

## Teaching Today, a podcast from The Teaching Council

### Episode 5: What is the role of sport in education?

**Host:** David Balham

**Panelists:**

**Celia Fleck**

**Alissa Murdoch**

**Garry Carnachan**

**David Balham:** Hello everybody and welcome to the Teaching Council's podcast, my name is David Balham. Our topic today is what is the role of sport in education – is there too much sport in education, is there too little, how does success on the sports field translate to success in the classroom, what about children who aren't interested in sports, or teachers for that matter. I've got three experts in the field sitting here in the studio with me today. If you could all introduce yourself, please and just tell me what your role is in sports in education. I'll start here on my left with Garry.

**Garry Carnachan:** Thanks, David. Garry Carnahan, currently the Executive Director of New Zealand Secondary Sports Council, previously a long time in teaching, including when I finished in teaching I was principal of a secondary school in New Plymouth and have been working in sports since then, including in the Sports in Education programme which we instigated along with Sport NZ back in 2012.

**Celia Fleck:** Mōrena, I'm Celia, Celia Fleck and I'm currently a PE Curriculum Facilitator and that's employed by University of Auckland but based here in Wellington. So, after 19 years teaching in secondary school in health and physical education, I'm now sitting alongside a couple of projects that SportNZ is funding. One being Play Sport which is where I provide a lot of PE curriculum support for a lot of primary, intermediate and secondary schools so it's really interesting now looking across that whole primary, intermediate and secondary space, getting familiar with that and also Sport in Education as Garry mentioned. In my last three years in secondary school I was a project leader and now am supporting schools throughout the country with the Sport in Education. My other hat is with PENZ, Physical Education New Zealand. Thanks for having me.

**Alissa Murdoch:** Kia ora koutou, Alissa Murdoch. I'm currently at Avalon Intermediate. I'm a classroom teacher, I'm a team leader. Prior to that I was 15 years at Taita College, and the last six of those as Head of PE and Health. At my role at Avalon I've just been appointed as the across school teacher in our Taita/Stokes Valley Kāhui Ako. That means I'm working with seven schools in our cluster as the conduit, really, between principal leads and achievement challenges and what's happening in schools. In my classroom teacher role, I've taken over, I guess,



leading sport in education in a primary setting with Year 7s and 8s.

**David Balham:** Thank you all, you're obviously all keen advocates of sport in education, but what makes it so important? Why do kids come to school and learn about sports rather than the things more traditionally associated with education - the three Rs.

**Garry Carnachan:** I think it's not so much learning about sport, David, it's sport provides a double-edge opportunity. One is to learn through sport: so, what can sport teach us and if you think about right from the start and you look at the front end of the curriculum around participating and contributing and relating to others and sport is certainly a vehicle and a context to learn through. And then there's learning in sport, so if you take part in sport and learn to be part of a team and leadership and a whole lot of the characteristics necessary to be part of a sporting team then a lot of those things are transferable skills to classrooms, to work, to home, to everywhere else. So, it's not so much learning about sport, it's learning in sport and learning through sport.

**Celia Fleck:** Yeah, I would agree with that view though sometimes I think we have to be careful with the language and how other people hear things. So, to me sport is that motivating and engaging context but a lot of the time, especially if it's in curriculum, that's going to be delivered through curriculum learning areas. So, physical education will use it as a context or other curriculum areas might use it. We have to be careful about how we are positioning sport and that people aren't mistaking sport for a curriculum as such.

**David Balham:** Well, that's a very good point. It's easy to see how sport fits into a PE class as part of the curriculum but how, for example, does it fit into a maths class. Alissa, you've been working in the Sport in Education programme in your own school. What's your view?

**Alissa Murdoch:** I would definitely piggyback the last two comments. So, contextualised learning which may mean that a maths class looks at where we're measuring not your desk that you're sitting at but you're going and measuring the netball court, the sub-boxes for touch or the marking for Ki o Rahi field and doing the geometry of Ki o Rahi. So, I would definitely say the contextualising of learning and then the active learning side of physical activity of where kids are and it may be more sport but it certainly is not at the expense of academic learning per se because it is alongside and you're sitting at the wrong table if you don't think it's as important as any other learning that is happening in the school. So, the maths class would be contextualised in a sporting context. So, that's making meaning for kids so when we're doing measurement, shapes, distances, we're not randomly picking some stats that come out of a textbook. We go out and measure heart rates, we measure beep test results perhaps, or laps or lengths, and we make real meaning for kids through sport and I'm going to add physical activity, not just sport.

**David Balham:** Yeah, it's a slightly different thing though isn't it? You can introduce sport into the curriculum by measuring a netball court instead of measuring your desk but that is perhaps a different thing than inserting it into the curriculum as something that may indeed displace some of the more traditional areas. How do you stop that from happening?

**Garry Carnachan:** I think that's probably a less common approach to having sport as a curriculum subject. Most schools would see it as co-curricular, especially in the secondary space. A number of schools do insert sport into their curricular and have either academies or high-performing approaches or sport studies classes, which



are really not different than a lot of other things that are inserted into the optional curriculum especially at secondary schools. We talk about sport as context for learning as a way of introducing active pedagogies. Some of the stuff that happens in PE, you know, pound for pound, PE teachers have the best pedagogy in most schools I've ever been associated with.

**David Balham:** How so?

**Garry Carnachan:** Basically, kids working in teams, clear demonstrations, immediate feedback – you know you could probably sit in the back of my maths class and not be able to solve a quadratic equation and hopefully I would notice at some point.

**David Balham:** You're a maths teacher?

**Garry Carnachan:** Yeah, and a PE teacher. But in PE the ability to demonstrate a skill is pretty overt, it happens in front of your eyes and the feedback, which we know is so important, is pretty immediate and direct. PE teachers tend to teach in large spaces together, so you have some collaborative work going on. So, a lot of the pedagogies, particularly the active pedagogies that happen in physical education, I think are very transferable to classroom situations and work very well. A teacher I know, very well, who spends a lot of time with me – my wife is a maths teacher – a lot of this stuff has rubbed off on her. I guess, just as a practical example, seeing as Alissa was teaching maths, she was teaching gradients of straight lines, straight line geometry and just took her kids out on the netball court, they had their phones and could time four different ways of covering the length of the netball court, go back inside and graph them and I think those kids will remember forever that the steeper the line the faster the rate of change.

**David Balham:** Okay, so that's an interesting way of bringing it practically into the classroom. A slightly different tact – Celia, what's the evidence that involvement in sport and physical activity actually helps your academic achievement?

**Celia Fleck:** There's evidence that Sport New Zealand have collected most recently through their Active NZ report but through the Sport in Education project we now have evidence from many, many secondary schools where we've seen improved academic achievement. And we've been really privileged to have NZCER support us and evaluating a lot of that, so it's been really quite robust that evaluation. So, seeing improved academic achievement and for me when I was teaching one of the most, really kind of in my face things I saw that I didn't expect to see was a dramatic decrease in behaviour referrals. So, you know we all have pastoral systems in our schools and we saw from a year 10 group going into year 11 Sport in Education class, their behaviour referrals decreased dramatically whereas when we compared them with a control group there was actually an increase. Also, a sense of belonging and a sense of community – when you engage with kids with something that they know, something that has real meaning to them it helps with that engagement and the therefore that achievement. We've seen it across lots of different schools; different deciles, rural to city, single-sex to co-ed, so it is definitely something that has been proven.

**Garry Carnachan:** That's in the NZ context but this project was grown out of some overseas research, a lot of it, across the world showing positive correlation of physical activity, of which sport is just a context, and academic achievement. One of the documents that attracted our attention early on is Brain Boost, out of the University of Western Australia, which is a bit of a summary of the research from around the world which does support that correlation. It's not well understood why. Does being physically active perhaps improve behaviours which



are necessary for learning in the classroom? Is it because cognitive functions that the brain requires, such as focusing and concentrating requires good oxygen flow and being physically active increases the oxygen flow? There's a whole lot of theories about why it might happen, but the fact is it happens.

**David Balham:** And does it have to be organised sport, or can it just be activity? Alissa, what do you think?

**Alissa Murdoch:** It doesn't have to be organised sport. And in fact, the Active NZ 2007 data looks at organised and informal and there is a high number of kids playing unorganised sport which might be lunchtime games after school basketball or whatever, it definitely doesn't need to be organised. It's a little alarming that of the 11 hours that is spent for kids aged 12 to 14 actively involved in sport that only 2.1 hours of that is at school. When you think about how long kids are in the classroom, I'm now with my kids six hours five times a week, 30 hours, and only two of that is being monitored with kids saying we're getting our physical activity in our class time. And that brings up lots of questions. If we are engaging in a Sport in Ed type model, we probably see that increase, and you'd probably be able to jump in, Celia, that in Sport in Ed schools, those figures would bring up averages. Two hours a week seems pretty low, in what kids see as class time.

**David Balham:** Yeah, there could be those, though, who would be alarmed at the thought of increasing that. Some parents for example might say my children got to class to learn, not to play sports.

**Celia Fleck:** I think what Alissa is saying is it's not just about that "going to play sport." I think, as I said I have two projects that have 'sport' in their name fundamentally because they are funded by Sport New Zealand but actually when we go in and contextualise that with staff and students we have to open that up much bigger, because the words sport is actually a barrier for many people. Kids are doing a lot more than organised sport so what we're saying is kids need to be active in their school day. We're doing them a real disservice when they turn up at school as 5-year-olds and suddenly it's "sit down." We've got that data that says Sit Less, Move More, Sleep Well that came out to schools recently. So, what can we do as teachers to ensure our kids are moving more in that school day? And learning through those experiences so it's not just moving to get them outside to move and play a game but it's learning through that movement.

**Garry Carnachan:** I think that 'sport' can be an off-putting word. I think you raise a good point, David, you know you say sport and you've lost a lot of people straight away.

**David Balham:** Why is that, do you think?

**Garry Carnachan:** Oh, you know, we all have things we hate and if you're going to mandate something people hate they are going to find a reason to hate it anyway. But I think that what this is if you take sport out, this is about good, effective teaching practice. This is about having an engaging context, using effective pedagogy, cross-curriculum areas for both delivery and assessment which is just really good teaching practice. Sport happens to be the context for which this project was delivered. If you're looking for a mass engagement tool, there are lots of them, sport is one of them – technology, music, there's a whole lot of things you can use. But, the data that we have says that there are only about five percent of New Zealand kids who hate sport. So, if you're going to use a mass engagement tool you're going to get a pretty good buy in. While we're talking about it in a curriculum sense, I want to just put out there for the rest for discussion, I don't want to ignore sport as a pure tool either. We talked about some of the front ends of curriculum that you can look by being in sport, we're talking about through sport with the curriculum, being in sport shouldn't be ignored. I'm a living example and I'm sure there are plenty of them. I wouldn't be here talking to you now if it wasn't for my school sport. I probably wouldn't have finished my, in those days, 7th form year, because sport was what was getting me through the gate. The first stage of engagement is getting someone through the gate and I went through the



gate largely because I was involved in my school sport and as a product of that I stayed long enough to be able to get a qualification, go to university and do what I've done. So, I don't want to minimise the pace of sport as a pure tool either.

**David Balham:** That's an interesting point. You talked about the five percent of kids who aren't keen on sport and that's a pretty impressive number, 95%, which makes it a useful tool. I should come clean and say I was one of the five percent. I hated sport at school, I was terrible at it, wore glasses, couldn't see, left-handed and big-footed and actually was made to feel out of place at my school which was very sports-centric. How do you cater for those students?

**Garry Carnachan:** I think anything has the capacity to be delivered poorly, and sport is included in that. The dangers of delivery sport poorly are making it too competitive, by not listening to the student voice about what it is that interests them about sport and not building on those. I think you've really got to do that. Not everybody will be interested in sport, and not everybody should be, and this is not for everybody. You will have a certain percentage that this is just not the tool for. But, if it's delivered well and you take the students interests and not say "Right, we're doing Rugby World Cup" and you've turned off half the population who don't like rugby. What is it kids want to do, how do I take their interests, as with anything in the curriculum, and build that into engagement. I think you have to start with the student.

**David Balham:** Let's just talk briefly about the non-traditional sports that are coming through.

**Garry Carnachan:** Yeah, hugely important. Young people are exposed to so many opportunities through the world of technology and media these days, which we've never seen before. Sport has evolved like anything else in the world as time goes on and in the New Zealand Secondary Schools sport calendar there's probably about 100 more events than there used to be say 120 years ago. That includes all sorts of exciting things like sport climbing, which is now an Olympic sport, and three on three versions of basketball, adventure racing, downhill mountain biking and bunches of stuff that kids do. Often these things are done in a less competitive environment, often they are less formal competitions. I don't think there is such thing as social sport but certainly less formal environments in which sport takes place. Young people, if you ask them what they want most out of their sport, and a lot of studies have been done on this, the top ones are all about the social capital. It's about having fun and being with their friends. Winning is still important to these kids but it's further down on the list of what they want.

**David Balham:** Alissa, you wanted to talk about yoga I believe.

**Alissa Murdoch:** Yeah, I just wanted to bring sort of, I guess, when you think yoga you're not necessarily thinking sport, but bringing the idea of into the classroom, and I'm talking the actual physical environment so when we're thinking we don't have the spaces to do things you don't necessarily need amazing facilities. You can do things, quite literally, in your classroom. Yoga in Schools is a programme that has been running at Avalon Intermediate and in some other schools around wellington for the last couple of years. Kids are getting incredible opportunities and exposure to engage in yoga practice twice a week in 45-minute sessions. It is really creating incredible culture within the class and amongst the school and giving kids a toolkit, really, of strategies of how to breathe, how to calm down, how take things like mindful minutes before reacting in a way that is less helpful. The benefits of yoga on the body, there's lots of science to support that but the benefits of yoga on the mind, from a teaching perspective is quite phenomenal. We've been very lucky to have Seedlings Yoga in our



schools with Sarah Warnock. It's gone right through the school; every teacher participates and for us as teachers getting two 45-minute yoga sessions is unbelievable. Incredibly lucky, that's from a teacher perspective so, talk about teacher wellbeing well I'm pretty well in those two time slots. The kids just have different ways of dealing, reacting and being and then you link the yoga to learning and we have a really conducive environment for learning: they are calm, they are focused, they are ready to go.

**David Balham:** Your schools sounds very progressive in all of these areas.

**Alissa Murdoch:** Yes, we are. Avalon Intermediate absolutely is. We've got some good leadership in the leadership team and the principal as well, which is helpful for me.

**Celia Fleck:** Yeah, one of the awesome things that we're seeing both the rise of extra-curricular and also as a context to use within the curricular is traditional Māori games. So, we've got these wonderful secondary Ki O Rahi championships but seeing that filter through to intermediate and primary schools, too, which is fantastic.

**David Balham:** Sorry, for the benefit of listeners who aren't familiar, what are traditional Māori games?

**Celia Fleck:** Well they are a multitude of traditional Māori games but they're just, they are what they sound like. They are games that have been used for many, many years to practice, I guess originally, in terms of preparing for warfare but now have turned into a quite recreational pursuit. Ki O Rahi probably is the most popular. Another really popular one with the schools that we teach is Tapu ae, Ti uru, but there are heaps that you could look into. They are a wonderful way of connecting with local iwi, again talking about those community partnerships in schools. They are a great way to introduce te reo into your school and actually use it in a context rather than it being quite siloed. And for our primary school teachers that we've been working with, in terms of supporting them with PE professional learning for them, there are a lot of teachers who have felt really frightened about... feeling like they have to be an expert in football or rugby or netball. When you position yourself like that you're setting yourself up to fail, really, because you're teaching kids that go along that get coaching every week or every Saturday. You've also got kids in the class that will always position themselves as experts and you can have quite a range of ability. Whereas if you take something like a traditional Māori game and it becomes a real leveller because you haven't got any experts in your class. You've got kids that will naturally be more physically able and able to pick things up quicker, but they can then teach the other kids. A game like Ki O Rahi, you can find a role for every kid in your class and they can will be successful. You would have loved it, you would have loved it back in school.

**David Balham:** Forty years too late!

**Celia Fleck:** For teachers it builds their confidence because suddenly they don't have to feel like they have to be an expert in something kids know well. It does kind of provide a better leveller in the class.

**David Balham:** Is there a risk we are taking certain groups of students and trying to push them towards sport. Is that a problem? What can we do about it?

**Celia Fleck:** I don't think succeeding in sport and succeeding in academic have to be mutually exclusive. In any case, and we've mentioned it a few times, it's about that effective pedagogy, it's about knowing your learners, so you want your learners to have the best possible outcomes. So, we're improving outcomes for them in their sporting experiences and improving their outcomes in academic and social contexts then we're doing the right thing for all learners.



**Alissa Murdoch:** You're playing to their strengths, the student's strengths and that means accelerating in physical activity, in sport, and therefore being more engaged in the learning that follows that and sits alongside that. Absolutely, agree not mutually exclusive. You're not either academic or sport in this project, in this work. All of the things you bring to the table to school and being able to support me to fly through that and not pigeon or separate what I can do really well with what I can't any, and only measure me on only what is considered academic. Through that amazing support and me flourishing, I then engage in the less exciting aspects, perhaps. Maybe that's writing up that great experience I had at Turbo Touch last week. I'm engaged in that now, because we won that and we felt incredible and now when the teacher is asking us to sit down and write a piece, what can I pin that piece to, oh that's right, the feelings and experiences I had at Turbo Touch where our team won and were awesome and I scored lots of tries and I'm proud of that, here's my wonderful piece of writing that's engaged and empowered me and lit something in me to want to write.

**Garry Carnachan:** It's interesting why we should single sport out in a possibly negative context around being in the curriculum. How is it different to any other interests and strengths young kids come through the gate with? If I'm a principal and a student walks through my gate and they are academically really talented, I've probably got gifted programmes and opportunities for them within my school and a structure that will build on their interests and their strengths. If they come in and they are musically talented I've probably got an itinerant programme, giving them extra tutoring, I've probably got bands and choirs and orchestras and goodness else knows and same across performing arts. Why, if a student walks through the gate and they're sporting talented, would I not take that student's strengths and interests and build on them?

**David Balham:** No reason whatsoever, I imagine. I've been looking at some reports which suggest that the teacher participation in sport is actually dropping over the last few years. It's getting harder and harder to get teachers involved. Obviously, an important factor at the moment, with the shortage of teachers and the fact they have to keep working harder and harder to keep their heads above water – which I'm sure you would all agree with that. What do we do about it? How do you get more teachers into sport?

**Garry Carnachan:** It's a complex problem. Firstly, we have an ageing teaching force and we've got a been there done that, I've had my turn so I'm missing out, we've got a cohort of young teachers who are different than they used to be. If you were a talented sporting person, often teaching was an attractive career because you could do physical education because it was perhaps a spin off from that sporting interest. Now, sports in itself is a career for so many of those young people. They are going off and becoming professional sports people or working in the sports industry in administration or whatever they're doing. So, the teachers we were getting were different and workload isn't a red herring, as you point out. It's a complex issue I think.

**David Balham:** Well, we're coming up to the end of our half hour. I would just like to go around the table now and ask all of you if you have any final thoughts and any particular changes you would like to see made in the curriculum in the way schools are run to enhance the way sport is used. Alissa, we'll start with you.

**Alissa Murdoch:** I think it's really important to understand the difference between sport and being active. I tautoko Garry's comments that sport in singular is something separate but very powerful as well for accelerating outcomes. I would encourage people to read the Brain Boost research, I think that naysayers can really get some value out of seeing that we aren't disadvantaging kids by being more active or taking them out of traditional lessons, in fact we are enhancing learning. I think that the more you understand the benefits and then are equipped with the skills that your classroom will become a pretty central place for building student wellbeing through actively engaging in education and being sparked to learn as well. I think some more reading perhaps, and really understanding what a Sport in Education model framework means. There's wonderful pieces of



evidence, there's such great stories out there and I think people should get on board and read a bit more of that and I think it will perhaps settle myths around what sport takes away, actually it's about what it brings and what it adds.

**Celia Fleck:** In that kind of co-curricular space I would like us to really look at the value of sport and what it does offer our young people in terms of contributing to their wellbeing but also contributing to those employability skills. We look at what employers are looking for now in the workforce – being able to work well with others, relate to others, critical thinking and communication and problem-solving and decision-making. Kids are doing those every day when they're out on the sports field. If we can celebrate that and work with those kids to identify it and so not just we as adults can identify but they can identify it and articulate it. I think that could be really powerful. I think in terms of engaging teachers in that extra-curricular stuff as well, I think it comes back to those key relationships with our learners, we have to know our learners well. Getting to know them in any kind of extra-curricular or co-curricular way is a really powerful way to do that and then bring back into the classroom. I would love to see, now with no National Standards, with all these reviews, I'd love to see people actually pick up that New Zealand Curriculum document again and go back to the front of it and think more about how they're empowered as a teacher and what contexts they can use and how they can really reframe success for their kids so it's not just about reading and writing tests but actually success looks like a whole lot of different things. Sport, physical activity, physical education can be really powerful.

**Garry Carnachan:** I'll echo support for what Alissa and Celia have said around curriculum and won't talk about that. I'll talk about I think there's a real need for leadership and recognition of what sport can bring to not just to the physical wellbeing of young people but to their emotional, mental, social, connectedness. One of the most important things for a young person to have is belonging, particularly in their teenage years. Sport delivered well can really contribute to that. We have horrific statistics around youth suicide and things like that and I think sport has a big part to play – if delivered well and not all about competition and failure and success but about the attributes sport can teach young people. To achieve that I think we need recognition and leadership from both levels. From the Government down, from the Ministry. There's no one at the Ministry with 'sport' above their door and yet it's a big part of what happens in schools. The funding for sports is pretty inadequate compared to other parts of the curriculum or to the defined curriculum. And we need that leadership within schools that is dedicated to sports. We have it in the secondary system where schools have sport directors etc. but we need that from the top down, not just in individual schools. In individual schools where there is leadership sport is delivered really well but we really do need a recognition from the top end of what sport can provide.

**David Balham:** Thank you, Garry for your contributions and thank you also Celia and Alissa.









