

Disrupting Anti-Black Racism in H&PE

As a provincial subject association for Health and Physical Education (H&PE), Ophea recognizes that the historical structures and systems still used within our sector contradict values of inclusion and belonging and have the potential to cause harm to many students. This is true for Black students and especially true for those who experience multiple marginalizations based on other intersecting identities they hold.

The education system continues to center colonial and Euro-centric ways of understanding H&PE, which favour white ways of understanding movement, physical activity, health and well-being. These frameworks are deeply rooted in white, capitalist values and communities, manifesting through the prioritization of certain sports, activities, foods, and medical/treatment models. This approach emphasizes individual achievement, competitive sports, and the prevention of chronic disease and obesity, often at the expense of community connectedness, cultural diversity, and holistic well-being.

Black students encounter complex challenges in relation to H&PE. The relationship between Black bodies and physical activity is deeply influenced by centuries of anti-Black racism, colonization, and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Historically, Black individuals were subject to objectification and commodification, their physicality exploited for the profit and entertainment of others¹. Black bodies were often stripped of agency and autonomy, in examples that range from being forced to participate in physical labour to being showcased in exhibitions of strength and agility. In the face of this dehumanization, Black communities and individuals have reclaimed their bodies as sites of ongoing empowerment and resistance, and redefined well-being on their own terms (not in service of white, capitalistic objectives)². The racist legacies of colonization and slavery continue to shape the ways in which Black students are perceived and treated in the education system, and specifically in relation to H&PE and well-being, highlighting the urgency in disrupting harmful narratives and discriminatory practices. The paradox experienced by Black students in H&PE is observed by both a hyper-fixation on Black students' athletic performance (matched with an erasure in other academic contexts), juxtaposed with a hyper-heterosexualization of Black students and a hypermasculinization of Black boys, but also Black girls who see their femininity questioned or stripped away when they challenge Eurocentric notions of womanhood and femininity and/or excel athletically.

These historical injustices contribute to ongoing systemic racism and discriminatory practices, which highlight the urgent need to address harmful narratives and promote equity in H&PE and student well-being. As we work to create inclusive spaces that expand Black students' access to experiences of belonging and joy in H&PE, we must acknowledge that representation matters deeply in all educational contexts. In conjunction with this, Afro-centric approaches in H&PE offer a powerful framework for fostering student belonging and empowerment. By centering the experiences, cultures,

and histories of the Black Diaspora, and of local Black communities (including parents/caregivers and families), we can shift the narrative, validating students' identities and lived realities in our day-to-day teachings and interactions. In H&PE, incorporating Afro-centric perspectives can involve curriculum content that reflects diverse cultural practices and traditions related to physical activity, wellness, and health. Additionally, fostering a culturally responsive and inclusive learning environment where students' voices are valued, and their experiences are affirmed, can significantly enhance their sense of belonging and engagement in H&PE. Through Afro-centric approaches, educators can create inclusive spaces that celebrate diversity, promote holistic well-being, and create the space for students to thrive, academically and personally.

This statement was developed in collaboration with various interest holders, subject matter experts (including Black youth with lived experience), and community partners.

Bibliography

1. Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). *The souls of black folk*. A.C. McClurg. Gumprich, M., & Hare, N. (2023).
2. Davis, A. Y. (1983). *Women, race & class*. Vintage Books.