

Sport Education: Ideology, Evidence and Implications for Physical Education in Africa

Jimoh Shehu


To cite this article: Jimoh Shehu (1998) Sport Education: Ideology, Evidence and Implications for Physical Education in Africa, *Sport, Education and Society*, 3:2, 227-235, DOI: [10.1080/1357332980030206](https://doi.org/10.1080/1357332980030206)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1357332980030206>



Published online: 24 May 2006.



[Submit your article to this journal](#) 



Article views: 400



Citing articles: 8 [View citing articles](#) 

Sport Education: Ideology, Evidence and Implications for Physical Education in Africa

JIMOH SHEHU
Kenyatta University, Kenya

ABSTRACT *In recent years a neo-liberal sport education paradigm has sought to refurbish traditional physical education frameworks and operative rules. This paper subjects the sport education model to critical scrutiny and deconstruction. It is argued that this model deserves attention because it places the ethics and logic of secondary school physical education on shifting sands. More importantly, it has hegemonic implications for physical education praxis in African schools.*

Introduction

Since the early 1980s, there has been frequent reference to what one may call the 'global crisis of school physical education' (see for example, Siedentop, 1987; Locke, 1992; Stroot, 1994; Hardman, 1995; Macdonald & Brooker, 1997). This crisis refers to what is purported to be the marginalisation and repression of school physical education the world over driven amongst other things by the interests of global capital or resource limitations. Part of the attempt to both 'save' and reconstruct the subject matter of PE has been the rise of a 'new' framework of thought and action called sport education (Siedentop, 1982; Siedentop, Mand & Taggart, 1986; Grant, Trendinnick & Hodge, 1992). This model has been touted as a postmodern alternative to the problematic traditional model of teaching PE. But how plausible is this new paradigm? In this era of globalisation what are the consequences of sport education for physical education programmes in Africa and elsewhere? This paper is an attempt to review the positive and negative features of sport education and to interpret the status of the model as a cultural process with hegemonic implications.

The Parameters of the Sport Education Model

The concept of sport education grew out of the inspirational work of Siedentop (1982, 1987, 1992 and 1994) in the USA. His formulations and arguments have been explained, extended and expounded by a number of physical education scholars including Corbett, 1995; Locke, 1992; Sparkes, 1990; Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1992. The fundamental premise of this approach—the debatable propositions on the basis of which the model has been constructed—is that the essential character of physical education resides in the

cultural dynamics of sport and, as such, sport education should be the precondition for school physical education. To quote Siedentop *et al.* (1986, pp. 188–189).

The rationale for sport education rests on a few very basic and important assumptions. The first is that sport derives from play; that is, sport represents an institutionalized form of competitive motorplay. The second is that sport is an important part of our culture and that sport occupies an important role in determining the health and vitality of the entire culture; that is, if more people participate in good sport, then the culture is stronger. The third assumption follows from the first two. If sport is a higher form of play and if good sport is important to health and vitality of the culture, then sport should be the subject matter of physical education. The development of good sports-persons and the development of a better sports culture should be central to the mission of physical education.

Thus, this model involves a shift from physiologic (i.e. a logic based on physical education), organised around the subject matter of human movement in various forms, to a sportologic (i.e. a logical organisation of sport activities), whose primary concern is competitive events. Siedentop (1994) posits six distinct yet related elements of sport education that revolve around competitive situational contexts such as seasonal play and display, team representation, formation of strategies of practice and opposition, structured contests, broad-based culminating tournaments, intra-group and inter-group record keeping, coaching and rule keeping by the teachers. Figure 1 outlines the interface between sport contests and the ideal type of sport education model as formulated by Siedentop. Educational aims and objectives of this interface include:

- development of skill and fitness
- appreciation and execution of strategic play
- developmental participation
- experiential sport administration
- leadership training
- group orientation
- appreciation of game rituals and convention
- development of capacity to make reasoned sport-related decisions
- competence in sport officiating and training
- self-directed involvement in post-school sport.

Whatever the shortcomings of the model's categories of analysis, it is a scholarly attempt to rehabilitate an understanding of physical education which is frequently ignored by the defenders of logocentric, scientific or technicist school programmes (Newman, 1959; Barrow, 1976). The model is remarkable in the sense that it offers a metaphysics of sport sustained by play in order to set meaningful controls upon the putative historical shifts and confusions of traditional physical education. Evidence from three projects involving about 80 Australian schools shows that many teachers and pupils find the model enjoyable, student-centred, practical, motivational, competency-enhancing, socially grounded and tractable (Alexander, Taggart & Thorpe, 1995). The Australian data, however, suggest that the future of the model cannot be divorced from the confluence of salient contextual conditions: political economy factors; the antinomies of the model's latent and manifest ethics; changing constellations of entertainment variables; school priorities and teachers' self-interests.

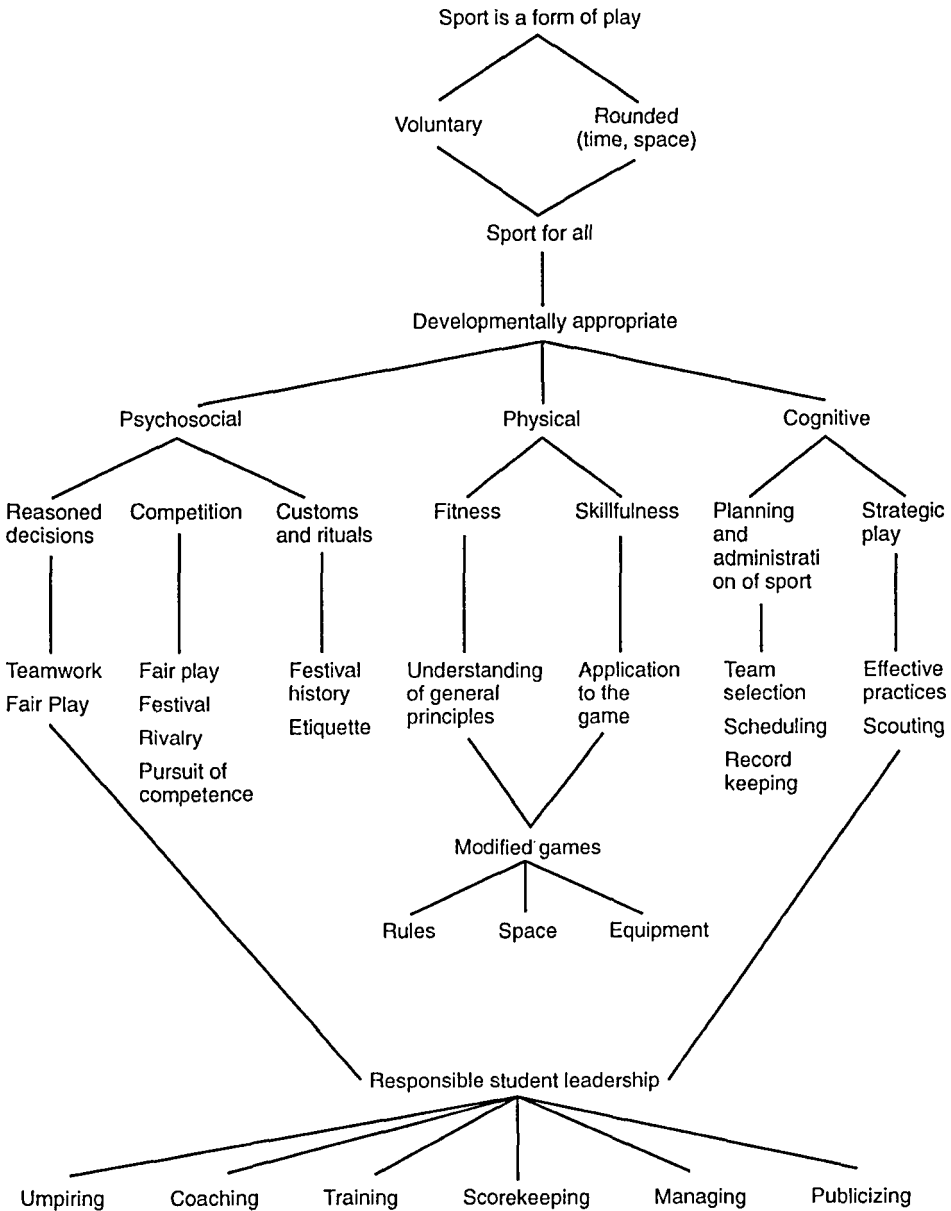


FIG. 1. Conceptual framework of sport education model (Siedentop, 1994).

Points of Agreement

One sees no reason to quarrel with sport education so long as it is not presented as the sole explanation of the logic of physical education. It is not persuasive even as a primary explanation. But to the extent that the model attempts to elaborate the logic of PE processes in a manner that would ensure the vitality of the root and branch of the subject one finds the following points acceptable:

1. **All skill practice and no play makes PE drab and boring.** Without doubt, it is PE classes that contain playful activities that are relatively more likely to generate and sustain the interests of students.
2. **Enjoyment increases the desire to learn.** Without doubt, a dismal or unpleasant learning environment decreases the intensity of effort brought to bear on learning tasks by young people. Hence if we want to invigorate students, PE interactions and transactions should be as enjoyable as possible.
3. **Physical activity should be learner-centred.** If psychology has taught us one thing, it is that meaningful learning must be self-forged. Thus, a student's capacity for learning PE is strengthened when he or she has opportunities to see through, think through, and work through instructional tasks.
4. **Judicious competition encourages competence-based self esteem.** We can use competition invidiously but we can also use it as a talisman to encourage personal growth of students. It is, therefore important, to make physical education classes occasions for appropriate self-reflected appraisal.
5. **Physical education must develop its essence from a societal fund of cultural values.** In other words, the programme must be based on the awareness of a socio-cultural hierarchy of values and ideals and their internal inadequacies or contradictions.
6. **Physical education must be reasonably faithful to its agenda of enhancing health and wellness, critical thinking, and virtuous cycle of social interaction.** Based on this, the subject matter of physical education must encourage innovative approaches to the promotion of quality (and/or quantity) of life, and, in particular, must be committed to the development of healthy, knowledgeable and sociable children and youth.

Limitations in the Sport Education Model

Of the impressiveness and the distinctiveness of the sport education model there can be no doubt. It is greatly to be desired that physical educators should theorise widely on epistemological and ontological issues because the profession routinely requires innovation and **reconstruction**. However, the sport education model is not, in my view, completely defensible. In what follows I am going to argue that, as it stands, it is flawed in a fundamental way. There is a large gap in its assumptions which can only be filled by substantially rethinking the philosophical character of the model. Yet, even if this is right, the model remains of major significance. The objections I shall make are intended only in a spirit of **dialectic**.

First, on the surface the model reads more like a school sport management strategy than a framework illuminating the structural and holistic character of physical education. And yet it is supposed to underpin the subject matter of physical education. What is the affinity of this model to education, physical or otherwise? Of course, it does not follow that sport education has no place in the school system. Whether this follows depends on what we mean by education and whether the features that characterise a sport education model (e.g. festive season, rituals and customs, training and contest) stand in its way. What does follow is that the subject matter of physical education cannot be **reduced** to sport, nor to any other form of physical activity. For while it is one thing to argue that within a school physical education programme, sport should be appropriately incorporated as a mechanism for evaluation, motivation or instruction, it is quite another to argue that, by itself, sport is sufficient to ensure the legitimation or institutionalisation of the

subject matter of physical education of which it is part. From the earliest time, the subject matter of physical education has not been in doubt. It has grounded itself in a discourse on the attunement of the sensory, motor and affective capacities of humanity. The methodological pathways to this attunement are many and varied. They include all forms of bodily exercise, physical activities or movement pursuits which enable us to flourish as human beings. The classical Athenians, who developed the first model of physical culture, left no one in doubt about what school physical education stands for. They operationalised it with obsessive vigour in their educational institutions. They let it be known that, in the final analysis, physical education was about contriving a beautiful mind in a beautiful body. They did not shy away from the notions of competition, contest or sport festivals but their idea of physical culture went beyond these. For them, a life immersed in regular, vigorous physical activity was a life imbued with *élan* associated with the ideal member of the human race. Thus, right from the time of the ancient Athenians, physical education had always been wider, not only than sport, competition, or rituals but wider than the physical itself. If sport is, then, only one of many possible concerns of PE, how do you elevate it to a position of primacy?

Second, the alleged solution to physical education's multiactivity—the intensification of coaching and sport organisation—may well be the origin of PE's problems. That is, the problem facing physical education arises not so much from the multiactivity of its programme structures as from the image of sport inflicted on PE. Physical education is permitted in many schools because it is codified in academic terms presupposing many domains of knowledge and science. But when the PE teacher's primary role is reduced to the role of a sport organiser, fundraiser, or referee—then one may expect the historical mission of PE to be betrayed. But it is sport, not PE, that is the origin of the crisis. PE is manifold, a totality of interconnected activities and models that disassemble this totality (or multiactivity) into bits and then fail to reassemble it, falsify reality. Concepts like 'sport', 'play', 'gymnastics', 'dance', 'aerobics', 'movement', 'games', 'athletics' name bits and pieces. Only by understanding these names as bundles of relationships and placing them back into the field from where they were abstracted can we hope to avoid misleading inferences and increase the coherence and self-confidence of PE.

Third, today there is really no 'dominant model' in physical education that needs replacing or throwing away (Locke, 1992; Sparkes, 1990) and there probably has not been for close to thirty years. Since the 1970s, diversity of model and framework has been the order of the day in an attempt to convey a more realistic image of what PE can and must do (Corbett, 1995; Macdonald & Brooker, 1997). So, to juxtapose sport education against a 'dominant model' is to make a mistake. The mistake is to think that the traditional model is based almost entirely on wrong assumptions while sport education is the flawless, new radicalism bucking the establishment PE. Sport education is embedded in the earlier models. That is, sport education cannot be appreciated without an understanding of the so-called dominant model(s). Perhaps even more than this, the earlier models are in some historical way constitutive of sport education in particular connections and interactions. So, if you cannot have sport education without its context and the context is the historicity of all previous PE models how then do you discard this context without annulling sport education's centre of gravity?

Fourth, the mere existence of a cynical view or distorted image of PE does not **necessarily** require that we start from scratch (Locke, 1992) or adopt sport education as the conceptual model for what we do (Siedentop, 1982). It is curious, this passion for nihilistic solutions among physical educationists. For example, the title 'physical education' is considered too grotesque by some analysts (Ojeme, 1984; Renson, 1990;

Cotzee, 1994) to justify several new paradigms that will replace it—lock, stock and barrel. Hence there is a kind of happy anarchy, where faculties seem to labour to invent a bewildering variety of frameworks and sub-specialisations as much to ensure their professional standing as to advance the discipline. This is not to say that the field of physical education needs no transformation or desedimentation. The point relevant to the discussion here is simply that the new model of today may become the conservative or dominant model of tomorrow. What do you do when sport education passes into the 'dominant repertoire'? Chuck it and try yoga education?

Fifth, the sport education model is cited as avoiding the taint of authoritarianism, as encouraging shared decision making. But we must not confuse liberalism with democracy or equity. Under sport education it is difficult not to be associated in some way with a team or its competitions. Consequently, it is difficult to imagine a situation of creative activity without a struggle for superiority or victory. In the end the only students catered for are the competitive ones. And if sport education favours the rivalrous students then those without inclination for scrimmage or competition rituals are likely to stand on the sidelines, missing out. Pretty clearly, sport education is no more or less democratic or inclusive in virtue of being student-directed. In fact, the model may be more impersonal and alienating given its emphasis on group contest systems.

The Hegemony of the Sport Education Model

Speaking in sociological terms, sport education really is not about the evolution of a culture (Siedentop, 1982) but is, instead, an ideological apparatus for the reproduction of a culture, the *laissez-faire* of competitive capitalism in the playground. The model is based on what one could call the **competition postulate**, that is, a non-empirical **a priori** principle that, given the prevailing market ideology, that is, the competitive ethos of Western society, it is reasonable to assume that the cultural evolution of humankind may be quickened if more and more people participate in sport. Thus physical education is to be treated like the market where students individually or collectively seek to maximise utilities and where athletic interests are strategised and promoted just like economic interests amidst intense competition.

The hegemony of the sport education model is easy enough to see. In the name of cultural evolution, the sport education model adopts prevailing political practice in the West and arbitrarily redefines physical education in terms of this practice. It represents issues of interest group competition as the salient issue of physical education and frames a discourse which is not really about PE. It does not deal with the issue of free, spontaneous, individual play or even the rights of individuals not to be included in a team or a contest. PE is no longer about working on a large canvas of human movement; it is merely a matter of facilitating sport groups which strive to outwit opponents or participate in game rituals. PE comes very close here to being reduced to the pursuit of *nosism*, that is, the plural form of *egoism*. Since sport educationists assume that sports are important to humanity, students are presumed to think of them as important too. The choice consists of determining whether the skills, competence and experience of the student qualifies him or her for the élitist or novice tournament. Thus, what we are faced with here is a good example of how the reproduction of a pre-fabricated idea operates from the general to the particular. What emerges is a sealed methodology, both in terms of its form and content. Under sport education, the class relation is a relation of skill owners. If one does not have a skill which has some strategic value for the team, one cannot participate in the game; one offers no athletic value and gets none. Each team

TABLE 1. Logic of physical education in African schools

Premises and conclusion	Example	Form
Major premise (self-evident proposition of the aim)	We want physically healthy school children	We want <i>A</i> (aim)
Minor premise (Enumeration of means)	There are several possible means to ensure physical fitness—PE, games, sports, dance, calisthenics, gymnastics, aerobics	There are several possible ways to obtain <i>A</i> ; <i>p, q, s, m</i>
Conclusion	Because several possible means are embedded in PE, we will integrate PE into the school curriculum	We choose <i>p</i> , as a means to <i>A</i>

is concerned with maximising utilities and rewards and the team members are only means to that end. In Western societies there is the tendency of commitment to the market to override commitment to democracy so that the less government tries to do beyond maintaining order, the better. Indeed, government cannot intervene without doing more harm than good. This characteristic of the market society is also evident in the workings of the sport education model. Not only free and innocent play but education, too, is subordinated to competitive drives, thus the teacher is cast in the role of rule keeper and competition facilitator. But by developing a structured and routinised system of competition is sport education not acting against the spirit of postmodernity? The so-called dominant model of physical education would appear to be much more replete with postmodernist assumptions, given its notions of multiactivity, diversity, contingency, uncertainty, choice, and transcendence.

Implications of the Sport Education Model for Physical Education Projects in Africa

In many Sub-Saharan African schools, the *raison d'être* of a PE class is health-related fitness. It is the occasion for manifold activities—dance, calisthenics, self-testing activities, dance drama, stunts, games and sport of low organisation. Exhilarating activity is seen as the prime physico-cultural reality, the engine that drives PE praxis. PE classes have minimal competition because they are about recreation and revitalisation of students. It has always been, and is still true today, that, from this perspective, school sport is defined as 'extracurricular activity', and consequently not intended to be dealt with during PE classes. Competitive sports are ideally articulated outside class hours or during annual inter-house or inter-school competitions. This separation of multiactivity PE and a monoactivity sport model attempts to privilege health-related fitness over sport-related fitness and to liberate the PE arena to the free play of extant and potential new activities.

TABLE 2. Logic of the sport education model

Premises and conclusions	Example	Form
Major premise (self-evident proposition of the means)	We have sport as an institutionalised higher form of play	We have <i>S</i> (sport as means)
Minor premise (enumeration of aims)	Through sport we can develop the ethos of competition, skill development, physical fitness élitism	There are aims that are inevitable consequences of indic form, <i>S</i> , namely, <i>a,b,c,d</i>
Conclusion	Because the evolution of our culture can be quickened by market-oriented education we will aim to enshrine only competitive activities in our PE programme	We choose <i>a</i> as a necessary result of <i>S</i>

The significant differences in the logical structure of the African prototype of school physical education and the sport education model can be expressed in terms of Aristotelian syllogism as shown in Tables 1 and 2. In the African prototype, a PE lesson is a moment of universality, the acting out of larger instructional units or movement tasks. There is a tendency towards holism here, but this is quite expected in educational systemic terms. Sport education reverses this logic completely.

According to the second syllogism, humankind can aspire to cultural evolution if more people participate more appropriately in sport (Siedentop, 1982). Logically, there is a tendency towards transnationalisation of sport-based PE in this, but this is quite predictable in global hegemonic terms. For the notion of sport education, as we have seen, is a child of industrial capitalism, the reproduction of life in society which is essentially a market. Contemporary Africa remains a far cry from this. Most African societies are still communal and it is this communality which defines teachers' and pupils' perception of PE, recreation and interaction in the playground. Nevertheless, the sport education model has an important role to play in African school but not as the subject matter of physical education. Rather, it can serve as an organising principle for the annual intra-school or inter-school sport competitions. However, it has to be articulated and mediated in an extraordinarily creative way by African PE teachers. To the extent that this happens, the model may open new possibilities of élitist school sport management in Africa without limiting the evolution and amplification of an affirmative physical education curriculum.

Correspondence: Dr Jimoh Shehu, Physical Education Department, Faculty of Education, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya.

References

- ALEXANDER, K., TAGGART, A. & THORPE, S. (1995) A spring in their steps? Possibilities for professional renewal through sport education in Australian schools, *Sports, Education and Society*, 1(1), pp. 23-46.
- BARROW, R. (1976) *Common Sense and the Curriculum* (London, Allen and Unwin).
- CORBETT, R.D. (1995) Methods and techniques for teaching educational aims of sport activities, *Journal of the International Council for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Sport and Dance*, 32(1), pp. 12-17.
- COETZEE, N.A.J. (1994) In search of a founded epistemology for human movement science, *International Journal of Physical Education*, 31(1), pp. 8-12.
- GRANT, B., TRENDINNICK, P. & HODGE, P. (1992) Sport education in physical education, *New Zealand Journal of Health, Physical Education and Recreation*, 25(3), pp. 3-6.
- HARDMAN, K. (1995) Present trends in the state and status of physical education: a global context, *International Journal of Physical Education*, 32(4), pp. 17-25.
- LOCKE, L. (1992) Changing secondary school physical education, *Quest*, 44(3), pp. 361-372.
- MACDONALD, D. & BROOKER, R. (1997) Becoming physically educated in high school: a program review, *Journal of the International Council for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Sport and Dance*, 33(3), pp. 60-63.
- NEWMAN, J.H. (1959) *The Idea of a University* (London, Doubleday).
- OJEME, E.O. (1984) Has the name physical education outlined its usefulness? *The Physical Educator*, 41(4), pp. 190-194.
- RENSON, R. (1990) From physical education to kinanthropology: a quest for academic and professional identity, *International Journal of Physical Education*, 27(3), pp. 10-24.
- SIEDENTOP, D. (1982) Movement and sport education: current reflections and future images, Keynote Address, *VII Commonwealth and International Conference on Sport, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance*, Brisbane.
- SIEDENTOP, D. (1987) High school physical education: Still an endangered species, *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance*, 58(2), pp. 24-25.
- SIEDENTOP, D. (1992) Thinking differently about secondary physical education, *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance*, 63(7), pp. 69-73.
- SIEDENTOP, D. (1994) *Sport Education in Physical Education* (Champaign, IL, Human Kinetics).
- SIEDENTOP, D., MAND, C. & TAGGART, A. (1986) *Physical Education: Teaching and Curriculum Strategies for Grades 5-12* (Palo Alto, CA, Mayfield).
- SPARKES, A.C. (1990) *Curriculum Change and Physical Education: Towards a Micropolitical Understanding* (Geelong, Deakin University).
- STROOT, S. (1994) Contemporary crisis or emerging reform? A review of secondary physical education, *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 13, pp. 333-341.
- TINNING, R. & FITZCLARENCE, L. (1992) Postmodern youth culture and the crisis in Australian secondary school physical education, *Quest*, 44, pp. 287-303.