balanced development of the body, will and mind (IOC, 2017). A mixed-methods research design was used because it drew on both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This research method is used in research when a combination of the two methods provides a better understanding of the research question than one approach would have done individually (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). The research was conducted in two parts. Part One of the study used a quantitative methodology, consisting of a short online survey. This enabled the researcher to identify participants who were teaching Olympism or the four Olympic ideals. It also guided the interview schedule for Part Two. Part Two of the study used a qualitative methodology, consisting of five semi-structured interviews. The aim of Part Two was to capture rich data from a small sample of NZ physical education teachers (secondary) to find out about their knowledge and experiences of teaching Olympism in PE. The mixed-methods approach allowed the researcher to ensure that participants in Part Two had some knowledge of Olympism and that they identified as teaching Olympism or the four Olympic ideals.

#### ***Data Collection***

The data was collected in two parts. Part One of the research involved inviting the Head of the PE Department from all the Christchurch (NZ) secondary schools to take part in a short online survey. Before this commenced the principals of the 41 schools in the Christchurch region were contacted to seek permission to conduct both Part One and Part Two of the research within their schools. Ethical approval had also been obtained from the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. Fourteen schools gave permission for the research to be conducted in their schools; as a result 12 of the 14 Heads of the PE Departments who were invited to, completed the short online survey. The online survey focused on Olympism. Part Two of the research involved interviewing five of the participants from Part One. The online survey was used to help select the participants for Part Two. These participants were selected from the group who identified as teaching Olympism or the four Olympic ideals. The five participants then took part in a 45 minute semi-structured

interview with the aim of gaining an understanding of their knowledge and experiences of teaching Olympism within PE.

### ***Data analysis***

The data was analysed using both a statistical and thematic analysis (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). A descriptive statistical analysis was used in Part One, and a thematic analysis was used in Part Two (Mutch, 2013). This eight-step process included the following: browse, highlight, code, group and label, develop themes and categories, check for consistency and resonance, select examples and report findings (Mutch, 2013). This process enabled the following themes to emerge; Teachers' knowledge of Olympism; Teachers' education; Olympism and the curriculum; Teaching Olympism; and Barriers. For the purpose of this article the following two themes will be discussed, Teachers' knowledge of Olympism and Teaching Olympism. This will be followed by suggestive comments as a result of the research.

## **Findings and discussion**

### ***Teachers' knowledge of Olympism***

Part One of the research showed that all of the participants had heard of the term Olympism. This opposes Parry (1998) who states that most people around the world are unfamiliar with the term Olympism. When most people hear a word similar to 'Olympic' they automatically assume the Olympic Games. A reason for this difference might be due to Olympism being woven into the Health and PE Learning Area in the NZC (MOE, 2007) through the underlying concepts. Culpan and Jones (2005) conducted research that followed the release of the 1999 curriculum, which initially incorporated Olympism. They found that despite the philosophy of Olympism being around for many years, the teachers they interviewed had been first introduced to the philosophy Olympism through the curriculum. This would support the idea that the reason the participants in Part One had heard of the term Olympism was due to the NZC.

The participants in Part Two of the research were asked to define and explain Olympism. The five participants showed general understanding of Olympism. They used words similar to those in the IOC's definition (2017), such as an education through movement, the joy of movement, and teaching values. However, none of the participants were able to give a clear and concise definition. A

reason for this might be due to Olympism being integrated into the NZC (2007), through the underlying concepts rather than through the use of the word Olympism. Another reason that the participants may not have been able to define Olympism is because of the confusion that surrounds the definition (Arnold, 1996; Da Costa 2006, Parry, 1998; 2006). Bale and Christensen (2004) state that there is no one universal definition for Olympism, therefore it is challenging for people to define. Without a clear definition people do their best to describe Olympism in their own words, just like the participants in this research.

There is a limited number of studies conducted internationally focusing on PE teachers' knowledge and teaching of Olympism. However, Naul (2008) collated the results of a number of quantitative studies conducted in other languages about student learning in Olympic education. In summary Naul (2008) suggests, that the characteristics of Olympic education that are suggested by the teachers are similar to the Olympic ideals (Adler & Pansa, 2004, as cited in Naul, 2008; Hummel, Erdtel & Ardler, 2004, as cited in Naul, 2008; Willimczik, 2002, as cited in Naul, 2008). This supports the research showing that these teachers also made links between Olympic education, (which is similar to Olympism), and the Olympic ideals.

The researcher was not only interested in finding out what PE teachers knew about Olympism, but also how they knew it. Pajares (1992) suggests that it can be challenging for a person to determine the difference between their own beliefs, and knowledge they have gained. When asked how they knew about Olympism, participants thought they had gained their knowledge from various sources as well as the philosophy of Olympism aligning with their beliefs. Tinning (2008) suggests that knowledge can be gained through a range of means such as modelling, stories, dance, art, books, speeches, TV, internet, radio etc. This learning can take place in both 'formal' institutional sites such as churches, hospitals, universities, schools and factories, or in 'informal' sites such as families, local parks and playgrounds. The findings are consistent with Tinning (2008) because all of the participants in Part Two identified their formal university education as a place where they had gained knowledge about Olympism and how to teach it. Culpan and Stevens' (2017) findings also support this. They found that PE (secondary) graduating students from NZ seemed to have a useful working knowledge of Olympism. Some participants in this



research also felt they had gained knowledge from their colleagues who had an interest in Olympism, professional development, their own research and planning for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (senior school qualification), resources that sometimes get sent to schools, the internet, and through research into post graduate study. Although the participants thought they had gained their knowledge from a range of sites, they also felt their beliefs and values played an important role in choosing what they will teach and how they teach it.

### *Teaching Olympism*

Teachers planning, decision-making and classroom behaviours are shaped by their beliefs (Erkmen, 2012; Harvey & O'Donovan, 2013; Pajares, 1992). The beliefs teachers have about themselves, their students, and teaching and learning will influence the way they view and approach their work (Erkmen, 2012; Harvey & O'Donovan, 2013; Pajares, 1992). Pajares (1992), and Harvey and O'Donovan (2013) suggest that teachers beliefs about their profession are well established before they attend university. Beliefs are developed early on in life through a person's observations and experiences while at school. During this time they will also establish a belief about what it means to be an effective teacher and how students should behave. More specifically to PE, Harvey and O'Donovan (2013) suggest that during this time, beliefs are also developed around the value of sport and the importance of competition and winning. Some of these beliefs align with what teacher educators are hoping for and some do not (Pajares, 1992). Most people who choose the education profession have usually had a positive experience at school and with their own teachers. This results in teachers teaching how they were taught rather than challenging the past or the status quo (Pajares, 1992; Harvey & O'Donovan, 2013). When the participants in Part Two of the research were asked how they knew how to teach Olympism, they all spoke about how they personally believe in the philosophy of Olympism (even though they may not use this term). This is because it fits with their own morals and values. The participants thought it was important to teach aspects of Olympism in their classroom regardless of what is specified in the curriculum because of these beliefs. The findings and the literature have shown that both the knowledge that is gained from formal and informal pedagogical sites, as well as the beliefs that develop from a young age, were important in determining what the participants knew about Olympism and how to teach it.

In Part One of the research, the participants were asked if they taught Olympism. Three of the participants answered yes, while nine answered no. The survey then asked the participants if they taught the four Olympic ideals in PE. All of the participants who answered these questions identified as teaching the following Olympic ideals: the balanced development of body, will and mind; how to be a good role model; values such as tolerance, generosity, unity, friendship, non-discrimination and respect for others. Eight of the 11 participants who answered, identified as teaching the joy found in effort (i.e. the happiness that comes from working hard to achieve something). These findings support Culpan (2007; 2008b) who suggests that Olympism education is in its early stages of existence in NZ, however, it has increased considerably since the philosophy of Olympism has been incorporated into the NZC (MOE, 2007). The findings showed that the Olympic ideals were being taught by the PE teachers that took part in the research. However, three quarters of the teachers who were surveyed in Part One did not identify as teaching Olympism.

The participants in Part Two of the research were asked if they teach Olympism implicitly or explicitly. The findings show that all of the participants agreed that they taught Olympism implicitly. This supports Culpan (2008a) who argues that Olympic education currently has no specific pedagogy. Tinning (2008) suggests pedagogy is the process of knowledge production or reproduction, and the purpose of intention is the difference between pedagogical work and a learning experience. If a teacher teaches Olympism implicitly it implies that it is a side product of other intended learning, and would suggest that the participants do not use a specific pedagogy to teach Olympism. Another criticism of Olympic education is that it lacks purpose (Kohe, 2010; Lenskyj, 2012). The findings from the research support this argument because if they are not teaching Olympism explicitly, then there is no specific intent to teach or pass on knowledge (Tinning, 2008). Without this intent, the teaching and learning lacks purpose. An 'across the curricula' approach to teaching Olympism is common, however, it does not necessarily maximise learning or meet the needs of students. Culpan and Wigmore (2010) suggest that this is because it is often 'apedagogical', and not contextualised within a physical activity or sporting context. The findings from the research show that the participants teach Olympism across the PE curricular, and implicitly across units. They do this through a variety of different teaching methods from different pedagogies, rather than drawing

on a specific Olympism pedagogy. This adds to the lack of purpose, because like the across the curricular approach, the specific teaching of Olympism simply becomes a by-product of other learning outcomes or content.

The participants in both Part One and Part Two were asked what methods of teaching and strategies they used to teach Olympism. The findings showed that a wide range of teaching methods and strategies are being used. These include: practical activities; co-operative learning; group challenges; implicit and explicit instruction throughout the junior programme; in the senior school as a case study when evaluating a trend, issue or event; the Sport Education Model (Siedentop, Hastie & Van den Mars, 2011); the Social Responsibility Model (Hellison, 2011); teaching interpersonal skills and values through a sporting context or cultural games unit and during a 'teachable moment' (McCone, 2016). The variety of teaching methods that were used by the participants to teach Olympism indicates that there is still no specific pedagogy or teaching model as Culpan (2008a) suggested. This shows that aspects of Olympism are being taught in PE. However, it highlights that teaching the philosophy of Olympism explicitly is not a regular occurrence, despite the teachers believing it is important. Consequently, no easily identifiable pedagogy was used.

The teaching of Olympism has improved overtime; however, there are still a number of barriers that the participants identified. Common perceived barriers were not knowing how to effectively teach Olympism or not having enough time to do it. The participants indicated that they do not have the time to learn how to teach Olympism explicitly, as a whole, and create the resources. Participant Five thought that not all PE teachers would be interested in teaching, or learning to teach Olympism explicitly in their classes. Participant One also felt that other staff and parents might be barriers, as they may have a more traditional view of PE that focuses on physical performance, rather than the current holistic approach. This lack of understanding may be a barrier as they might view Olympism as unimportant or not be able to see the relevance in PE. These findings are consistent with the literature. Morgan and Hansen (2008) suggest that lack of confidence, training, knowledge and interest all influence the delivery of PE programmes. Some other factors include having a crowded curriculum, inadequate time and money for planning and resources, and low subject status (Hardman & Marshall, 2000;

Morgan & Hansen, 2008). Morgan and Hansen (2008) also suggest that when teachers hold negative attitudes towards PE, or aspects of it, they tend to question the value of it for their students. This reduces the quality of teaching in PE and their willingness to learn. While there has been additional support for the introduction of Olympism education into PE programmes, these resources were produced over ten years ago (MOE, 2001; 2004). The participants felt that new resources and more professional development would be needed to help support teachers to teach Olympism explicitly.

### *Future of Olympism in NZ physical education*

When drawing conclusions from the research and looking to the future of Olympism in NZ physical education it is difficult to make generalisations due to the small sample size. However, all of the participants in Part Two of the research indicated they would be interested in learning how to teach Olympism explicitly in PE. Therefore, through reflecting on this research, other NZ Olympism research (Culpan & Jones, 2005; Culpan & Stevens, 2017; Thorn, 2010), and personal teaching experience this article suggests, along with further research, a focus on pre-service and in-service teacher education, development of new resources, and a daily lesson framework to improve the teaching of Olympism in NZ physical education.

Petrie (2015) suggests that to increase a teacher's knowledge and understanding about a concept or philosophy in-depth professional learning needs to take place in both pre-service and in-service teacher education. Therefore, it is important that students are explicitly taught about Olympism and how it links directly to the curriculum during their pre-service education. Culpan and Stevens (2017) agree with this, suggesting that there needs to be a consistent strategic push to have Olympism embedded into pre-service education. This education needs to continue through to current teachers in the form of in-service professional development. It needs to explain the direct links between the philosophy of Olympism and the curriculum, and why the term Olympism is not used in the curriculum document. Teachers also need to be exposed to some practical ideas of how explicitly teaching Olympism could come to life in their classrooms. This could be supported by the updating and recirculation of the two resources created by the MOE (2001; 2004) that focused on teaching Olympism and the Olympic ideals. The findings of the research showed that most of the participants were not familiar with these documents.

The research also showed that there was no specific pedagogy used to teach Olympism and that often it was a by-product of other learning. To ensure Olympism is taught explicitly, on an everyday basis this article advocates for a daily lesson framework to be developed. It proposes a framework that merges the philosophy of Olympism and the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) model (Hellison, 2011), as well as introducing critical pedagogy. TPSR was designed by Don Hellison with the aim of teaching students personal and social responsibility (Gordon, 2009), and is a common pedagogical approach within NZ physical education (Gordon, 2007; Gordon, Thevenard & Hodis, 2012). Olympism and TPSR are similar in nature as they are both humanist teaching pedagogies and aim to develop moral character through physical movement and sport. A major critique of Olympism and TPSR is the lack of critical theory (Binder, 2012; Culpan & Wigmore, 2010; Kohe, 2010; Lenskyj, 2012; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995; Teetzel, 2012). With the introduction of critical pedagogy, wider societal, moral and political influences and issues can be addressed and ensure PE is not taught within a vacuum. Petrie (2015), and Culpan and Stevens (2017) both suggest that caution needs to be exercised when introducing a new conceptual framework, as not all teachers are looking for change (Culpan and Stevens, 2017). However, a framework of this nature would allow PE teachers to teach Olympism explicitly without compromising other learning outcomes. By combining Olympism, TPSR and critical pedagogy physical educators may be able to start addressing some of the limitations of these models, as we currently know them. By combining humanistic and critical pedagogy, we will enable physically educated students to contribute to a peaceful and better world and have a greater sense of social justice and equity. All of which are consistent with PE in the NZC (MOE, 2007).

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this article was to discuss the findings of the research, focusing on NZ physical education teachers' (secondary) knowledge and teaching of Olympism. This research and article has highlighted that the PE teachers involved have some knowledge of Olympism, however they teach it implicitly, despite believing it is important. This is done through a range of teaching methods and models, across the curriculum. This shows that Olympism does have a presence within NZ physical education.

However, considerable work needs to be done to ensure it is taught explicitly, and in a consistent and effective manner.

The findings suggest all of the participants had heard of the term Olympism. The five participants in Part Two showed some general understanding of Olympism; however, none of them were able to give a clear and concise definition. This may be due to the links between the NZC (MOE, 2007), and the philosophy of Olympism. The participants gained their knowledge about Olympism and how to teach it through a variety of sources. They all felt that some of their knowledge came from their formal university education; however, they thought their beliefs and values influenced what they teach and how they teach it. All of the participants agreed that they are teaching Olympism implicitly. These findings support the argument that currently Olympic education has no specific pedagogy (Culpan, 2008a), and that it often lacks purpose (Kohe, 2010; Lenskyj, 2012). The reason for this is if we do not teach something explicitly, then there is no specific intent to pass on knowledge (Tinning, 2008). Without this intent, teaching and learning lacks pedagogy and purpose. The participants identified a wide range of teaching methods and strategies to teach Olympism or aspects of it. This variety indicates that there is still not a specific pedagogy or model being used to teach Olympism; however, it is essential that the learning has purpose and specific learning intentions. Therefore, a specific Olympism pedagogy needs to be developed. Despite Olympism being taught around the world, it is difficult to compare the findings to international research. This is due to the limited number of studies focusing on PE teachers' knowledge and teaching of Olympism, and the researcher having to rely on translations and summaries of studies conducted in languages other than English.

Finally, the article suggests four ideas, alongside further research, that may improve the teaching of Olympism in NZ physical education (secondary). These focus on pre-service and in-service teacher education, resource development, and a daily lesson framework. The implementation of these changes may help the Olympic Movement to move closer to their goal, which is "to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practised in accordance with Olympism and its values" (IOC, 2017, p. 15). Without any change, Olympism will likely be a by-product of other teaching and learning in NZ physical education.

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