

Ethno-Nationalism and Education: Implications for Physical Education

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Abstract

Education shapes knowledge, values, and identities; historically it has served to transmit cultural heritage (Mubita et al., 2022). Ethno-nationalism—an ideology that centers ethnicity in the idea of nationhood—can infiltrate schooling and reconfigure curricula, resource distribution, and identity formation (Le Bossé, 2021; Oppong, 2019).

This paper examines how ethno-nationalist influences operate within educational systems and argues that physical education (PE), reconceived as a humanizing, intercultural practice, can mitigate exclusionary effects and foster inclusive identity formation.

A qualitative interpretive synthesis of the authors' manuscript and the provided literature was conducted. Methods included documentary analysis, philosophical/ethical inquiry, and applied pedagogical mapping to PE practice (Garrido et al., 2020; Osler & Pandur, 2019).

Ethno-nationalism shapes resource allocation, admission policies, segregation, and curriculum content, producing distorted historical narratives and exclusion of minority voices (Ogendi, 2022; Arneil, 2021). PE offers embodied opportunities for intercultural contact, cooperative practice, and ethical reflection that can counteract these tendencies (Garrido et al., 2020; Council of Europe, 2019).

Reframing PE as an intentional site for intercultural education and ethical formation provides practical pathways to resist ethno-nationalist exclusion. Recommendations include inclusive curriculum design, teacher development, equitable resource allocation, and program evaluation.

Keywords: Ethno-nationalism; Education; Physical education; Inclusive curriculum; Intercultural dialogue; Identity formation

1. Introduction

Education is a social practice that transmits knowledge and shapes identities across generations. As the authors note, “Education, a fundamental process encompassing the transfer of knowledge and skills from one individual to another, is a cornerstone of human development and progress.” (Halilio & Lemana, n.d.). Ethno-nationalism—where ethnicity becomes the primary marker of national belonging—can infiltrate schooling and reconfigure what is taught, who is included, and how students understand themselves (Le

Bossé, 2021). This paper examines those processes and positions physical education (PE) as a practical, humanizing response.

2. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative interpretive synthesis of the provided manuscript and the cited literature. Procedures included: (a) documentary analysis of the shared texts (Oppong, 2019; Ogendi, 2022; Killen & Rutland, 2022); (b) ethical and philosophical analysis of tensions between cultural preservation and equal rights (Gudonis & Jones, 2020; Chin, 2019); and (c) applied pedagogical mapping to PE practice (Garrido et al., 2020; Osler & Pandur, 2019). The aim was to translate conceptual claims into actionable recommendations for PE teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers.

3. Findings and Discussion

- Structural impacts: Ethno-nationalism affects resource allocation, often privileging schools serving dominant groups and limiting facilities, equipment, and trained PE staff in marginalized communities (Ogendi, 2022). Biased admission policies and segregation reduce cross-group contact and reinforce social divisions (Arneil, 2021; Intercultural Learning Classroom Activities Content of This Guide, 2018).
- Curricular impacts: Curricula shaped by ethno-nationalist agendas produce distorted historical narratives and exclusion of diverse voices, undermining critical thinking and pluralistic understanding (Oppong, 2019; Gudonis & Jones, 2020).
- Identity formation: Students face pressures to assimilate into dominant identities, inhibiting individuality and producing marginalization among minority and immigrant students (UNESCO, 2023; Killen & Rutland, 2022).
- PE as humanizing practice: PE offers embodied, cooperative contexts that can foster intercultural contact, practice fairness, and humanize peers across difference. Incorporating culturally diverse games and structured cooperative tasks creates low-stakes opportunities for empathy and mutual respect (Garrido et al., 2020; Council of Europe, 2019).

4. Recommendations

1. Inclusive PE curriculum: Integrate indigenous games, folk dances, and culturally diverse sports; accompany activities with contextual history and student storytelling (Garrido et al., 2020; Osler & Pandur, 2019).
2. Teacher professional development: Provide anti-bias and intercultural training for PE teachers; include reflective debrief techniques linking embodied practice to ethical reasoning (Council of Europe, 2019; Chin, 2019).
3. Equitable resourcing: Advocate for policies ensuring all schools have basic PE facilities, equipment, and trained staff (Ainscow, 2020; Ogendi, 2022).
4. School practices: Use rotating, teacher-designed teams to avoid self-segregation; host intercultural sports festivals paired with classroom reflection (Garrido et al., 2020).
5. Assessment and accountability: Monitor participation, belonging, and incidents of exclusion; conduct periodic curriculum audits for representation and historical accuracy (Killen & Rutland, 2022; Oppong, 2019).

5. Limitations and Future Research

This synthesis is conceptual and draws on secondary sources; empirical validation is required. Future research should include case studies of intercultural PE interventions, longitudinal studies on identity outcomes, and policy analyses of resource allocation effects.

6. Conclusion

Ethno-nationalism poses a multifaceted threat to inclusive education. Reframing PE as a deliberate site for intercultural contact, embodied learning, and ethical reflection offers a practical, humanizing pathway to resist exclusion. Realizing this potential requires aligned action across curriculum design, teacher development, resource policy, and ongoing research.

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