

«HISTORY OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT»

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Introduction ⁽¹⁾

In 1961, Henry Steele Commager, the noted Amherst historian, enumerated what he considered to be the advances made in the world in the last quarter century. Despite a great deal of evil, he felt that the forces of good had gone steadfastly ahead. But he expressed some fear, since so many «benign achievements also have their malign sides.» The major areas in which he felt progress had been made include: 1) the survival of civilization; 2) the end of Western colonialism; 3) the vast progress in natural sciences; 4) the development of electronics; 5) the formidable advances in medical science; 6) the creation and growth of the United Nations; 7) the acceptance of responsibility for the welfare of less fortunate nations; 8) the rapid growth of Big Government (can they do the job?); 9) the unprecedented educational revolution, especially in America; and 10) the recognition of intellectual and material equality that eventually will destroy artificial inequalities of class, race or color ⁽²⁾.

These historical occurrences, social influences, scientific discoveries, and inventions all hold implications for the field of education and for physical education. They have caused leaders in the field to become concerned about the body of knowledge upon which our developing profession is based. The «knowledge explosion» has caught up with us, just as it has with our colleagues in other areas of education, and the increase of knowledge in a geometric ratio threatens to engulf us. We are faced with the absolute necessity of «re-tooling»

and upgrading our research efforts in universities. In the process we will need to structure our graduate programs in such a way that we will be able to cope with the need for highly competent research workers who can understand and assess the knowledge which is available to us in a multitude of disciplines. Many of these disciplines, some of which we are only dimly aware, are our related fields or foundation sciences. We will be successful as a profession to the extent that we are able to assimilate this knowledge and the resultant ordered generalizations that have meaning for us. It will then be necessary for researchers in physical education to set up tentative hypotheses, based on the findings of scientists in related fields and in our own, and to apply the various methods of research with careful, painstaking investigation of problems which belong uniquely to physical education. This task belongs to us alone. No other discipline will do this for us, except in a secondary way and belatedly. No other generation of physical educators has ever faced such an enormous problem. It is fortunate that we are aware of it, but at present we are poorly prepared to meet it, and time is short.

The potentialities for pure and applied research in physical education and sport are limitless. This is especially true because of the nature of the field and its possible relationships with physiology, anatomy, psychology (and educational psychology), sociology, history, philosophy, anthropology, chemistry, medicine, and theory of administration. At the moment it is not possible to predict completely and accurately where the future may lead research workers in this field. As past research is viewed historically, and as present research investigation is examined through available descriptive research techniques, it is possible only through philosophical analysis to

⁽¹⁾ A paper presented at the 1964 Meeting of the *Western Conference Directors of Physical Education, Urbana, Illinois*, December 10, 1964.

⁽²⁾ Commager, Henry Steele. «*A Quarter Century — Its Advancements*», *Look*, Vol. 25, No. 12:80-91 (June 6, 1961).

conjecture about the directions in which the field may hope to move.

Here at Illinois, it is recognized that the research undertaking must both consolidate and expand in order to face future demands and needs squarely. We must be on the alert for the brightest young minds in the profession. These people will be attracted only if they see evidence of a continuing and broadening program of research, teaching, and service. It is with these thoughts in mind that the following avenues of research were recommended for the Graduate Department of Physical Education:

1. Physical Fitness (Exercise Physiology).
2. Kinesiology — Human Movement Analysis.
3. Sports and Exercise Psychology.
4. Exercise Therapy (Remedial and Adapted Activities).
5. Historical Investigation.
6. Philosophical Investigation.
7. Investigation in Theory and Practice of Administration.
8. Sociological Investigation.
9. Investigation Related to Teaching and Learning ⁽³⁾.

History of Physical Education and Sport

Having considered the question of research in physical education broadly, may we now turn our attention to a brief consideration of that aspect of the effort which is called history of physical education and sport. The «body of knowledge» is the immediate topic under consideration. Knowledge has been defined as «that which is gained and preserved by knowing; enlightenment; learning; also, broadly, the sum of information conserved by civilization.» Wise men appreciate that knowledge

⁽³⁾ «Discussion of Present and Future Research Space Needs,» a report presented to Dean King J. McCristal, College of Physical Education, June, 1964, by Professors Cureton, Jackson, Noble, and Zeigler.

accumulation is only part of the task; understanding and wisdom are those attributes for which we really strive. But our attention is focused on knowledge at the moment. Where does our field stand in this matter of historical knowledge today? What do we know? How well do we know it? What don't we know? Can it be discovered? What will we need to know to meet the demands of the future?

What role can historical research play in physical education? Nevins explains the function of history as follows:

Although when we use the word history we instinctively think of the past, this is an error, for history is actually a bridge connecting the past with the present, and pointing the road to the future

This conception of history as a lantern carried by the side of man, moving forward with every step taken, is of course far ampler than the concept of a mere interesting tale to be told, a vivid scene to be described, or a group of picturesque characters to be delineated. It is essentially western and modern ⁽⁴⁾.

Still, the question might be asked further, «What *is* history?» Is everything historic? Are we referring to the actual order of events as seen by an interpreter (the historian)? A student of history might ask whether the philosophy of history challenges the democratic way of life. This would imply that there is just one way of looking at history or that there is simply one philosophy. If there are a number of philosophies of history, can we say that one is paramount?

Approaching the problem from another angle, we might question the validity and reliability of historical research. Is it possible to construct a valid philosophy of history that is fact and not fiction? What constitutes acceptable history? Is a simple chronological listing of events satisfactory? Some would argue that history must show

⁽⁴⁾ Nevins, Allan. *The Gateway to History*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Company, Incorporated, 1962, p. 14.

the connection between a series of events. It has been said that good history has depth as well as surface. Mommsen has asserted that «history is neither made nor written without love or hate»⁽⁵⁾.

Allan Nevins, long considered one of America's great historians, has offered us one the finest, clearest definitions of the work of the historian in these words:

Not only is the intention of true history high, but the method is scientific. The historian, that is, collects his data fairly, observes it systematically, organizes it logically, and tests its parts thoroughly. Then by inductive logic and the use of hypothesis he reaches provisional generalizations, and only when he has carried out a final search for new data, and made fresh tests, does he commit final conclusions. In all this he casts off, so far as possible, the prejudice of race, nationality, class, and faction. If his method falls short of the test-tube precision of the chemist, it is at any rate as scientific as he can make it. He will go to the primary sources for as many facts as possible, and restrict his reliance on secondary accounts. He will give each category of evidence its proper valuation: the official document, the letter, the memoir, the newspaper story, the pamphlet, the artifact. He will put every witness, every scrap of paper, under cross-examination. And when he finishes his reconstruction of the past, he will give it as veracious a glow of life as his art can encompass⁽⁶⁾.

These are noble words, and beautifully written. But we must return to reality and ask ourselves once again, «What is the body of historical knowledge in physical education and sport?» If we would answer this question honestly, we would be forced into the admission that the contribution of physical education historians is, relatively speaking, quite meagre indeed, and that the quality of our efforts leaves much to be desired. We have not come very far, we have

a long way to go, and we ought to be about our business. This is not meant to be harsh and critical. We appreciate the contributions that *have* been made. Those of us who have contributed in small or larger measure to this «body of knowledge» realize full well the inadequacy of our efforts. Some have done much better than others, and much fine material exists in languages other than English. Our provinciality in this regard makes this material largely unavailable to us at present.

«As late as 1880 there were only eleven professors of history in American colleges»⁽⁷⁾. Muller points out, however, that:

Our age is nevertheless more historically minded than any previous age, and has a much longer, wider, clearer view of the past. Its contributions to historical knowledge, over the last hundred years, are among its most honorable achievements⁽⁸⁾.

This means that there is hope for us in physical education yet, if we will but see the need and train our own historians of physical education and sport with the readily available help of true historical scholars.

But we in physical education are, generally speaking, not truly aware of this yet. A few years ago, this writer encouraged a potential scholar to place his emphasis in graduate work on the history and philosophy of physical education. He told this young man that there was a great need for people like him in our field, and that he should be able to be placed in a fine university where he could carry on this work. What happened? This young man became so discouraged by the lack of demand for his services that he almost left the field. Fortunately, there is a happy ending to this tale. He has now been employed by a large university and will continue his efforts along the lines of his talent and

⁽⁵⁾ Zeigler, Earle F. *Philosophical Foundations for Physical, Health, and Recreation Education*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964, pp. 4-5.

⁽⁶⁾ Nevins, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁽⁷⁾ Muller, Herbert J. *The Uses of the Past*. New York: Mentor Books (Originally published by Oxford University Press, Inc.) p. 34.

⁽⁸⁾ Muller, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

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interest. But what has happened to others who undertook historical or philosophical dissertations? Why have they not produced since they completed their degrees? Was their burden on the job too onerous, or was the climate not right?

We are fortunate indeed that history has become so popular, and that significant contributions have been made to historical knowledge by historians. Many primary sources have been uncovered, which can be of great aid to us. We can get a certain amount of assistance as well from educational historians, but they have typically shunned physical education and sport. Wood deprecates the fact that those who have written about education and its history have slighted «physical culture» perhaps through bias:

Despite the fact that lip-service has been paid increasingly to the dictum 'a sound mind in a sound body', ever since western Europe began to revive the educational concepts of the Graeco-Roman world, there is still a lack of balance between physical and mental culture, both in school programs and among those who write on education. This is evident in many quarters, even where a certain universality of outlook ought to reign. Turn where one will, it is impossible to find physical culture adequately presented in books dealing with the general history of education. Written in keeping with a dominant rationalism, these books have been concerned chiefly with intellectual movements and institutions for mental improvement⁽⁹⁾.

Furthermore, Brickman takes many of his colleagues in general professional education to task when he criticizes much of their literary output sharply. He decries «the perennial tendency toward dogmatism, superficiality, repetitiousness, and bombast.» He makes a strong plea for improved scholarship, as he asserts that «the more education makes use of the recognized techniques of scholarly inquiry, the better

will be its chances of attaining first-class citizenship in the academic community.»⁽¹⁰⁾

Lest we be a bit smug about this criticism of our colleagues in general professional education, we should take heed of Professor Brickman's comments about our own efforts in physical education history. About one well-known history text, he says, «some of the chapters are superficial, while some are overloaded with material of dubious value.»⁽¹¹⁾ Another early edition of a standard history of physical education is said to be «an extremely elementary treatment of the subject from primitive times to the present informative on the American period. The bibliographies are good, but little use of them has been made in the text.»⁽¹²⁾ His most damning thrust is leveled at another physical education history as follows: «A documented, detailed treatment based, to a large extent, upon secondary sources.»⁽¹³⁾

He does have a kind word for one history of physical education that ninety-nine per cent of our physical educators have probably never even heard about — «The most scholarly and thoroughgoing history of physical education in ancient times. Rich documentation from primary source materials.»⁽¹⁴⁾ But who wrote it? It was written by Thomas Woody, a solid, educational historian.

It is true that a fair amount of sport history has been written, and much of it is of good quality. But, by and large, we cannot take credit for this work. Physical educators have written a number of Master's and doctoral theses on historical topics, but the quality of this work is not high typically. Generally speaking, the people who wrote these theses were not first-rate scholars trained in historiography. Nor were their thesis advisers trained

⁽¹⁰⁾ Brickman, W. W. *Guide to Research in Educational History*. New York: N. Y. U. Bookstore, 1949, Preface.

⁽¹¹⁾ Brickman, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁽¹²⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁽¹³⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁽¹⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁽⁹⁾ Woody, Thomas. *Life and Education in Early Societies*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949, p. vii.

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historians! We do not mean to be overly critical of these efforts. They represent a start . . . quite a good start in fact, especially when we consider other historical efforts of this nature in related academic fields. Further historical studies in physical education could be related to the following types of topics: time period, geographical region, educational level, educational institutions, biography, innovations, philosophy, methodology, curriculum, personnel, comparative education, children, legislation, materials, non-school agencies, professional organizations, finance, architecture, administration, periodicals and other literature, influence of individuals, comparison of theories, legal liability, sport, economics, and politics. A major, related problem is that the instructors teaching our history courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels are typically not very knowledgeable about some of the better, representative historical writing that has been accomplished *even* in our own field!

At present the seven graduate instructors who are concerned with the history of physical education and sport here at Illinois are attempting to discover, list, abstract, and assess every historical investigation related to this aspect of our graduate research and teaching program. It is difficult enough to accomplish this in those studies done in the English language, but we are going to encounter difficulties with important efforts written in other tongues (such as Diem in German, Pereira in Portuguese, and Van Schagen in French, to mention just a few). Fortunately, the recently published history of Indian physical education written by Rajagopalan is in English.

History of physical education and sport within education is a branch of educational history, and educational history is a branch of history. History of educational institutions within the past decade at least, has achieved a certain amount of academic respectability⁽¹⁵⁾ and we in physical edu-

cation now have the opportunity to make a solid historical contribution, if we are but up to the task. At present, we appear to be far from ready to meet this opportunity and responsibility. It is the unfortunate truth that we are too often busy attempting to «make silk purses out of sows' ears.»

It is a truism to state that we need a much stronger body of organized knowledge based on research in order to call ourselves a fine profession. We have developed professional preparation that is intellectual in character; we do pursue our duties largely for others; and we are not judged to be successful by the size of our bank accounts. Furthermore, we have a code of ethics; we have certain public recognition; we have professional leaders who are devoting their entire lives to the task; we are acquiring certain performance skills; and we have fellowship with our associates through various meetings and published literature. But despite these dramatic advances, there is still a primary need for an organized body of knowledge based on legitimate research, and this is certainly true in the area of history.

Those of us who are here today representing the ten universities of the Western Conference are by and large committed to this need for a body of research knowledge. We know that there is an urgent need. We can make decisions about who goes, who sends them, where they should go, what they are after, how they get it, and what they do with it then. We can lay out a blueprint for co-operative research effort that will give us the body of knowledge that we need so desperately. My plea today is that you do not forget the history and philosophy of physical education and sport. «And so we had better strive to become clearly and fully conscious of who we are, where we are, how we got this way.»⁽¹⁶⁾ and which path we shall take.

«Two roads diverged in a wood, and I . . . I took the one less traveled by . . . And that has made all the difference.»⁽¹⁷⁾

⁽¹⁵⁾ Widmar, Barbara (quoting Winton Solberg) in the *Chanpaing-Urbana Courier*, October 6, 1963.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Muller, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Frost, Robert.

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