

# A PHYSICAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

**John Cheffers**

*School of Physical Education, University of Boston, MA, USA*

Conference paper

## The 21<sup>st</sup> century

We must take the opportunity to change, to improve, to help people become fit and happy as they never have before. We must seize the moment to be healthy and free from disease, to be lively and vibrant and resilient. Brave words, worthy words, their application will surely give us quality of life. Unfortunately, many such epithets never get past the lip rolling stage in the lives of those who engage in high speeches and other political slogans. When it comes to issues that affect our lives deeply we are, often, shameless hypocrites. We launch into empty statements in response to weighty continuing problems. Eminent American philosopher, John Dewey, spent a lifetime lecturing against the evils of lecturing, yet his philosophy of learning by doing has been embraced by multitudes of educators and, in practice, has helped millions of students understand both cognitive and affective areas. But real quality of life is not something that can be dismissed with the latest 'ism'. From Creation, human beings have chased the "golden rainbow", searched for a "Shangri la", and gone to their destruction in search of

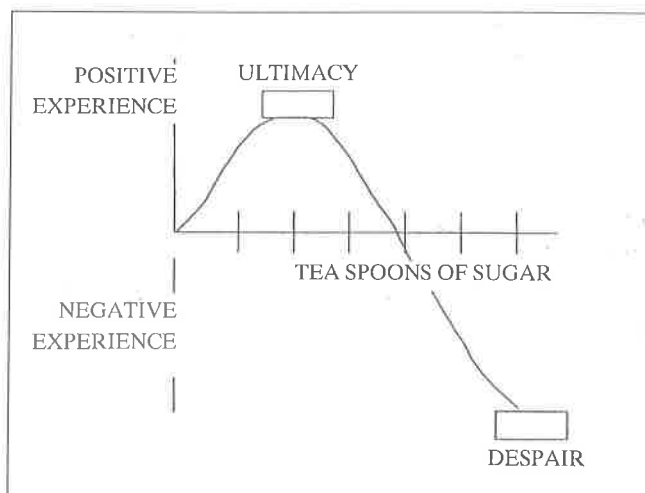
"holy grails". To some people, quality of life is the search or the process; to others it is the result. Few would quarrel with a statement that included both the process and product in finding an answer to the question 'How do I live better a rid enjoin those around me to enjoy their lives as well?' In a practical sense, human movement figures prominently in quality of life discussions; play, sport, games, physical fitness... In all its varied forms, movement contributes to laughter and sensory satisfaction in human beings. There is of course the inverted U in regard to enjoyment matters.

Too little and too much will result in chaos and despair and primitive closure will deny ultimacy in human experience. (Figure I, Ultimacy)

## PE curriculum and its contribution to the quality of life cycle

I believe we must avoid issuing grand, sweeping statements about the bizarre and seductive quality of life issues, and get down to bread and butter facts. The curriculum we plan for children has to reflect historical

Figure 1: Ultimacy and your cup of tea



needs, expert judgment on the part of teachers, and a curriculum that will both educate and inspire. This address will concentrate on the 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum. The 20<sup>th</sup> century has been important in that compulsory education has become a reality and a subject called physical education has not only materialized, but has had a hundred years of practice - much good has resulted. If I was to stand here before you, toe-lay, and say that the physical education curricula in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been a total failure, I would be guilty of committing the same crime that bleeding heart researchers commit when they see all history as failure. No, that is not the intention of this speech. What is obvious, however, is that everywhere we have made seminal mistakes and brought upon ourselves the fury of our contemporaries. We have enshrined the push-up, exemplified the star jump; punishment has been meted out in the form of running laps or we have sanctified repetitive, asinine drills, *ad nauseam*. Many an aspiring child has been turned off physical education and, in consequence, failed to recognize the importance of human movement as a life long requirement for excellence in living. In a general sense, we have closeted education into separate compartments, seeking to study with greater depth. In fact we have created little kingdoms with each specialty (math, science, music, literature, etc.) fighting for it's life to preserve the last minute of concentration and influence. This has divided staff rooms, and compartmentalized studies into unreal units, indeed, often, artificial boxes. If we are to educate the human being as a whole, as an articulate, fully functioning being, we must put the compartments back together again. Physical education must play its part. This turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century moment has loosened the ties on such historical restriction sufficient for us to glimpse the future. In advancing a five organizing centered curriculum, I have obviously called upon much that is already in existence and recognize the work of many educators around the world.

### What would a curriculum that directly addresses quality of life issues look like in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

1. It must recognize that Heart, Lung, Health (HLH) is critical for quality human existence.
2. It must recognize that Games, some new and some traditional, form an intricate basis of human activity.
3. The place of human movement in the general school curriculum must be recognized and appreciated. The 'linkage' of human movement with cognitive and affective structures is of critical importance.
4. The fourth area is the undeniable influence that competitive sports have in human existence.
5. The fifth conceptual construct takes one out of the school setting into the life cycle of community and home. Non-school activities can have as strong an influence on human movement experience as anything that we have enshrined in the compulsory world of regulated education.

Yet, they are school curriculum subjects just as math, language, science, and music are and form a core curriculum in so being.

Let us look at these five constructs in greater depth.

**1. Heart, Lung, Health (HLH):** The copious evidence in the research laboratories clearly indicates the need for movement which will exercise the heart and lungs on a regular basis. Children should move daily, from 40 minutes to an hour, in ways that promote human endurance. In this way, organs will be prepared, strengthened, fat cells restricted, and joy in movement introduced and experienced. Muscular endurance, which is a more specific form of extended activity, is also important. Typical examples are walking, jogging, running, cycling, swimming, skiing, and endurance games like soccer, basketball, and field hockey. Students often learn the basics of these activities in school but must be encouraged from the outset to incorporate this important center during their non-school times

also. Walking to school, exercising animals, daily chores, and other endurance movements pitch in to this center as well. Fortunately, one does not have to spend a lot of time convincing the curriculum skeptics that heart-lung-health is central, not peripheral, to human well being.

**2. Games:** Children will emulate the popular games of the day, whether the school sanctions them or not. Baseball, Soccer, Basketball, Track and Field, Hockey, Swimming will be played because their elders have modeled them. So, we must help children play games better and give them proper perspectives. These we call Traditional Games, games with fixed rules, but they are important.

The phenomenon of New Games also fits into this organizing center; here the games can be changed, substituted for, recreated, or modified in personnel as circumstances prescribe. The rules and regulations of new games are flexible, thus they can be cooperative, recreational, serious, capricious, challenging, resourceful, but they are always competitive.

I want to spend a moment on game theory.

To those of esoteric persuasion, the mention of the word games brings to mind human peripheral activity; something merely recreational; important perhaps for young children, useful during vacations, and perhaps necessary as a break from important school subjects and the tedium of school protocol. Perhaps this is a very mistaken view point. Many a thinker from Hessing to Callois to Wittgenstein has borrowed the concept of games to explain matters as divergent as simple play and as complex as language communication. George Sage, for instance, talks of a theory of sport being revealed through the media of play, games, and sport. To him, play is unshackled, creative human activity which has many forms and which takes place regardless of external human organization and management. It is individually driven, it is fanciful, serious, imitative, creative. It can represent stories or feelings; it can involve widespread material. Its forms can be as disparate as a child in a sand lot pushing a car or as mischievous as the office clerk playing tricks on the secretaries. When this play takes the form of competition with goals and learns and rules, we tend to call it

a game. There is no set length of time, it can be changed radically, and has, as its goal, immediate resolution. Two pick up squads playing "three on three" basketball at lunch time is a typical game. When games generate more serious components, such as schedules, fixtures, regular teams with referees and strict management regulation, they become institutionalized and this enterprise is called a sport. It is hoped that the wholesome elements of play will be incorporated into the fun and zest of a game and will remain with the same integrity once the enterprise becomes a sport. We could spend many hours debating this factor in modern society, but games are an essential part of human activity and the quality of life. Many philosophers have attempted to place games in that perspective. Aristotle linked the well ordered state with games and leisure. Sartre saw play as an outlet for mass activity. Merlo Ponte maintained the body needed something other than mere skills, but expressive development. Schiller expressed that play and games are totally absorbent and the type of creative enterprise that harmonizes the two important facets of human existence, the rational and the sensual. Ludwig Wittgenstein came to the conclusion that primitive language took the form of 'language games.' In his classic, unfinished text, *Philosophical Investigations*, he included a full list of games; "it includes obeying and giving orders, describing the appearance of objects, giving measurements, constructing an object from a description, reporting an event, speculating about an event, forming and testing an hypothesis, presenting results of experiments in tables and diagrams, making up stories, acting plays, singing catches, guessing riddles, telling jokes, translating from one language into another, asking, thinking, cursing, greeting, and praying." He came to the conclusion that when we see simple language games, we see activities, reactions which are clear cut and transparent upon which we can build more complicated forms of expression. Further, he maintained that words can only be determined as having meaning when their use is understood. In other words, the intricacies of language have meaning when examined in the context of how they are used. Perhaps the

same thing can be said about games in general. To those of esoteric persuasion, who deprecate the position of games in society, I direct two very simple questions: both children and adults play games with whimsical and serious intent, with a predictive meaning, and with emotional release - can we afford to ignore much behaviors and dare we underestimate their importance?

**3. Movement 'linkage':** The integration of human movement with other subject areas is not accomplished often but is rich in potential. When the physical educator sits down with the math teacher and those responsible for languages, art, music, and so on and they plan joint curriculum, everybody benefits and the children usually enjoy the experience. The covariance of physical education and sport with classroom subjects has been experimented with, even established in some schools, but needs to develop strongly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is my contention that one can not focus properly on any specific task without having a perspective on the meaning and use of that task. We must then develop bilateral thinking in our students and encourage them to reach out in many directions in order to focus better on their chosen objective. What better operation than to prepare the students for cooperative ventures with the gymnasium and the playing fields as their base? Each May, at Boston University, we take 300 inner city children from the Boston area to a residential camp in the forests and lakes of Maine. Table B outlines the program. It is obvious that the overnight camping, traveling experience featured, however, the following subjects are also centrally involved - physical education, health, dance, nutrition, math, geography, civics, language, zoology, science, and music. When the children return to their schools, many activities are engaged in which reflect the experience they had at camp and, in addition to the subject areas, the following issues are featured - home sharing, independence and interdependence, trust, responsibility, fun, self-worth, rhythms and singing, sensitivity to peers and the environment.

**4. Sports:** The current practices of providing intramural and inter-school sports must continue. We can improve their effect by

including more children and more sports but the nature of this aspect of the students' moving experience is sound. Concomitant emphases can be placed on values, structure, self discipline, teamwork, strategy, and unselfishness. Most people in this audience are aware of this organizing center and very familiar with its existence. Sometimes abuse reduces its influence but proper guidance and supervision can silence most critics.

**5. The Non-school Curriculum:** Non-school activities, endorsed or conducted by schools or other community institutions and churches, is often as important as activities held within the official school auspice. Hiking, climbing, expeditioning, rafting, camping, and explorations are excellent experiences for children during their growing years and adults who wish to add vibrancy to their lives. There is little doubt that the full range of emotional experience attends this important conceptual area. When students are part of the planning and the execution, they frequently enjoy it more.

### Final consideration

In reviewing these five organizing centers, some curriculum specialists will say - "What's happened to strength, agility, flexibility...", "How do we learn sports skills, etc...." My answer is that situation specific strength and agility training is contained within the five organizing centers and should not be overstressed. They are dealt with as and when needed. These five concepts cover human needs in Health fitness - they will spawn new behaviors and emphases in the schools. Obviously, the "2 x 40 minute, PE period" will not suffice. All teachers can help with daily heart, lung, health (HLH). They can set time aside each day to supervise walking, running, cycling, etc. If this is not done 3-5 times each week, little good will result. Linkage can take place during class time with authenticity and universal benefit. Games and sports usually occur when formal instruction has finished and non-school adventure type activities invite weekends and holidays as the most likely companions. The PE curriculum will look very different in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Quality of life is inextricably linked with worthwhile learning and wide ranging emotional experiences. Quality and responsibility in human behavior must go hand in hand, if community objectives are to be achieved. When Jimmy runs out of the forest, throws a couple of hand springs

and stands gleaming, " I climbed the rock and then absailed down without falling. I feel terrific!" This statement "I feel terrific!" is quality of life and our 21<sup>st</sup> century physical education curriculum had better produce this effect.

Table B: Linkage Program Boston University /Time Table - Boston University Human Movement Program - SED

**Holy Name School - Grade 6 / Theme : Island of the Blue Dolphin**

	<b>Monday, May 4</b>	<b>Tuesday, May 5</b>	<b>Wednesday, May 6</b>	<b>Thursday, May 7</b>
<b>7:00 a.m.</b>		Rise, Ablute	Rise, Ablute	Rise, Ablute
<b>8:00 a.m.</b>	Leave Holy Name	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
<b>9:00 a.m.</b>		Session III. 1. Sensitivity 2. Fish & Game 3. Challenge 4. Drama 5. Orienteering 6. Archery	Session V. 1. Orienteering. 2. Archery 3. Sensitivity 4. Fish & Game 5. Challenge 6. Drama	Performance of Play Island of the Blue Dolphins
<b>11:00 a.m.</b>	Arrive Agassiz			Leave the Holy Name
<b>12:00 a.m.</b>	Lunch			
<b>12:30 a.m.</b>		Lunch	Lunch	
<b>1:00 p.m.</b>	Session I. 1. Fish & Game 2. Drama 3. Orienteering 4. Sensitivity 6. Fish & Game	Session IV. 1. Archery 2. Sensitivity 3. Fish & Game 4. Challenge 5. Drama 6. Orienteering	Session VI. 1. Drama 2. Orienteering 3. Archery 4. Sensitivity 5. Fish & Game 6. Challenge	
<b>9:30 p.m.</b>				
<b>4:00 p.m.</b>	Session II. 1. Challenge 2. Challenge 3. Drama 4. Orienteering 5. Archery 6. Sensitivity	Recreation	Recreation	
<b>6:30 p.m.</b>	Supper	Supper	Supper	
<b>8:00 p.m.</b>	New Games	Night Strike	Dance	
<b>9:30 p.m.</b>	Cabins	Cabins	Cabins	

## References

1. Aristotle (1992). *Introduction to Aristotle* (Ed.) Richard McKeon. New York: Modern Library.
2. Cheffers, J. (1997). Tuesdays and Thursdays with Boston's Inner City Youth, *Quest*, 49: 50-66.
3. Eitzen, S., G. Sage (1996). *Sociology of North American Sport* (6<sup>th</sup> Edition). Dubuque, Io: W.C. Brown,
4. Gilbert, A. G. (1977). *Teaching the Three R's Through Movement Experiences*. Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing,
5. Melograno, V. (1995). *Designing the Physical Education Curriculum: A Self Directed Approach*. Champaign, Il: Human Kinetics.
6. Morgan, W.J., K. Meier (1988). *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport*. Champaign, Il: Human Kinetics.
7. Orlick, T. (1978). *The Cooperative, Sports and Games Book*. New York: Pantheon.
8. Plato (1991). *The Republic, Book VII*. New York: Basic Books Harper Collins Publisher.
9. Rabil, A. Jr. (1967). *Merleau Ponty: Existentialist of the Social World*. New York: Columbia University Press.
10. Sartre, J-P. (1990). *Essentialism and Human Emotion*. New York: Citadel Press.
11. Schiller, F.W. (1977). *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing.
12. Werner, P.H., E.C. Burton (1979). *Learning Through Movement: Teaching Cognitive Content Through Physical Activities*. St.Louis: C.V. Mosby.
13. Whitehead, A.N.. (1933). *Adventures of Ideas*. New York: Macmillan Company.
14. Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1968). *Philosophical Investigations*. New York: Macmillan.