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What is 'sport pedagogy' and why study it?

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... the aim of education should be to develop to the full the potentialities of every child.

(Board of Education, 1937, p. 12)

You've got to recognise that those 20 people in front of you will have different ways of learning. Some can take it straight away just by listening to what you say. However, just because I believe in a certain thing and I have pictures in my mind of how it's going to happen doesn't mean that all the players do ... they all have different learning rates and preferences.

(Elite football coach, Jones, Armour and Potrac, 2004, p. 26)

High-quality PE and sport always: enable all young people, whatever their circumstances or ability, to take part in and enjoy PE and sport; promote young people's health, safety and well-being; enable all young people to improve and achieve in line with their age and potential.

(Government document on high-quality physical education and sport, DfES, 2004, p. 1)

Personalised learning, tailoring teaching and learning to individual need, is essential in helping children to achieve the best possible progress and outcomes. It is critical in raising standards and narrowing the attainment gaps that exist between different groups of pupils.

(DCSF, 2010, Personalised Learning website, accessed March 2010)



Why sport pedagogy?

Children in schools often ask why they have to study a subject or topic if its relevance to them and their lives is not immediately obvious. It is a reasonable question for any learner to ask. This chapter, therefore, begins with a rationale for sport pedagogy as an area of

study in further and higher education, moves on to definitions and analysis of its core terms, and then delves into the wider literature to explore some of the issues and challenges inherent in the terms 'pedagogy' and 'sport pedagogy'. Some of the arguments in this chapter are relatively easy to follow while others might be more challenging; nonetheless, as you delve further into the book, some of the complex issues will become clearer.

The study of 'sport pedagogy' is relevant to those adults who have a personal interest in sport, and also a strong interest in helping children and young people to develop their 'potentialities' through sport. Essentially, pedagogy is about children as learners and about education (although not necessarily about schools) so 'sport pedagogy' is about children learning both *in* and *through* (in addition to *about*) sport. It is worth noting that pedagogy is used in the context of adult learning too, and although the term 'androgogy' would be more accurate, it is rarely used.

Sport pedagogy is interested in the ways in which children and young people can be supported to learn sport-specific skills *and*, importantly, how that learning can be structured and managed to ensure they also gain wider personal, social and health benefits from their participation. The wider benefits to be gained from participation in sport are not insignificant. Consider, for example, growing evidence of the importance of regular physical activity for health. Engagement in sport is one important and enjoyable way in which large numbers of children and young people can become (and remain) physically active. Yet, if learning experiences are poor, young people tend to avoid sport, or drop out as soon as they have the choice. The term *sport pedagogy* is appropriate, therefore, because this book is about children and young people, their complex and individual needs as learners in sport (wherever they may find sport) and the ways in which teachers and coaches can fulfil their obligations to meet those needs.

In order to understand the scope of sport pedagogy, it is important from the outset to disaggregate learning and education from schools – children can and do learn in many different places. On the other hand, teaching, coaching and learning do occur in schools which are easily recognised as educational contexts. Physical education is compulsory for many children and young people and, amongst other things, physical education teaches children about, in and through a range of sports. In addition, sport is a major part of extracurricular activities and the extended curriculum in schools. The use of the term sport pedagogy in this book, however, stretches beyond school boundaries in a deliberate attempt to foreground children learning in sport *wherever that may occur*.

Historically, there have been debates about the conceptual and practical distinctions between 'sport' and 'physical education' and between teaching and coaching. In focusing on sport pedagogy as its organising concept, this book is not trivialising the very real differences between the physical education and sport workforces, nor the historical battles fought by the physical education profession to gain recognition in schools. Indeed, both of these issues are addressed in some of the chapters that follow. Nonetheless, the position taken in this book is that in addition to the differences, there is much common ground between physical education and youth sport, and between teaching and coaching. Indeed, as was noted in the Introduction, any distinctions can appear relatively meaningless to young sports participants. An attempt is made, therefore, to (partially) neutralise some of the historical tensions between physical education and youth sport in an attempt to prioritise the needs of young learners in sport wherever they happen to be learning.

Comment

Sport pedagogy is the foundation of effective teaching and coaching in physical education and youth sport.



So, what is sport pedagogy?

Sport pedagogy can be conceptualised as a sub-discipline of the academic field of sport sciences. For the purposes of this book, sport sciences is used as an umbrella term that covers a range of related programmes of study including sport(s) science(s); sports studies, coaching science/studies, kinesiology (USA), *éducation physique et sportive* (France) and human movement studies (Australia). As with most terms, there is some debate about the precise definition of the term ‘sport pedagogy’ and about its value as a sub-discipline. Both ‘pedagogy’ and ‘sport’ are contested terms, so perhaps this should come as no surprise. Moreover, sport sciences is a relatively young area of study that has struggled – and continues to struggle – to gain full academic acceptance within the academy and at degree level. As part of that struggle, sport sciences has sought to align itself with traditional fields of study, hence the popularity of sub-disciplines such as exercise physiology and sport psychology. Yet, at some point, all disciplines collide in the real world; in this case in the practice that is sport. If children (*all* children) are to get the best from sport, someone has to bring individual disciplines together in meaningful and helpful ways in order to support young learners. This is no easy task, yet it is the task facing teachers, coaches and other adults who attempt to teach, coach and support diverse children and young people as learners in and through sport.

In the introduction to this book, ‘sport pedagogy’ was defined as a sub-discipline of sport sciences (and related areas of study) that has three complex dimensions that are made even more complex as they interact to form *each pedagogical encounter*:

- 1 **Knowledge in context:** what is viewed as valued or appropriate knowledge to be taught, coached or learnt is contingent upon a range of contextual factors. Schools, for example, may have to follow a national curriculum which changes over time, usually as a result of a range of political, social, economic and cultural factors. Similarly, historical analysis of the links between physical education, sport and health illustrates shifting priorities that are influenced by the broader social concerns about health issues. The key point to be made about the ‘knowledge in context’ dimension of pedagogy is that the selection of any knowledge to be taught, coached or learnt is always a context-bound decision that reflects, reinforces, reproduces (and sometimes challenges) what powerful individuals or groups believe is valuable at any given time.
- 2 **Learners and learning:** this dimension of pedagogy foregrounds children and young people as diverse learners and the ways in which they can be supported to learn effectively in and through sport. It is obvious that young learners vary in their needs and interests. It is important, however, to consider that statement in at least two ways: very young children have different needs from those of adolescents, yet *within* those two broad categories the range of diversity will also be vast. This range is likely to include ability, disability, gender, race, class, interest, health status, obesity level, disaffection and more, all of which can impact upon learning. At the core of sport pedagogy, therefore,

is expertise in learning theories, and in understanding children and young people as diverse learners.

- 3 Teachers/teaching and coaches/coaching:** the key point to grasp about any pedagogical encounter between teacher/coach and young learner is that all three dimensions of pedagogy are present and are interacting, which explains why teaching and coaching are challenging (and exciting) activities. Effective teachers and coaches are lifelong learners themselves who continuously and critically reflect upon their personal capacities to meet the needs of young learners. To be considered as true 'professionals', teachers and coaches must commit to 'growing' their expertise continuously in the sport-related knowledge available to be taught or coached and in the range of pedagogical tools and models from which to draw in order to harness the power of sport. In this way, teachers and coaches model lifelong learning for children and young people.

Perhaps most important of all, however, is the requirement to grasp that as a sub-discipline of the field of sport sciences, sport pedagogy is in the unique position of being characterised by its function of assimilating all the other relevant sub-disciplines into practitioner knowledge.

Comment

Sport pedagogy is a multidimensional, multilayered term that represents the complex learning process in physical education and youth sport.

The multilayered, multidimensional definition of sport pedagogy presented above borrows from and adapts numerous earlier definitions of both pedagogy and sport pedagogy, and some of these are explored in the next two sections of this chapter. In particular, the work of Kirk, Macdonald and O'Sullivan (2006), Rovegno (2003), Grossman (1989), and Shulman (1987) must be acknowledged because all define and explain pedagogy as a complex multifaceted concept. As was noted earlier, understanding sport pedagogy in this way is important in order to establish it as that conceptual and practical space where knowledge from all the other sub-disciplines of sport sciences programmes comes together in the interests of children, young people and their learning.

The key theoretical roots of sport pedagogy are in educational theory, sociology, psychology, history, philosophy and social policy. In addition, an effective teacher or coach will need to draw upon knowledge and skills learnt in physiology, biomechanics, practical sport, perhaps some arts subjects – indeed, from almost anywhere that connects to sport. This explains why undergraduates find sport pedagogy to be practically and conceptually challenging; like all multidisciplinary endeavours it lacks the comforting (albeit illusory) certainty of a single discipline boundary. Yet, without expertise in this multidimensional and unifying (interdisciplinary) sub-discipline, it is difficult to imagine how teachers and coaches can design or deliver effective programmes of activity in sport that can attempt to meet the diverse needs of children and young people. In other words, being a great physiologist or psychologist will not, on its own, make you a great teacher or coach.

Comment

Sport pedagogy is that place where you will bring together your knowledge from all the other sub-disciplines of sport sciences.

Gardner and Boix-Mansilla (1999) argued that ‘any individual who not only applies more than one discipline but actually strives to combine or synthesise these stances is engaged in that rare but precious practice called interdisciplinary work’ (p. 87). Teachers and coaches in youth sport routinely draw on a range of disciplines within and beyond sport sciences which are then synthesised in practice. This means that teachers and coaches are *always* engaged in ‘interdisciplinary work’, suggesting that sport pedagogy, with its focus on synthesis, is an academic challenge entirely appropriate to critical study in further and higher education. Further to this, sport pedagogy cannot be categorised as a wholly sport-led model of learning, nor is it wholly child-centred. Instead sport is valued both for itself and for what it can offer each child and young person. The study of sport pedagogy, therefore, contributes to the development of skilful, professional teachers and coaches (and other adults), enabling them to bring sport and young people together in meaningful pedagogical encounters.

In addition to sport pedagogy being a sub-discipline that informs the development of effective teachers and coaches, it is important to remember that it is also a discrete area of research. For those interested in the role of sport in learning, there are opportunities to conduct research at degree level, higher degree level and beyond in a range of areas including, for example:

- youth disaffection and re-engagement through sport;
- health education in and through sport;
- inclusion and youth sport;
- the rights of the child in sport;
- effective professional development for teachers and youth sport coaches.

Indeed, research questions in sport pedagogy seek to address some of the most pressing social problems in contemporary societies.

As befits any complex area of study, it is important to have a critical understanding of key terms and their historical foundations. Although sport pedagogy is explained and illustrated from different perspectives through each chapter in this book, it is helpful to begin this learning journey with a preliminary critical analysis of the terms ‘pedagogy’ and ‘sport pedagogy’. It was noted in the Introduction that ‘sport’ is understood in its broadest terms throughout this book. There are academic debates around the margins and boundaries of sport/not sport, and some of these issues surface in the following chapters, but these are not addressed in detail here.

Comment

There are many areas of sport pedagogy that would benefit from additional research.



Pedagogy revealed . . . and confounded

The extracts that opened this chapter are from the fields of education, physical education and sport. They span a period of over 70 years, yet they all express similar sentiments and these are at the core of any understanding of pedagogy. The first extract is from the *Handbook of Suggestions for Teachers* issued by the Board of Education in England in 1937, and its focus is on *every child*. The second is a quote from Graham Taylor, an elite-level

football coach in England, who speaks of learners having *different learning rates and preferences*. The third is from a recent government document on physical education and sport which suggests that high-quality provision will *enable all young people to improve and achieve in line with their age and potential*. The fourth extract is from a current and major focus of education policy in England, personalised learning, that emphasises the importance of *tailoring teaching and learning to individual need*. Taken together, these extracts highlight two important points: first, similar concerns are apparent from education, sport and physical education perspectives and, second, historical insights serve as a powerful reminder of the enduring challenges to be faced in designing effective learning structures and processes.

Historically, the term 'pedagogy' derives from ancient Greece where a 'pedagogue' was not a teacher but a well-educated servant in a wealthy household who took responsibility for a child's social and moral development (Savater, 1997). The pedagogue, therefore, was responsible for the overall development of the child. Although the term pedagogy has evolved over time, its etymological roots are significant because it is clear it would be inappropriate to reduce the concept of pedagogy to 'merely' instruction or to a transmission definition of learning; something more is going on. Watkins and Mortimore (1999) reviewed a range of definitions of pedagogy and concluded that 'learning' is at its core. They commented, however, that pedagogy is poorly understood, and that there has been a neglect of:

this most important of topics – affecting the way hundreds and thousands of learners of different ages and stages are taught . . . Instead of systematic collections of evidence, teachers have had to rely on ideological positions, folk wisdom and the mantras of enthusiasts for particular approaches. (Preface)

Stone (2000) made a similar case for clarification, arguing that the term pedagogy had become so flexible that it had become amoeba-like, and its study had become 'as rigorous as a jellyfish' (p. 94).

Perhaps the easiest way to begin an analysis of the term 'pedagogy' is to Google 'definitions of pedagogy'. A quick analysis of the results reveals key words that recur: instruction, education, the art and/or science of teaching, profession of teaching, etc. The main territory covered by the concept of pedagogy becomes immediately apparent. Leach and Moon (1999), however, suggested that although at its simplest pedagogy can be viewed as teaching and learning, a more complex understanding recognises the relationship between four key elements of any educational encounter: teachers, learners, the learning task and the learning environment. Importantly, these authors argued that 'at the heart of this dynamic process is a personal view of the purposes of education, what constitutes good teaching, and a belief in the purposes of the subject' (p. 274). More recently, Alexander (2008) argued that 'pedagogy is still very much a work in progress'; nonetheless, he echoed Leach and Moon's complex view of pedagogy when he defined pedagogy as 'the act of teaching together with the ideas, values and beliefs by which that act is informed, sustained and justified' (p. 4). Alexander further commented that although teaching is at the heart of pedagogy, there is more to it. In particular, Alexander pointed to the 'extraordinary richness of pedagogy as a field of intellectual exploration and empirical enquiry' (p. 183) and, in echoes of Leach and Moon's argument:

for the sake of the students whose interests we claim to serve we have an obligation to make explicit and debate those ideas, values, beliefs and theories that may be hidden even from ourselves yet powerfully shape what both teachers and students do. (p. 183)

In similar vein, Ireson, Mortimore and Hallam (1999) claimed that one of the main problems with understanding pedagogy was that there had been insufficient focus on the goals of education up to that time; they argued that the question ‘What are we teaching for?’ (p. 213) had not been posed often enough – and was rarely answered. This issue is revisited later in this chapter.

Comment

The term pedagogy has its roots in ancient Greece where it referred to the holistic development of children.

Alexander (2008) draws the threads of this conceptual discussion together in his claim that ‘Pedagogy has a purpose. It mediates learning, knowledge, culture and identity’ (p. 183). The work of John Holt provides a practical illustration of this key point. In 1964, in a damning critique of schools and approaches to learning, Holt argued that children were failing to learn effectively because of the prevailing educational practices. In 1968, Holt wrote a second book entitled *How Children Learn* in order to offer more positive insights into young learners and their learning. His purpose was to ‘describe children – in a few cases adults – using their minds well, learning boldly and effectively’ (Foreword). Holt believed that ‘only a few children in school ever become good at learning’, claiming that ‘most of them get humiliated, frightened and discouraged’ (ibid.). Holt felt it was important, therefore, to observe and describe children (especially young children) engaged in effective learning, in order that adults might better understand the learning process. In the extract below, Holt recounts his analysis of children being taught to swim by their parents, and draws on his critical observations of teaching his own child. In particular, Holt noticed that ‘The courage of little children (and not them alone) rises and falls, like the tide – only the cycles are in minutes, or even seconds’ (p. 117). This insight led Holt to observe:

At one time or another I have watched a number of parents trying to teach their very little children to swim. On the whole they don’t get very far because they are so insensitive to this rise and fall of courage in the child. Is it because they don’t notice? Or because they don’t care? Perhaps they feel that the child’s feelings are unimportant, to be easily overridden by exhortation and encouragement, or anger and threats . . . In any case such would-be-teachers, even when they are not wholly unsuccessful, lose a great deal, since a child who is allowed to return to babyhood for a while when he feels the need of it, to fill up his tank of courage when he feels the need of it, when he feels it run dry, will move ahead into the unknown far faster than we adults could push him. (p. 118)

Holt added:

If we continually try to force a child to do what he is afraid to do, he will become more timid, and will use his brains and energy to avoid the pressures we put on him. If, however, we are careful not to push a child beyond the limits of his courage, he is almost sure to get braver. (p. 119)

Holt’s observation is fascinating because it raises so many questions that are central to pedagogy. Formulating answers to these questions can illustrate the complex ways in which the

different aspects of pedagogy interact in the pedagogical encounter of teaching/coaching, and each is also applicable to the sport context; for example:

- What are we teaching or coaching?
- Why are we teaching and coaching this activity/sport in this way at this time?
- How are we teaching or coaching and why this way?
- How do we know this is the best sport or the best approach for this child at this time?
- What has led us to hold these beliefs?
- What pressures are there on us (implicit and explicit) to 'make' this child succeed?
- Does it matter if the child fails in this activity – and to whom?
- Is this the best setting in which this child can learn?
- Do I know enough about children, learning, education and this (sport) activity to create a positive learning experience for this child?
- Is my stock of knowledge relevant, current and growing?

At the very least, therefore, it could be argued that Holt forces us to confront pedagogy in the kind of complexity advocated by both Leach and Moon (1999) and Alexander (2008). Moreover, in his use of swimming as an example, Holt's observations also nudge us towards critical analysis of the concept of sport pedagogy.

Comment

An understanding of pedagogy reveals the complexity inherent in planning effective teaching and coaching sessions.

Sport pedagogy revealed . . . and confounded

Tinning (2008) has undertaken a comprehensive review of the concept of sport pedagogy within sport sciences (although he mainly uses the US term 'kinesiology'). His paper has been identified as one of the additional resources to accompany this chapter, so although a summary of the key points is included here, reading the paper in full will be beneficial. Tinning analyses the concept of pedagogy and points out that the term has subdivided into numerous 'types' of pedagogy ranging from critical pedagogy to feminist pedagogy. (Here again, Googling the term 'pedagogy' is revealing as something of the range of contexts in which the term is used becomes apparent.) Tinning also highlights some of the complexity and overlap between the core terms denoting pedagogy, and he reinforces the key point made earlier: 'the ways in which people think about pedagogy are underpinned or informed by particular knowledge paradigms and ways of seeing the world' (p. 409). In particular, Tinning is keen to avoid narrow conceptualisations of pedagogy, believing that a broader notion is of more value for the field. On the other hand, Tinning is also critical of the way in which scholars from different theoretical perspectives have appropriated the term 'pedagogy', making it difficult to find common ground.

Recognising that the term sport pedagogy is 'amorphous', Tinning (2008) states that it is 'generally accepted that sport pedagogy is a subdiscipline of the field of kinesiology' (p. 412).

He cites the view of Haag (1989) that ‘sport pedagogy has a central position within sport science, in every teaching and learning process in physical activity’ and that it resides ‘between sport science and the science of education’ (p. 413). Interestingly, however, as Tinning traced the use of the term ‘sport pedagogy’ through various lectures, conferences and publications in the broad field and from around the world, it became clear that the term has been used only intermittently and with little clarity. This is unhelpful for students and scholars who may be attempting to enter the field. Tinning, however, proposed a way forward, arguing that pedagogy is fundamentally about ‘the processes of knowledge (re)production’ and that it is the ‘consequence of pedagogical intentions’ (p. 416). Thus, for Tinning, *pedagogical work* within kinesiology is:

that effect or influence on ways of thinking, beliefs, practices, dispositions and identities regarding physical activity performance and participation, bodily practices and understandings and self-awareness related to health and well-being that is produced by an individual’s encounter with certain prescribed pedagogical practices and devices. (p. 417)

This description is complex and can appear difficult to unpick, but Tinning then goes on to consider sport pedagogy as a ‘foundational subdiscipline’ of kinesiology, and this makes his view clearer. Importantly, kinesiology (like sport sciences) is often a very broad field of study covering ‘human movement’ across domains and well beyond sport. Thus, Tinning argues, we need to understand pedagogical work related to ‘physical activity, bodies, and health’ wherever it takes place. He also argues that we need to understand the pedagogical work undertaken by other ‘cultural players’ in the field, such as those working in obesity/health.

Comment

Definitions of sport pedagogy are contested but it has clear links to pedagogies in health and personal/social development.

It is apparent that the three-dimensional definition of sport pedagogy that is used in this book shares some common ground with Tinning’s (2008) view, but also that it has a slightly different starting point. Whereas there is agreement that an understanding of sport pedagogy should enable scholars and practitioners to draw upon and connect knowledge from different orientations, it is suggested in this book that the pivotal focus of sport pedagogy should be the needs and interests of children and young people learning in and through sport. What this means is that the ability of teachers and coaches to ‘*diagnose*’ learners’ needs in sport, and their own abilities to teach/coach effectively to meet those needs, become the core focus of sport pedagogy. So, whereas ‘sport pedagogy’ is not the same as ‘health pedagogy’, there are clear links because if a young learner encounters effective, appropriate and uplifting learning experiences in sport they are more likely to retain an interest in engagement which may, in turn, lead to health benefits for some.

In a major text in the field of physical education, Kirk, Macdonald and O’Sullivan (2006) defined pedagogy ‘by its three key elements of learning, teaching and curriculum’ and stated that they ‘understand these three elements to be interdependent’ (p. xi). The context of the book is mainly (although not exclusively) school-based physical education, and the chapters tend to focus on one or other of the different elements of pedagogy. Nonetheless,

this text draws together the work of respected scholars from around the world, and there are several chapters that offer useful insights for this discussion on sport pedagogy. For example, De Martelaer and Theeboom explored the relationship between physical education and youth sport, identifying their commonalities and the roots of their pedagogical differences. Tsangaridou undertook a detailed analysis of teachers' knowledge, drawing upon the work of key educational theorists such as Shulman (1987). Trudel and Gilbert undertook an extensive analysis of coaching and coach education, concluding that 'Sport coaches, and those who train them, must be "perpetual students" who constantly seek new information' (p. 532). Thus, this handbook, and those chapters specifically, are identified as additional resources to support this chapter.

Finally, as was noted in the Introduction of this book, it is important to remember that the study of sport pedagogy is not founded on an uncritical understanding of sport; there is also a 'flip side' to consider. Sport practices can be harmful for young learners, including inflicting physical, social and emotional harm. Indeed, a historical analysis reveals that this potential for harm has long been recognised. In 1927, the Board of Education in England produced a guide on *The Education of the Adolescent*. In a section entitled 'Physical Training and Games' it noted:

It is generally admitted that games have an educational as well as a recreative use. They encourage and develop self-reliance, teamwork, loyalty, self restraint, and resourcefulness. The weak point in games is that they often benefit most the strongest and healthiest pupils, who require them least. (Board of Education, 1927, p. 245)

Furthermore, although the European Commission White Paper on Sport (2007) proclaimed the 'educational dimension' and the 'social, cultural and recreational role' of sport, there were also some (albeit limited) expressions of caution. It is interesting in this context to consider Myerson's (2005) story. She wrote in some detail about her personal experiences as a child learning in sport. In a book entitled *Not a Games Person*, Myerson's recollections of the way sport was taught suggest that the Board of Education's (1927) claim was prophetic in her case, and that John Holt's observations about children becoming frightened, discouraged and humiliated were not overstated. For Myerson, 'Sports Day' was the worst day in the entire school year:

I hate this day and I hate being in this sack, but I have no choice . . . Because school is character-building, my mum always says, it's where they make you Be A Sport and Join In and although they make you do that several times a week, once a year they make you do it with equipment and organised lines and the awfulness of an audience: Sports day. I hate it and dread it so I must need to have my character built. (p. 21)

What can be taken from all this is that whereas it is unrealistic to expect all sports to appeal to all children and young people all of the time, it is also worth questioning the wisdom of putting children and young people into and through sports activities and experiences where they are, in essence, learning how to fail and to become discouraged. Belief in the value of sport and its potential as a broad educational tool would suggest it is incumbent upon teachers and coaches, and any other adults involved in youth sport, to use sport effectively to meet the needs of children, rather than assuming that simply pushing children through sports experiences will, in some magical way, result in positive outcomes for all of them. As Myerson illustrates above (and Holt pointed out earlier), using sport uncritically as some form of 'character-building' process for children is naive at best, and damaging at worst.

Comment

Sport pedagogy is founded on the recognition that it is essential to 'diagnose' learners' needs as a key step in designing practice. This is important in order to counteract some of the potential harm done to young learners when they are engaged in inappropriate learning activities.



Conclusion

It might be helpful to conclude this analysis of the concept of sport pedagogy with questions about *purpose*. In an earlier section, it was noted that questions about the 'purpose' of education are rarely asked or answered, and this is interesting in the context of 'sport pedagogy'. Clearly 'sport' is a key feature of sport pedagogy, yet, as was noted earlier, in the sub-discipline of sport pedagogy, the needs and interests of the young learners in sport are paramount. This means that traditional, adult or elite forms of sport must always be subjugated to the educational needs of children and young people, and it challenges directly the notion that youth sport should be viewed primarily as a training ground for adult sport or, indeed, lifelong participation in sport. On the contrary, youth sport, from a pedagogical perspective, has to serve the needs of children and young people *at the time in which they engage*. What this means, in practice, is that in order to be effective, teachers and coaches need to recognise (diagnose) individual learners' needs and interests, consult young people about them, reflect on their personal and professional capacities as teachers or coaches to meet those learning requirements, update personal knowledge as required (driven by their analysis of learning need) and then design and deliver appropriate pedagogical encounters in sport in the form of programmes, lessons, sessions or activities.

Undoubtedly, 'needs and interests' is a loaded phrase: a child's conception of 'need' might be very different from an adult's or what can be provided in reality, and it is unrealistic to expect that all children and young people can have all of their interests supported all of the time. In the three-dimensional definition of pedagogy presented earlier, it was made clear that knowledge and context are interlinked, and that beliefs about what is considered to be valuable or valued knowledge shift over time and in response to social contextual factors. Nonetheless, if there is an underpinning belief that engagement in appropriate sport activities can be a 'good' thing for children and young people, offering a range of sport-specific and personal, educational, social and health benefits, then the principle of understanding and addressing individual need, where possible, is non-negotiable. This reinforces earlier points made about the importance of critically interrogating the source of all personal knowledge and beliefs, what Bruner (1999) called folk theories, about what is 'good' or 'best' for children and young people in sport. Such beliefs always reflect personal history, and wider structural beliefs about children, education and sport (and much else besides). Whether folk theories are acknowledged or not, they influence what is taught or coached, and what children and young people may be prepared to learn.

The premise underpinning this book was identified as a belief in children's rights in sport, and adults' responsibilities. Knowledge and understanding of sport pedagogy are the first steps towards ensuring that the rights of large numbers of children and young people to effective learning in and through sport are not denied.



Learning tasks

Individual task: memories of teachers and coaches past

- 1 Think back to your experiences as a young learner in physical education and youth sport. Identify the two best and the two worst teachers/coaches that you can remember, then write a 200-word narrative on each, explaining how they helped or hindered your learning.
- 2 Undertake a critical review of your four narratives. Can you draw any tentative conclusions about effective teaching and coaching?
- 3 Critically review your conclusions. These are likely to form the basis of any 'folk pedagogies' that you hold about what is 'good' for other young learners. Can you identify any of your conclusions that might – and might not – be applicable to different kinds of learners in physical education and youth sport?

Group task: the bigger picture

This activity can be done in pairs or larger groups.

- 1 Share the key outcomes from the individual learning task and create a group (draft) poster that maps clearly your findings about effective and ineffective teachers/coaches.
- 2 Conduct a literature search to find at least four publications (books or journal articles) on effective teachers and/or coaches. The publications could come from the physical education and youth sport literature, or the wider education literature.
- 3 Compare the findings from the literature search with the findings from your analysis of your personal narratives, identifying any similarities, differences and additional information.
- 4 Finalise your poster so that it becomes an accurate representation of your group's analysis of the key features of effective and ineffective teachers/coaches.

Further reading

Tinning, R. (2006) Pedagogy, sport pedagogy, and the field of kinesiology, *Quest*, 60, 405–24.

Tinning, R. (2010) *Pedagogy and Human Movement*, London: Routledge.

Kirk, D., Macdonald, D. and O'Sullivan, M. (eds) (2006) *The Handbook of Physical Education*, London: Sage. Several of these chapters are relevant, including:

- 4.8 'Teachers' knowledge' by Niki Tsangaridou
- 4.9 'Coaching and coach education' by Pierre Trudel and Wade Gilbert
- 5.6 'Physical education and youth sport' by Kristine De Martelaer and Marc Theeboom.

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Alexander, R. (2008) *Essays on Pedagogy*, London: Routledge.

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