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Sport and Education

Tribute to Martin Lee

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SPORT, EDUCATION AND SOCIETY: THE CHALLENGE

1. Introduction

In a book of this nature I thought it would be valuable to explore the relationships between the ideas of sport, education and society, all of which are changing at an increasing rate. Many of these changes, which place demands upon teachers, coaches and administrators in both sport and education were probably not considered 50 or even 20 years ago. Consequently it may be helpful to look briefly at these relationships and their effects on current, and possibly future, practice. I should say at the outset that, over several decades in the field, I have come to a position that promotes sport for kids rather than kids for sport. This principle guides what I shall say here, and I hope that during the discussion I shall be able to present the case for that position.

2. Society, education and sport

I have deliberately changed the order of presentation of these concepts because it seems to me that society embraces those sporting and educational processes within it (see Figure 1).

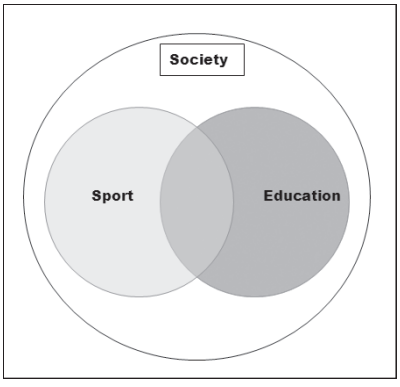

Figure 1. Relationships between Society, Education and Sport

Essentially, while sporting and educational processes occur within a social setting there is an overlap between sport and education. Sporting activities, e.g. games, athletics, swimming and gymnastics are included in educational curricula , and sport can have educational influence, for better or worse! The impact probably depends less on the content and more on the process of the programmes; in the words of the well known song "It ain't what you do but the way that you do it!" However, that in itself is dependent upon the vision of one or more clearly understood goals for the process. They will determine, ultimately, both the content and process.

3. Society

There is little doubt that the last several years have seen the growth, almost at an exponential rate, of change in societies throughout the world. Migration rates are on the rise throughout the world with many from poorer and third world nations migrating to more affluent countries. The USA has been subject to a steady increase in its Hispanic population, which is having marked effect on its demographic characteristics and politics. The recent expansion of the European Union has led to a considerable flow of labour from the eastern nations to the more affluent western members. The movement is not all one way. Increasing numbers of British people are taking advantage of early retirement, inexpensive housing and employment opportunities to move to the warmer parts of Europe and living in what sometimes have become, English enclaves – not always to the desire of local people! All these developments have political, economic, and educational effects and can cause considerable upheaval.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which signalled the demise of Communism in eastern Europe, one of the most significant socio-political changes has been the migration of Islamic peoples to western Europe and beyond and the rise of militant Islam. This is already having a major effect on politics and economics and upon education protocols in the host countries and has resulted in conflict. It is predicted that the situation will become much more volatile in the relatively near future. A senior British military strategist, Rear Admiral Christopher Parry, has recently (June, 2006) warned that western civilisation faces a threat similar to that which destroyed the Roman Empire. As a result of environmental destruction, a population boom, advancing technology and a radical Islam he predicts a world of 'reverse colonisation' in which groups of people travel between countries exploiting modern communications and cheap travelling costs, without developing any commitment to the host country (Almond, 2006). Such a scenario suggests challenges to the notion of assimilation and the integrating effects of education. In the United Kingdom this has already prompted debate about the place of church (now 'faith') schools, which operate to specifically tailored curricula. Previously the faith schools were largely limited to Anglican, Catholic and Jewish schools which were sought after as promoters of high academic standards but largely promoted tolerance and allowed children to mix freely. More recently however the spread of Muslim schools which promote strict adherence to Islamic principles and teaching is causing concern among traditional "European" schools. Add to this the continuing recognition of women's equality in many male

dominated societies and it can be argued that we are in a period of considerable social change that will have effects on, and may conflict with educational, social and athletic life. For example In 1992 Hassiba Bulmerka won the 1500 metres to become Algeria's first Olympic gold medallist but was criticised by fundamentalist Muslims who objected to her athletic dress and she was forced to live and train in Europe. The values associated with particular cultures are coming into conflict as migration increases and the prevailing cultural norms seem to be increasingly under threat. A recent proposal in the United Kingdom would change the goals of education to reduce the teaching of a particular set of cultural values and replace it with encouraging young people to develop their own set of "secure" values. This has provoked considerable argument and some dismay since the values that may be developed may not be in accord with the prevailing culture. In particular, clearly identifying right from wrong appears to be under threat and children may be encouraged to take a relativistic view of their own, and others', actions. This is of particular relevance to sport and physical education, as I shall argue later.

The point of the current argument is to emphasise the rapidly changing nature of society (societies) and the need for coaches and teachers to reflect on their role within them. Unless coaches and teachers understand the widespread influence they have over their charges and the nature of cultural norms and values systems within which they operate they will not optimise the influence that they have.

4. Education

Broadly, education may be considered as a process by which societies prepare their young people for adulthood and to make a contribution to the maintenance of that society. This process embodies experiences which contribute both to the development of maturity and independence and to the collective welfare of the society itself. In modern industrial and post-industrial societies much of the time devoted to educational processes is training in skills appropriate to the demands of the society. So, we have training in, for example, language skills, mathematics (elementary), information technology and so on. Increasingly, in the United Kingdom at least, there is a drift towards subjects for which students can see a direct and immediate market in order to progress to higher education or to the workplace. This concern with content may overshadow the broader outcomes of education that assist the transmission of dominant cultural expectations such as personal growth and the attitudes and values that impact upon social behaviour.

The developmental period of human young is longer than for other species, taking in the region of twenty years. During that period children acquire language and numeracy skills, abstract thought, physical skills and an appreciation of morality. The latter may be exemplified through the learning of conformity to rules. It is reasonable to suppose that, during this extended developmental period all experiences contribute to the learning process, for better or worse. This leads to the conclusion that those who interact with young people necessarily influence them and are obliged to maximise the benefits of that interaction beyond the strict confines of their subject material.

5. Physical Education

Let me now turn to the specific domain of physical education, not surprisingly I will draw upon my experience of the subject in the United Kingdom. The National Curriculum in Great Britain distinguishes PE & Sport as follows: P.E. emphasises learning in a physical context, the purpose of which is to develop knowledge, skills, understanding, and to promote physical development. Sport, on the other hand is a range of physical activities where the emphasis is on participation and competition, where the contest and its outcomes are the central focus. Nevertheless the curriculum, or its proposers, recognises that sporting activities and, indeed, the practice of sport *can contribute* to education (italics added; National Curriculum, 1999). A more recent statement issued by a group of experts at the National Summit on Physical Education in January 2005 introduced the concept of physical literacy as an objective of the physical education curriculum as follows:

> "The aim of physical education is systematically to develop competence so that children are able to move efficiently, effectively, and safely and *understand* (my italics) what they are doing. The outcome – physical literacy – is as important to children's education and development as numeracy and literacy." (Talbot, 2006, p. 9)

Two leading figures in physical education in the UK, Margaret Whitehead and Elizabeth Murdoch, have developed the concept further and point out that, while physical education is limited to the school years, physical literacy has a life-long significance. They consider that the benefits it bestows include self-esteem, self-confidence, physical competence at the level appropriate to the individual, sensitivity to interpersonal relationships and an understanding of the contribution of exercise to health (Whitehead & Murdoch, 2006). Thus there are considered to be physical, cognitive, social and personal benefits.

Since I have argued that all experiences may contribute to learning in some way it is pertinent to ask not only what does it contribute but also: are there unintended consequences? Furthermore, since much of P.E. consists of sporting activities there is inevitably a degree of competition and the nature of the activity may change because the competitive outcome, not the process, becomes more important. Therefore, we are in a situation in which P.E. and Sport involve the many of the same activities to different ends.

Because of this divergence the individualistic and altruistic ends of physical education as envisaged by Whitehead and Murdoch may become subservient to the achievement goals demanded by sport as the boundaries between physical education and sport become more indistinct. Thus the teacher becomes a sport coach, often as an enjoyable extension of his or her formal teaching duties and the part-time amateur coach becomes a physical educator almost by default. For example, and with reference to the distinction between right and wrong, which has become an issue for debate in UK education proposals in recent months, sports activities provide clear rules about what is and what is not allowable – playing within the rules is a condition of participation, whilst we must acknowledge that exacting maximum advantage over opponents within those rules is the mark of skilled performers. Thus sports activities

provide a golden opportunity to teach the difference between right and wrong and lay the foundation for understanding moral principles, as well as providing opportunities to excel at given skills.

6. Sport

Let us now turn specifically to sport. That sport forms a significant part of modern life across the world is self-evident. The Football World Cup taking place in Germany at the time of writing was expected to draw an audience of over 100,000,000 television spectators for each game; this is probably the biggest marketing event in television history. The quadrennial celebration of global sports events also includes the Olympic Games, probably the largest sport festival but one which is free of overt commercial sponsorship, and World championships in most of the sports included in the Olympics. The revenue generated by sports events is enormous and forms a significant part of the global economy. This puts the emphasis on commercial outcomes and competitive success as opposed to educational benefits. Nevertheless such benefits remain possible outcomes.

Sport, as opposed to physical education, fulfils a number of different functions in modern society some of which I will address briefly. First, it promotes the pursuit of excellence. This is a necessary outcome of the competitive element and has been said to encourage the fascist values of admiration of strength and contempt for weakness which reaches its ideal in the individual sports that are on show at the Olympic Games (Tannsjo, 2000). This admiration of the elite may actually lead to a reduction in participation in sport as more people are content to be spectators. Thus, the drive to excellence may be instrumental in reducing sport solely to a form of entertainment.

Secondly, sport fosters a sense of identity. People take pleasure in the success of their local and national teams and bask in the reflected glory that is produced. Increasingly we see demonstrations of social identity at sports events, sometimes to the detriment of the event itself. This process can promote national unity as opportunities for national achievement proliferate and nations are ranked in superiority. Hence, young people are the necessary raw material to sustain the pursuit of national success.

Thirdly, sport is a facet of the entertainment industry in which different sports and events compete for spectators. Given the economic value of sport and its infrastructure the industry, for that is what it is, demands expansion and has resulted in extensive labour migration in many sports as athletes sell their skills. However, failure means that sports clubs may be bankrupted and unsuitable performers – athletes – become a liability. Interestingly, unlike any other business, professional sport depends upon the survival of competitors. It is, therefore in the interests of clubs to keep rivals in business! The draft system in the USA recognises this and encourages an equal distribution of talent. In the major European sports the free market operates and leads to the accumulation of the best talent in a few clubs, e.g. Chelsea FC, Real Madrid etc. In this process, as is the case with nationalism, young people are the raw material without which the product cannot be manufactured.

Thus, a fourth function, or perhaps outcome, of sport is to identify talent. In the race for national and commercial success only the most talented survive and sports bodies and clubs must develop strategies for identifying and enlisting talented

children. This, in turn, places pressure on coaches, parents, and, ultimately, the children themselves.

Fifthly, sport provides opportunities for strenuous physical activity, which in the current climate, has become more desirable in order to combat the rise in both childhood and adult obesity. As young people are increasingly drawn to electronic forms of recreation the need for attractive physical activity is more pressing to establish healthy exercise patterns for life and preserve the health of the population.

Finally, sport can be an educational forum. It is felt that children can develop physical and social skills and self-confidence, be presented with challenges, and better academic performance. They also have the opportunity to prepare for adult recreation, with its consequent health and social benefits; and there are career openings for a few. However, the educational benefits, as anticipated in the development of specialist sports schools in the UK have not yet been clearly demonstrated (Jesson & Taylor, 2002; Jesson, 2003).

On a slightly different tack there are outcomes of sporting participation that may be thought of as unintentional, or of secondary importance. And yet many educators and sports coaches see them as an integral part of the process of taking part in sport. I am referring to those personal qualities which may be encouraged by sports participation and which some consider of major lifelong benefit. As an example I will draw from a little book by Bill Bradley entitled *Values of the Game* (1998). Bradley was an all-American basketball player while at Princeton, Olympic gold medallist, a Rhodes scholar, and won two NBA championships with the New York Knicks. He later went on to serve as the Senator for New Jersey. So he has been an athlete, scholar and politician and is well placed to reflect on his experiences in basketball. In his book he describes some of the qualities that it imbued in him – perhaps the value of the game to him. By implication he believes that such qualities can be made available to all who commit themselves to sporting excellence. The qualities that he identifies are as follows:

- *Passion*: The sheer joy of performing skills and being a member of a team working towards a single goal.
- *Discipline*: A quality common to all great athletes shown in their determination to practice hard to achieve their goals.
- *Selflessness*: Helping others and helping oneself; for those in team sports it means putting the team before oneself to achieve a common end.
- *Respect*: A strong commitment to the team ethos, for other players and the requirements of the game.
- *Perspective*: The ability to act on the knowledge of one's strengths and weaknesses; to accept victory with modesty and dignity and failure with grace and determination.
- *Courage*: Willingness to give your all for the team, to play in spite of your fears and to return when you don't initially succeed.
- *Leadership*: Getting others to achieve what they might not have achieved without your influence.

- *Responsibility*: Accepting ownership of one's own weaknesses and putting them right.
- *Resilience*: Being able to learn from defeat or failure and to come back stronger.
- *Imagination*: Breaking out of the confines of the predictable, "thinking out of the envelope"; it allows good players to become great.

It is interesting that there is no place in this list of personal qualities for a sense of justice and fairness. Sport is structured by sets of rules which constrain certain types of behaviour and, in so doing, fashions the skills that are necessary to achieve the ends of the particular sport or game. Thus in association football players use the feet to play the ball and may not handle it, while in basketball the game is played only with the hands. Violations of the constraints result in penalties of varying forms. And yet players will try to violate them or take advantage of accidental violations in order to gain a tactical or even a scoring advantage which is undeserved. Hence, taking part in sport exposes the participants to a moral choice on many occasions – should I foul an opponent now? should I claim that I was fouled when I wasn't? Can I get a penalty shot on goal?

The influential German philosopher Immanuel Kant explored the nature of moral choice at length and had as a basic principle that moral decisions have no purpose outside of themselves, there is no utilitarian outcome to a moral choice. He said that there were two compelling principles with regard to the command of reason. The first is the *hypothetical imperative* which says that one must do *x* in order to achieve an end *y*. Thus the action of choice is determined, in sport, by doing anything to assist in winning whether within the laws of the game or not. So, it is acceptable to cheat, upset your opponent by wasting time, insulting her, or by taking drugs. The second principle, however, known as the *categorical imperative,* demands that one must act on the principle that the action should become law and, in essence, is the virtuous thing to do (Russell, 1945 / 1972). Thus to cheat, insult an opponent or take drugs, is non-virtuous and hence is immoral. These principles seem to me to embody the dilemma that faces athletes and coaches on a daily basis and also provide the opportunity for education through sport – to distinguish between right and wrong and act accordingly. A major categorical imperative for Kant was that no-one should use another as the means to his own ends. This, too, has significant implications for youth sport coaches (see Ryan, 1995).

7. Values in Physical Education and Sport

This brings me to the notion of the values that drive our choices in sport and life itself. The essentially elitist, outcome orientation of sport conflicts with the universalist, process orientation of physical education. In the world of sport, the pursuit of power, prestige and status demands success and children's broader developmental and educational needs may be subjugated to those values.

Thus we are faced with a dilemma to choose between different value sets. Values are the guiding principles by which we live our lives, or primary motivational forces. They are essentially beliefs that we hold about desirable goals or actions; they transcend situations and, hence, are universally applicable; they guide the selection of behaviour; and they can be ordered by importance (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). These characteristics imply, therefore, that all values are desirable but that we make choices about their relative importance. When we are faced with a value conflict we must make a choice, e.g. is it more important for me to be the best or to be the best I can be? There is an important difference between these two.

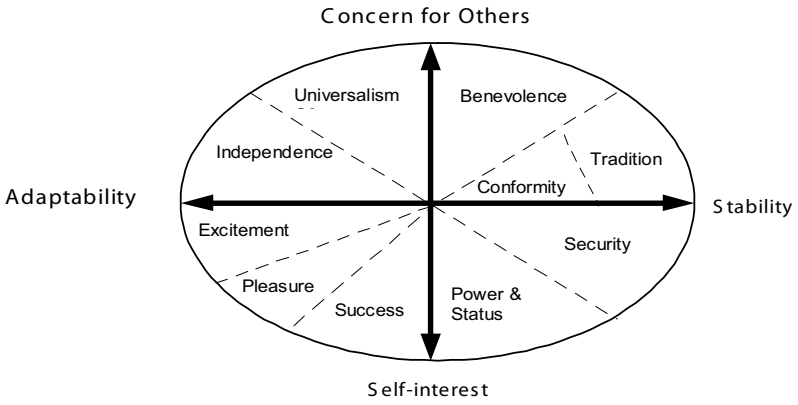

Figure 2. Structure and content of values applied to sport. (Adapted from Schwartz, 1992)

Values have both content and structure. Value content refers to the type of goal involved, e.g. competitive success. Structure refers to the relationships between different goal types. After a world-wide study Schwartz (1992) showed that values can be mapped around two major axes, each with two polar extremes (Figure 2). The first represents Self-interest to Concern for Others. The second represents Adaptability to Stability. Ten value types (domains) are located around these axes and are more or less compatible according to their proximity or separation along them. In the case shown, Achievement values are opposite values of Benevolence but compatible with Power, and values concerned with Power are opposite to Universalism, which is compatible with Benevolence – which represents those values concerned with care for others. Universalism is defined as demonstrating understanding, tolerance, and enhancement of the welfare of all; for example, both team-mates and opponents. Benevolence is defined as demonstrating similar concerns for those with whom we are in frequent contact, for example, team-mates (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000). Since values are ranked into systems, we can experience conflict when we are forced to choose

between opposing values that are similar in importance to us. So herein lies a paradox; we promote competitive activities in which the goal is to beat an opponent, while at the same time we ask young people to be altruistic. Schwartz (1992) considers that value conflicts rarely arise in everyday life but, in sport, it is common; the activity is essentially self-interested but requires selflessness in the expression of sportsmanship. This lies at the heart of the potential conflict between an activity as education and activity as sport. However, for adolescents Bardi & Schwartz (1994) have suggested that achievement values are located in the self-direction domain, which may mean that the conflict is experienced less among younger athletes.

Indeed, we have some data that suggests that young athletes do not encounter the problem. In a large survey of values in young athletes, my colleagues and I have found that most important values were Enjoyment followed by Personal Achievement, then a group of values concerned with fairplay, which we termed socio-moral values. The least important value, in a list of 18, was Winning (Lee, Whitehead & Balchin, 2001). We have since replicated this with other samples and get consistent results, so we are confident that it is reliable data.

8. Transmission of values

Teachers and coaches are an important influence on the values of children (Lee & Cockman, 1996) but it is important to show consistency between words and deeds and across different situations. In adults, changes in values are most reliably brought about by exposing discrepancies between self-image and perc eived value systems (Rokeach, 1973). In children, it is reasonable to propose that these two facets of personality might develop together because of interpersonal influences from significant others, such as parents, teachers and coaches.

For example, if the development of winners is the prime objective, as it is in elite sport, then we may emphasise competitive success above all else, encourage winners, reject those who do not measure up, and encourage competitors to take all possible advantages. However, if, as teachers, holistic development of young adults is the prime consideration then we will encourage every athlete to do his or her best, set individual targets for performance, support all athletes even when they fall short, and reward effort, commitment, good behaviour and personal improvement.

There are clearly important implications of this analysis; I will identify just three. First, the attitudes and behaviours that we see in our young athletes are strongly influenced by the values that we hold and transmit. Second, elitist values demand superiority – and only a few coaches work with the best; in the pursuit of competitive success, educational values may be overwhelmed. Third, sport forces a confrontation with values, perhaps as nowhere else.

9. The challenge

In summary, Schwartz' model, upon which I have based this argument, predicts that educational values are self-transcendent while sport's values are self-enhancing. Thus, young people are inevitably forced to make choices – frequently moral choices – all the

time in sporting activities. This in itself creates the paradox. Physical education and sport use the same activities for different purposes; a benevolent motive can produce unwanted -- possibly malevolent -- outcomes. Therefore, stronger links between school and sport force a confrontation of values and create a need for careful philosophical examination by those entrusted with the development of the programmes. The effects of programmes are brought about by not what we do but the way that we do it.

The challenge, therefore, is to be able to distinguish the Educational Process from the Sporting Performance Product, to treat each child as an end in itself and not as a means to an end. This means that teachers and coaches should provide programmes that have a sound philosophical basis, with clear objectives, and provide the best opportunities for each and every individual to develop whatever talent they possess and to promote personal growth as they progress from young people to adulthood. It means asking ourselves serious questions about what we are trying to do. For coaches this may be particularly enlightening. Some may see themselves as an extension of the school physical education programme which focuses on the development of full potential, however little that may be, of all the youngsters who turn up. Others may see themselves as being there to develop excellence in the few talented youngsters in their charge – and by definition talented youngsters are in short supply! Still others may see it as a career opportunity in which coaching successful young athletes is a step up the ladder to future glory. Your response to this challenge demands careful consideration and is revealing; it will clarify why you are coaching youngsters.

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