

Physical Education & Outdoor Education: complementary but discrete disciplines

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The Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER) includes Outdoor Education (OE) as a component of Physical Education (PE). Yet Outdoor Education is clearly thought of by many as a discrete discipline separate from Physical Education. Outdoor Education has a body of knowledge that differs from that of Physical Education. This in turn has mandated that OE teachers be trained differently to PE teachers. Some teacher registration boards acknowledge this. Most importantly, the socio-cultural imperatives that are shaping the contributions of Physical Education in schools differ from those of Outdoor Education. In this paper we examine the differences between Outdoor Education and Physical Education. We argue that an inclusion of Outdoor Education as a component of Physical Education is misleading and demonstrates a lack of contemporary understanding of the distinctive contributions made by these two separate disciplines to education. In light of Physical Education's inclusion in the Australian National Curriculum, clarity of the respective contributions of PE and OE is even more compelling. Clarifying the respective roles of PE and OE will ultimately benefit curriculum planners, teachers, students and the wider community.

Introduction

In Victorian schools in 2000, Outdoor Education was more likely to be taught by those trained in Physical Education than any other discipline area, including Outdoor Education (Lugg & Martin, 2001). By 2007, those teaching Outdoor Education who held formal qualifications in that area had increased from 24% to 28%, but this was still less than those teaching Outdoor Education who held qualifications in Physical Education (Cumming, 2007). If one conceives of Outdoor Education as a component of Physical Education, then the above is of little significance. However, if Outdoor Education has moved to pursue educational outcomes different to those of Physical Education, then the large number of teachers working outside their primary discipline area carries significant implications for both Physical Education teachers and the emerging discipline of Outdoor Education.

In this paper we aim to clarify the relationship between Outdoor Education and Physical Education. We acknowledge at the outset that such clarity must be based on assumptions about the nature and scope of both Physical Education and Outdoor Education, assumptions that will inevitably remain contested.

Despite the large number of Physical Educators involved in teaching Outdoor Education in schools, we contend that the majority of the literature and research into the evolution and development of Outdoor Education as a more discrete disciplinary area has been published in relatively new Outdoor Education professional journals, beyond the conventional scope of Physical Education discourse. Similarly, contemporary discourse on Physical Education futures (for example Kirk, 2009; Penney & Jess, 2004) is not standard reading for outdoor educators. While many of the conversations we synthesize in this paper are not new, we argue that they may well be new to readers with Physical Education backgrounds, and are important to revisit as Australia moves towards developing a new national curriculum for Physical Education, and outdoor educators advocate for their own voice in the national curriculum debate.

The evolution of professions

Professions and the specific challenges they address in society are mutable. As new social or cultural issues emerge, groups examine them and either reject, embrace or accommodate these new imperatives. As a consequence there is a Darwinian evolution that, over time, transforms professional knowledge and practice to ensure it remains a best fit for contemporary circumstances. For Physical Education, the emergence of youth obesity, binge drinking and the internet, for example, have all in some way forced practitioners to re-think how Physical Education may respond to such challenges. Leahy and Harrison's (2008) discussion of obesity and its implications for PE teachers is one recent example of this. Physical Education is but one profession in a cast of many professional groups within education that are analysing, reflecting on and responding to contemporary social change.

Despite social change and the impact this has upon professional knowledge and practice, what remains relatively stable within professions is the underlying core contribution or motive of service upon which a profession is based. A motive of service is a professional *ultimate good*, it is the reason for being, the underlying claim for social and/or economic relevance. Indeed, it is this contribution or motive of service that is a pivotal signpost to identifying a profession as something worthwhile and not easily discarded. In earlier work, one of the current authors identified other signposts to a profession (Martin, 2001). These signposts point the way to a professional framework and help delineate the nature and scope of one profession from another. The key signposts to a profession include: a clearly defined body of knowledge, a code of ethical practice, and some form of gate-keeping or accreditation system that both regulates and monitors the quality of entry into the profession (Martin, 2001).

These signposts help define the profession and should lead to an improved public recognition of the role of the profession and corresponding consolidation or improvement of the quality of service provision. In this paper we compare and contrast the key signposts to the professions of Physical Education and Outdoor Education, particularly the defining motive of service, the body of knowledge upon which practices are based and current processes of inclusion or professional gate-keeping. In so doing, the distinctive and complementary contributions that PE and OE each make to education in Australia should be more transparent.

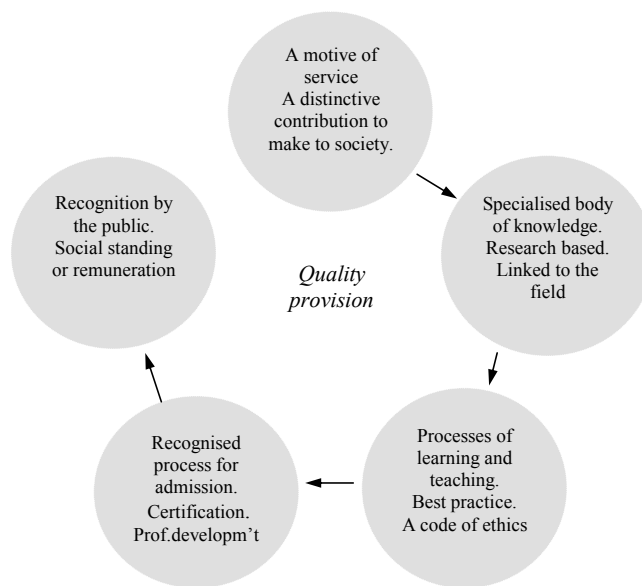


Figure 1
Signpost to a profession

Motive of service for Physical Education

The nature and scope of Physical Education in the curriculum is contested. For example, writing at the opening of a new millennium, Penney and Chandler (2000) argued that agreement about the core aims of Physical Education are less than clear and remain a source of apparent tension. Together with Mike Jess, Penney later called for a re-conceptualisation of Physical Education curriculum towards lifelong physical activity that embraced four dimensions: functional, recreational, health related and performance related physical activity (Penney & Jess, 2004, p. 274). David Kirk's recent work on Physical Education futures maintains the debate by offering significant alternate pathways (Kirk, 2009). While these examples and their outcomes remain problematic, we argue that the underlying motive of service that has sustained Physical Educators in their practices over recent decades has a resonant core centred on the importance of physical activity, a belief in the role of such activity for adolescent health, wellbeing and social contribution. We also acknowledge however, that this motive of service is potentially diverse and curriculum manifestations can become clouded and considerable debate around specific practices of Physical Education remains. It is not our purpose here to enter into that debate, but rather contrast and compare how contemporary beliefs of Physical Education may sit along side those offered for Outdoor Education. One means to do this is to consider how Physical Education has positioned itself in practice with respect to the Australian National Curriculum.

The (re)establishing of a national curriculum in Australia has provided a political imperative for Physical Educators to focus their debate and affirm a curriculum direction and clarity of intent for Physical Education in schools (Emmel, 2008; Penney, 2006). ACHPER's success in having Health and Physical Education (HPE) included within the Australian National Curriculum was no doubt

assisted by a clear motive of service for Physical Education encapsulated by the ACHPER National statement on Physical Education (2009).

ACHPER urges the Federal Government to formally acknowledge that:

- *HPE is the area of the curriculum that provides education for children to learn how to lead healthy lifestyles now and in the future; that is, lifestyles characterised by and recognising the importance of health and physical education and physical activity for physical, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing*
- *HPE is the area of the curriculum that is directly concerned with the development of skills, knowledge, understandings, values and attitudes that will counter so called lifestyle diseases that are widely acknowledged as representing an unprecedented threat to the health and economic future of Australia; and that*
- *HPE is the area of the curriculum that engages students in learning related to contemporary, adolescent health issues. (ACHPER, 2009, p. 1)*

This statement clearly states the agenda for HPE in schools, defining both nature and scope of curriculum. It positions Physical Education as educative developmental practice, rather than therapeutically driven. Phase 1 of the National Curriculum embeds traditional subjects such as English, Maths, History and Science. Phase 2 adds Geography, Languages and the Arts. It was in advocacy for HPE to be included in a third phase of Australia's new National Curriculum that ACHPER's statements were directed. We have known since April 2010 that this has been successful. Government has agreed to "the prioritisation of Health and Physical Education (HPE) within Phase 3 of the curriculum development plan; the inclusion of HPE as a core learning requirement for all students in each year from K–10; and to maximise within the overall package of required school learning the number of school hours that students participate in quality Physical Education and Sport" (MCEECDYA, 2010, p. 2). Penney (2010) has the view that, "this may well prove to be a 'defining time' for HPE in Australia; a time when the stakes are high in curriculum development and when that development remains highly political" (p.5). Focussing HPE in schooling in this way also helps emerging disciplines such as Outdoor Education (and potentially Sport) that have grown out of traditional Physical Education to also be more directed in their service motives.

Motive of service for Outdoor Education

"In 1979 as a newly graduated Physical Education teacher I commenced my professional life in a small secondary school in rural western Victorian, where sport dominated both town and school life. While enthusiasm for Physical Education was generally high, not all students shared a passion for competitive activity. I introduced canoeing on the town lake as part of the PE program. For some students this seemed a turning point in their enthusiasm for physical activity and ultimately led to more outdoor activity options. It was an experience that helped move my career towards Outdoor Education. I realised then that adventurous outdoor recreation activities proved a welcome alternative for some students and gave them an opportunity for self-defined success, denied them in traditional competitive sports." (Peter)

Outdoor Education has its roots in Physical Education, and both disciplines would acknowledge their militaristic origins. Outdoor recreation pursuits, like canoeing or rock climbing, remain among the range of activities from which physical educators draw. However, Outdoor Education, like PE, has been responding to social and cultural change. By 1982 Outdoor Education had a dedicated professional body, the Victorian Outdoor Education Association, and had become a separate subject at Year 12 accredited by the Victorian Institute of Secondary Education (VISE). The content of the 1982 course was outdoor pursuits based and looked much like Physical Education with different activities. It was “...not meant to be purely academic. [But was]... designed to develop and sustain interest and abilities in an important sector of recreation – one which may become a life-long pleasure for the individual” (VISE, 1982, p. 2).

Like Physical Education, Outdoor Education’s nature and scope has been contested since its inception as a subject. Leading into the 1990s a major shift in Outdoor Education discourse was driven by several key authors in universities here and the United Kingdom towards the purpose of Outdoor Education being education for an environmentally sustainable future (Lugg, 1999). This shift was reflected in the curriculum in several Australian states, but most noticeably in Victoria. Outdoor Education remained as a separate senior school subject in Victorian education through the 1980s but shifted away from recreation goals to be more reflective of a growing social concern for the natural environment. By 1990 the rationale for the year 11 and 12 course in Outdoor Education stated “The primary focus of outdoor education is on understanding people’s relationships with the outdoors” (VCAB, 1990, p. 1). Outdoor adventure activities continued as the primary vehicle by which students engaged with the outdoors, but the educational intent had shifted to a more socially critical environmental agenda. The focus on human nature relationships has remained and was strengthened in 2000 when senior school curriculum in Outdoor Education merged with Environmental Studies.

Most recently there has been a re-orienting of the environmental agenda of Outdoor Education towards enabling students to better understand their home range. This has stemmed in part from a counter response to the adventure based, travel intensive tradition of Outdoor Education as a pursuit based, equipment dependent endeavor. Brian Wattchow and Mike Brown’s 2011 work advocates for an Outdoor Education centred on a responsive *place based pedagogy*, specifically teaching students how to live well in their wider lives and bioregion (Wattchow & Brown, 2011). There are some interesting conceptual parallels here to the call for Physical Education to consider life long learning with increased relevance to student’s lives and learning beyond schooling (Penney & Jess, 2004).

In 2010, Outdoor Education Australia (OEA) at its biennial national conference re-asserted its belief about Outdoor Education with a declaration.

Outdoor Education provides unique opportunities to develop positive relationships with the environment, others and ourselves through interaction with the natural world. These relationships are essential for the wellbeing and sustainability of individuals, society and our environment. (OEA, 2010, n.p)

This declaration drew on an earlier motive of service for Outdoor Education that stated “the ultimate goal of Outdoor Education was to contribute towards a sustainable community” (Mann, 2002, p. 69).

Clarification of Outdoor Education’s contemporary role in education has implications for Physical Educators who have long understood Outdoor Education from their outdoor recreation perspective, but may not have been aware of its evolution. PE is focussed most on physical health and wellbeing through activity. OE is focussed most on human to nature relationships, often formed through recreation activity, and the benefits that can ensue for people and the environment. Also contained within the motive of service for Outdoor Education are the contributions claimed for individual and social wellbeing. It is here that much overlap remains with HPE, as well as other curriculum areas. While PE and OE have shared histories and related concerns, the cultural imperatives to which PE and OE now respond and the motive of service that underpins the respective professions differ, and this difference has implications for the body of knowledge that teachers draw upon in their work.

Body of knowledge for both Physical Education and Outdoor Education teachers

Both PE and OE teachers have mastery of specific content to teach effectively in schools. In Victorian schools both PE and OE remain popular subjects in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) undertaken by senior secondary students in Years 11 and 12. The rationales for any accredited study design are a clear indication of the intent of a study and give a snapshot of the disciplinary knowledge upon which the study is based. Accredited senior curriculum documents therefore serve as practical reference points to compare the similarities and divergence between PE and OE at the VCE level.

VCE Physical Education examines the biological, physiological, psychological, social and cultural influences on performance and participation in physical activity. It focuses on the interrelationship between motor learning and psychological, biomechanical, physiological and sociological factors that influence physical performances, and participation in physical activity. The study of physical activity and sedentary behaviour is significant for the understanding of health, wellbeing and performance of people. (VCAA, 2010)

Teachers of this course would be cognisant of the health and human sciences as they relate to physical activity. Cultural attitudes towards activity are also important. The VCE PE study design mentions the need for an understanding of the social, environmental, cultural, biological, psychological and physiological factors that influence participation in physical activity and developing a critical perspective on physical activity across the lifespan (VCAA, 2010). In addition, there is also considerable professional knowledge demanded of a PE teacher relating to the teaching or pedagogy of such a course, and this constitutes a significant part of the overall professional body of knowledge for physical educators. It is significant to note the re-introduction of training programs into the VCE PE study design for 2011 - 2014. In this area of study, students are required to design, participate in and evaluate a six week training program that demonstrates the correct

application of training principles and methods to enhance and maintain specific health-related fitness components (VCAA, 2010). Clearly Physical Education teachers must have an underlying knowledge of sports coaching, physically active lifestyles, biomechanics, activity participation and physiological performance.

In contrast, the rationale for VCE Outdoor Education has a completely different focus, a focus based on increased environmental content and a strategic renaming of the study to Outdoor and Environmental Studies.

Outdoor and Environmental Studies is a study of the ways humans interact with and relate to natural environments... Ultimately, the study is directed towards enabling students to make critically informed comment on questions of environmental sustainability and to understand the importance of environmental health, particularly in local contexts. (VCAA, 2005, p. 7)

Teachers here require knowledge relating to human to nature relationships and cultural relationships with nature over time. Like the PE design, a blend of theory and practice is used to make sense of the study's focus. In Outdoor Education this demands teachers are ecologically literate and have a range of knowledge and skills needed for safe travel and living outdoors. The rationale states this quite specifically and the implications for teachers' knowledge are clear.

In this study both passive and active outdoor activities provide the means for students to develop experiential knowledge of natural environments. Such knowledge is then enhanced through theoretical study of natural environments from perspectives of environmental history, ecology and the social studies of human–nature relationships. As a consequence of the importance of the experiential components, Outdoor and Environmental Studies also provides students with the skills and knowledge to safely participate in activities in natural environments and to respect and value the environment. (VCAA, 2005, p. 7)

The respective senior school study design rationales for PE and Outdoor Environmental Studies make clear the differences between PE and OE and the skills and knowledge needed by teachers of these two subjects. However, these extracts also hint at the similarities between PE and OE. Both studies demand an integration of theory and practice. Both draw on experiential knowledge gained from performance of physical activity. The teaching of outdoor travel skills, such as canoeing or bushwalking, are essential aspects of Outdoor Education just as the teaching of fundamental motor skills or physical activity performance are central to Physical Education. The similarity between PE and OE lies in the teaching of movement knowledge and skills, but the purposes and contexts in which these skills reside are significantly different. In addition, there are similarities in PE and OE in the outcomes they seek for individual and social wellbeing that position both within the same learning area. Both Physical Education and Outdoor Education are concerned with student learning that is lifelong. For PE, a healthy lifestyle has implications for individual and social wellbeing. For OE, a healthy relationship with nature adds the natural environment to the wellbeing equation.

The respective professional associations that act as gatekeepers to the professions of PE and OE recognise these differences and have structured accreditation and registration pathways as a result.

Keeping the gate – registration and accreditation in PE and OE

For Physical Education teachers a defined body of knowledge has evolved over many years and is used as the basis for Physical Education teacher training programs at universities around the country. Of course such knowledge is neither undisputed nor static. That is why professional associations such as ACHPER are in ready consultation with teacher registration boards in negotiating the requirements appropriate for new entry into the profession. Regulation of who enters the profession, who qualifies as a PE teacher, is another important signpost to the maturity of a profession. A code of professional ethics is also a clear signpost to a profession, and here too ACHPER has crafted a code of ethics for teachers of Health and Physical Education. To be registered as a secondary school teacher in Victorian schools demands four years of tertiary study that meets guidelines set down by the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT).

While the details are guidelines, in practice they become prescriptive. When tertiary institutions construct curricula for teacher training courses they must comply with the VIT guidelines and seek accreditation from the VIT before they can legitimately advertise that their course is suitable for teaching specific subject areas in the Victorian education system. In addition, individual teacher registration is subject to applicants meeting the guidelines. Outdoor Education and Physical Education are each described by distinctly different qualification guidelines.

For teachers of Physical Education the VIT mandates:

One and a half years of study in Physical Education...[which will] include study in the following areas:

(a) Discipline Study: Human Movement (e.g. anatomy, physiology, exercise physiology, biomechanics, growth and motor development, skill acquisition and psycho-social aspects of physical activity), Health and Nutrition.

(b) Skills: fundamental motor skills, ball handling, dance, games, fitness education, athletics, aquatics, sport education.

A current First Aid certificate (Emergency First Aid Level 2) and a current AustSwim Teacher of Swimming and Water Safety Certificate. (VIT, 2008)

For teachers of Outdoor Education the VIT require:

One year of study in Outdoor Education which includes environmental studies and outdoor recreational activities.

A current first aid certificate (Emergency First Aid Level 2). (VIT, 2008)

Although the VIT have not detailed the contents of Outdoor Education's one year of specialist study, tertiary members of the Victorian Outdoor Education Association have agreed to a set of peer endorsed guidelines. These have been modelled on the format of the PE guidelines and specify both discipline and skills.

One year of study in Outdoor Education including study in:

a) Discipline Study: The educational potential of outdoor experience for sustainability and personal and human development, Human interaction with natural environments (eg. environmental ethics, sense of place study, environmental history, indigenous relationships with the environment), Outdoor activity knowledge, Ecological literacy, and Safety management.

b) Skill areas to include: base camping (activities for), overnight bushwalking (navigation), flat water paddling, environmental interpretation, experiential education facilitation, organization and risk management planning, outdoor leadership. (Martin, 2008)

Again the differences between Physical Education and Outdoor Education are highlighted here. The VIT guidelines help ensure the respective knowledge base of both Physical Education and Outdoor Education are maintained. The VIT prefer broad guidelines to give teacher training institutions more latitude to create distinctiveness in their courses of study without compromising the integrity of the professional knowledge (R. Newton, personal communication, February 25, 2010). Outdoor Education's peer developed guidelines allow the profession to be more self-monitoring and responsive within a regulatory framework imposed by the VIT.

Implications and discussion

Outdoor Education has historically been closely linked with Physical Education. However, as the above information conveys, Outdoor Education has now evolved to become a more independent field pursuing strong environmental goals. In 2009 and 2010 Outdoor Education Australia (OEA), like ACHPER, advocated for a voice in the national curriculum discussion. In OEA's submission to the national curriculum project, Outdoor Education was argued as being distinctive in its contribution to schooling in three areas (Hewitson & Martin, 2010). First, it is the only subject to specifically seek to enable students to gain the skills and knowledge to live more closely with and connect with the natural world. Outdoor Education on the most basic level provides for students' primary experiences of nature, which they can see, feel, taste, hear and smell for themselves (Louv, 2005). Second, Outdoor Education seeks a deliberate critical perspective on aspects of contemporary living as they impact upon our relationship with nature. As an example, in the hands of a skilled outdoor educator a bushwalk becomes the experiential means to evaluate aspects of taken for granted technology and our dependence upon them. Enabling students to gain a more culturally critical perspective on human to nature relationships in contemporary wellbeing is a complex task, but vital for us to make informed decisions that guide our actions for human and environmental futures. Third, Outdoor Education teaches personal assessment of risk and the management of it. Understanding risk includes identification of any benefits to be gained, the hazards to be encountered and likelihood of occurrences. It is a disciplined analysis of a given situation and its context, and while this occurs in an outdoor setting, the skills have relevance to other aspects of an adolescent's life.

This said, Outdoor Education retains an important role in promoting personal and group development learning outcomes, particularly in the junior school where Outdoor Education exists

often as a co or extra curricula process of learning rather than a discrete subject. Seeking personal and group development goals is not unique to Outdoor Education. It is something shared with many other subjects, including Physical Education, but it is something Outdoor Education does well (McLeod & Allen-Craig, 2007; Quay, Dickinson, & Nettleton, 2002) and is well applied to at risk populations (Pryor, Carpenter, & Townsend, 2005).

Conclusion

As quoted at the outset of this paper, Outdoor Education is often taught in schools by teachers of Physical Education. In the 2001 study of the nature and scope of outdoor education in Victorian schools, 35% of OE teachers were PE trained, while only 24% held outdoor education qualifications (Lugg & Martin, 2001). In South Australia in 2003, 67% of teachers taking Outdoor Education were PE trained, compared to only 6% who held Outdoor Education tertiary qualifications (Poly & Pickett, 2003). More recent data shows a improvement in these figures where in Victoria 28% of all OE teachers hold a specialist OE degree or graduate diploma thereby meeting VIT specialist area guidelines (Cumming, 2007). This could be attributed to an increase in the availability of specialist OE programs, particularly in Victoria where seven tertiary institutions now offer specialist Outdoor Education teacher training compared to only two in 1990. However, teachers trained in Physical Education still dominate the teaching of Outdoor Education in schools.

Although evidence is difficult to obtain, it seems that when Outdoor Education is taught by physical educators, personal and group development outcomes take precedence over environmental goals. In Lugg and Martin's (2001) study, those teachers who had an Outdoor Education qualification rated environmental appreciation the second most important reason for teaching outdoors behind promoting student self esteem. For those with Physical Education qualifications self esteem was also ranked highest, but environmental appreciation was ranked seventh behind a host of other personal and group development goals.

Outdoor Education and Physical Education are complementary but discrete disciplinary areas. They draw on different bodies of knowledge, seek differing learning outcomes and are responding to differing socio-cultural challenges. While they share core beliefs in promoting wellbeing for individuals and the importance of experiential learning, they apply that learning to different end points. As we enter an era of more nationalised education, it is vital professional understanding is developed across state borders and we take this opportunity to consolidate and re-affirm our respective educational contributions.

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