

# CRITICAL THINKING IN PE: THE OLYMPICS

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Has your class been following the Olympics?

The event provides so many opportunity to learn beyond graphing medal tallies, investigating and learning about flags, or running your own mini-Olympics opportunity.

We know that creating responsive, relevant learning opportunities based on real life situations helps our students connect with the world they are living in. Better yet, when we relate that to their own life, the connections are strengthened.

## **Uniforms at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics was a hot topic**

The Norwegian Women's Handball team protested the regulation uniform by wearing shorts, as their male counterparts do, and were fined for the act. Germany's female gymnasts stood out for wearing 'unitards' during their qualifying round.

The point they were making? That everybody, male or female, should have the choice of what to wear.



photo by Max Komthongvijit on Unsplash

**Consider some of the following questions to develop critical thinking in physical education for your students in years 5-8 (or adapt them to suit your class level).**

Look at images of the various sporting codes at the Tokyo Olympics.

- Why do you think the uniform regulators decided on these uniforms for female gymnasts and handball teams?
- What do the athletes think?
- Do you think the uniforms are ok? Why do you think that?
- If you were an Olympic uniform regulator, what things would you need to consider? What decisions would you make about these uniforms and why?

## Let's think critically about our own school/sports uniforms

Consider the following points:

- Is it regulation?
- Is it comfortable?
- Is it traditional or stereotypical?
- Does it give the wearer confidence and strengthened mental wellbeing?
- Does it allow for all body shapes, cultural differences, gender ...?
- Does it allow for optimal performance - how?
- Is it driven by the media, fashion, or popularity?

## Resources to support this discussion

Radio New Zealand's *The Detail* looks at the outrage over the bikini rules for handballers, branded as prurient and voyeuristic, and why it could be a game changer for women's sports kits.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/programmes/the-detail/story/2018805857/an-olympic-sized-argument-over-women-s-sport-uniforms>

Washington Post article *Wearing unitards, German gymnasts promote comfort, take stand against sexualization*

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/olympics/2021/07/25/german-gymnastics-unitards-olympics/>

Washington Post article *It's the 21st century. Let female athletes wear what they want*

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/07/23/women-beach-handball-bikini-uniform-fine-olympics/>

## Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum (1999) defines critical thinking as 'examining, questioning, evaluating, and challenging issues and practices' and critical action as 'action based on critical thinking' (p. 56)

The Insights for Teachers NMSSA Health & Physical Education 2017 report is designed to support health and physical education (HPE) teaching in primary classrooms. It describes student responses to a selection of tasks from assessment of the HPE learning area carried out by the National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement (NMSSA) in 2017.

One of the tasks related to critical thinking, for example, focussing on the students' ability to:

- recognise stereotypes
- think critically about the underlying message of a story
- take and justify a position about the message
- suggest strategies to promote personal well-being in relation to the message.

Page 19 of the report "Is this Ok?" provides an example of a task and student responses focused on critical thinking about health-related issues.

## Last thoughts

Page 10 of the Insights report has some descriptors for critical thinking, critical action and creative thinking that were developed by an expert panel of teachers and HPE educators.

They may be helpful as a reference for you to gauge your students' critical thinking skills in physical education?