

Valuing learning in, through, and about sport-physical education and the development of sport literacy

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Abstract

This chapter offers clear and convincing argument for reconceptualising current approaches and dominant paradigms at play in physical education teacher education (PETE). Throughout the study reported in this chapter I draw on my experience as an early career academic that came to PETE with 18 years of experience in teaching and developing physical education (PE) curricula in schools. This research was, therefore, an example of reflection in action requiring a reflexive standpoint acknowledging that I was included in the subject matter that I was trying to understand. As I interrogated the autobiographical data and research literature, theoretical concepts emerged to inform my theorising and to expand my thinking about the practice of sport teaching in PE. I confront the models, metaphors and images that had been part of my apprenticeship of observation and pre-service teacher training.

INTRODUCTION: AN APPRENTICESHIP OF OBSERVATION

I grew up in a sporty family. Dad was a successful league footballer, accomplished squash player capable of matching the state grade players he hit with during his Monday and Friday evening games to keep fit, and a more than handy opening bowler and bat during his company's internal cricket matches. Mum was also a capable sportsperson. Like Dad, she was a squash player, engaging in mid-week ladies' competitions, playing once a week against my Auntie who was a club player, as well as playing mid-week ladies tennis. I grew up around football ovals, tennis courts and squash clubs. And back in the day before mobile gaming devices, to keep myself busy I picked up a racquet or a ball and hit or kicked with anyone that would indulge me, or I hit or kicked against a bare wall engaging in an imaginary squash game against the great Australian squash player Geoff Hunt, or pretending to be my football hero Kevin McSporran from West Torrens.

With "sporty" parents, it was always going to be that I was encouraged by my parents to play sport. I enjoyed school PE and eventually, I represented the school in 1st XVIII football, 1st XI cricket, Open A Squash, Open A Tennis and athletics as well as playing all these sports in community club settings. By my final year of school I thought becoming a PE teacher would be "cool" and would enable me to share my interest and joy in sport with others. As it turns out, my "sporty" profile and interest is somewhat typical of those entering PETE courses (Valtonen, Kuusela, & Ruismäki, 2011). This profile of experience influences PETE candidates to think that a career in PE teaching involves teaching others to play games (Dewar & Lawson, 1984) and they therefore bring a custodial orientation that favourably directs them to follow teaching styles and programs that are similar to their school and community sport experience (Morgan & Hansen, 2008).

PE teachers are influenced throughout their careers by a range of factors, including an apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) from their years of having been in PE lessons (Stuart & Thurlow, 2000) and prior experiences of home and family life, cultural and social practices. This forms their value orientation and these experiences have a distinct and traceable influence in shaping PE teachers' perspectives through their PETE and beyond (Crum, 1983). Sikes (1988) suggested that potential PE teachers have typically spent much time as members of sports teams in addition to their many years as students of PE.

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My experience of PETE in the 1980's confirmed the primacy of games and sport teaching in PE. I did not think to question the "ideal" lesson and unit plans we were taught, which emphasised PE as sport-as-techniques (Kirk, 2010) as it was consistent with my experience of community sport coaching and school PE. When I undertook my professional experience placements, the expectations of mentor teachers were consistent with the planning design and enactment of PE experienced at teachers college.

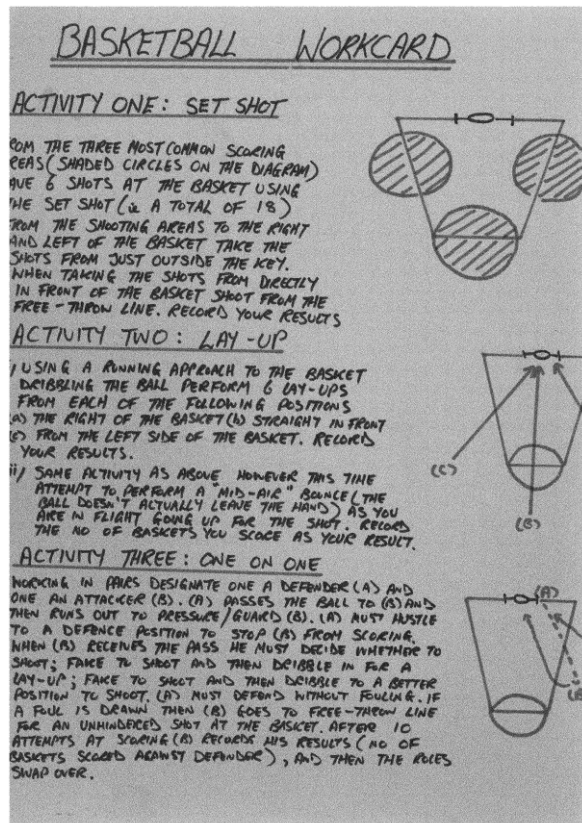


Figure 1. One of my PETE assessment tasks from teachers college

TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES ARE INFLUENCED BY THE CONTEXTS IN WHICH THEY WORK

After completing my degree I moved to Western Australia to start my teaching career and it was then that I was exposed to ideas that had not been canvassed during my teacher training. My first Head of Department had completed his pre-service PETE in England and was a devotee of a game-based approach to sport teaching. There existed a contradiction between my linear practice-to-game PE teaching, predicated on an assumption that students needed to learn the specialised skills of the sport before playing the game, and the game-based PE teaching. The contradiction encouraged me to question the basis of what I taught and also the prescriptive "ideal" unit plans that were based on a "notion of progression as an additive process" (Kirk, 2010, p. 85), which had been instilled in me during my pre-service PETE.

According to Curtner-Smith (1999), many teachers adapt the curriculum to fit their beliefs about teaching. However, it is possible that influences impact at different times in a teacher's career, and it follows that the beliefs and curriculum value orientation of a teacher can change over time if the teacher is influenced by the contexts in which he or she works. While the "sporty" students in my classes appeared to thrive in the sport-as-techniques (Kirk, 2010) direct practice "skill and drill" structure I was

reproducing, many students appeared to learn more about what they could not do, rather than what they could achieve. I began to search for alternative theories to inform my understanding of sport teaching that embraced students' learningⁱ and learning needs in sport within outcomes based PEⁱⁱ. Although I was not aware of it at the time, my orientation was gradually shifting from teaching sport-as-techniques, to teaching through sport: that is, I began to focus on the education in PE rather than on training motor skill technique reproduction.

I increasingly adopted a cognitive orientation to sport teaching in PE and sport coaching in secondary schools. My experience of secondary school PE classes convinced me that this direction was more inclusive of the wide range of student abilities and also more likely to produce better learning outcomes. Further, I postulated that this approach might encourage personal and social skill development while teaching the youth in my PE classes to think for themselves, solve problems and create solutions. I had come to recognise that it was not possible for all students to develop sport-specific movement skill competency in the time frame generally allocated to the teaching of various sports in PE. I questioned the equity of the technique-orientated approach that had been advocated in my pre-service PETE. The "one size fits all" skill and drill approach I had been inducted into was frequently counterproductive to student learning.

In my view, it is very important that PE professionals discuss the "active *construction* of knowledge" (MacPhail, 2002 cited in Penney, 2003, p. 304) in sport teaching. Unfortunately, it is my experience that the situation still prevails in many schools that the form of most PE curricula gives "every appearance of legitimating a view of physical education as comprising merely a collection of activities" (Penney & Chandler, 2000, p. 75). The residue of past views that equated PE as gymnastics and drill continues today in the dominance of a so called "physical education method" (Metzler, 2011) evidenced as directive teaching (Light, 2013) and a sport-as-techniques curricula model (Kirk, 2010). For many students, this traditional approach to games and sport teaching has neither stimulated interest nor improved the ability to play games, but has often convinced students they lack the necessary skill to play games well (Griffin, Mitchell, & Oslin, 1997). Graham (2001) suggested that determining whether children are learning is interconnected with the challenge of knowing what it is the PE teacher wants them to learn.

ISSUES, CONTROVERSIES, PROBLEMS

The prevailing orthodoxy that presents sport as merely a series of techniques in skill-drills ignores the context in which these skills are applied in games (Bunker & Thorpe, 1982; Mitchell, Oslin & Griffin, 2006). Vander Schee and Boyles (2010) suggested that fragmenting complex interactions into a series of routine simple steps is an example of teacher de-skilling (Carlson, cited in Vander Schee & Boyles, 2010, p. 78) and makes PE teaching appear to be no more than a series of unproblematic step-by-step procedures. The scripted teaching of textbook based sport skill learning limits the design and enactment of sport learning, creates a boundary around the content, context and method of delivery, and suggests learning is a series of unproblematic steps that can be expressed in an ideal lesson plan. I argue that what is enacted becomes a triumph of form over substance as this type of sport teaching lacks the "musculature of a focused teaching-learning pedagogy" (Alexander & Penney, 2005, p. 289). Siedentop (1982) claimed the technical model of teaching placed too much emphasis on the acquisition of motor skills to the extent that other valued ways of knowing and developing meaning were marginalised or excluded. In particular, where a technocratic model of sport teaching prevailed, an unproblematic relationship between activity and learning was framed.

Although PE is not only about sport, sport assumes a priority for PE (Drummond & Pill, 2011; Wuest & Bucher, 2006). Tinning stated:

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Most (PE classes) are oriented around sport(s). Teachers use HPE classes as practice sessions and/or selection opportunities for sporting events. In most HPE classes it is typical to see students playing volleyball, soccer, field hockey, tennis, rugby, netball, Australian Rules football and doing track and field (Tinning, 2005, p. 60).

Sport, in the educational guises of PE and school sport, has a major role to play in the education of young people (Laker, 2002). This includes education about the socio-cultural elements of sport in communities, including: participation in sport as a means for active and healthy living; as viewers or consumers of sport; as providers of sport experiences; and sport as a vocation. Sport is a form of physical activity firmly associated with PE (Penney, Clarke, & Kinchin, 2002; Wuest & Bucher, 2006). Sports skill development and sports teaching have been identified as the major content of South Australian secondary school PE (Department of Education, Training and Development, 2002). Internationally, sport is seen as pivotal (Green, 2000) and integral (Bailey & Kirk, 2009) to PE: an historical cornerstone (Laker, 2003) legitimating the existence of PE in schools. Internationally, games and sport are recognised as one of the most important elements of the PE curriculum as they represent the “prime source of content and key contexts for teaching and learning” (Lopez, Jordan, Penney, & Chandler, 2009, p. 47). However, I agree with Evans (2003) that unless greater attention is given to the education aspects of sport by situating sport as a site of education, rather than it being merely a means of providing physical activity provision, sport in PE is unlikely to impact on the abilities that students both bring to school and derive from schooling. Sport is likely to remain a valued and appealing form of physical and social activity that for many Australians is imbued with symbolic meaning (Veal & Lynch, 2001), but unless physical education can present a more educationally coherent and cogent discourse for sport teaching it is likely to remain positioned at the margins of the school curriculum. I argue, therefore, that it is time to revisit sport in physical education in a different format as for too long physical education has been “characterised by a preoccupation with the development of narrowly defined techniques” (Bell, n.d., p. 1) to the exclusion of other ways of knowing sport and participating in sport learning.

An historical paradoxical tension exists between the physical and the education in PE (Bailey, 2005) as a by-product of residual ideas that continue to associate physical PE with the drill pedagogy of gymnastics and “good” teaching as ordered and good students as compliant. Arnold’s (1979) philosophical conceptualisation of PE as education in, through and about movement is however recognised as the standard reference “for theorising the form and content of physical education in relation to its educational status in schools” (Kirk, 1988, p. 71). Arnold’s proposals for developing the PE curriculum were recently reaffirmed in two key documents: the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER, 2008) in their curriculum direction to teachers titled *Health and Physical Education Learning Statement*, and the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (ACARA) (2012) *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education* document to guide the writers of the Australian Health and Physical Education curriculum. Applied specifically to sport, Arnold’s (1979) three conceptual dimensions can be summarised as:

1. **Education in sport** - skill (tactical and technical) acquisition enabling an individual to move efficiently and effectively;
2. **Education about sport** - recognising that sport is structured in certain ways to bring about certain things; and
3. **Education through sport** - social, cognitive, moral and emotional learning is available through engagement in sport.

Tinning, Macdonald, Wright and Hickey (2001) concluded that learning *in* movement has been the traditional area of focus for Australian PE, and that teachers assumed that PE's claims to influence learning in the other two areas of education through and about movement will happen automatically, which Tinning et al. claimed is not evident in practice. If that proposition is accepted, sport teaching in Australian PE has not been achieving its potential in contributing to the overall education of students, while also falling well short of the vision and ideals presented in ACHPER's and ACARA's statements about the form and function of PE. Consequently, PE in Australia suffers from a crisis of legitimisation within education, particularly in relation to its nature and status (Stolz, 2010) and the tentative place of PE in Australian education contrasts with the confident place of sport in Australian society (Saunders, 2005).

Sport may have captured the attention, interest and imagination of Australian culture but as an activity, the congruity of associating sport with education and learning is not obvious. In my view, the primary function of sport in PE is educative. It follows then that the inclusion of any form of movement must demonstrate concrete evidence of educative benefits if it is to share curriculum time and limited resources with other and valued ways of learning. Australian PE's historical "self-reproducing failure" (Alexander, Taggart, and Medland, 1993) to expect student learning as a primary function of PE contrasts with the general understanding that cognition, in the form of knowledge and understanding, is generally regarded as the most useful and valuable aspect of any field of education (Felshin, 1972; Green, 2000). Nearly 20 years on from Locke's (1992) claim that replacing the dominant curriculum model for secondary physical education was necessary, the sport component of the Australian PE curriculum would still be regarded by many to be largely unchanged, increasingly problematic in achieving the curriculum outcomes of Australian curriculum statements, and unsustainable if PE is to move from the margins of educational discourse.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

My research evolved towards a direct concern with the re-thinking of sport teaching in PE and re-working the language framing sport teaching to reflect Arnold's (1979) three dimensions - education in, through and about movement. This re-thinking of sport teaching in PE would involve an alternative way of "knowing"ⁱⁱⁱ that moved sport teaching beyond the narrow focus of students simply being taught sport-as-techniques through directive pedagogy. To this end, I used multi-literacies theory to explain sport literacy as an end-outcome and design framework for sport teaching.

Literacy, within the context of multi-literacies theory, refers to the skill of an individual to read and understand the body of knowledge associated with a field of learning (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Literacy therefore includes the development of the functional ability to absorb, share, transform and create knowledge (Kickbusch, 1989). Considered from a multi-literacies perspective, sport knowledge, how it is understood and communicated, the thinking processes, and the communication of meaning learnt through sport, can be thought of in terms of a "text". That is, the meaning of sport can be read, understood, manipulated and communicated at various levels of complexity according to the ability of an individual to engage with the sophistication of the body of knowledge. In essence, sport literacy involves conveying knowledge about sport so that learners achieve the capacity to put sport skills and knowledge to functional use for informed and engaged citizenship, to understand the role sport plays in society, and in the development of constructive, concerned and reflective citizens (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2001).

The UNESCO Statement for the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003, cited in Mandigo, 2008) explained that literacy is about:

- how we communicate in society;
- social practices and relationships, knowledge, language and culture;
- content knowledge and comprehension of the content;

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- applying critical and creative thinking;
- conveying information through various forms; and
- use of knowledge and skill to make connections within and between various contexts.

Literacy, therefore, includes a variety of skills for an adult to function well in society. Mandigo, Francis and Lodewk (2007) suggested there were four features of literacy theory pertinent to teaching PE. They are presented here within a sport context:

- sport is an applied, practised and situated set of skills;
- sport is a body of knowledge with meaning that can be interpreted, understood and used creatively;
- sport forms an operational text which can be communicated and read in various forms; and
- becoming sport literate requires a learning process.

Sport literacy is conceptualised around the idea of game appreciation (Refer to Figure 2) – appreciating what the sport is about in its entirety, not simply tactical appreciation of the rules. Game appreciation is therefore presented to include appreciation of the history, ritual and conventions that provide sport with its social and cultural meaning, practice and institutional structures. The need to create participatory roles and space for students to take responsibility for the variety of roles instrumental in the construction of sport is inherent in the framing of sport literacy. Siedentop, Hastie and van der Mars (2004) highlighted how the use of role responsibility contributes to a more complete understanding of sport as a cultural practice.

A Framework for Developing Sport Literacy

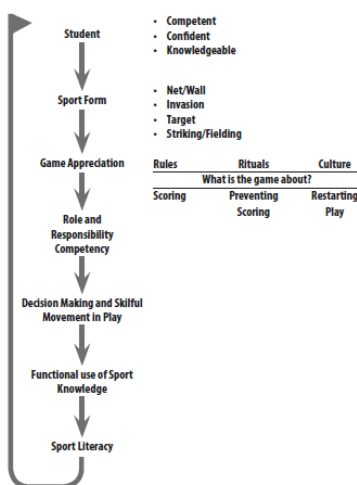


Figure 2. Sport literacy- a learning framework for sport teaching in PE

Summarised below are the outcomes for the teaching of sport (sport literacy) and a suite of objectives for sport teaching and learning in PE informed by the sport literacy framework.

- Knowledge and understanding that enables tactical appreciation and strategical understanding to read (Hopper, 2003) a game;
- Motor techniques and tactical knowledge underpinning the capacity to make reasoned decisions about participation in play;

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- Knowledge and understanding to enable reasoned decisions about possible roles in sport settings;
- Knowledge and understanding of the psychomotor and physiological competencies required for sport participation at various levels (such as community through to elite sport participation);
- Knowledge and understanding that fosters appreciation of the tactical similarities in structurally similar games, and the ability to make reasoned decisions about the transfer of game knowledge between sports;
- Knowledge and understanding of the rules, rituals, traditions and the socio-cultural significance of sport, and the ability to distinguish between good and bad practices so as to be able to make reasoned decisions about sport concerns; and
- Knowledge and understanding to allow reasoned decisions concerning community and vocational engagement with sport.

The above abilities and knowledge bases represent the broad foundation for sport literacy and subsequently, learning in, through and about sport within PE.

In essence, sport literacy involves knowledge generation about sport so that learners achieve the capacity to put sport skills and knowledge to functional use. This use reflects informed and engaged citizenship to understand the role sport plays in society, planning and evaluating various roles they can take in the community.

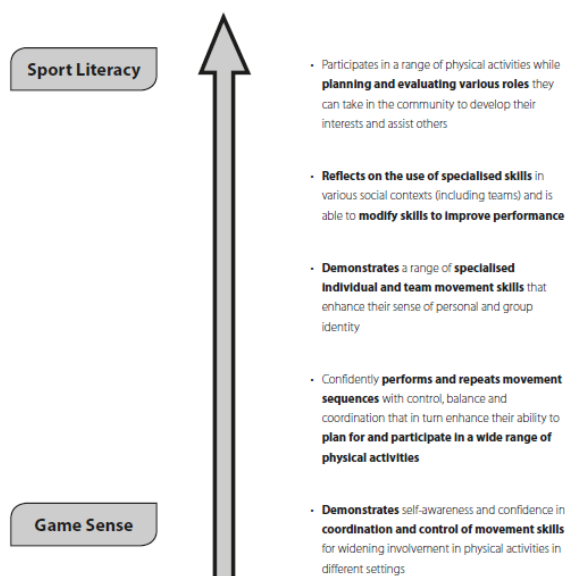


Figure 3. Developing sport literacy in PE from Foundation to Year 10

The seven outcomes arising from the sport literacy framing can be thought of in terms of human capital. Each of the capitals is a resource that can be invested in and drawn on throughout life. The Sport Literacy framework positions sport as a form of physical activity that acts as a key driver of different types of capital formation, with each of the capitals in turn influencing both activity and each other, thus

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forming a synergistic feedback loop whose whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Bailey et al., 2013) (Refer to Figure 3). This helps in understanding the relationship between sport as a particular expression of physical activity and different aspects of human development (physical, social, emotional, cognitive) (Department of Education and Children's Services, 2004) that PE has rhetorically sought to influence in developing a particular type of citizen. Bailey et al. (2013) explained that sport can be an attractive and motivating form of physical activity, making it a highly effective tool for engaging and empowering communities to take action to improve their health. However, this is a narrow focus that can blind policy makers to the other potential cognitive, emotional and social wellbeing effects of sport participation. I argue that taking a broader view of sport teaching as the development of sport literacy locates PE within a holistic view of human development advocated by a human capital model (Bailey et al., 2013):

Human capital model

- Physical capital: direct benefits to physical health and positive influences on healthy behaviours
- Emotional capital: character development
- Social capital: outcomes arising from networks with other people
- Intellectual capital: cognitive and intellectual gains
- Financial capital: productivity

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This chapter has deconstructed the themes that emerge from the critical research literature asking if PE is more rhetoric than reality. It has also engaged with the constructivist research task dealing with the design, enactment and coherence of sport teaching to propose a pedagogical and curriculum enhancement of sport teaching in PE.

Research into teachers' use of the framing of sport literacy to achieve education in, through and about sport is recommended. Also, research investigating the ability of sport literacy to frame and guide curriculum and pedagogical decision-making coherence with the curriculum standards and content descriptions of the content documents used in various jurisdictions is necessary to test the theoretical proposition of sport literacy in the natural setting of school PE.

CONCLUSION

The business of schools is essentially education. It should be possible to justify PE, sport in PE and sport teaching for their educative purpose (Kirk, 1996). This requires a curriculum and professional discourse that articulates a philosophy and practice pertaining to education and learning. Student learning, rather than rote reproduction of textbook techniques and physical activity accumulation must, therefore, become explicit in defining the subject (Penney & Chandler, 2000) and in framing the design of curriculum (Pill, 2013).

Contemporary PE must challenge the notion that sport is intrinsically understood or that it is inherently valuable behaviour simply because one is Australian. The contribution of the social and educational aspects of sport within PE cannot be underestimated – based on its functionalist positioning as part of the formation of physical competencies; its speculative benefits to personal character formation; and broader sociological assumptions about sport's contribution to an understanding of Australian culture,

gendered embodiment and sexuality. While school PE may offer children an array of sporting experiences, that some might perceive as a 'suite of sports', it is the fundamental philosophies underpinning the sport experience within a program of instruction (curriculum), and the way it is enacted (pedagogy) that determines student engagement with the sport experience across the lifespan. Sport within PE should assist physical education as an educational process, positioned within educational discourses and drawing upon educational argument (Brooker & MacDonald 1993) in order to promote, engage and facilitate sport participation within school and beyond (Drummond & Pill, 2011).

The capacity of PE to promote sport participation in school and beyond is a matter of curriculum design and pedagogy. It has been argued that a narrow mechanistic definition of sport teaching and learning as directive teaching arguably leads to an embodied sense of incompetence, rather than competency, for many students. Irrespective of whether one chooses to adopt the stance promoted in this chapter toward sport and PE, the role of PE in promoting sport participation in school and beyond is linked with the development of skills and understandings enabling the functional use of sport knowledge within active and engaged citizenship.

Curriculum and pedagogical decision-making are an integral part of efforts to move away from the branding of PE as a 'marginal' concern of the curriculum (Hardman & Marshall 2005). Confronting the norms of the traditional PE method that still remains the status quo in many secondary settings will play a pivotal role in educating through sport in areas of personal and social skill development, physical activity and participation, and the health of individuals and communities (Drummond & Pill, 2011).

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Apprenticeship of observation: A term coined by Dan Lortie in 1975 to describe the phenomenon that many teachers teach the way they experienced teaching during his or her schooling.

Direct Practice: A pedagogy typified by a focus on a teacher controlled decisions and student learning of a teacher directed and predicted response or performance.

Sport Education: A curriculum model developed by Daryl Siedentop that has three aims: literate, enthusiastic and competent sport participants.

Literacy: The skill of an individual to read and understand the body of knowledge associated with a field of learning.

Curriculum: The course of study offered within a learning area.

Pedagogy: The process and practice of teaching.

Pedagogical framework: An agreed set of teaching practices (pedagogies) aimed at ensuring high quality teaching focused on student achievement of the curriculum learning outcomes.

Sport literacy: The functional use of sport knowledge for active and engaged citizenship.

Sport technique: An idealised motor pattern considered necessary to play a game.

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i Learning refers to students' interactivity while participating in the learning environment, evidenced as cognitive functions such as actively seeking, using, differentiating, elaborating, interpreting, relating, adapting and understanding information (Kirk, Nauright, Hanrahan, Macdonald & Jobling, 1996).

ii Outcomes are the statements of learning results that the curriculum expects students to demonstrate by the end of particular stages of the learning experience.

iii "Knowing" is used here to refer to the outward projection of an individual's cognition, and reveals the links between learning, thinking and acting (Billett, 2001).