Happy 21st Birthday Sport Education: Where are we now?

Clive Pope
University of Waikato

Introduction

The Sport Education curriculum model turns twenty-one years old this year. And like any birthday there should be opportunity to reflect on the past, confirm and celebrate the present and to consider the future - to take stock on what has happened and what needs to happen. It is a time for the three Rs: reflection, reconsideration, and revision. In earlier times a 21st birthday was symbolised with a key signaling a transition into adulthood marked by a more settled and perhaps mature status. What might adult status mean for sport education and how has the earlier growth evolved? The Sport Education Curriculum (SEM) has been the focus of several texts, book chapters and more than 70 academic articles. It has established a ubiquitous status on the educational landscape, particularly in New Zealand secondary schools. This article traces the growth and maturation of SEM and invites readers to reflect on the current state of this curriculum model.

Reflecting on the past: Education and the culture of sport

Sport is unquestionably an important part of New Zealand's culture. For many New Zealanders it is part of who they are and what they do. However, the relationship between sport and culture is not always seen to be compatible. While Chris Laidlaw, a former All Black and now media commentator, has argued that sport is "perhaps the only genuinely all-embracing expression of New Zealand nationalism," he also notes that culture and sport "have traditionally been two different streams with little in the way of confluence … each with a faint distaste for the other" (Laidlaw, 1999, p.12-13). One reason for any strained status could be attributed to the increasingly complex meaning of sport to both adults and young people.

Although many people accept the importance of sport to the culture of this country, the need to educate young New Zealanders about the wider meaning of sport has historically been something that occurs outside the formal curriculum. Education can play an important role in the transmission of sport culture by creating opportunities for students to experience and understand its benefits. In the late 1980s Alderson and Crutchley (1990) examined the value of sport as a cultural form and claimed that there was a lack of education about the culture of sport. They urged educators to prepare young people to "make the most of sport in their lives" (p.61) and to see sport as a way to enhance leisure. The timing of this intervention proved significant in focusing attention on the culture of sport and education.

Programmes that encourage and foster participation in sport among young people are needed. I am guided here by Daryl Siedentop who argues that educative sport should be marked by inclusion, hold interest to a diverse range of young people by catering to their physical and emotional needs and be delivered with clear and identifiable goals (Siedentop, 1995).

Early argument for Sport Education

Siedentop (1982) identified sport as the real subject matter of physical education and argued that it should be thoroughly examined:

> We need to confront directly the problems in sport and to begin to shape a sport culture that is egalitarian, yet allows for elite performance, a sport culture that is completely humane and very competitive, a sport culture in which a person's involvement in sport is properly seen as a fundamental part of their lifestyle - one in which sport in all its forms for all the people flourishes and, in so doing, nurtures and sustains the culture itself (Siedentop, 1982, p. 6).

Here Siedentop argues that so much emphasis has been placed on the acquisition of skill in physical education that the full meaning and purpose of sport is lost and many of the objectives of teaching such skills cannot be achieved. Typically, highly structured lessons or sessions that emphasise the mastery of motor skills prior to game involvement characterise teaching and coaching sport (Grehaigné, Godbout, & Bouthier, 1995). The emphasis on skills decontextualises the chosen sport as well as student learning (Siedentop, 1996; Turner & Martinek, 1995). The current culture of sport portrayed within many physical education programmes is therefore often restrictive. In particular many teachers have been reluctant to adopt play as a teaching and learning tool. Yet common complaints from teachers and coaches are that techniques often break down in game play, creating what I have termed the 'Play-Sport Crevasse'. The expectation of teachers and coaches is players and / or students will negotiate this cleft in spite of this limited preparation.

The conception of Sport Eduction

The genesis of sport education lies in the early work of Siedentop and his interest in play and play theory. As a follow-on from his doctoral work Daryl Siedentop published his Introductory Analysis (Siedentop, 1972) text which focused on play and theory. He advocated play as " an essential source of human behaviour " (p.178) and introduced a play education model because play was essentially what is done in physical education. The theory was influenced by the work of Huizinga (1962) and Caillois (1961) who signalled the importance of play as a learning experience and as a desirable pursuit for both children and adults. According to Siedentop (1972) the obvious site for such a transition is the physical education programme. Here students can be socialised into the adult version of play in a manner that is both positive and educational. The adoption of play as the subject matter of physical education was presented as a serious proposal:

> ...it is time for physical education to take play seriously; to examine the depth and breadth of the implications of play; to recognise it as a source of the meaning that we have found in the activities of physical education; and to develop theories and programs which are consistent with the overriding human importance of an active play life. (Siedentop, 1972, p.206).

But the play education model was largely theoretical and it would be fair to say it received limited attention from educators.

Ten years later he presented a keynote lecture at the Commonwealth Conference in Brisbane where he proposed the theoretical bones of what we now know to be the Sport Education Model (Siedentop, 1982).

Ostensibly SEM was founded on two assumptions! The first recognises the important link between play and sport but more importantly the need to acknowledge the role of play as a precursor to sport. This is because when sport is correctly understood, appropriately conceptualised and fully enacted is a form of play. In other words, the essential meaning and importance of sport is derived from play. The second assumption on which this SEM is based is that a society

in which higher forms of ludic activity are pursued vigorously by all the people is a more mature society; that is, a mature sports culture represents an evolution of culture toward a more meaningful form. However, any curriculum theory that is unsupported at an applied level to sustain programmes in schools is destined to the dusty shelves of teacher backrooms - and with some justification. Fortunately the period of latency was short lived

Sport Education as the Growing Child

The following few years were spent on formulating a workable model. The practical version of this model appeared in Physical education teaching and curriculum strategies for grades 5-12 (Siedentop, Mand, & Taggart, 1986). For many educators this was the first full attention to the model that provided a workable framework upon which a complete model could be built. While this text outlined several programme options that could be adopted by teachers of physical education it was Siedentop's Sport Education Model outlined in this book that was to become the focus of attention in New Zealand.

The principle objective of the SEM is to assist students to become competent, literate and enthusiastic participants and consumers of sport. Competence is interpreted as the acquisition of skills and strategies at the appropriate developmental level and applying these in a way that students' knowledge is enhanced so they may successfully participate in games. Literate refers to understanding the values, roles, rituals and traditions associated with sport. Differentiating between acceptable and unacceptable sports practices is an important aspect of sport literacy. Enthusiasm revolves around the desire to participate in the many faces of sport and nurture actions that "preserve, protect and enhance the sport culture" (Siedentop, 1987, p.79). In summary, the SEM had three long-term purposes:

1. to contribute to a sound, sane and humane sport culture
2. to ensure sport involvement is primarily for the benefit of participants
3. to make sport more widely accessible

Sport education provides a more concentrated and diverse examination of the sport culture than does more traditional programmes. This is possible through the principle characteristics of the sport education model which are:

1. Sport education uses longer seasons (20 plus lessons) than traditional units used in physical education.
2. Students remain as members of teams throughout the season. Team selection and affiliation are critical aspects of the programme.
3. The season includes practice sessions, pre-season games and a formal competition.
4. The season concludes with a suitable culminating event.
5. Records are kept and publicised, adding meaning to what takes place during the season.

The many roles required to operate within a sport season are filled by students. These might include selector, referee, coach, manager, umpire, statistician, first-aid person or a publicity officer. Students are, therefore, encouraged to share ownership for the way the model is implemented and pursue greater responsibility for the operation of the model. The level of intensity is therefore controlled by the students. Meanwhile their teacher assumes a role more like a facilitator. For the teacher, the crucial success of the SEM will often come down to the nature and timing of the responsibility accorded to her / his students.

The rapid adolescent growth phase

After an initial time in the wilderness, what Daryl Siedentop describes as the international turning point for the growth of Sport Education, was the decision by Bevan Grant (then based at The University of Otago) and Peter Sharp (The Hillary Commission) to conduct a national trial. The trial was established to investigate the implications of including sport education as part of a year 10 programme in 1991. It was a collaborative project that advertised nationally, inviting schools to participate. From 55 self-nominated schools 34 were chosen. These were divided into clusters in Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Tasman, Canterbury, Otago and Southland. A total of 86 teachers and nearly 2500 students took part in the trial using fourteen different sport codes. Teachers received professional development on SEM and then planned, implemented, reflected on and evaluated the model. Details of the research and outcomes are published elsewhere (Grant, 1992; Grant, Sharp & Siedentop, 1992) but it is poignant to acknowledge the growth that followed the New Zealand initiative.

The secondary trial was followed by a similar initiative in Intermediate schools (Grant & Pope, 1995; Pope & Grant, 1996) as well as a national trial in Australia (Alexander, 1994). Many teachers involved in these research initiatives revealed that SEM had provided them with an opportunity to do things differently. As Richard Tinning (Tinning, 1995) applauds, SEM offered a salient and timely challenge to many traditional ways of how things are done in physical education namely "the sport education model is a direct challenge to the traditional teaching method in physical education. Such a challenge is both necessary and laudable" (Italics original, p. 20.).

These developments 'Down Under' prompted the production of the first dedicated sport education text (Siedentop, 1994) which would become the resource for a burgeoning model in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Europe, USA and Africa. Quality PE through positive sport experiences: Sport Education has since been expanded and refined to the complete guide version (Siedentop, Hastie, & Van der Mars, 2004). The research base for SEM has also grown. SEM has featured in five international journal special features: a recent review highlighted over 65 refereed articles that have been published on SEM (Wallhead & O'Sullivan, 2005).

Sport Education Model as an adult

There is little doubt that this curriculum model has come a long way in twenty-one years. Many schools throughout this country have embraced the model yet what do we know of its current status? Is SEM nearing a mid-life crisis? This birthday is therefore an opportunity for us to employ the three Rs of reflection, revision and reconsideration as an endeavour to promote the continued growth and maturation of SEM. Curriculum, like many other things, is not static, rather it is an on-going conversation between teachers, students, researchers, policy makers and resource providers. As part of that conversation it is perhaps time to ask questions about a future pathway:

1. Has Sport Education reached its potential?
2. What are some of the innovations of SEM?
3. How has or could technology enhance the way this model is taught?
4. Has SEM been 'blunted' to fit local factors? For example, is the recommended season [20 sessions] shortened to fit traditional programmes or units?
5. If schools are not using SEM, then what alternatives are adopted?
6. What integration stories exist with other models - TGFU or Hellison's Social Responsibilty Model?
7. How can SEM connect to 'real world' outcomes?
8. What support do teachers and or coaches require to ensure growth of SEM?

Siedentop (1992) reminds us, that we must think differently about physical education to make it more meaningful to those students who pass through the high school system. The challenge will be to explore what allows young people to feel committed and connected to education - how we might promote a clustering of students and behaviours in constructive settings that invite success and a sense of belonging. Richard Sagor (Sagor, 2002), has alerted us to learning styles of today's young people. Such styles are marked by devotion

to a search for competence in something that is valued by individuals who in turn build on the enthusiasm of others to establish an air of loyalty and eventual success. Sagor warns "if we don't pay attention to what motivates [young people], we will lose more students than we will save" (Sagor, 2002, p.36). The author proposed five needs that young people identified. The need to:

1. feel competent
2. feel useful
3. feel potent
4. feel optimistic
5. belong.

In this 'sport' skateboarders will often learn new skills with a failure ratio of 100:1 but they persevere and those five needs will often promote resilience and engagement.

Play, fun and increasing competence can be integrated into the sport component of physical education in ways that absorb players intensely and utterly. The extent that we bring students to these experiences increases the chances of achieving long-term goals.

There is a sport culture, valued by many, and constantly evolving. Most importantly our role as educators is to provide the mechanism for growth because:

If sport …is a valued part of society, it is society's responsibility to find ways to formalize the process of how people come to learn and participate in the sport culture. Quite simply, we must teach each new generation our sport culture, and one of the best places to do that is within the school curriculum (Metzler, 2000, p. 258).

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