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Physical Education as a Profession

JAN BROEKHOFF

Reading Lawson's "Paths Toward Professionalization" (Note 1), I was struck once again by the persistence with which physical educators in higher education seek to justify our profession on intellectual grounds. Lawson draws the lines between knowledge and craft and describes the schism between the "guardians of tradition," reinforced by "scientific pedagogues," and the new breed of kinesiological academicians. Once more, physical educators in general stand indicted as a group of doers who lack sufficient theoretical rationale for their practices and beliefs (Morford, 1972). It brings to mind an interesting period in ancient Greek education in which a group of new teachers, called Sophists, heralded the end of the traditional education still prevalent in Athens in the 5th century, B.C.

Traditional Greek education until the time of the Sophists had been largely paradigmatic: a teaching through example with a premium on performance and skill. Physical education occupied center

stage in the upbringing of Greek youth of the upper classes. For centuries, the great exemplar for this "old education" had been Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. When Odysseus washes up on the island of the Phaeacians, he proves his mettle and gains immediate acceptance by winning an athletic contest, for, as Homer expresses it, "Nothing makes a man so famous for life as what he can do with his hands and feet" (1961, p. 126). Odysseus was a man of many skills, crafty in that double sense so admired and appreciated by the ancient Greeks. It was against this long and venerable tradition of knowing-how-to-do-things that the Sophists and philosophers of the late 5th century, B.C. launched the intellectual enterprise of knowing-for-knowledge's-sake.

The old education did not fade away without putting up a fight. One of its staunchest defenders was the poet Aristophanes who tattered the Sophists and Socrates by name with his biting sarcasm. In *The Clouds* he draws a sharp contrast between the old values and the new fashion:

[With a traditional education] you will be bright and fresh as a flower, spending your time in the gymnasiums. . . . you will go to the Academy

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where you will run your laps beneath the olive trees, having garlanded your brow with the light reed, in company with a friend your own age . . . you will have an ivory chest, a clear skin, broad shoulders, a tiny tongue. . . .

But if your mode of life is up-to-date, you will have a weak body, a color sickly pale, narrow shoulders, an immense tongue. (1911, pp. 230-231)

Aristophanes goes so far as to link the size of the male genitalia to the type of upbringing. Yet, his mockery and verbal fireworks do little to stem the tide of intellectual education. As Marrou (1955/1964, pp. 92-93) relates, Greek education became predominantly a matter of the intellect and physical education lost its central place. To Marrou this development was the logical outcome of the transition of Greek society from a "noble warrior" culture to a "scribe" culture. Far from being harmonious, he views physical and intellectual education as opposing, even hostile tendencies. Interestingly, he notes that the shift toward intellectual education eventually affected physical education itself.

Elsewhere (Broekhoff, 1972), I have attempted to show how the tendency to objectify and reify the world around us has changed the way in which we experience our bodies and has affected the way in which we move. Many movements of the German gymnastics of the 19th century, for example, were specifically designed to fit the intellectual climate of the schools of that era. The problem I want to address

here, though different, shows similarities as it involves in part physical education's adaptation to the demands of a system of higher education. Physical educators within higher education have created and are still generating a body of knowledge that has at best only an indirect relationship to what happens in the gymnasia of this country. Yet, it is suggested that this body of knowledge serve as the self-definition of physical education as an academic discipline and that it lie at the core of the education and preparation of new members of the profession. From running our laps in the Academy we have come to full circle in the groves of academe.

Professionalization

Perhaps it is good at this point to affirm that, to me, physical education as a profession should be defined in terms of what physical education teachers are expected to do in their encounters with children, youth, and adults. By far the most common of such encounters take place in the physical education classes in the schools, although other more or less structured environments cannot be excluded. In the gymnasium, on the courts, and on the fields, physical education teachers give exercises, conduct physical activities, and teach their students how to play games, how to dance. Especially for young children these activities almost always are an end in themselves, even if the teacher often uses them as means to an end: an in-

crease in muscular strength, improvement of social interaction. Whatever the variations on the theme, the center of gravity of the physical education profession lies in the act of teaching.

I realize that by viewing physical education predominantly as a teaching profession I have put myself squarely on the side of the "guardians of tradition" and the "scientific pedagogues," a restricted position in Lawson's estimation that forms an obstacle to professionalization. Lawson (Note 1) pleads for a much broader conception of "the field"—one more akin to the needs of a changing society and one which includes professionals in such areas as sport administration, exercise assessment, sport business, sport communications, and sport medicine. Although I see the need for and value of training people for such occupations, I find them only marginally related to the profession of physical education. It would be very hard, for example, to combine in one code of ethics the aspirations of sport businessmen and sport communicators with those of physical educators. I suspect, moreover, that the broadening perspective of "the field" is not so much related to professional idealism as to the shrinking enrollments in departments of physical education. Be that as it may, I should like to turn my attention to the central theme of "Paths Toward Professionalization."

One of the most important characteristics of a true profession, according to Lawson (Note 1), is that it possess "a coded,

theoretical body of professional knowledge . . . upon which authoritative professional judgments are based" (p. 6). This knowledge should be too sophisticated to be mastered by "every" layperson. The problem with physical education, he argues, is that it has concentrated too much on performance skills and experiential knowledge in the preparation of its teachers. Performance skills and experiential knowledge (knowing-how-to-do things) are widely shared commodities, easily transmitted to the lay public, and therefore prime sources of deprofessionalization. At first glance, these statements seem reasonable enough, but upon closer inspection a number of problems arise. In contrast to lawyers and physicians, the mission of physical educators is to share with the public the performance skills and knowledge they themselves acquired in the course of their professional preparation; you might say that physical education's mission is to self-destruct professionally. What marks physical educators as professionals, of course, is not that they possess performance skills, but rather their ability to impart these skills to others in the pursuit of certain educational goals. Most physical educators with any teaching experience, I am sure, would dispute that performance skills are easily transmitted!

Whereas the professional skills of lawyers and physicians are rather obviously related to professional knowledge (and, in the case of physicians, the public at least trusts that magic has been

replaced by knowledge), this is not quite so obvious in the case of physical educators. The teaching behaviors of physical educators in the gymnasium do not self-evidently reveal or imply the considerable professional knowledge on which they are based. The long-term educational goals that lie beyond the performance of the physical activities are usually hidden from a casual observer, the skills themselves and the class routines often deceptively simple. As a result, people have frequently been heard to say that they could teach physical education or, in a related field, coach a sport. Perhaps this is why Lawson exhorts the physical education profession to invest in the stock of knowledge generated in what he calls the discipline of kinesiology and sport studies.

Although the discipline of kinesiology and sport studies is conceived of as a field of study with various professional outlets, the emphasis is not on professional application. Rather, students of the discipline seek to gain a scholarly and scientific understanding of "human involvement in physical and ludic activities" (Lawson, Note 1, p. 10). Knowledge in the field of kinesiology and sport studies is therefore academic rather than practical. Nevertheless, this academic discipline should form the core in the preparation of physical education teachers as a necessary step toward professionalization (Morford & Lawson, Note 2). Apart from the viability of such a discipline, which I will discuss later, the question must be asked whether a profession could or should control

and monopolize a field of academic study to "professionalize" its members. A more pointed question, perhaps, is whether it makes any difference. People choose their physicians for their knowledge of pathology or their surgical skills, not because they happen to have an understanding of say, muscle contraction mechanisms in invertebrates. Even more so, it seems to me, will the professional merit of physical educators be judged by their teaching performance in the gymnasium and on the sporting fields and, indirectly, by the performance of their students.

Lawson's stress of the need for a theoretical body of knowledge should not imply that he does not value performance. In fact, he makes a case for physical education as a performing art and invites us to view performance according to the "music-art-drama model" (Note 1, p. 17). Even so, I have the uneasy feeling that Lawson is not interested in performance *sui generis*. I can understand it when he says that music students study musicology to improve their performance as musicians. I am at a loss, however, when he intimates that art students produce art "as a bridge to art criticism," and that likewise in physical education, performance should be a means to similar ends. I have yet to meet artists who claim that their artistic creations were meant to strengthen the field of art criticism, and yet to hear of athletes who performed mainly to contribute knowledge to the discipline of kinesiology and sport studies.

The Academic Discipline

The idea of requiring that aspiring physical educators master academic knowledge in a formal course of learning is not new. It was eloquently expressed as early as 1964 by Franklin Henry who recently revisited his conception of physical education as an academic discipline in *Quest* (1978). In his original address and subsequent articles, Henry suggests that we model the education of physical educators after the way in which chemistry and mathematics teachers are prepared: first master the content of the academic discipline and next, if a teaching certificate is desired, supplement the academic major with the necessary professional courses in the college of education. Elsewhere (Broekhoff, 1977), I have pointed out the main problem with this analogy. Chemistry students who want to become teachers will most likely teach chemistry, and mathematics students will teach mathematics; very few physical education students, however, will ever teach kinesiology and sport studies. For the vast majority of them, the academic subject matter will remain just that—academic.

If there is no direct relationship between the content of the academic discipline and teaching in physical education, there must be another rationale for the study of kinesiology and sport studies. Indeed, the advocates of the academic major find such justification in the concept of a liberal education. Most recently, this concept was described and de-

fended in a presentation by Morford and Lawson (Note 2). Contrary to a narrow professional preparation which leads to ad hoc training with its inherent danger of being continually out of date, a liberal education stresses the importance of “theory in generalized application.” Students with a liberal education will therefore be able to cope with complex problems that defy stereotyped solutions. Since a liberal education puts great emphasis on the interconnectedness of knowledge, Morford and Lawson consider the crossdisciplinary study of kinesiology uniquely suited to this kind of education.

Liberal education has a long and venerable tradition. Because of its academic character and its limited practical value with regard to occupational training, liberal education has largely been the privilege of the upper classes of society. The British public schools form an interesting example. For centuries they resisted any change in their basic academic curriculum, which consisted mainly in the teaching of Latin and Greek. During the Clarendon hearings of the 1860's, the inclusion of mathematics and physical science was violently opposed because they lacked “any tendency to humanise.” (Little wonder that the schools were increasingly criticized by more modern-minded educators.) The ultimate in the defense of the public schools came in a statement by Lord Plumer, at Eton himself in 1870, who addressed the school in 1916 in an inimitable Old Boy style: “We are often told that

they taught us nothing at Eton. That may be so, but I think they taught it very well" (Gathorne-Hardy, 1977, p. 138).

It would, of course, not be fair to compare kinesiology and sport studies with the classics program of the 19th century British public schools. The subfields of the discipline, motor control, biomechanics and biodynamics, and sport studies have been broadly conceived; and the concept of liberal education has been redefined in terms of modern educational theory. The crucial feature of kinesiology and sport studies, however, lies in its crossdisciplinary character. In this respect, Morford and Lawson have followed in the footsteps of Henry who has insisted from the beginning that the academic field of physical education should be crossdisciplinary rather than interdisciplinary. Knowledge about human involvement in physical and ludic activities, in other words, should be gained by the horizontal integration of selected parts of a number of related disciplines, not just by the collection of unidisciplinary pieces of information.

The concept of a crossdisciplinary field of knowledge is not merely an attractive theoretical construct, it is an absolute necessity if the discipline of kinesiology and sport studies is to serve as a meaningful core in the schooling of physical education students. It is on that issue that I have grave doubts. The acknowledged cross-disciplines such as biochemistry and social psychology are usually hybrids. I can think easily of 15

academic fields in the sciences and humanities that should yield valuable knowledge about physical and ludic activities. How can we begin to integrate these widely divergent sources of knowledge into one crossdiscipline, not even considering the multiformity of the methods of inquiry? Morford and Lawson's subcategorization is a valiant effort to create a semblance of integration, but it is not clear that the subfields of kinesiology and sport studies will be on speaking terms other than in a very superficial manner.

Henry (1978) himself has noted the increasing tendency toward vertical development and fragmentation of knowledge in the unidisciplinary aspects of our academic endeavors. Perhaps the best reflection of reality is the recent decision by the *Research Quarterly's* Advisory Committee to appoint some 14 section editors. As the editor indicated, the degree of specialization in the subdisciplines made it increasingly difficult for her to judge the merits of articles in a wide variety of substantive areas (Safrit, 1978). Undoubtedly we have now reached the early stages of scientific respectability which the futurologist Polak (1977) describes as the expertocracy: a community of scholars who know more and more about less and less. In this climate, efforts to integrate academic knowledge, laudable as they are, will almost surely lead to failure. Under the circumstances it is naive to think that innocent undergraduate students could master academic

knowledge in a perplexing number of substantive areas and then, somehow, integrate and apply this knowledge to the teaching of physical activities and sport skills.

Scientific Pedagogues

I have, alas, studied philosophy,
Jurisprudence and medicine, too,
And, worst of all, theology
With keen endeavor, through and
through—
And here I am, for all my lore,
The wretched fool I was before.
Called Master of Arts, and Doctor to
boot,
For ten years almost I confute
And up and down, wherever it goes,
I drag my students by the nose—
And see that for all our science and
art
We can know nothing. It burns my
heart.

(Goethe's *Faust*, 1808/1963)

With some poetic license and the substitution of appropriate subject matter, Faust's lament might be called "Locke's Complaint." Locke (1977a) once more raised the question of the practical significance of the academic discipline for the teaching of physical education. The stock answer has been, and still is, that the search for knowledge is worthy in and of itself and needs no demonstration or requirement of practical application (Henry, 1978). This answer is particularly frustrating in view of the fact that the academic discipline originated and grew in professional departments and schools of physical education. Henry's short history of the academic major at the University of California, Berkeley, offers a good illus-

tration. The development of the independent major there was not so much a response to the needs of the teaching profession as to the degree requirements of the College of Letters and Science. Initially, the search for knowledge may have been guided by the need for practical application; in retrospect, it was a short road from oxygen debt to mitochondria.

The tension between academic discipline and professional application appears to be a greater problem in the United States than in other countries. Kinesiology and sport studies in Eastern European countries and in Russia have always had a strong emphasis on practical application. This is not necessarily so in Western Europe, but here sport studies usually did not originate in institutions charged with the preparation of physical education teachers. In West Germany, for example, the recognition in the 1950's that sport had become an important societal and cultural phenomenon led to the creation of a number of Institutes of Sport Science in the universities. These institutes are under no obligation to produce practical knowledge for the profession of physical education, but by the same token they do not advocate the various sport sciences as an ideal liberal education for physical education undergraduates. The theoretical framework for professional physical education in West Germany is embodied in the study of sport pedagogy, which deals with aims and objectives, methods, didactics, and the questions and problems related to "the teaching-

learning processes involving movement" (Haag, 1978, p. 66).

It is precisely to the "distinguished subject" of pedagogy that Locke (1977a) directs the attention of his professional colleagues. On the reasonable assumption that teaching itself should be subject to logical analysis and systematic inquiry, he holds out hope for a "dismal science" (Locke, 1977b). Much as I agree with the premise, I get a strong sensation of *déjà vu* when I peruse the long list of references to his article on the science of teaching, revealing so many interaction analyses, behavior modifications, and reinforcement contingencies. Could it be that pedagogy must find its respectability and the act of teaching its legitimation in the restrictive confines of behavioristic science as, earlier, performance found its justification in academic knowledge? When Locke (1977b) states that, among others, movement education, humanistic education, and teaching by discovery "come into the gym without supportive evidence, and leave the gym without adequate evaluation" (p. 11), does he mean without behavior tallies or significant multivariate F-ratios? I hope not and I think not.

If pedagogy is to become a vital field of knowledge for physical education teachers, it cannot model itself exclusively after the physical or behavioral sciences. Somehow, the option must be preserved that much of teaching is an art that can be studied and learned up to a point, after which it becomes a creation dependent on a person's special talent and

affinity for working with other people. That proposition has obvious implications for the understanding and identification of "teaching talent" and the selection and encouragement of aspiring physical education teachers. Equally, the proposition must be entertained that the behavior of mitochondria is of a different nature than that of human beings. This should encourage "scientific pedagogues" to define the epistemological limitations of certain methods of inquiry. Gallit (1978) concludes that the traditional epistemological assumption of the "given," which features prominently in the natural and most of the behavioral sciences, is not suited for physical education because it cannot account for knowledge-as-skill. This points to one of the persistent problems of modern physical education: the inability or unwillingness of researchers and scholars to translate academic and scientific knowledge into the language of teacher and learner. European workers in the area of sport pedagogy have wisely opted for a multiform methodology, including not only empirical experimental, but also traditional hermeneutic and more recently phenomenological approaches to the study of teaching and learning.

The Profession

If children, adolescents, parents, adults do not think that what physical educators do is very important or valuable to them, no amount of applied or academic knowledge is going to

save the profession. The strength of physical education as a profession is related directly to the success physical educators have in convincing the public that they have important contributions to make to the health and well-being of people of all ages. Whereas the services of physicians and lawyers are relatively self-evident, the same cannot be said for the contributions of physical educators. To communicate the potential benefits of physical education to the public requires an educational process in itself. The profession's most important assets in this process are teachers who know what they should be doing and are good at doing it. This kind of teacher is most likely to be found in a profession which has a clear conception of its goals and a deep commitment to its mission.

I am in agreement with much of the criticism Lawson has with respect to the failure of physical educators to make an impact within as well as outside the schools. It is an indictment of sorts that we, as a profession, have not convinced the public of the need for elementary school specialists, that our involvement in youth sport programs, where sound educational practices are most needed, is minimal. The temptation in such cases is often to look for other avenues and to offer services in areas in which the public does perceive a need. This may explain the interest physical education departments show in sport management, sport journalism, sport business, exercise assessment, etc. Attractive as these ventures are, I feel that

our first priority must be the problems of physical education, if indeed they matter at all.

The past few decades have witnessed a revolution of graduate programs in physical education, mainly through a knowledge explosion in applied as well as basic research. If anywhere a new revolution is needed, I agree with Morford and Lawson (Note 2) that it should come at the undergraduate level. The sediment of graduate knowledge that settled to the bottom did not materially change the majority of undergraduate programs in this country. They have remained static and unresponsive to societal change. Contrary to Morford and Lawson, however, I do not advocate the intellectualization of these programs through the establishment of academic majors under the aegis of colleges of arts and sciences, divorced from professional preparation. Rather, I suggest that we attempt an integration of applied knowledge by relating what we already know and what we must discover to the many tasks physical educators face in their encounters with children, youth, and adults. For this kind of integration, the cooperation and responsiveness of graduate scholars and researchers are indispensable. Although the science and art of teaching would feature prominently in such an enterprise, I do not see the resulting curriculum as narrow ad hoc training. In another context (Broekhoff, 1977), I have indicated how the sociology of knowledge and the social sciences in general might contribute to this

course of study.

After course work in the fundamental subjects necessary for a basic understanding of the structural and functional characteristics of the human body (such as physiology and anatomy), the innovative features of the program should include upper-division seminars in which a wide variety of topics would be approached from many different perspectives. A seminar on the growth and development of elementary school children, for example, should include morphological, functional, motoric, as well as social and psychological considerations. The seminar should be taught by teams of teachers with a special interest in integrating and applying knowledge about the various aspects of growth; there would be frequent observation of and actual contact with elementary school children. Teachers in the undergraduate seminars should ideally be generalists, who were allowed in their graduate studies to cross disciplinary boundaries to integrate knowledge and find practical applications. I do not think that such study programs would in any way be a threat to academic integrity.

In the final analysis, we always return to the original questions of purpose and mission, of old education and new fashion. Some day in the future, all people may well have the leisure time that only the very rich of the ancient Greeks possessed. May it be said of that future day that "physical educators were highly respected, for nothing satisfied and pleased

men and women of our time as much as what they could do with their hands and feet."

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