battleground
SCHOOLS
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L–Z
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Like Dewey, many of the early progressive educators were utopian in aspiring to a more just society. Their ideals of respect for the child and his or her ability to learn, and that teaching and learning ought be enjoyable and inspired, are still worth our emulation today.


Stephen C. Fleury and Michael L. Bentley

**PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

**THE PURPOSE OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

From a historical perspective, perhaps nothing has been more cyclic in the field of physical education than issues surrounding the purpose of physical education programs. Physical education programs have their roots in health. The idea that their purpose lies in the health benefits of physical activity and fitness is pervasive throughout our history, gaining momentum with each war and national health crisis. In between these times, broader perspectives encompassing social and emotional development, quality of life issues, and the notion that participation in sport and physical activity provides opportunities for children and adults to participate in our culture gain prominence. While most physical educators see health as the *product* of a good program and not the purpose of a good program, clearly, the public attaches great importance to health and perceives health benefits as the primary purpose of physical education programs.

Recently, the field has reached some consensus on the notion of education for a physically active lifestyle as the primary purpose of school programs. National attention given to the health problems caused by a physically inactive population has served to propel this orientation to the forefront and has allowed health, sport, and affectively oriented perspectives on physical education programs to come together under one purpose. As with most slogan systems, the devil is in the details and there is no real consensus on what constitutes an effective program designed to educate students for a physically active lifestyle.

Professionals have sought to focus and preserve the purpose of physical education as an education for a physically active lifestyle, both as students and the adults they will become. Sometimes this goal conflicts with the notions that
physical education should provide students with vigorous physical activity during the school day, since education for a physically active lifestyle does not always involve participation in vigorous physical activity. The national physical education content standards have taken the position that program goals related to the development of motor skills, and knowledge about activity, fitness, participation in physical activity, and social skills are all important to the development of a physically active lifestyle.

Physical education programs have also struggled with their close affiliation with athletics and sport. Many potential health advocates and nonathletes have failed to see the value of traditional goals of physical education programs, particularly the idea of developing motor skill competencies. The profession defends its stance on motor skill competency, citing the idea that children who are active are largely those participating in youth sports, and adults who are physically active are largely those who have been active youth. However, the profession does not support traditional programs dominated by team sports that require the development of complex motor skills. Recent curricular directions of physical education programs have instead sought to reach the nonparticipant by expanding curricular offerings to different kinds of movement activities and those that do not require high levels of complex motor skills. For example, it is not uncommon to see dance, fitness activities, adventure activities, individual sports, martial arts, and activities such as in-line skating as part of today's secondary physical education programs. It is also not uncommon to see programs focus on helping students make the transition to participation outside of physical education class by working together with community resources for participation, and providing students with the skills to assess their own fitness levels and develop personal goals in that regard.

Another recent development spawned by the physical activity crisis in the country has been to replace education oriented curriculums (those that teach the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to be physically active) with physical activity programs that provide students opportunities to be physically active without necessarily educating them to be so. For both elementary and secondary physical education teachers using the physical activity approach, participation in physical activity, interest, and enjoyment are believed to be the avenue to guide students toward being physically active later in life.

THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

In the early 1900s when secondary physical education was primarily based on physical training, calisthenics, and fitness activities, physical education at the elementary level rarely existed. Recess was the only form of physical activity provided children in the school day. When many school systems across the country included elementary physical education it was often in response to finding a way to provide release or planning time for classroom teachers rather than providing quality physical education to children. In most situations physical education was nothing more than supervised play time that really required few teaching skills and little content. The primary goal was for children to have an opportunity to
Physical activity during play does not always mean physical education goals related to the development of fitness, participation in sports that require directions of physical participation by extinct activities and those example, it is not unique, individual sports, of today's secondary programs focus on level of physical education and secondary school, participation, and s levels and develop activity crisis in the us (those that teach e) with physical ac sensitivity active with- and secondary school, participation o be the avenue to release energy. As the demand for elementary physical education increased, so too did the demand for structured, quality programs.

Early elementary school physical education curriculums either focused on low organization games (playground games) or were watered down versions of secondary sports programs. In some places these programs still exist. Recent national policy documents over the past few decades have defined developmentally appropriate curriculum design:

1. Secondary curriculum is not appropriate at the elementary level as the curriculum should instead match the developmental levels of the students taught.
2. Content focus should be on the basic motor skill development in the areas of games, gymnastics, and dance.
3. Games are selected to assist children's learning, skill attainment, and enjoyment but never as ends within themselves.
4. Fitness should be interwoven in the content with goals for enjoyment, understanding of the components of fitness, and an understanding of the health benefits as opposed to fitness through formal exercises and calisthenics.
5. Content selection should aim toward increasing activity and learning time. Small sided teams, appropriate amount and size equipment for all students, tasks designed in a progression as well as designed to meet the differing levels of students, and minimal wait times are crucial to the content delivery.

Differing philosophical perspectives on what content is best for elementary children will continue to exist in our country due to the flexibility that accompanies a standards-based approach. These philosophical differences are evident through the variety of elementary physical education programs across the United States, the teacher education programs that present one approach over the other, and, more recently, the use of packaged programs trying to "sell" the content to be used in physical education. In essence, this is the topic that promotes controversial dialogue today and will continue into the next few decades.

SPECIALISTS VERSUS NONSPECIALISTS

A question that has spurred sustained study and some controversy concerns the value of a certified physical education specialist. The issue is most relevant at the elementary school level, where certified physical education specialists are commonly recommended but by no means universal throughout the states. In cases where specialists are not hired to teach physical education, the onus of responsibility tends to shift instead to the classroom teacher.

Can non-specialists facilitate program goals as effectively as physical education specialists? Do specialists make a difference in the quantity and quality of teaching and learning in physical education? Answering these questions is important for a wide audience, including those allocating resources for training and hiring physical education teachers. Central to the idea of program effectiveness in
physical education is an orientation toward creating conditions for optimal student learning and growth toward a physically active lifestyle. Many argue that realizing this goal requires teachers of physical education to possess specialized value knowledge, and skills in physical education curriculum and instruction. From this perspective, the physical education specialist should have an advantage over the nonspecialist in developing and maintaining an effective program.

The overall trend indicates that specialists provide better physical education than nonspecialists. Presently, the goal of physical education to facilitate growth toward a physically active lifestyle requires teachers to provide students with maximum opportunities for motor skill learning and appropriate levels of physical activity. Studies of elementary schools have found that specialists focus more on teaching skills as opposed to playing games, allowed for more time or skill practice, and produced higher levels of student activity, energy expenditure and fitness. In contrast, classroom teachers used less effective and less productive teaching behaviors (e.g., limited interaction with and monitoring of students during activity), minimally engaged students in activity, and had negative attitudes toward teaching physical education.

Longitudinal research suggests that, with specialized training, classroom teachers can learn to provide more quality physical education, although certified physical education teachers still produce the best results. Since it is not currently realistic to ensure that all schools be equipped with physical education specialists, an important measure being taken is the incorporation of physical education training for preservice classroom teachers. Such training provides the classroom teacher with both a framework for teaching motor skills effectively and the means for increasing students’ daily activity levels closer to recommended amounts. Although the classroom teacher can be looked to as a source for providing physical activity during the school day, it is unlikely that limited training can prepare this teacher to effectively teach motor skills, and effective physical education programs will be dependent on the extent to which children receive instruction from a specialist.

GENDER ISSUES

An ecosystem is at work in the classroom environment, wherein a web of relationships builds and breaks according to the interplay of professional practices and personal beliefs. In physical education, a major focus of inquiry concerns itself with classroom ecology and the positioning and function of gender in the teaching-learning process. Although the need for gender equity in modern education has pervaded U.S. schools for well over 100 years, it was not until the 1960s that the issue received widespread attention through the women’s liberation movement. Title IX was created in 1972 to give equal rights in education to girls and boys, and soon afterward, physical education guidelines were established specifying that classes be coeducational and that boys and girls receive the same education and equal treatment. However, this approach has mostly failed to accomplish the goals that presuppose it. In fact, it may even have exacerbated the problem, since within this context, girls must struggle to succeed
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amid curricular and instructional conditions that preserve and propagate a male dominant hegemony.

Since the mid-twentieth century, the physical education curriculum has typically revolved around sports, games, and activities that cater to a dominant form of masculinity, privileging boys with characteristically “male” physical and social dispositions (e.g., strong, aggressive, “macho”). By and large, this type of curriculum has sustained itself, even where the shift from gender-separated to gender-integrated classes has occurred. Girls, and boys, who do not fit this prototypical male profile, are forced to contend with a masculine-charged climate that is both restrictive and retrograde in an educational sense. Girls inclined toward participation in this type of curriculum have had difficulty gaining access to, finding acceptance in, or acquiring legitimacy among its empowered male members. A girl who displays masculine characteristics and strives for excellence in sports traditionally played by males is likely to meet with some scrutiny and even some derision. Thus, the culture created by such a curriculum reasserts socially constructed views of gender appropriateness.

A “hidden curriculum” is also at play in physical education classes. A number of research perspectives have shed light on the implicit curricular and instructional choices physical education teachers make, which convey gendered beliefs and may produce powerful effects on student self-efficacy and achievement. Two prominent examples of such perspectives are research on the effect of teacher expectations on teacher behavior and student learning, termed “the Pygmalion Effect,” and research on girls’ and boys’ participation patterns in physical education classes. It is clear that physical education teachers interact with boys and girls differently in accordance with perceptions of ability, which are based on gender. In short, a belief that boys are more capable than girls in physical education leads teachers to develop higher, more skill-based expectations for boys and lower, more effort-based expectations for girls. It is also clear that boys participate in class more actively and with higher success than girls, although some girls may enjoy both the physical and social challenges presented in coeducational physical education.

While there is no easy solution to achieving gender equity in school physical education, some professionals believe the right move is returning to single gender classes and some programs have done so. The most promising path to take, however, may be that leading to a more flexible and more inclusive curriculum. There is some evidence that girls are responding positively to the push for increased physical activity outside of school, but a broader, more diverse curriculum must be put in place for both girls and boys to receive a fair and equal chance at receiving quality physical education.

MARGINALIZATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Turn on any movie or cartoon depicting a physical education teacher or coach and you have evidence of marginalization. Typically this character is overweight, boisterous, blows a whistle every few seconds, and of course, is having
the class play dodge ball, kickball, or climb the dreaded rope to the ceiling. On the surface, these stereotypes might seem harmless and even humorous, but on a deeper level they push physical education to the fringes of school culture and discourse, widening the rift between attention and resources provided to core subject areas and what is allocated to physical education programs.

In recent history, this divide has continued to grow in response to high stakes assessment and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Placing increased emphasis on certain core academic content areas has resulted in a decrease in time or total elimination of physical education in many states or school systems. Despite the research stating 95 percent of parents and 92 percent of teens believe physical education should be included in the school curriculum, only 35 states mandate the number of high school credits required for a student to graduate. Nationwide, middle and elementary school time allotted to physical education varies by length of class time, number of meetings per week, and duration within the year (9 weeks only, one semester, etc.). *The Guidelines for Elementary Physical Education* (NASPE, 1994) recommend that class size for elementary physical education should be consistent with that of the classroom teacher, and the length of the class time should match the developmental level of the learners. A suggested guideline is 30 minutes for grades K–2 and 45 minutes for grades three and up with a total time of 150 minutes per week. Guidelines for secondary schools recommend 225 minutes per week. However, only 8 percent of elementary, 6.4 percent of middle, and 5.8 percent of high schools meet this recommendation.

The focus in schools on core subjects seems to be a complacency among administrators about what goes on in physical education as long as no one gets injured. Within this system of priorities, physical education teachers have rarely been held accountable for the quality of their teaching. On report cards, grades in certain core areas carry more weight and physical education is often a pass or fail grade. Only 22 states require physical education to be included in a student’s grade point average. This alone informs the student and parents that physical education does not “count.” In many states, secondary schools allow substitutions such as marching band (11 states), ROTC (18), and athletics (17) as replacements for instructional physical education. In elementary schools, physical education is often viewed by teachers and administrators as release time for classroom teachers to plan as well as an avenue for children to release energy. The instructional benefits of a quality physical education program are often overlooked.

The marginalization of physical education has been sustained with the lack of accountability at all levels for good programs. Unlike classroom teachers, physical education teachers and programs are largely not accountable for student learning. Parents are unaware of expectations for student learning or the quality of the program their students are receiving. At the secondary level many physical educators serve a double role as both teacher and coach. While teaching is the primary professional responsibility for which the individual is hired, coaching is often seen as the more important role. The results of effective coaching receive widespread attention and acclaim and are easily identifiable
across society. Win/loss records are reported by the media, making the performance of the coach visible to the public and measurable in common terms. In contrast, the results of effective physical education teaching remain little noticed or largely unidentifiable on a scale large enough to create accountability.

Often, the result of marginalization and a lack of accountability is teacher complacency, burnout, or a change in professions. In order to be accountable, clear program outcomes and ways to measure those outcomes need to be established. The national professional organizations, states, and local districts are beginning to move in this direction, but progress is slow. Because physical education programs are institutionalized as marginalized subjects and the present focus on academic excellence is so pervasive, accountability may need to be established with state, district, and school policy.


Judith Rink, Tina Hall, and Collin Webster

POPULAR CULTURE AND SCHOOLS

If one considers the Ancient Greek Lyceum as a form of institutionalized schooling, then the tension between schools and popular culture has existed for at least 2,400 years. In Plato's Republic, Socrates, speaking through the words of Plato, argues that poetry should be outlawed from their utopian city experiment. Socrates was critical of poetry because the poets, in their public performances, openly criticized his ideas. Plato wrote for Socrates, because the latter believed the written word was a poor imitation of truth and numbed the mind while speech was an authentic imitation of truth. Just as the written word was removed from truth, poets were as well. The poets rarely spoke in their own voices, choosing instead to put words in the mouths of Greek gods and Athenian heroes. Today, critics of hip-hop artists make the same claim. Critics assert rappers rarely use their own words and steal the songs of other musicians.

Socrates's complaints about popular culture did not stop there. In the final book of The Republic, Socrates warns that poetry lowers the intellectual abilities of even the best scholars. Poetry appeals to the base of all human beings and does nothing to elevate our abilities to discern. Perhaps even worse for Socrates, poetry, like painting, is not original in its creation, easily fooling the masses into believing their works of art are real or representations of reality. The debates