

Physical Activity Promotion

A Responsibility for Both K-12 Physical Education and Kinesiology

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Overcoming “disciplinary and professional disconnects” will help the physical education profession promote lifelong physical activity and health.

Physical education is a physical activity profession, and in the mid-20th century it was criticized for not being based on well-founded disciplinary studies (Conant, 1956). As a result, a movement to develop a more “scientific” disciplinary base for physical education was established. Franklin Henry’s presentation, “The Academic Discipline of Physical Education,” at the 1964 national convention of the National College Physical Education Association for Men, later published in *JOPER* (1964), is often credited with accelerating the movement toward disciplinary areas of study. In the 1970s and 1980s, the body of knowledge in kinesiology (also called exercise science) emerged to include many subcategories of disciplinary study. The list on the left side of figure 1 illustrates many of the subdisciplines that currently provide the base for the activity professions. The academic discipline includes basic information on potential clients (e.g., students, other learners), but additional information related to clients or learners is often provided in physical education professional classes.

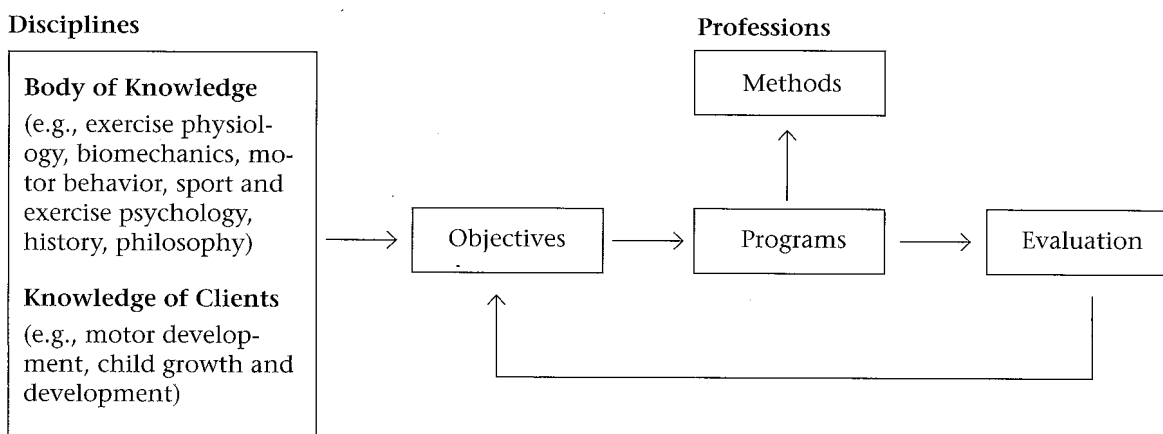
In addition to having a base of knowledge emerging from academic disciplines, professionals such as K-12 physical educators or people in related professions such as athletic training and coaching need additional knowledge and skills. To be successful, for example, they need to understand the characteristics and needs of their clients and have the skills related to developing objectives and designing, implementing, and evaluating specialized programs, curricula, and procedures (see right side of figure 1). Being knowledgeable and skillful in a wide variety of motor skills is important for future teachers, who need to study extensively the various teaching methods if they are to be able to implement appropriate programs efficiently.

In recent years, our field (i.e., the discipline and the profession) has expanded to include many professions other than K-12 physical education. These professions—fitness management, cardiac rehabilitation, sports management, health and wellness promotion, and others—have diverse clients with differing needs, and they require different programs, methodologies, and evaluation techniques (Corbin, 1966, 1993).

The “Disciplinary Disconnect”

As the discipline and the various professions evolved over time, the content of disciplinary classes offered at universities sometimes became less “connected”

Figure 1. Our Field: The Discipline + The Profession



Adapted from Corbin (1993)

with physical education. “Core” courses in the discipline were required to try to meet the demands of the expanding professional programs, while at the same time meeting the knowledge demands of pre-professional areas such as pre-med and pre-physical therapy. As a result, the content of core courses often became less relevant to the preparation of preservice teachers seeking a career in K-12 physical education. For example, meeting the needs of pre-med students in exercise physiology classes required an increased focus on exercise biochemistry, which made the courses less applicable and relevant to preservice teachers. Similarly, motor behavior classes focused more on motor control theories and less on motor learning; and biomechanics classes focused more on math and physics and less on direct applications to teaching.

Meanwhile, with limits on university curricular hours, new and highly relevant areas of disciplinary study, such as exercise epidemiology and health-behavior-change theory, were often unable to find their way into programs for future physical educators. We believe that the disciplinary classes for physical education teacher education need to be reviewed and subsequently brought into line with the specific needs of future teachers. If the “disciplinary disconnect” is to be avoided, disciplinary classes that are designed specifically for teachers may be necessary; or at least they need to be separate from classes for students who need highly specialized academic content and little application. We also believe that areas such as physical activity epidemiology and health-behavior-change theory should be added to the disciplinary content for future physical educators.

The “Professional Disconnect”

As identified in figure 1, the professional study for future K-12 physical education teachers requires expertise in programs (curriculum), methodology, and evaluation. Such expertise helps teachers plan and conduct sound physical education programs relevant to the needs of their learners. Outlined objectives are of paramount importance for professionals because they provide the basis for program content

and effective teaching. In 1986, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) created an “outcomes committee” to answer the question, “What should physically educated students know and be able to do?” In 1992, the “Outcomes Project” of NASPE described the five characteristics of a physically educated person (NASPE, 1992) and these have served as the principal objectives for K-12 physical educators (table 1).

We strongly endorse the characteristics of a physically educated person (table 1) and support reaching them as primary objectives of K-12 physical education. The emphasis on “the pursuit of healthful physical activity” clearly indicates that physical activity is, and should be, the primary focus of physical education programs. This emphasis on physical activity promotion is consistent with a public health approach to physical education that began to be advocated by numerous scholars in the late 1980s (Corbin, 1987; Pate, Ross, Simons-Mortons, & Corbin, 1987; Simons-Mortons, Hartos, Leaf, & Preusser, 1987). The movement toward health-based physical education, featuring physical activity as a primary objective, was reinforced by other leading scholars in the 1990s (Blair, 1993; McGinnis, Kanner, & DeGraw, 1991; Morris, 1991; Pate & Hohn, 1994; Sallis & McKenzie, 1991) and became a part of important position statements from the American College of Sports Medicine (1990), the American Heart Association (AHA, 1992), the United States Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS, 1991), and the Surgeon General’s Office (USDHHS, 1996). Since the turn of the century, the importance of physical activity for good health in youth and adulthood has gained the support of research and medical communities, as well as from the general public (Haskell, et al., 2007) and has led to the publication of physical activity guidelines for youths (NASPE, 1998, 2004b; Sallis, Patrick, & Long, 1994; Strong et al., 2005). Parents of school-age youths endorse physical education as a method of promoting physical activity for the prevention of obesity and chronic disease (Harvard Forums, 2003; NASPE/AHA, 2006). Today, more than any other time in our history, physical education

has the evidence to support its inclusion in the curriculum and its contribution toward the good health of the nation (Pate et al., 2006).

In recent years, NASPE (2004a) has developed standards that provide the basis for programming in K-12 physical education. The introductory comments in the NASPE standards publication mention current public health concerns and new research supporting the importance of physical activity. The introduction to the six NASPE standards also notes the following:

Physical activity is critical to the development and maintenance of good health. The goal of physical education is to develop physically educated individuals who have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity. (NASPE, 2004a, p. 11)

Both the 1992 and 2004 documents identify participation in physical activity as a major standard. The 2004 standards focus more on concepts and principles of movement that enhance learning and performance than knowing the implications and benefits of physical activity. In our view, being active, knowing and understanding the benefits of physical activity, valuing physical activity for health and wellness, and being able to use the self-management skills that will promote lifetime activity should be displayed first and most prominently in the standards. Both sets of standards are limited in that they do not feature the behavioral skills that have been scientifically demonstrated to be associated with being physically active (e.g., planning, goal setting, identifying places to be active, soliciting social support, and self-reinforcement).

Individual states develop their own unique standards, but they typically use NASPE standards as the basis for them. Because states typically focus specifically on the six NASPE standards and not on NASPE's introductory statement, the focus on physical activity promotion often gets lost (e.g., in California) in favor of a focus on standards related to developing social interactions and personal responsibility. Local districts and schools, in turn, use state standards to develop objectives when planning their programs and the focus on physical activity becomes further diminished. Thus, a "professional disconnect" occurs when physical activity—the principal objective of physical education in K-12—is misplaced. It is important to note that we do not object to physical education having learning outcomes that do not relate to physical activity promotion, nor do we think that other objectives such as those reflected in the six standards are unimportant. Nonetheless, as Corbin (2004) noted, "not all of our goals are equal." Currently there is so little time for physical education in our schools that even physical activity goals cannot be reached, let alone all the other standards (McKenzie, 2007; McKenzie et al., 2006).

Suggestions for Connecting Physical Education to Physical Activity

To help eliminate the K-12 disconnect, we offer the following suggestions:

Table 1. Characteristics of a Physically Educated Person

To pursue a lifetime of healthful physical activity, a physically educated person:

- has learned skills necessary to perform a variety of physical activities;
- knows the implications of and the benefits from involvement in physical activities;
- does participate regularly in physical activity;
- is physically fit; and,
- values physical activity and its contribution to a healthful lifestyle.

Source: NASPE (1992)

- Standards that provide the basis for national, state, and local physical education programs should include physical activity participation and promotion as primary objectives.
- School physical education programs (i.e., the curriculum) should reflect the focus on physical activity.
- Teaching methods should include techniques that promote active behaviors during physical education classes and beyond. Even without requiring more or longer lessons, research has clearly shown that physical activity during classes can be increased by about 18 percent by using an active curriculum and implementing efficient management strategies (McKenzie, 2007; McKenzie et al., 2004).
- Scientific evidence should be used to lobby for more physical education time in schools and increased opportunities for physical activity before, during, and after school.
- Scientific evidence should be used to lobby schools to hire well-trained physical educators who know how to engage students in active physical education, teach self-management skills, and promote physical activity in all school settings.
- Physical education professionals should teach behavioral self-management skills that promote lifelong physical activity. Research has shown that even young children can learn important self-management skills (Marcoux et al., 1999) and that classroom and activity sessions in secondary schools designed to teach self-management and important exercise concepts and principles are effective in promoting activity within and beyond the school setting (Dale & Corbin, 2000; Dale, Corbin, & Cuddihy, 1998).
- Teacher preparation programs should restructure their curricula to include disciplinary classes that directly relate to what future teachers will actually teach, including information relevant to physical activity promotion and health-behavior change. Additionally, professional development classes should give future teachers the skills to provide substantial activity in physical education classes, teach self-management skills and key activity concepts and principles, promote physical activity both in and out of schools, and collaborate with others to promote physical activity.
- Staff development programs (i.e., inservice education)

should be provided to help practicing teachers learn the techniques described in the previous point.

- Physical educators should use their collaborative skills to engage parents, other teachers, school administrators, and members of the community to become involved in physical activity and health-promotion efforts.

In 2004, Congress passed the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act (Public Law 108-265). This act requires that all schools with federally funded meal programs have a "wellness plan." The plan must have goals for physical activity and nutrition and must include strategies for implementing and evaluating the goals. This federal mandate provides a perfect opportunity for schools to implement the recommendations of this article in order to eliminate the "disciplinary and professional disconnects" related to K-12 physical education. Now, more than ever before, we have the evidence to show that physical activity is of prime importance to public health. Schools are the most cost-effective locations for physical activity promotion (Pate et al., 2006) and physical education, when delivered by teachers armed with proven activity-promotion methodologies, is the best method for promoting lifelong physical activity and health.

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