



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

*Report from the AIESEP-Bham 2012 Specialist Research Seminar*

## **'Sport (& Exercise) Pedagogy': (Re)Defining the Field'**

Thursday 29th March - Saturday 31st March 2012, University of Birmingham, UK.

This report is organised into 8 sections:

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### **1. AIESEP-Bham 2012 Position Statement: Sport (and Exercise) Pedagogy**

'Sport Pedagogy' is an academic sub-discipline of the broader fields of Sport & Exercise Sciences, Kinesiology and Human Movement Studies (etc). Taking its place alongside established sub-disciplines such as exercise physiology, sport and exercise psychology and sports biomechanics, sport pedagogy focuses on synthesising knowledge to inform the 'pedagogical encounter'. The pedagogical encounter is defined as that precise moment where a teacher, coach or instructor seeks to support a learner in sport, physical activity or exercise settings. The learning needs of the target learner are paramount in the pedagogical encounter. Physical education

teaching, sport coaching and exercise instruction are key professional sites that can be informed by sport pedagogy.

In its subject matter, sport pedagogy (or sport & exercise pedagogy) focuses on understanding, informing and improving theory, practice and policy in sport, exercise, physical activity and physical education. It is an interdisciplinary area of study centred on learners and learning in physical activity settings. The purpose of sport pedagogy is to support the needs of learners in sport, and other forms of physical activity, wherever and whenever they seek to learn through the life-course. Sport pedagogy, therefore, underpins teaching, coaching and instruction and transcends traditional barriers between different forms of practice in the field.

The precise title of this area of study was debated at the AIESEP-Bham 2012 seminar. Some participants preferred 'Sport Pedagogy' while others argued for 'Sport & Exercise Pedagogy' to reflect the wider reach of the field. The term 'Sport Pedagogy' is used in this position statement to cover both, although the merits of making explicit links to the wider physical activity/health field warrant further consideration.

Led from universities, the development of knowledge in sport pedagogy should be a collaborative intellectual venture between academics, practitioners and, where appropriate, policy makers. Sport pedagogy academics can lead the way in working with colleagues in the wider field of sport and exercise sciences (used here as an umbrella term to include physical/social science sub-disciplines and physical education/coaching). In so doing, sport pedagogy works across disciplinary silos in order to develop holistic knowledge that can inform practice. This knowledge will better prepare practitioners to address the diverse and dynamic needs of the learners for whom they are responsible.

There are a number of ways in which sport pedagogy can improve the quality of career-long professional development for teachers, coaches and instructors. Examples include: the development of new theories, informing the design of more

appropriate intervention studies, building expertise in a models-based approach to practice, and constructing 'pedagogical cases' to translate theory into practice and to build new interdisciplinary theory. Interdisciplinary pedagogical cases are at the heart of sport pedagogy. They would be of interest to both students and practitioners, and they could be accumulated to form an accessible knowledge base that can be shared, critiqued and developed over time.

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## **Background to the Position Statement.**

### **2. What was the purpose of the seminar?**

An AIESEP Specialist Research Seminar is an intensive meeting of 30-50 experts who share an interest in tackling questions or issues related to a specific research topic. The purpose of this seminar was to produce a position statement and action plan on the topic which is then published and made available to the wider academic community on the AIESEP website. 36 participants from 13 countries attended the Birmingham seminar.

### **3. Which key questions were addressed?**

- (i) What is 'Sport (& Exercise) Pedagogy'...or what could it be...and how does it articulate with its key intellectual communities?
- (ii) How can Sport (& Exercise) Pedagogy be strengthened as a (sub) discipline at university level?
- (iii) How can Sport (& Exercise) Pedagogy underpin the professionalism of teachers, coaches and other physical activity professionals?
- (iv) What are the most pressing questions to be addressed by Sport (& Exercise) Pedagogy researchers over the next ten years?

### **4. What was the theoretical starting point?**

This seminar was organised in order to consider ways in which the development of a redefined (sub) discipline in universities could better support professional

practitioners in physical education, sport coaching and exercise instruction. Drawing on her earlier work, Kathy Armour argued that sport (& exercise) pedagogy could be defined as the interdisciplinary study and development of the complex and crowded space where sport, exercise, physical activity, science and education come together in practice. In particular, it was argued that fragmentation in the intellectual communities supporting practitioners in physical education, sport and exercise does not serve them or the wider society well. It was also argued that the traditional and sometimes rigid barriers between physical education and sport; coaching and teaching; sport, health and education policy; and sport sciences and education need to be dismantled in the interests of meeting the needs of our 'clients'. In this context, 'clients' were defined as learners and participants in various physical activity settings at every level and life-course stage. The term 'client' was the source of some debate during the seminar.

Drawing on the previous work of colleagues in and beyond the field of physical education, Kathy Armour (2011) has defined sport pedagogy as:

*Three complex dimensions made more complex as they interact in each pedagogical encounter:*

- *Knowledge in context*
- *Learners and learning*
- *Teachers/teaching; coaches/coaching...etc*

Learners and learning are at the heart of sport pedagogy, and underpinning knowledge is both multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary. In her opening presentation, Armour also drew on the work of Stenhouse (1979) to propose that the development of 'pedagogical cases' would be an important step in developing a shared and accessible body of pedagogical knowledge to support professional practitioners in the field. It was suggested that participants may wish to consider adopting the broader term: 'Sport & Exercise Pedagogy'.

## **5. Who were the seminar participants?**

The participants were organised into five working groups who addressed each of the seminar questions in response to challenges set by short expert inputs from

participants (David Kirk, Mary O’Sullivan, Hans van der Mars, Leen Haerens, Marc Cloes, Hayley Fitzgerald, Fiona Chambers, Matt Bridge, Uwe Puehse). The responses from each working group were summarised by each of the group leaders. The final document has been collated by the seminar leader (Kathy Armour) so it is, to some extent, a compromise position.

**WG 1:** Ann Macphail (leader); Matt Bridge; Michal Lenartowicz; Jean Lemoyne; Mike Waring; Hayley Fitzgerald; Kristine de Martelaer.

**WG 2:** Nathalie Wallian (leader); Ian Boardley; Hsin-heng Chen; Fiona Chambers; David Kirk; Hans van der Mars; Rachel Sandford.

**WG 3:** Cathy Gower (leader); Symeon Dagkas; Jo Harris; Alexandra Valencis Peris; Mikael Londos; Laura Purdy; Uwe Puehse.

**WG 4:** Mark Griffiths (leader); Kyriaki Makopoulou; Jonathan Grix; Marc Cloes; Sinead Luttrell; Joao Costa; Pilvikki Heikinaro-Johansson.

**WG 5:** Torsten Buhre (leader); Lesley Philpotts; Frank Herold; Mary O’Sullivan; Gemma van Vuuren-Cassar; Leen Haerens; Jan Seghers.

## **6. Working group responses to the key seminar questions (informing the draft Position Statement on Sport Pedagogy)**

The Position Statement that appears at the beginning of this document has been compiled from the working group responses to the key seminar questions. The collated responses are summarised below. ***Seminar questions i and iii:***

- (i) What is ‘Sport (& Exercise) Pedagogy’...or what could it be...and how does it articulate with its key intellectual communities?
- (iii) How can Sport (& Exercise) Pedagogy underpin the professionalism of teachers, coaches and other physical activity professionals?

Although Kathy Armour had proposed the term 'Sport & Exercise Pedagogy' to replace the term she had used previously – Sport Pedagogy – the seminar participants were uncertain about this suggestion. Instead, they favoured using the shorter term 'Sport Pedagogy' (SP) followed by a clear, explanatory sentence to make the range of the field apparent. The name was considered to be less important than the mission. Throughout this document, therefore, the term 'Sport Pedagogy' has been adopted. The use of the term 'pedagogy' was welcomed as it signals the importance of the educational process in sport, PA and PE. It was agreed that there is a need for clear branding in and beyond the academy and that in this context, the term 'Sport & Exercise Pedagogy' might be preferable.

At the outset, it was agreed to consider SP in the context of the professional learning needs (all levels of training/career) of the main groups working in the sport, exercise, physical activity and physical education instruction fields. If we get it right, SP could be regarded as the intellectual/conceptual/theoretical 'hub', or organisational framework, for informing best teaching/coaching/instruction practices. Importantly, SP informs the different yet overlapping sites of social practice in the field (both formal and informal) including: school, sports club, family, community, commercial sites and hospitals. Essentially, SP knowledge is relevant in any practice-based site where learning in sport, exercise, physical activity or physical education takes place.

Sport pedagogy is applied, practice referenced, multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary. Its purpose is to create new knowledge to support practitioners in physical activity settings such as sport, exercise, physical activity and physical education. SP aims to inform, support and develop evidence-based practice, while at the same time recognising that the field is contested.

Sport pedagogy takes, as its starting point, the lived, embodied experience of participant learners in physical activity settings. In order to meet the needs of these learners, however, it draws upon best available practical and theoretical knowledge from within and beyond the field, and also seeks to develop new theories and

practices. The focus is on developing greater understanding of the learning needs of the individual at different stages in the life course, more personalisation in provision and an enhanced recognition of difference and diversity. Learners' (inter/multi-disciplinary) 'needs' are the focal point for SP – although the term 'client' may be regarded as problematic.

The field of SP is unique in the wider Sport and Exercise Sciences field because it is practice-referenced and focussed on the holistic needs of embodied learners. This means that SP is required to be multi/inter-disciplinary to meet the needs of learners. Essentially, SP is about pedagogical intent, and at its heart is the 'pedagogical encounter' which refers to any geographical, temporal and embodied space in which a teacher/coach/instructor meets a learner and enacts practice. Practice influences the learners' abilities, meanings, dispositions and values. Identifying these as the core precepts of SP suggests that one key way in which a body of knowledge in SP can be developed and shared is the construction of detailed case studies of pedagogical encounters. Another way is to ensure that experimental methods and the design of intervention studies are appropriate to the realities of the practice setting.

***Seminar question ii:***

- (ii) How can Sport (& Exercise) Pedagogy be strengthened as a (sub) discipline at university level?

4 out of 5 groups felt that there was definitely an intellectual space for SP in university departments of Sport & Exercise Sciences, Education/Physical Education, Kinesiology, Human Movement Studies etc. These groups felt that we would be stronger in the academy if we could pool the expertise in teaching, coaching and exercise instruction to create a strong, interdisciplinary pedagogical base for practice. Working with policy and professional associations is also essential.

Importantly, although practice is always multi/inter-disciplinary, conferences, journals and academic curricula are not. This is the key challenge to be addressed. It

seems clear that academics in sport pedagogy will need to model inter-disciplinary research and should also act as the conduit for bringing together colleagues across disciplines to better (a) translate theory and research into practice; (b) to ensure practice informs theory and research; and (c) ensure theory informs practice. It was argued that if we were able to create a stronger academic base in pedagogy, we would be able to attract more research funding and greater numbers of PhD students in our field – both of which are essential to the intellectual health of the sub-discipline in the modern academy.

It was agreed that as we look to the future, ensuring the intellectual field has a critical mass is essential. Master's degrees were identified as a strong source of recruitment and also part time postgraduate study might be encouraged such that academics, practitioners and policy makers can work together. In addition, more students would come forward for postgraduate research in sport pedagogy if undergraduate teaching in this area was more exciting and intellectually challenging. Pedagogical cases, models-based practice, influencing the design of intervention studies, developing new theories and new evaluation methods appropriate to the field are all examples of the scope of SP.

In summary, it was agreed that SP should be a core sub-discipline on all Sport and Exercise Sciences, Physical Education, Sport Coaching, Kinesiology, Human Movement Studies (etc) programmes. The common title of Sport Pedagogy (or Sport & Exercise Pedagogy) would ensure that the identity of this area of study is visible and clear to all. It is unhelpful at present where there is no clear 'brand' for education-based work in the field.

***Seminar question iv:***

- (iv) What are the most pressing questions to be addressed by Sport (& Exercise) Pedagogy researchers over the next ten years?

The following were identified as examples:



- We have big research GAPS in our understanding of transfer of learning across different settings and sites; transition in PA/Sport participation through the life-course; youth dispositions towards wellbeing.
- We need to find ways to prepare young people for sport, exercise and physical activity through the life-course in terms of flexibility adaptability and decision making.
- How can we design effective communication and dissemination tools (21<sup>st</sup> century tools) to ensure research reaches practitioners and is informed by them?
- Advanced pedagogies – what do they look like in our field?
- Can we interrogate existing datasets to understand where pedagogy might be a variable in participation etc.?
- Evidence-based sport pedagogy: developing new methodologies and also adapting existing methodologies to better meet the needs of practice.
- Further GAPS - lack of pedagogy in HBPE interventions; i.e. Lack of pedagogical evidence to design effective interventions; weaknesses in our understanding of a developmental approach to HBPE from early childhood to adolescence; no clear pedagogy of obesity; greater understanding of the role of school in establishing sedentary behaviours; more work needed on effective models of interaction between physical education with community/home provision; need a new model for PE teacher/coach interaction in an enlarged school model.
- Lack of pedagogy in out-of-school settings (e.g., organised sport clubs)

## **7. Future Plans**

It was suggested we need to undertake the following activities to establish Sport Pedagogy in universities in ways that ensure it can support professional practice:

- Ensure SP has a central hub with clear international connections (AIESEP website might be an appropriate forum)

- Work closely with existing groups: AERA, BERA, EERA etc. to ensure SP views are heard and contribute to the debate
- Maintain a dynamic review of the SP strategy as it evolves to ensure it retains currency; publish a position statement as soon as possible in a key journal (*NB 'Sport Education & Society' has already offered a special edition on this topic*) and invite critical commentary from a range of disciplines
- Consider both academic and practitioner positions simultaneously and ensure there are outputs appropriate to both groups
- Find effective ways to disseminate and the notion of publishing pedagogical cases was supported. [*NB a contract to produce the first set of pedagogical cases in our field has already been agreed with Pearson who recently published the Sport Pedagogy book edited by Armour (2011). All participants in the AIESEP-Bham 2012 seminar will be invited to submit cases working with colleagues from other disciplines in their institutions.*]
- Find better tools for intervention studies and the evaluation of intervention effects.

## **8. Thanks**

I would like to record my thanks to all those who participated in the AIESEP-Bham 2012 Specialist Research Seminar. It was an intensive 2 days, and everyone worked tirelessly to debate and to answer the seminar questions. Particular thanks are due to the working group leaders, the participants who gave expert inputs, Katy Caves who supported the organisation and communication, and my academic colleagues at the University of Birmingham who supported the seminar.

***Kathy Armour, June 2012***