Current Curriculum and Trends in Professional Preparation in Health and Physical Education in the United States of America

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Professional preparation in physical education has undergone many changes in the last ten years. Whereas in earlier years the term referred principally to teacher education, it has now broadened to include other areas related to sports, health, and physical education such as Commercial Sport Management, Movement or Sport Science, Sports Journalism, Health Education, Athletic Training, and Dance. Before describing these curricula I feel it is necessary to give some background regarding changes in the U.S.A.

Politico-economic-socio Milieu

Since 1980 there have been sweeping changes in the political and economic sector of our country. There is less federal support for education and this, coupled with an economic recession, has impacted education from pre-school to higher education. Concomitantly, there has been a drop in school enrollment in the elementary schools due to a declining birth rate. These factors have meant that there are (1) lower school budgets, (2) decline in the number of teachers hired, (3) less physical education, (4) fewer teachers and coaches, and (5) fewer students enrolled in physical education teacher preparation programs.

One of the plusses of this situation is that greater cooperation between public schools and higher education is evident. Old adversaries have become new allies. Though once viewed as separate and distinct these institutions are now joining forces and working together to improve curriculum and minimize effects of declining monies and reduction in students.

Tax reductions in California, Massachusetts, North Dakota, and many other states have negatively affected elementary and secondary school programs in physical education. Less than one-third of children and adolescents aged 10–17 are estimated to participate in daily physical education and the percentage is declining. University physical education departments in states such as Oregon, Washington, Minnesota, Michigan and Ohio have had to severely reduce their budgets or have been entirely eliminated from the university program. In some cases, this has resulted in some creative approaches to program maintenance. Oregon is a good example of this. When told there would be fewer university funds for operation, they devised a multifaceted effort to raise funds so they could continue to offer physical education to students.

Alongside the decrease in funding for education there has been a catastrophic increase in

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health care costs. Hospitalization cost is increasing by 15% each year and currently a one–day stay in the hospital costs almost $200. The trend is that the future health of the nation will depend upon each individual's willingness to do something about his or her own health. This presents a tremendous opportunity for the worth of physical education to be recognized in relationship to health maintenance. Physical and sport educators are working toward providing themselves with certification programs such as that through the American College of Sports Medicine.

While there is less money available for tax supported physical education the idea of fitness is sweeping the media, if not the nation. Women and men, twice the number of 15 years ago, engage in regularly scheduled physical activity.

Individuals, probably in response to both the media blitz and greater awareness of the individual's role in health maintenance, are spending large sums of money on products and ideas that seem attractive, require little self discipline, and offer irresistible rewards in terms of personal appearance. Often, they do not have the knowledge upon which to base their programs nor do they have professional guidance. This presents excellent opportunities for physical education in terms of career opportunities and a receptive audience in the schools. However, we are challenged by leaders in other professions calling to our attention that in contrast to what we have done in the past doing a good job of "making healthy people healthier and skilled people more skilled, but a terrible job making unhealthy people healthy and poorly skilled people skilled", we must meet needs of all people. We have been issued a challenge and are responding to it. The great interest in personal appearance and personal fitness presents a tremendous opportunity for physical education.

Education in the United States is currently undergoing a great metamorphosis. In April of this year a Presidential Task Force on Education Report decried the mediocrity in American secondary schools. Subsequent study commissions have likewise criticized the declining quality of schooling. Some have rushed to defend the schools. Others have supported the call for higher standards in math and science instruction, more English and foreign language study, more school time and a longer school year. It is anticipated that in response to this report along with the current demand for "high tech" time money allotted for physical education programs will decrease. Our national and state physical education associations are working diligently to maintain and increase current requirements and quality of instruction in physical education. Some physical educators predict there will be no instructional physical education in 15 years. This presents a real challenge to make our programs indispensable. If we can demonstrate that our programs help people to become responsible for their own health and fitness, assist people regardless of age, skill, or disabling lifelong skills, and can show the necessity of involving physical educators in the planning of space and underwater communities, then we can survive.

Demographic surveys indicate that 11% of the U. S. population is classified as senior citizens or elderly. This has promoted a fresh look at the role of physical education. Traditional programs of professional preparation wherein the emphasis has been on working with children and youth are being reevaluated. Physical education is increasingly being perceived as part of a total wellness program wherein physical education plays a lifetime role along with diet and lifestyle habits. Adult oriented programs are increasingly offered in professional preparation programs. Currently 2.5% of companies and institutions with more than
500 employees offer fitness programs for their workers. Predictions are that this will increase. At this point, I believe we could take a lesson from Japanese industry in the way your industries have used quality circles and developed programs for industrial workers. There are encouraging signs that the number of companies providing such programs for their employees is increasing. There is a need to provide qualified individuals with a relevant and effective preparation for positions in such programs as well as for working with the elderly.

Physical educators will need to be provided with proper credentials to establish jurisdiction over their domain and to assist people in becoming responsible for their health and fitness. Recognizing that people will live longer and will need to adjust to an increasingly technological milieu has many implications for health and wellness.

In 1972 a federal law commonly known as Title IX requiring equal opportunity for females and males was passed in the United States. It has resulted in more opportunities and increased equity for females in sport. An unanticipated by-product of this action has been a perceptible decline in quality of instruction in secondary schools in physical education. The required scheduling of boys and girls in the same classes has sometimes resulted in a noticeable shift in physical education from that of being an instructional program to a recreational program. This accompanied by the fact that high school programs focus on competitive sports involving a relatively few people partially explains why physical education in the secondary schools is often perceived as being of secondary importance. Effective physical educators are working hard and oftentimes, successfully, to counteract this impression.

The federal government has established goals for the improvement of health. The program is entitled Health Objectives, 1990. Its aim is toward the improvement of health at five main stages, infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and older adulthood. The American Alliance has a leadership role in this and has challenged physical educators to ensure a proper foundation of knowledge upon which citizens make choices regarding participation in health promoting activity.

These are just a few of the societal factors impacting upon programs of physical education in the United States. In summary, they require that traditional programs be evaluated and that physical educators be creative and responsive in institutions of higher learning. It is no wonder then, that professional preparation in most institutions goes beyond teacher preparation and has significantly changed in the last fifteen years. A description of these changes will now be presented.

**Professional Preparation Programs**

A survey of programs at college and universities curricula showed that responses are being made to changing needs. Because we have a noncentralized system of education there is great diversity, however, patterns emerge as individual states and institutions of higher learning in those states are assessing how they can best meet the needs of their clientele.

As you say in Asia, "The bamboo tree survives because it is able to bend with the wind", the diversity of curricula reflects a bending with the wind in physical education.

A survey of curricula in more than 100 colleges and universities showed that a similarity exists throughout our program. While each institution has developed its own professional
preparation program and is responsible for its own evaluative criteria there is a substantial amount of communication between professionals regarding curricula. The various accrediting entities such as the National Council for Teacher Accreditation of Teacher Education and the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools also function to examine curricular programs.

All curricula result in a degree program and most programs are divided into general education, human movement, and professional coursework. The general education emphasizes intellectual growth and development rather than vocational preparation. The required units in this area range from 30—57 hours in a 128 credit hour university degree program. These courses are usually taken in the liberal arts area and include courses in humanities such as oral and written communication and literature, the natural sciences such as human physiology and anatomy, physics, and human nutrition, social sciences such as psychology and sociology, and first aid and health. Some universities also have a foreign language requirement.

The second component of the curriculum is the human movement area (approximately 25 hours) dealing with the broad spectrum of knowledge associated with human movement. These courses include the history and philosophy of physical education, motor learning, biomechanics, exercise physiology, and social—psychological aspects of movement.

The third area, professional coursework, varies according to the area chosen for specialization by the individual student. These options available at different schools will be described as to focus and curriculum content.

Teacher Education

The various possibilities in teacher education include the following:
1. Elementary Specialist in physical education—kindergarten through grade six.
3. Physical Education Specialist—kindergarten through grade 12.
4. Health Education Specialist.
5. Dance Education Specialists (offered as an option or a minor in several institutions).
6. Adapted Physical Education Specialist.

The certification for teaching includes requirements centered on performance and teaching skills in aquatics, dance, and sports; professional physical education coursework in the areas of evaluation, adapted physical education, the teaching-learning process, administration and curriculum development. Along with all students in the general teacher preparation program they take courses focusing on education foundations, educational psychology, concepts, methods and techniques involved in teaching, and use of media. Each student also participates in supervised student teaching in his or her area of specialization. In many schools students majoring in one area may complement that major with a minor or secondary specialization in health and safety, recreation, athletic training, driver education, or in one of the other academic areas as social sciences or natural science.

All universities have a minimum grade requirement for acceptance into the teacher education program. On a five point system (A=5) the qualifying grade point varies from 3.00 to 3.50 in all college courses and at least a 3.24 in physical education courses. Acceptance into the
teacher education program is granted during the junior year at most universities.

Some schools in response to societal changes are requiring students to take a course in human relations which is intended to develop an awareness and appreciation of the contributions of all people to American life. Most schools are requiring a course in computer science for students in teacher education. A few are placing more stress on public relations assisting students to develop skills in communicating with elected officials and public groups. Increasingly, students are required to take courses in personal health and physical fitness. Likewise, it is required for all students in physical education to take at least one course in Adapted Physical Education. It is anticipated that the emphasis on a scientific based program for teacher education will continue and that in response to recommendations from the various school study groups, teacher education requirements will be strengthened.

More and more, prospective physical educators are provided with increased and earlier opportunity to practice teaching skills in teaching environments that closely resemble the real world. It usually consists of assisting a teacher or a coach in a local school. Such programs as well as the use of video taping of physical education and academic classes in action permits students to develop a realistic understanding of the teaching learning process.

All the teacher education programs fulfill the requirements for their particular state's teacher certification. Most programs can be completed in four years, however, in some states it requires five years of study. Some states grant provisional teaching certificates and after satisfactory completion of one year of teaching, the permanent certificate is granted.

Increasingly, there is a tendency to require teachers to meet certain competencies. SUNY in Brockport, New York, students must demonstrate at least intermediate skill level in a minimum of eight different activities, one each from swimming, gymnastics, dance, individual/dual indoor and outdoor sports, and team indoor and outdoor sports. They also must demonstrate advanced skill in at least one activity of commonly taught and coached school sports.

Washington State University has worked cooperatively with the State Board of Education, state professional associations, a teacher's association to develop a competency based teacher preparation program in physical education at their school.

At Columbia Teacher's College the physical education faculty and physical education staff of several school districts in New York City have developed a Program Development Center together to improve and revise curricula, to devise experimental fitness units, to test a series of competency instructional units and to revise secondary elective programs.

Exercise Science

This option is variously called sports science, bio science, kinesiology, cardiovascular health and exercise, movement and sports science, and exercise technology. It is designed for students who desire to prepare for non-teaching careers in the sports or physical activity field. Opportunities include the following:

1. Exercise specialist in corporate fitness programs, hospitals, health clubs, cardiac rehabilitation programs, or public or private agencies providing physical fitness activities.
2. Certification programs granted by the American College of Sports Medicine covering the Exercise Test Technologist, Exercise Specialist, Program Director, and Fitness

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3. Pre-medicine or pre-physical, pre-corrective, pre-occupational therapy.
4. Prepare students for graduate study and research in the fields of Physical Education, Kinesiology and related fields.

Students in this curriculum are required to take the general education courses, the physical education or human movement core requirements, and various courses in math, chemistry, computer science, commercial recreation, medical aspects of sports, and a practicum in sport and exercise science. Generally, there are also courses required in psychology and sociology beyond the basic courses. Courses are selected from other disciplines that have particular relevance such as Sociology of the Life Cycle or Principles of Motor Modification.

**Sports Management**

This is closely related to the exercise science option just described. This option places more emphasis on the management aspect rather than the scientific, however, the curricula and work opportunities do overlap. This program is also known as Sport and physical Fitness Business and Management, Public Recreation Administration, and Sport Studies and Management.

Career opportunities include the following:
1. Fitness and Sport Director/Manager
2. Sports Marketing and Promotion Information
3. Sport Administration
4. Public Recreation Administration for National Parks, City Recreation Programs and Industrial Recreation, etc.

Students in this option also take the general education and physical education core courses. Cognate courses may include courses from business, computer science, recreation, leisure, sociology, psychology, forestry and wildlife, speech, industrial relations, business and marketing, and a practicum in exercise and sport science.

Both this area and exercise science are drawing large numbers of students. As industry and commercial fitness programs increase in response to public demand opportunities for employment increase. Currently, some of these enterprises such as health spas are not managed by professionally trained personnel and there is action by sports scientists to establish jurisdiction in this area so that quality leadership can be ensured. As opportunities for employment in schools have been decreasing in the last few years students are increasingly choosing this option within physical education.

**Athletic Training**

This has been a rapidly growing area for specialization. Each state has at least one institution where athletic training is available. The National Trainers Association certifies individuals through examination. Upon certification athletic trainers work with sports teams in fitness conditioning, injury prevention and rehabilitation. The general education and physical education requirements are similar to other programs in physical education. The specific courses include approximately 30 credit hours in areas of chemistry, drug education, athletic training modalities and rehabilitation, aquatic fitness, coaching theory, adapted physical education
and a practicum in athletic training consisting of at least 600 hours of actual athletic training experience.

**Sports Communication**

Some of the programs in sports management include sports communication as a focus within the program but a few schools delineate that a specific option. Students who select this option may find jobs in the following positions:

1. Sports information director
2. Radio-TV affiliate
3. Sports journalism - sports newspaper reporter

Colleges and universities employ persons to promote and publicize their sport programs and report sport results. With the growth of women's sports there have been more job opportunities. The opportunities in sports reporting are more limited and often are not full time positions. Institutions that offer sports communication plan curriculum jointly with journalism or telecommunicative departments within the university.

**Health Related Studies**

Specific programs in this area include Community Health specialist, Health and Recreation specialist, and School Health specialists. Possibilities include the following:

1. Community based health education specialists for positions in voluntary agencies, government, or commercial agencies.
2. Pre-professional training for students who are preparing for advanced study leading to careers in physical therapy, occupational therapy, health administration, and special education.
3. School health instructor

In addition to the general education and physical education core courses students are offered a wide variety of health courses such as Human Diseases - Cause and Prevention, First Aid, Community and Public Health, Environmental Health, Health Promotion in the Community and Workplace, and Drug Education. In addition, they select courses from departments other than Physical Education and must complete a directed field experience in Health Education.

**Dance**

Dance is offered as a major or minor in many universities. Some students graduate in dance with a Bachelor of Science degree in Physical Education, and others with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. The areas of dance emphasis include ballet, ballroom, folk, modern, jazz, and tap dance. This major prepares students for the following opportunities.

1. To teach in public schools or private studios
2. Pursue further professional work toward a career in dance
3. Entrance into a program of dance therapy
4. Entrance into graduate school
5. Employment in a wide variety of programs such as senior citizen programs, artists in the schools, the theatre, and recreation programs.

As in all other options, the dance students take the general education course, the core
physical education classes, and then take the third portion of their work in numerous courses in rhythm, dance techniques and composition, methods of teaching dance, and frequently courses in theater or other arts. They are expected to participate in performance and to present their own work in performance.

Additional programs

While not widely distributed there are options in specific universities for students to specialize in Outdoor Pursuits such as at the University of Oregon, Underwater Education at Temple University, Research emphasis at California State at Northridge and to prepare specifically to work with social agencies such as the YMCA at George Williams and Springfield Colleges.

In a study of 277 institutions of higher learning it was found that 42% of the programs include some type of program related to health and fitness for the elderly. Most of these were of the physical fitness type activity with the well elderly. Boston Bouve is one of the few universities in which the physical education department includes a degree with specialization in Gerontology. It is anticipated that with the advancing age of the American populace more universities will offer such an option. The President's Council on Physical Fitness and the Center for the Study of Aging give encouragement for more work in this area.

A requirement at the University of Maryland and California-Northridge is that each senior participate in a Senior Seminar designed to give each student opportunities to research a major topic. This is done with careful guidance of a faculty member and each student then presents the findings to the other students and faculty.

The foregoing description of options available in physical education shows that the areas which once denoted school programs and teacher education for them has outgrown this precise meaning. While each option is first built upon a requisite general education requirement accompanied by a scholarly analysis of a more specific focalized body of knowledge known as the core courses the third component exists in the form of preparation for a specific career in a wide variety of opportunities.

The undergraduate curricula in physical education has continued to expand opportunities. Most physical education departments have thoughtfully worked to develop programs that have substance and relevancy to society's current and future needs. They have avoided the tendency to rush headlong into offering curricula for which they neither have personnel, expertise, nor facilities. They have wrestled philosophically with trends and issues, have kept abreast of societal changes, and have responded with creative relevant programs. More and more they have worked cooperatively with other entities in the universities such as medicine, business, fisheries and wildlife, nutrition, sociology, family environment, nutrition, veterinary medicine, public administration and telecommunications to develop joint programs and to collaborate on research efforts.

Professional physical educators have also become more involved in the political process. They have worked with elected officials in developing legislation regarding physical education requirements in the schools, expanded opportunities for the handicapped, and assisted in the development of teaching certification requirements.
Like the bamboo, physical education has been affected by the winds of change. Sometimes there have been strong buffeting winds as in a typhoon but as in such a storm, while there has been anxiety, there has also been excitement. It has resulted in fresh approaches, stabilization of long-standing programs, and occasional weeding out of programs that have outlived their usefulness. In the examination of programs and directions there has been consultation with leaders in physical education in other countries. That in itself is justification for our exchange program with you. We learn from you and we hope that you likewise learn from us. I thank you very much for the opportunity of being with you. I have learned from you and am eager to share these things with my colleagues in the United States. If you have any questions regarding the information I have shared I would welcome speaking with you in more detail about it. Again, thank you very much and Sayonara.

References

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