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**'Get into Groups'**  
**Young Pacific Island Women and the potential  
for Empowerment in Physical Education**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

Degree of Master of International Development

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing on a case study of three South Auckland schools, the aim of my research is to investigate how Pacific Island young women are empowered or disempowered through their experiences in the Physical Education classroom, and how they negotiate these experiences. Ways to improve the delivery of the Physical Education Curriculum to ensure it is meaningful, engaging and empowering for young women of Pacific Island descent are also explored. This research is qualitative in design and underpinned by feminist research principles, hence the voices of these Pacific Island young women are privileged.

The findings of my study show that delivering a Physical Education Curriculum where the focus is not solely on physical skill acquisition seems to resonate with Pasifika young women. One which includes a broader understanding of health and wellbeing where emphasis is placed on appreciating the whole body, and the importance of non-physical skills such as relationships and interpersonal skills. Feelings of empowerment were thus experienced. Having supportive friends in the class and the desire to have a positive adult role model is also strong. Teachers are better positioned to facilitate transformative experiences when a rapport has been built. The degree to which empowerment was felt within the Physical Education classroom appeared to have some impact on the young women's involvement in co-curricular sport. However, parental influence was the largest contributing factor of participation levels in physical activity outside the classroom setting, contesting views surrounding the influence of schooling as a sole means to promoting physical activity.

This study supports findings in the Sport for Development literature, of which Physical Education is a part of who argue that using sport and physical activity as an opportunity for development must combine sport and play with other non-sport components, such as leadership, in order to enhance effectiveness. This is particularly so if empowerment is to occur. Thus, the old 'sport techniques' paradigm, which still appears to prevail in New Zealand secondary schools is argued not to be conducive to the empowerment process. If empowerment is to occur on the individual level, as well as relational and social, a more holistic approach should be applied within the classroom. Finally given the influence of parents, if Physical Education is to be truly empowering to Pacific Island young women, especially in the longer term, the establishment of effective partnerships with Pacific Island families and community, such as the church, are also required.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BMI	Body Mass Index
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
DP	Deputy Principal
EFA	The World Declaration on Education for All
GAD	Gender and Development
GDI	Gender Development Index
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
HOD	Head of Department
HPE	Health and Physical Education
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MUHEC	Massey University Human Ethics Committee
NZ	New Zealand
NZC	New Zealand Curriculum
NCEA	National Certificate in Educational Achievement
PE	Physical Education
S4D	Sport for Development
SEPE	Sport, Exercise and Physical Education
SPAD	Sport and Physical Activity for Development
SPED	Sport and Physical Education for Development
TKI	Te Kete Ipurangi
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WAD	Women and Development
WID	Women in Development
WHO	The World Health Organisation

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