

## **Evolution of Play Practice**

*The barber learns his trade on the orphan's chin.*

—Arabic proverb

This chapter provides a time line outlining the history, origins and the evolution of Play Practice. It aims to suggest that all teachers and coaches can be innovative if they are encouraged to value their own personal knowledge and experience.

The early years ... September 1957 to 1960. During these years Alan Launder was appointed Head of the Physical Education department at Wymondham Secondary Modern School in Norfolk, England. For an inexperienced teacher this experience confirms that, 'If you want to drain the swamp you must first tame the alligators'. The methods suggested in teachers college simply did not work for Launder as he began teaching in this context with adolescent boys, many of whom had already been labeled 'intellectually limited' by an archaic educational system and were simply serving their time before leaving school to find work at the minimum age of 15. With very large and diverse classes, poor facilities, limited equipment, a traditional physical education curriculum, no mentors to learn from and a school that had no specialist teacher of physical education for the three previous years, Launder realized the program had to be powerfully influenced by the responses of the students.

The students ready acceptance of new ideas, limited and ill-defined though they were at the time, contrasted sharply with their negative reaction to traditional methods. Cross country running provided the first example of this. It had only been included in the program because of a dearth of facilities and of staff available to supervise the traditional games afternoon, when on four days a week an entire year group of almost 150 boys appeared for a double lesson of one and a half hours. So it was incorporated into a rotation with basketball and table tennis. With three groups of students, each group did two of the three activities in any given week and completed the rotation the following week.

The idea of timing each boy on every run over a series of relatively short courses was the result of pure serendipity. Initially it came from the need to control the situation and ensure that boys did not simply 'vanish' for a period, while the notion of recording those performances came from

a request by a lad who wanted to know if he had improved his time since the previous run! The motivation that came from a simple recording process that focused on individual performances in a time trial and not the position in a race, quickly led to Wymondham becoming a major force in Norfolk school cross country running. Figure 1 shows Jim Ireland, the individual champion along with his five 14 year old team mates who won the 1959 Norfolk Schools Under 16 Championship; a feat the school repeated in 1960.

**\INSERT Fig 1 here\**

Wymondham winning team, 1959 Norfolk Schools Under 16 Championship

This experience helped to establish one of the fundamental principles of Play Practice. Students liked to be challenged, to succeed and to have their successes noted, they did not like to fail or be beaten and they certainly did not want to be ‘defeated’! Thus ensuring early and continuing success for each youngster became a critical aspect of Play Practice. What was interesting was that once youngsters had built their confidence through time trials and had begun to enjoy the challenge of running they were happy to compete at county and even national level. However it became clear that the notion of ‘success’ had to be redefined!

January 1958. The importance of major culminating activities first became apparent. Table tennis had been included in the curriculum because it was possible to involve up to forty boys at a time in the school hall and it was also a popular game in the community. In 1958 the Eagle Comic in Britain introduced a national competition for English schools in which every student who entered gained 1 point for their school; if they won their match and went into the next round they gained 5 points and so on up.

What the organizers had not accounted for was a school entering every student in the competition so that it had accumulated 450 points before a match had been played! By the time the winner emerged from its internal tournament, the school had already gained enough points to win the brand new table on offer, even before their champion had to compete against players from other schools.

This tournament then became a focus for improvement, enthusiasm grew and standards soared

and in 1959 the school not only won another table for its total points score, but gained a second table when its champion Roger Meadows won the individual boys title in London! Naturally the same system was introduced to Dr. Challoner's Grammar School in 1961, where 12 superb tables were built by the students - with money they themselves provided! Not only do many former students remember the joy of building those tables, but some are still playing competitive table tennis over forty years on.

September 1959 to April 1960.

When Alan Wade presented his revolutionary ideas on the teaching of football to a group of experienced coaches, he could take high levels of technical ability for granted. A few weeks later after attending this coaching course, Launder began to introduce classes of eleven to eighteen year old boys to the principles of tactical play. There was an immense variation in experience and technical ability in these classes and this experience led to two important insights. The first was that an intelligent application of the principles of play reduced the technical demands of a game. The second was that there is a tight relationship between a player's technical ability and the tactical possibilities open to them. This eventually contributed to the development of the play practice mantra – '*What is tactically desirable must be technically possible*'.

September 1960 to July 1967.

It became clear that eleven year old beginners could verbalize and begin to apply the concepts of penetration, support, width and depth in attack in soccer and could understand how these could be countered by the principles of defense.

April 1960 to July 1967.

When the timing approach to cross country running was taken to Dr. Challoner's Grammar School in 1960 it was immediately successful so that the school became the dominant cross country running school in Britain in the period from 1963 – 67. Running in the physical education program there was based mainly on courses that could be completed in less than fifteen minutes. **Figure 2**, is a copy of a class list from 1964.

**\INSERT Fig 2 here\  
1964 Class List.**

This system had the advantage that there was usually time in the remainder of the lesson for the students to play some of their favorite games. There is little doubt that this contributed to maintaining motivation and commitment! The important thing to note here is that there was no cross country club and no organized training sessions; boys simply ran as and when they had time; inevitably some began to run to and from school. In other words top class performances in cross running evolved entirely from a physical education program in which the importance of developing and maintaining fitness was recognized.

In 1965 Dr. Challoners had six out of the eight runners in the Buckinghamshire team for the English Schools senior cross country championships. In this 5 mile race, if they had been running as a team, the Challoner's school runners would have finished sixth out of 36 counties. In fact if John Gulson and John Newman (who were recovering from the flu) had been able to equal their positions of the previous year, the school team would have finished third behind only Yorkshire and Lancashire, the two largest counties in England, and ahead of other major counties such as Essex and Surrey.

**Fig 3.** shows Richard Melvern, Jeremy Stagg, Chris Murray and John Gulson after winning yet another major race.

**\INSERT Fig 3 about here\**

Performances of Under 15 year group in the Summer of 1967.

April 1962.

The idea of testing and recording in cross country running was transferred to track and field. Again the emphasis was on indirect competition, in which every student could 'win' simply by improving. This was the antithesis of the traditional pattern of competition in athletics, that is with one winner and many losers.

April - July 1963.

The concept of working technical models emerged as it became clear that it was impossible for

youngsters to master the advanced technical models typically used by elite performers of this great sport. Not only was there never enough time, but few children had the physical ability necessary to master these models, nor the desire to do so! This introduced the Play Practice mantra, *'What is technically desirable must be physically possible'*.

Working models of technique made it possible for students to experience virtually the whole range of events. Fig 4 shows the performances of the Under 15 year group of 110 boys in the summer of 1967. These data provided the initial scoring tables for the Five Award Star Scheme and the school became a powerhouse in track and field. Figure 4 shows the 12 boys from Challoners who were among the 60 boys and girls who represented Buckinghamshire at the English School Championships in 1967. Kazimir Kicinski (shot put) and Richard Stanczyc (javelin) were subsequently selected to represent England Schools.

**\INSERT Fig 4 here\**

Challoner's representatives for Buckinghamshire.

The school sports curriculum did not revolve solely around cross country running and track and field. For example 8 boys from the track and field ranking list shown in Figure 3 above, playing as a team for the county of Buckinghamshire, in 1967 defeated the London schools basketball team (which included 5 England international players) in an early round of the National Under 15 Championship. Indeed 4 of the boys shown in Figure 3 above were members of that team, while one, Steve Chappell, who went on to represent England as a pole vaulter, also played for successful school teams in soccer and cricket! It is also worth noting that John Gulson starred for Buckinghamshire in cross country running, track and field, basketball, cricket and soccer! July 1961 to July 1967.

During this period the School's annual Track and Field Championship reaffirmed the importance of a culminating activity, as a large proportion of the student population took part.

1959 to 1967.

With few in service courses in secondary physical education available during this period,

professional development came through the courses conducted by the national sporting associations. As a result the most significant external influences on what was to become Play Practice were coaches associated with these bodies.

So meeting Alan Wade, the Director of Coaching for the English Football Association at the Loughborough summer school in the summer of 1959 lead to an epiphany that occurred at the perfect time to help resolve some of the very real problems Launder faced in the early days of teaching. Wade's notion of using small sided games to teach the tactical principles of soccer met the needs of students to play, while at the same time ensuring that they were developing other aspects of skilled play – in other words practicing - without being aware of it! This was the most significant single outside contribution to the evolution of the Play practice approach to teaching games.

However other important influences during this period were;

In 1958, Jack Carrington, the Coaching Director for the English Table tennis Association, who stressed the importance of high levels of technical ability in racquet sports.

In 1961, Harry Crabtree of the M.C.C., who had developed methods which could be used to help large groups of children master the techniques of cricket.

1962, Tom McNab, Southern Counties Coaching Coordinator for track and field in Britain, who recognized the value of the innovative approach to teaching track and field being used at Dr. Challoner's, and developed it into the Five Star Award scheme that was subsequently taken up by 27 countries.

January 1962 to 1967.

Launder took parties of students from Dr. Challoner's on skiing holidays to Europe. On the first trip, as a complete beginner, he learned some important lessons that were to affect Play Practice. He became aware of the intense pressure to perform in front of the rest of a class when attempting a completely new challenge, of the frustration of having to spend considerable time waiting for ones turn to try again and the boredom involved in repeating the same technical exercise time and again. All of that paled into insignificance compared to the embarrassment of

falling over during an exercise.

This experience reaffirmed the importance of carefully selecting the practice environment to give beginners the best chance of success and the need to focus on other elements of skilled performance, such as the ability of the skier to select terrain that is appropriate to their ability. This insight led to the trek approach to introducing skiing outlined earlier. However above all, the ski experience reemphasized the importance of empathy on the part of the instructor.

1957 to 1967.

Other lessons were learned during this fantastic experience in two schools were that;

- It was possible to involve students of virtually any level of ability in enjoyable and challenging physical activities.
- Opportunity and encouragement were the keys to the emergence of talented individuals. Many youngsters had talent they had never been aware of. This was especially the case with distance running, which seemed to attract more than its share of what are now termed 'nerds' but who at that time were seen merely as studious youngsters, who had shown no prior interest in sports of any kind, nor it must be said, any particular talent for running.
- It was important to develop an ethos within the school where younger students could see the possibilities for themselves in the performances of the seniors.
- A school sports curriculum had to be broad enough to cater to a range of interests and abilities, but tight enough to ensure that students could develop the competence and confidence necessary for joining community clubs and so continue to participate in sport when they left school.

It is also worth noting that the commitment to distance running at Challoners gradually morphed into a general interest in health and fitness throughout the whole school even though this was not a planned outcome. Many issues, most notably that of smoking, were addressed and this eventually led to a policy that staff members were not allowed to smoke within sight of any student!

However perhaps the most important thing learned from these teaching experiences was that there are ‘talented’ youngsters in every school! All that was required for them to begin to realize their potential was opportunity and encouragement.

1967 to 1968.

Lauder moved to Western Kentucky University, to study for a masters degree in education. The major advantage of this experience was that it provided an opportunity for deep reflection on the previous experiences. In both of these schools, Lauder had been the sole physical education teacher for much of that time. This meant that during any given week he taught every one of the three classes in each year group twice as individual classes, and once as a total year group – the ‘games lesson’. This demanding program, with never more than one free period a week, along with coaching school sports clubs and teams for up to 15 hours a week ensured that Lauder had almost double the student contact that many young teachers have in the same time frame. This provided an almost unique opportunity to try out, and where necessary alter, my methods in the course of a single week! This matches the process Dawkins suggested was an experiment, in that you do something, you manipulate, you change something in a systematic way and you compare the change either with a control – or with a different change. This was precisely the process employed in the evolution of Play Practice, albeit unconsciously.

1968 to 1970.

Lauder was the physical education teacher at Western Kentucky University Elementary school where he introduced students to movement education, movement and music, dance drama, folk dance and games, including soccer. This experience reconfirmed the importance of empathy, enjoyment and fun in physical education experiences.

1970 to 1973.

Lauder taught the PE 354 at Western Kentucky University. This was the sole required course in physical education for elementary education majors, and this experience confirmed that adults enjoyed participating in and teaching, these same activities.

1968 to 1970.



During this time Launder was the Coach of the University Junior High School basketball team. While this may not seem to be especially relevant, it provided one significant insight that has impacted the teaching of invasion games in the Play Practice model. It became clear that the eponymous 3 v 1 fast break drill employed by almost every basketball coach could be turned into a game that could be used to develop many elements of skill in a wide range of other sports including soccer, lacrosse, field hockey and Australian rules football. This was the origin of the ‘continuous 3 v 1 ‘Go for goal’ game.

1967 to 1973.

Launder was the Field event coach at Western Kentucky University. Another seemingly irrelevant experience, but coaching international caliber athletes in this program reinforced the fact that ‘What is technically desirable must be physically possible.’

**Figure 5** shows Chuck Einix, an all American in the discus who combined great power with exceptional technique in the discus.

**\INSERT Fig 5 here\**

What is technically desirable must be physically possible

In 1973, Launder published the article, ‘Soccer for schools, a modern approach’ after introducing beginners to soccer in basketball crazy Kentucky suggesting, ‘*Soccer should be introduced very simply in a modified form that meets children where they are in terms of their skills, needs and interests.*’ And, ‘*The concepts of a team, of playing in a certain direction, scoring a goal, attack and defense, change of possession and out of play, with its acceptance of a bounded playing area, are important both to soccer and to many other games. In addition children can begin to see a need for rules and hopefully develop an awareness of such difficult concepts as the rights of others and fair play. Finally this chaotic game lays a real foundation for understanding soccer and of the skills needed for success in it. Both logic and experience suggest that this approach to introducing soccer is far better than static one at a time lead up games, which in fact lead nowhere and makes far more sense than practicing isolated skills (sic) which can never be used in the game. It goes on, Help players develop further by teaching the offensive (tactical) principles of width, support, movement and penetration and the defensive principle of delay. Without some understanding of these (tactical) principles the game will tend to remain a chaotic*

*jumble in which there will be no time and space for players to control and kick accurately.* ’  
(p.26)

1957 Onwards.

A major influence in the evolution of Play Practice has been the very obvious popularity of pick-up games, which are to be found everywhere there are at least two people and a ball of some kind. Played with minimal equipment in any available space, with no officials, uniforms, time limits or prizes, pick-up games give everyone and anyone a chance to play. It is likely that at any instant, more people around the world are playing in informal games of this kind than in official competitions. One of the key concepts that emerged from an assessment of pickup games was that if a learning situation was to be really useful, failure must be accepted and even legitimized.

1982.

Launder attended the Loughborough Summer School and had the opportunity to meet Len Almond, Dave Bunker and Rod Thorpe and consider their ideas on the teaching of games for the first time. Given that I had been employing tactical approaches to the teaching of soccer and basketball since 1959, the concepts they presented were not as revolutionary as they appeared to be to the academics who subsequently chose TGfU as a focus for research. However, their innovative sector game approach to teaching cricket was incorporated into Play Practice, with the prime emphasis on technical development rather than tactical understanding. Len Almond’s classification of games was also drawn upon in this text.

1973 to 2000.

During this period of time Launder was the National pole vault coach for Australia. This experience reinforced the tight relationship between technique and physical capacities, the place of ‘understanding’ in the effective development of technique and most especially the need for learners to make a determined commitment to mastery if they are to progress.

The next significant influence took the evolutionary process back to where it had all begun, which was to find ways to help students at the University of South Australia cope with the reluctant and resistant learners they met during their extended teaching practice blocks. This

problem was being exacerbated by the broadening of the physical education curriculum and its extension to senior level students in South Australian schools. As a result student teachers were required to plan and teach curriculum units in activities they had never experienced and had to deal with students only two or three years younger than themselves.

Both issues were addressed by with the use of an elective unit in the program as a supplementary practical course where innovative approaches to teaching could be explored. Given the increasing problems in schools the process was initially driven by the need to have youngsters playing a game or meeting a challenge as soon as possible in a lesson. With many games this could only be achieved by simplifying them!

So in 'target table tennis' the tactical demands are eliminated, allowing players to begin to master the techniques that are critical to success in this Olympic sport. Conversely 'mittball', also created at this time, minimizes the technical demands of Lacrosse and enables beginners to begin playing a game that 'feels just like lacrosse'. At the same time an analysis of touch lead to an approach that focused on the primary rules of what is fundamentally a running game, in fact a game in which passing the ball is almost a last resort.

When a group of high school seniors chose American football as an extended elective of twelve lessons, the student teacher was faced with unique problems that could never be completely overcome, if only because of the equipment requirements. Where to begin? The solution was to consider the clients! What did they want to do in this game? Block? Tackle? Not really! They wanted to throw the ball, catch it, or run with it, in that order! This lead inevitably to the approach which evolved from one on one games.

Golf was also being added to the curriculum in many schools but all too often a golf lesson in the school grounds deteriorated into aimless hitting into the distance. The simple solution was to focus and enhance practice by marking out replicas of some of the most famous greens in golf on the school grounds. While the length of the holes was reduced, because students would only be using seven irons or nine irons, this brought a fantasy element to what could be a mundane exercise. Personalized tests were set up using distance and accuracy challenges to represent

situations in the game or specific holes.

Archery, which had become a popular elective in South Australia, was another sport where it was necessary to critically review accepted teaching methods. Accepted practice was to begin with very close targets; unfortunately this encouraged the development of dead end techniques in both aiming and in drawing the bow. It also ignored the fact that there is immense satisfaction in watching an arrow soar away into the sky and in seeing how far you can make it fly. At the same time this exercise provides the most dramatic lesson possible about the potential danger of what, after all, is a weapons system. The solutions arrived at, may not be possible for every school but they represent an attempt to improve the motivation, understanding and performance of students through the use of interesting challenges. For example attaching balloons to the regulation target was a great success because now accuracy was loudly rewarded!

In games like cricket, baseball and softball the biggest problem is that few players are involved at any one time. So here we took up the sector game approach developed by the talented trio at Loughborough. However while they had suggested that these games should be used to develop tactical understanding, Play Practice employs them primarily to develop technical ability. This simply reflects the fact that our analysis of striking and fielding games showed that they are fundamentally 1 v 1 games, so technical ability and **not** tactical understanding is the crucial factor in success, especially with beginners.

Because of the place of Australian Rules Football in South Australian culture, it was inevitable that many of the girls classes would choose it as an elective, even though at that time few women played it competitively. So Play Practices were created that eliminated the sometimes brutal, body contact common in this great game. The first priority was to minimize the technical demands of this great game. This was done by ensuring that, where kicking the ball was involved, the girls had plenty of time to focus on the task.

The culmination of the play practice approach is to use 'action fantasy games' to ENHANCE practice in both individual and team games and so give all youngsters the chance to experience the magical moments that Novak alludes to. The concept of action fantasy games evolved in an

attempt to motivate groups of youngsters of varying ability to practice purposefully. The seminal influence came once again from the informal pick-up games played around the world. In these games youngsters love to emulate their sporting idols and to take on their identity when playing. Indeed the struggle to 'be' a particularly favored hero is often as hard fought as the game itself.

The story of the development of action fantasy games is especially interesting because it clearly demonstrates the gradual evolution of an innovation and confirms the importance of reflection. In 1982 a preservice teacher working with table tennis in the Lab school environment found that children rapidly lost interest when one player was dominant in a game. To counter this, at a time when games were played to 21 points, the idea of starting games at 15 - 15 instead of from 0 - 0 was introduced; this meant that it was impossible for the points spread to blow out. After the first game the players agreed on a handicap; so that the second game might start with the score at 18 - 15. For the next game the handicap was again adjusted where necessary.

The next step occurred when Fantasy games were put onto cards to solve a common problem in the teaching of games where large numbers of students are practicing, especially when they are working in pairs as in tennis. This notion was stimulated when observing a student teacher conduct a tennis lesson at a local high school; after presenting the practice task the teacher moved away to provide feedback to students at the extremities of the area. Almost immediately the lads in front of the supervising lecturer who was sitting on a nearby grass bank began to belt balls all over the place! The latter intervened, and not knowing the class, suggested that to the boys that they should at least make an attempt to improve, even if they found the practice difficult. They were horrified and blurted out that they played in a local club and were the best players in the class - the practice was just too simple and boring for them to make any commitment! Clearly this problem had to be resolved - and the solution was found invaluable across a number of scenarios.

This approach also solved a problem where the students were also widely dispersed on tennis courts in three different areas at Burra High School in South Australia. This meant that it was impossible to guarantee one of the key elements of management, the proximity of the teacher. It

was soon discovered that fantasy games kept children engaged and on task even when the teacher was not in the vicinity! However their popularity was such that the concept was rapidly expanded.

The curriculum unit on “Bicycle maintenance” developed by a third year student, the late Sam White, is surely a classic ‘fantasy game’. In 1984, Sam, an Adelaide student teacher, was required to teach a unit of work dealing with the maintenance of cycles and safe highway riding. To encourage purposeful and careful riding habits with a class of difficult boys, as well as to ensure perfectly maintained cycles, he created the “Tour de West Lakes”, which was the name of the area around his school. Sam modeled his “race” on the world-renowned Tour de France and brought to the school as much information as he could find about this great sporting event. Each lesson included a ride of several miles that made up a “stage” of the “race”. To eliminate racing and its attendant dangers, Sam used the beautifully simple device of determining the finishing position and time randomly. As the riders finished each stage, they picked a card from a box that allocated a position and riding time so that the student who finished first might well draw a card that placed them last! This arrangement made actual racing pointless, and, when combined with a system of time penalties for traffic offences or careless riding, it ensured that the students rode sensibly and safely. Naturally Sam also had a time bonus system for all bicycles that were well maintained.

Prizes were awarded for stage winners, and the race leader, as in the tour de France, wore the famed yellow jersey. There were special sections for “sprints” and “hill climbs” as in the real tour, even though not a hill of any kind could be found within 15 miles of the school! Stage results were published and a well-organized presentation of prizes took place at the end of the “race”. Though there is no research evidence to support this, we believe that few of the children involved will quickly forget this experience.

The lesson here is that even pre service teachers can do amazing things if they are given a model upon which to base their ideas and the opportunity to put those ideas into practice.

1973 to 1995.

Lauder's continued work at the University of South Australia featured heavy teaching loads (common to virtually all members of staff in the School of Physical Education at that time) involving student contact of over 20 hours a week, a commitment to coaching the women's basketball team and working with track and field athletes up to Olympic level. This meant that there was never time to draw the elements of Play Practice together into a coherent package during this period. However, in 1991 after presenting papers at the 1990 Commonwealth Games Conference and the 1991 AIESEP Conference in Atlanta with the theme "Minor Games, Mini games and fantasy games too!" it became clear that there was a need to find a single term that captured the essence of what was clearly an innovative approach to teaching sport. After some considerable reflection and discussion the term Play Practice was selected. In 2001 the book "Play Practice, a games approach to teaching and coaching sports" was published. Perhaps the delay in the emergence of this innovative approach was as natural as it was inevitable. As Matthew Syed (2010, p 98) observed in his excellent book 'Bounce', *'But careful study has shown that creative innovation follows a very precise pattern; like excellence itself, it emerges from the rigors of purposeful practice. It is the consequence of experts absorbing themselves for so long in their chosen field that they become, as it were, pregnant with creative energy. To put it another way, eureka moments are not lightning bolts from the blue, but tidal waters that erupt following deep immersion in an area of experience.'*

It was during this time, (in 1990) that Wendy Piltz joined the staff at the University of SA and began working with Alan on refining and expanding the principles associated with Play Practice. Of note was the development of the National Coaching scheme for Lacrosse which was designed using Play Practice. This was a significant in highlighting the importance of clearly defining aspects of skilled play for the sport, applying the tactical principles of play and using the P's of Pedagogy in the coach education curriculum. The other focus of research and development during this time was in the area of 'bench coaching' with an emphasis on improving the capacity of teachers and coaches to observe and make sense of what is happening in the chaotic action of the game. Results indicated the importance for beginning coaches to use a guiding template to filter and make sense of the game and both the principles of play and the elements of skilled play were reported as being a valuable template to support this observation and analysis process (Lauder and Piltz, 1999; Piltz 1999; Piltz 2004).

2001- 2012

Over the last decade the essential features of Play Practice have been further refined, applied and coherently embedded into the pre-service teacher education program in Health and Physical Education at the University of South Australia by Wendy Piltz. The four Models and the key processes described in Play Practice have been fully integrated into the developmental sequence of learning presented in the Health and Physical Education courses of study. Of significance is

1. Sustaining a program of study in HPE featuring practical workshop experiences where content knowledge is integrated with pedagogical understanding. In these courses the model of skilled play with its clear definitions has been embedded it is used as a framework for analysis, planning and observation.
2. Aligning the lesson planning proforma with the broader concepts of skilled play, shaping learning contexts, focusing and enhancing the play. Emphasizing the importance of fair play and resilience when designing learning challenges.
3. Clear connections in the unit planning process to the level of the learner and the key elements of skilled play, with implications for the teaching and learning process. Consideration to designing engaging learning settings using the process of shaping and focusing to assist with teaching 'in context'. An emphasis on strategies for enhancing the environment to engage diverse participants, generate success and build individual competence & confidence.
4. The working models of Play Practice including 'skilled play', the 'P's of pedagogy' and the 'process for teaching' are used by pre-service teachers to improve their professional action and reflection. They are incorporated into a series of informative focus sheets used by pre-service teachers to guide and expand their post teaching reflection.
5. All of the HPE courses are designed from the perspective of learning as a complex process and feature integrated and dynamic environments that challenge and enable learning to emerge. Best practice for teaching and learning is modeled. Students are immersed in a structure for improving professional practice as they apply the processes of shaping, focusing and enhancing in a 'lab school teaching' context as the prime learning experience for their development. The pre-service teacher is central in this process and they are responsible for their learning as they plan, teach, observe and reflectively



evaluate their experiences. The opportunity for learning is carefully structured using all aspects of Play Practice to ensure the students are engaged and progressively challenged to expand their capabilities and depth in understanding of teaching and learning.

During this period of time it has been possible to reflect on and evaluate the structural framework used in HPE teacher education, including the key learning experiences and also to monitor the progressive development of pre-service teachers as they move through the program. The opportunity to undertake this practice based research focusing on the perceptions of pre-service teachers and the efficacy of this approach for their development has provided important information for teacher education. These studies undertaken by Piltz (2006: 2008a&b) indicate:

- There is a positive relationship between the embedded structure of Play Practice and the development of personal and professional confidence and competence of pre-service HPE teachers.
- There is overwhelming support for the value of the working model presented by the P's of pedagogy. It is used effectively by pre-service teachers as a framework to assist in planning, reflective evaluation and providing feedback. It helps individuals to identify significant factors influencing teaching and learning, empowers them to monitor and develop teaching capabilities and builds their self- confidence.
- The model of skilled play is significant in helping pre-service teachers to teach games effectively. Pre-service teachers indicated how the clarification of terminology improved their understanding of sports performance and assisted their ability to analyze activities. This in turn lead to an increase in confidence and understanding of how to structure relevant game-like learning experiences, improved understanding of the process of progressing learning and increased ability to provide authentic feedback. The model also helped pre-service teachers to observe and identify what the learners are able to do as a basis for the students' learning. Pre-service teachers also discovered that though using the model to guide the focus for teaching and learning, it freed up cognitive space and enabled more time to be available for increased interaction with individuals in the class. More recent evaluations of students who were introduced to this framework as a part of a course of study on teaching and learning games reported similar findings (Piltz & Launder, 2012). Students indicated they gained an increased confidence in their ability to

analyze sports, an improved understanding of the complexities of different activities and a better appreciation of how all components interact and influence each other. The model also impacted on their perceptions and understanding of the differences existing between beginner and elite performers and provided them with strategies for simplifying learning tasks to enable early success for novice participants. Many students had not considered *fair play* and *resilience* as key aspects of skilled play. The model helped them to develop a deeper understanding of these elements and a better appreciation of the significance of foregrounding fair play and resilience, when introducing children to games and sport.

- The process of shaping was seen as significant for guiding planning and designing games and challenges to suit the needs of learners. Focusing was used to draw attention to the key elements, as a guide for observation, a trigger for questions and it provided an orientation for analysis and feedback. It also enabled students to consider ways to personalize the game and adapt to the diverse needs of learners.
- The concept of enhancing the play drew attention to the importance of learner engagement and the need to provide a relevant and positive learning environment.
- Pre-service teachers reported positively on the sequence of experiences provided in the program noting an increased ability to cope with the complexities of teaching and increased confidence in the planning, teaching and reflection cycle. They also reported fewer management issues when they structured learning experiences to engage, to maximize participation, to foster success and enjoyment. This in turn established a ‘virtuous’ positive cycle of success where they enjoyed the process of learning to teach and began to build their confidence and commitment to their professional role.

The ‘process for teaching sport’ is one of the Play Practice models that is continuously evolving. The purpose of this model is to provide a guiding framework to support professional practice and to present this in a way that is easy for novice practitioners to understand and relatively easy to employ when facilitating learning. The model reflects the perspective of learning as a complex social process where engagement and the power of play feature significantly in establishing an intrinsic, self-determined motivation for participation. The process begins with an analysis of the activity by identifying which elements of skilled play are important in a particular sport. In addition, educators must determine which elements should be emphasized with a specific group

of players, especially if they are beginners. The process of simplifying, shaping, focusing and enhancing the play can then be undertaken to facilitate learning. During the last decade this process has been applied to a diverse array of activities resulting in an adaption of key terms associated with the aspects of skilled play to accommodate a diverse range of activities including dance, surfing and cycling. In these activities the concept of game sense as defined by Launder (2001) has been applied and adjusted to the specific context so the terms 'cycle sense', 'wave sense' and 'musicality' have been developed accordingly. Pre-service teachers report on the value of these definitions for helping them to analyze and plan for teaching and learning this vital component in these activities.

One of the greatest strengths of Play Practice is that it is continuously evolving and it provides a basis for ongoing connection and enjoyment in one's professional work. As teachers and coaches develop their understanding of the principles of this approach they can apply key concepts to various degrees into their practice. This encourages innovation, builds confidence and enjoyment in professional practice and when this is shared in professional communities it can sustain a positive climate for teachers and coaches. Play Practice provides principles for engaging and developing skilled players, applicable to all levels of participation across a wide variety of sports. It provides a basis for ongoing professional development for teachers and coaches, promotes enjoyment, challenge and innovation in these important roles.

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