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A HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN THE CAPE COLONY AND PROVINCE PRIOR TO THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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ABSTRACT

A large 'corpus' of both scholarly and informal literature, exploring the history of Physical Education (PE) in South Africa (SA), exists. These works reflect the racial schisms that dominated PE. This literature review traces a historical development that transcends traditional 'race' boundaries. A sport-historical investigation was undertaken based on literature in dissertations, academic and non-academic journals and general publications. By reworking the existing literature, the study revealed that PE was not introduced uniformly into all sectors of society. It showed how the playing of games remained the dominant form of physical activity at elite schools while the marginalised classes (poor, non-white and women), had Physical Training (PT) Drill. However, PE always had a low status on the school timetable. In Black schools, Drill and later PE was introduced mainly for the purposes of discipline and social control, as well as the commonly known idea of medical and health reasons, which were paramount.

Key words: Physical Education; History; South Africa; Cape Colony; Cape Province; Games; Gymnastics; PT drill.

INTRODUCTION

The study of the history of Physical Education (PE) in South Africa is a neglected field of research and only one doctoral dissertation in the 21st century could be found on the subject (Cleophas, 2009). To date, many research studies on South African PE operated within a 'race' based theme (Willemse, 1969; Potgieter, 1972; Agjee, 1981; De Klerk, 1986; Weixlederer, 1987; Vermaas, 1989; Cleophas, 2009). This study attempts to present a historical gaze at PE in South Africa that transcends 'race' and also attempts to do justice to the ascertion of Floris van der Merwe that the history of any subject serves as a barometer for progress (Van der Merwe, 1999).

This study is presented in thematic rather than strictly chronological sequence because of overlapping leitmotifs during different periods. Presently, there is a virtual absence of PE historical issues in serious, detailed, informed and open discussion at national level in South Africa. This study addresses this vacuum by undertaking a social-historical survey of the subject from 1892, when the subject was introduced into the Cape Colony until the period prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. The first theme covers a world historical perspective of PE in 19th to early 20th Century. In the second theme, attention is given to PT in the Cape Colony and Cape Province, centring on PT at schools (drill and gymnastics), and the playing of games at Cape schools.

A WORLD HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF PE IN 19th TO EARLY 20th CENTURY

It is necessary to locate the origin of PE in the Cape Colony within world history in order to gain clarity on the topic under investigation. In this regard, a historical interpretation of the origin of the subject as presented by McIntosh (1968:11) is useful:

> During the 19th century there grew up in England two distinct traditions of PE. While each had its origin in earlier days neither had grown beyond the embryonic stage by 1800. In the Public Schools 'organised games' began to appear early in the century. At first games were the spontaneous recreations of the boys and were for the most part disapproved of by masters. However, as the century wore on, 'organised games' came to be recognised by authority and were regarded as a powerful force in the education of the sons of the middle and upper classes. They became a feature of all Public Schools, old and new, great and small… Organised games were indeed an intrinsic part of the education of the ruling classes… Outside the Public Schools a different type of PE grew up, springing from several roots – military drill, callisthenics and gymnastics. From them grew the system of physical training which, at the end of the century, was being adopted in the Public Elementary Schools.

During the period under review, there were therefore, two systems of PE in vogue in England: the public school system of organised games and the elementary school system of PT. Organised games concentrated on character training while PT focussed on discipline and the physiological effects of systematised exercise (McIntosh, 1968). The School Drill Manual, appearing in 1871, stated that a value of drill is "a moral lesson of prompt and ready obedience … [where] the practice of working together in bodies is cultivated" (Ex-Adjutant of His Majesty's Infantry, 1871:vi).

Drill lessons in 19th century schools were never long ones and the exercises were never intended to be violent (Bates, 1897; Gladman, 1898). The intention was that drill should be accompanied by music in order to "aid to uniformity of movement essential for purposes of discipline" (Gladman, 1898:162). Drill was also characterised by notions of: "… children must not be allowed to overstrain themselves, steadiness of pace should be aimed at and the running should be on the toes; flat-footed running is both ungraceful and useless as a means of developing the lower limbs" (Gladman, 1898:163).

The playing of games had other objectives and two PE officials from the Birmingham Education Authority stated: "Games are universally accepted as important for character, social and physical training, more particularly in English-speaking countries … the development of the games spirit is a recognised cultural contribution by this country to the rest of the world" (Clark & MacCuaig, 1951:vi). Socially, the cult of athleticism (playing of organised games) was closely bound up with the rise of a new middle class to educational privilege and political power. Robust team games became an important part of the ethos of middle class schools from the 1830s onwards when Dr Arnold assumed principalship of Rugby School and boys took to team games that he allowed (McIntosh, 1963).

A feature of public schools, with their mainly upper class clientele, became the development of athleticism (McIntosh, 1952). One of the features of athleticism was its close connection with military training (McIntosh, 1957). This feature started to be replaced by a new school of thought in the British world of the 1930s that PE should replace the "old term, school drill

and encourage the concurrent development of a healthy physique, alert intelligence and sound character" (Newman, 1940:8).

On the other hand, Tom Brown's recollections of his school days at Rugby School illustrate the rough nature of games: "… two collar bones were broken this semester and a dozen fellows lamed. And last year a fellow had his leg broken" (Hughes, 1994:100). Physical drill developed a social status inferior to the better established upper class game of cricket and football. An English School Inspector, Gladman (1898:164), remarked, "Physical exercises can never fully replace good games". From this lowly status, gymnastics and drill never raised themselves in English Public Schools. In direct contrast, PT in elementary or poor schools had gymnastics and drill as its bedrock. This is especially true of the Swedish system of PE that formed the basis of physical drill (Gladman, 1898; McIntosh, 1968).

PHYSICAL TRAINING IN THE CAPE COLONY AND CAPE PROVINCE

During the 19th and early 20th Century, two main types of schools existed: mission and public. The former were attended by the poorer classes who happened to be (but not exclusively) Coloured, while public schools were those schools that catered for those communities who were financially able to establish schools and pay half the teachers' salaries (Malherbe, 1925).

The subject, Physical Training (PT), was first reported on by the Cape of Good Hope Education Department in 1892. After Thomas Muir assumed the position of Superintendent-General of Education the previous year, he introduced the subject (Van der Merwe, 1999). It is not clear what the Education Department's motive was for introducing the subject, but it coincided with a time when Cape Town was acquiring the social features of an industrialised society (Worden *et al*., 1998). These features included the rise of poverty levels that stretched across racial boundaries. The *Cape Argus* stated that poor White workers and their families were "compelled to live in towns amidst Coloured people and are sinking … into the social condition of the … Coloured population" (Worden *et al*., 1998:249). This gave rise to a demand for a healthy and disciplined labour force by capitalist industrialists during the 19th century that added to an interest in PT.

Through vacation courses that started in 1893 and lasted until 1908, teachers were exposed to the Swedish Gymnastic System (De Klerk, 1978). This was in response to the negative reports of the school inspectors. In 1892, school inspector Fraser reported that various forms of drill, physical exercises, callisthenics and unsatisfactory marching exercises were found in his circuit (Department of Public Education for the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, 1893). Inspector Edward Noaks reported that physical exercises were taught effectively in two schools and a start had been made in another. Inspector Bartmann commented that callisthenics received attention in some first class girls' schools. He suggested the introduction of gymnastic exercises, especially where there were no adequate open playgrounds, and a modified form of military drill in boys' schools. Muir's own impression was that drill and physical exercises were not nearly as common as he expected (Department of Public Education for the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, 1893).

Physical training at schools (drill and gymnastics)

PT appeared to be more visible at mission and girls' schools than public schools for boys during the period under review. The practice of PT in all Cape colonial schools was under the charge of the class teacher, although nine or 10 girls' schools had trained female teachers from Europe on their staffs in 1909 (Willemse, 1969). A possible explanation for this is that public schools followed curricula based on Scottish lines in order "to provide a broad base of classical subjects upon which the student could later erect his own special study" (Thomson, 1961:25). It was only in 1901, four years after the opening of Rondebosch Boys' High School (RBHS) for Junior Boys, that W.J. Milne, the Departmental instructor, started attending "on certain days to give instruction in singing and drill" (Cornell, 1947:7). This was despite the fact that RBHS was an English boys' school whose principal, Robert Ramage, and "several of his senior boys were enrolled in the Rondebosch Town Guard during the South African War (1899-1902)" (Cornell, 1947:5).

THE ST. ANDREW'S GYMNASIUM, NEWLANDS

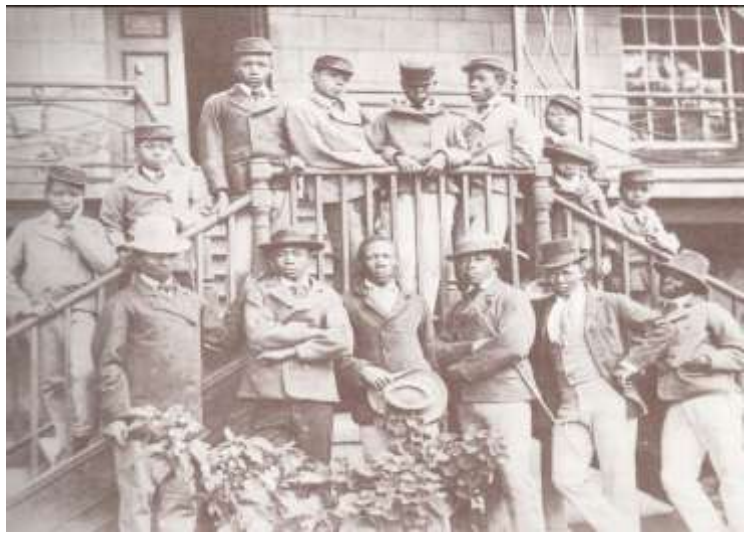
"The boys, with the exception of the European instructors, are largely recruited from the poorer quarters in Newlands. No better evidence than this photo is needed to testify to the good work that can be done" (APO, 1914:8).

The boys' public schools received PT drill mainly through the cadet movement (Willemse, 1969). On the other hand, mission schools, such as St Andrew's Anglican in Newlands, focussed on gymnastic training with the aim of showing off "what good can be done" (APO, 1914:8). This was part of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie political strategy of social upliftment. The organisation representing the interests of Coloured teachers from 1913 onwards, the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA), pursued this strategy vigorously until the 1940s. Thus John Abrahamse, despairing of the moral redemption of Coloured people, cried out during his presidential address of 1938 that, "We are knee-haltered because a large portion of our people drag us down into a mire of filth" (Adhikari, 2002:158).

A situation developed at the Zonnebloem Training School (commonly referred to as the Zonnebloem College), that had been established in February 1858 to anglicise the sons of traditional African chiefs, where the boys resisted PT (Odendaal, 2003). The boys and young men at Zonnebloem developed an aversion for PT, and Janet Hodgson referred to correspondence between Zonnebloem officials in her master's thesis as follows:

> Drilling was introduced into the curriculum; but it was the only discipline to which some of the elder boys did not yield to quite so cheerfully. It was suggested that their reluctance was more likely due to their not understanding the object of the exercise, rather than from any dislike of it; and that being so tractable, they would soon become reconciled to this activity (Hodgson, 1975:223).

Although Zonnebloem was considered a mission institution, it reflected the definition of an English Public School: "an endowed place of education of old standing to which the sons of gentleman resort in considerable numbers and where they reside from eight or nine to eighteen years of age" (McIntosh, 1957:178). Hodgson's account of the reluctance of the Zonnebloem boys to engage in drill could be explained by its inferior status compared to the playing of games.



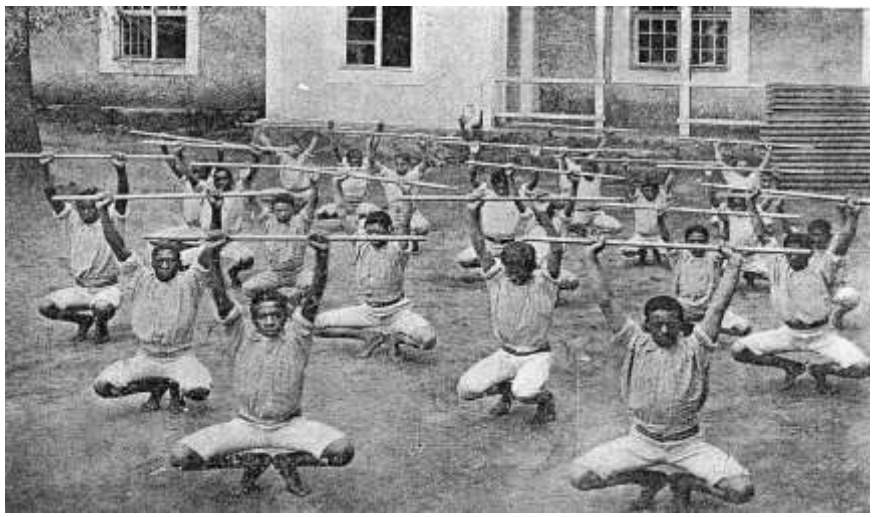
The sons of chiefs, Zonnebloem College, Cape Town, 1863. Cricket was their favoured game (Odendaal, 2003:25).

The idea of PT being an activity designated for the poorer classes has some justification by contemplating the participating schools in the Coronation Physical Training competition. This competition was organised by the Cape of Good Hope Education Department in 1902 and the participating units where drawn only from mission schools and the lower socio-economic public schools for the purpose of showing off a youthful vigour of the British Empire (Cleophas & Van der Merwe, 2012). The practice of PT at the Genadendal Mission Training School (GMTS) had a different slant than the British model at the turn of the 20th Century. The GMTS, was a Moravian institution in the Cape Colony where African, Coloured and

White students attended. Here the Moravian authorities, under the directorship of T. Renkewitz, actively promoted drill in the late 19th and early 20th century. Renkewitz presented PT as physical exercises, not physical drill and the aim was not for discipline but:

> To give the scholars the full command of their limbs and not only to make their muscles strong and tough. The latter purpose is attained by making the boys practise all kinds of movements with pretty heavy iron dumbbells and iron rods. As to the former, we prefer making the movements without music as we are convinced of securing the aim better by the simple unexpected word of command, which compels them to move suddenly and without preparation. At the same time, we do not underrate the value of elegance … (Renkewitz, c.1904:85).

The GMTS was under the directorship of Renkewitz from 1882 until 1904 and the instruction medium was exclusively English, although the Training School published a Dutch-Afrikaans newspaper, *De Bode*, since 1 December 1859 (Balie, 1988). When the South African War broke out on 11 November, many of the Moravian missionaries expressed in their diaries their sympathies with the Boers in their resistance to British imperialism (Krüger & Schaberg, 1984). Therefore, PT was presented as an activity that did not offend either the victorious British or the Boer sympathisers.



Boys doing PT drill at Genadendal Training School (Renkewitz, c.1904:87).

There was an increase in the number of pupils receiving instruction in physical training drill at mission schools by 1899, but only a third of all schools in the Cape Colony paid some attention to the subject (Department of Public Education for the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, 1900). Edward Noaks, whose inspectoral circuit included an area with several mission schools, reported that attempts to introduce half an hour of daily drill lessons in mission schools met with partial success (Department of Public Education for the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, 1901). This was due to the teaching conditions in these schools. Most mission schools had overcrowded classrooms and teaching happened under conditions that were

detrimental to the health and progress of the pupils and teachers (WCARS Correspondence file, 4/2/1/3/1866, B779/49).

A major concern of the education authorities was maintaining discipline in mission schools and physical training drill was a suitable means of achieving this. Muir favoured physical training drill in helping to instil discipline in schools (Department of Public Education for the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, 1903; Department of Public Education, 1913). It was during his tenure that the British used the school system as a means to break down Afrikaner nationalism and extend control over Black people (Christie, 1985).

Physical training drill, being part of this school system, could be used to teach non-white children obedience and at the time, most Coloured leaders supported this idea. The TLSA, stated through its president, Fred Hendricks, that Manual Training would help train the youth to discharge the duties of citizenship (APO, 1915). Manual Training was a system of practical education that included PT (Schreve, 1911). The idea of drill lingered in South African education until the 1940s where in "some schools, it consisted of ten minutes first thing in the morning … where the teacher has to deal with as many as seventy children" (Scott, 1947:12).

Ten minutes of drill in the morning at Zonnebloem Primary School in the 1930s (Photo: J.K.H. Hodgson).

Playing of games at Cape schools

The British games played in 19th century PT 'lessons' at schools evolved into the 20th century sport codes that became part of political struggles across the spectrum. The journalist, Gerhard Roux, mentions that sport became the unifying factor between liberal and right-wing students at Stellenbosch University after the Second World War (Roux, 2014). Games, and later sport, therefore became important political instruments for the British ruling class from the late 19th century onwards. English games were underpinned by 19th century Muscular Christianity (a philosophy that made exercise and fitness compatible with Christian life), that

shifted to a phenomenon where the educational value of sport was recognised (Siedentop, 1990).

A division between the emphasis on games (for children at elite schools) and PT (for those at lower socio-economic institutions), was evident. It is reported that George Ogilvie introduced games to an elite school in the Cape, the Diocesan College (Bishops), when he became principal in 1861, along the lines of Muscular Christianity (Dobson, c.1997). This is to be understood because Ogilvie attended the Winchester and Wadham Colleges (in Oxford) where ball games were part of the school culture (Van der Merwe, 2007). The same situation existed at Zonnebloem. At the turn of the 20th century, the Zonnebloem staff was made up entirely of Oxford or Cambridge graduates, with the exception of one (Cleophas, 2012). Odendaal (2003) reports that by 1864, the year in which over-arm bowling was finally legalised in England, Zonnebloem College had two cricket teams. Both schools, Zonnebloem and Bishops, employed a PT drill teacher only long after games were introduced. Zonnebloem introduced Physical Drill in 1904 when Charles O'Hine came on to the staff and Bishops in 1927 when Mr Britton joined the teaching staff and introduced the Swedish system of gymnastics (Editorial, 1944; Willemse, 1969).

The South African College (SACS) is another elite school that traces its history to 1829 and a football match against Bishops as early as 1862, but no account exists of PT being taught at this institution during the 19th century (Babrow, 1979). When the Rondebosch Public School for Junior Boys was established in 1897, no evidence could be found that suggests PT was taught from the outset. However, when Alexander Hahn was appointed to the staff in April 1899, he "immediately interested himself in organising sports and games and his action received the hearty support of [the school] committee" (Cornell, 1947:5).

In January 1900, A.N. MacFarlane was appointed on the staff and he established soccer (Cornell, 1947). Bishops, along with other elite public schools (Green and Sea Point, the Normal College School, Paarl Gymnasium, St George's Grammar, SACS, Wellington Boys' High and Wynberg), established the Schools' Challenge Shield for rugby on 4 May 1898 (WPRFU, 1898a; Dobson, 1997). It could be argued that these schools favoured a football competition, as was the case in England, above swimming and athletics because of the former's ability to promote group loyalty and team spirit (McIntosh, 1968). However, many principals at mission schools imitated the British value system and with the support of the Perseverance and California Rugby Clubs, a few better-off schools in this category formed the Central School Sports Union (CSU) in June 1928 at the Wesleyan School in Mowbray, and initially it catered for rugby and cricket only (Moses, 1929).

The ruling class in the Cape Colony had applied segregation measures in the broader society and Coloured people found themselves excluded from mainstream sport development. Therefore, the CSU was not part of the Schools' Challenge Shield because of a rule, in the constitution of the Western Province Junior Rugby Football Union that stated, "Affiliation to the Union shall be open only to teams consisting entirely of European players" (WPRFU, 1898b:n.p.).

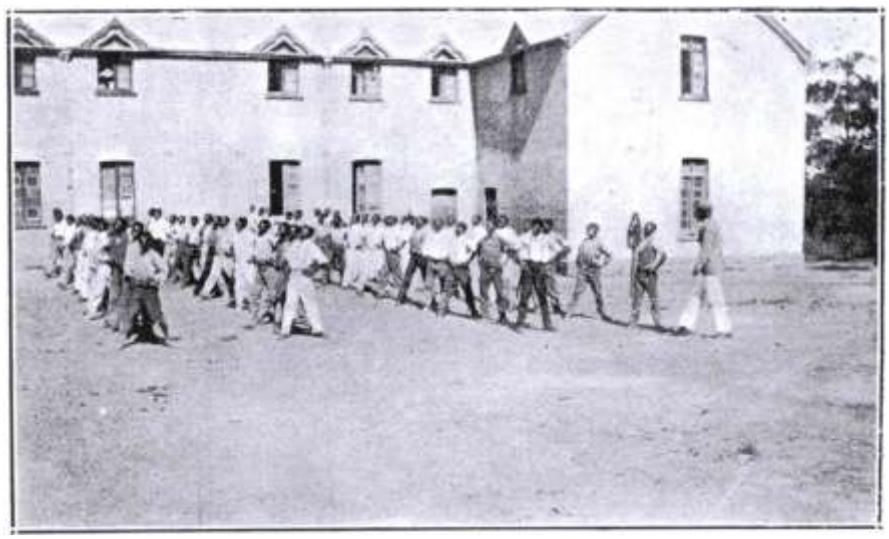
However, physical drill and gymnastics became gradually more visible at mission schools because from the last decade of the 19th century, an educated leisure class agitated for

enclosed fields that aimed to keep the masses away from the games of the social elite. During most of the 19th century, English games in the Cape Colony ran along the same haphazard, self-governing and self-maintained lines of American universities. These games were spontaneous and organised by the students themselves. Shortly after inter-college sport was introduced in America, non-playing supporters attended games on an organised basis and rowdyism and hooliganism frequently resulted afterwards (Munrow, 1957). A similar situation evolved in the Cape Colony but there, hooliganism became equated with racial descriptors. This is illustrated when a sport field was inaugurated in Stellenbosch in 1898. A writer in the *Stellenbosch Students' Quarterly* (P.K.A., 1898:21) wrote:

> In days gone by, our sporting predecessors had to content themselves with pitching their wickets and planting their goal posts on the *Braak*. As, however, this was a public square, the rights of the Chams had to be recognized … in fact … more preparations were made and more pains taken to wage a successful war against the bellicose champions of the said Chams than energy expended in attaining proficiency in the game of football… growing discontented with all this, they sought pastures new.

The reference to Cham or Ham, the son of the biblical Noah, is significant here because the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa used this as a justification for the racial separation of people since (C)Ham was believed to be dark skinned and the father of the Black peoples of the world. Many Black people accepted their 'racial difference' from other people and implemented class distinctions amongst themselves. Educational achievement became the most important single criterion by which urbanised Black people graded themselves (Pauw, 1963). Games Masters, who were a feature of school life, guarded these social restrictions. They were "in social status a gentleman and in athletic status an amateur" (McIntosh, 1957:188).

These masters instilled in their learners a passion for games and sport and resistance to any notion of achievement for personal glory. Therefore, Nelson Mandela stated in his autobiography that after he adapted to life at Clarkebury Institute, a boarding school in the Eastern Cape that he attended in 1934 and 1935, he participated in sport and games as often as he could, even though his performances were mediocre. He elaborated on this as follows: "I played for the love of sport, not the glory, for I received none. We played lawn tennis with homemade wooden rackets and soccer with bare feet on a field of dust" (Mandela, 1994:40).



Students at drill
Clarkebury in c.1929 (Clarkebury Mission Tembuland, 1930).

Roundabout this time colleges, schools, clubs and military regiments in England were increasingly seeking athletic knowledge for "a system of exercises designed to make the human body sufficiently supple and strong for the production of major feats of athletic achievement" (Heys & Webster, 1932:9). The 1920s and 1930s were therefore a period that witnessed the introduction of PE specialist courses at the Stellenbosch University and teacher training colleges in the Cape Province. This is the next theme in South African PE history could be explored.

Cape Town Teachers' Training College in c.1921 (Clarkson, 1994:17).

CONCLUSION

This article highlighted the rationale of drill exercises and gymnastics in a particular setting. PE was introduced into the South African curriculum as PT drill that was borrowed from the British system. This system comprised English ball games and military manoeuvres on the one hand and the gymnastic freestanding and apparatus work from continental origin on the other. In the English public or elite schools, ball games remained popular, while gymnastics and military manoeuvres never enjoyed the same status. The reverse was true for elementary or the poorer schools.

This study confirms Willemse's findings that although sporadic attempts were made to promote PT in the 19th century, this did not materialise. It was a dark period in the history of the subject in South Africa (Willemse, 1969). The early 20th century was characterised by an increasing interest in the gymnastics and drill aspects of PT. However, gymnastics and drill were more popular in mission schools, whereas the playing of games that later evolved into organised sport, were more popular at elite boys' schools.

The PT drill that was introduced in the mission schools had as its main aim discipline for the purpose of social control. Many pupils at these schools, therefore never valued it as highly as playing games. In addition, PT was more widespread in girls' schools. Boys' schools introduced PT much later into their curriculum and organised themselves around sport leagues in team games. Mission schools in the Western and Eastern Cape did the same. However, mission schools were marginalised from mainstream school sport competition and, therefore, PT and not school sport, provided purposeful movement participation opportunity for these learners.

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