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Umbrellas: Which Way Is
the Wind Blowing?
by
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Photo courtesy of Wellesley College,
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The field of physical education/kinesiology is facing unique challenges. There are ongoing pressures for change and adaptation forcing us to look to our past as we face an uncertain future. In the past, we have been blessed with all-encompassing categories that may be called ‘‘umbrellas.’’ The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD) has offered us an umbrella that some of us appear to be rejecting. We do so at our peril. Disciplinary development became energized in the 1960s; we now appreciate more fully that our field entails the study of human movement particular to physical activities such as exercise, sport, games, play, aquatics, dance, and athletics. As a profession, we need the undergirding knowledge that our disciplinarians are gradually providing. This knowledge should come from both the disciplinary and professional wings of our field. There is a continuing need for the services that physical education/kinesiology can provide. We will survive if we cooperate with our colleagues in the allied professions under the overarching umbrella of AAHPERD, if we achieve consensus about what it is we do under our own umbrella, and if we devise ways and means of keeping the struts of our own umbrella strong enough to fight off the strong winds that are presently tending to tear it out of our hands.

The first Homans Lecture took place on March 12, 1967, in Las Vegas, Nevada. Dr. Mable Lee paid tribute to Amy Morris Homans at the inauguration of this lecture series sponsored by the National Association of Physical Education for College Women. Lee (1967) stated, ‘‘This [series] will be her professional immortality.’’ Indeed it is!

I did not know Homans personally, but I was privileged to receive an Amy Morris Homans Fellowship from Wellesley College to pursue my doctoral dissertation on the life and professional career of Dr. Gertrude Moulton. Betty Spears (1982), the 16th Amy Morris Homans Lecturer, stated, ‘‘Although we may not choose to emulate Homans in every respect, we can still appreciate her strength of character and her many achievements as she struggled to overcome the challenges she faced’’ (p. 90). This is what today’s presentation is all about—challenges we face, individually and collectively.

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Just outside the front door stood Mary Poppins, dressed in her coat and hat, with her carpet bag in one hand and her umbrella in the other. The wind was blowing wildly about her, tugging at her skirt, tilting her hat rakishly to one side. But it seemed to Jane and Michael that she did not mind, for she smiled as though she and the wind understood each other. She paused for a moment on the step and glanced back towards the front door. Then, with a quick movement, she opened the umbrella, though it was not raining, and thrust it over her head.

The wind, with a wild cry, slipped under the umbrella, pressing it upwards as though trying to force it out of Mary Poppins’ hand. But she held on tightly, and that, apparently, was what the wind wanted her to do, for presently it lifted the umbrella higher into the air and Mary Poppins from the ground. It carried her lightly so that her toes just grazed over the garden path. Then it lifted her over the front gate and swept her upwards toward the branches of the cherry trees in the lane. “She’s going, Jane, she’s going!” cried Michael, weeping.

(They had no doubt now) . . . Mary Poppins had gone for good because the wind had changed. (She floated away in the upper air) . . . over the cherry trees and the roofs of the houses, holding tightly to the umbrella with one hand and the carpet bag with the other. (Travers, 1934, pp. 199-200)

A Definition and a Brief Background

What is important here is umbrellas! Mary Poppins relied on her umbrella and the magic of the wind to overcome gravity and to help her pursue change—change in her life and in the lives of others. “[An] umbrella is a device for protection from the weather, consisting of the collapsible canopy mounted on a central rod—anything that protects—or an all-encompassing category, organization, authority by means of which many different things or groups are linked” (Webster’s New World Dictionary). In our field we have referred, time and again, to umbrellas. The latter part of the definition is still part of our active vocabulary.

Earlier in our history, in the 1920s, an umbrella of physical education was developing that was all encompassing. After initial disagreement about the aim of teacher preparation programs in the period from 1890 to 1919, a unique American philosophy of physical education began to take hold in teacher education in our field that included health, physical education, camping, and athletics. World War I draft statistics made it necessary to renew an emphasis on health, and the “natural program of physical education, as proposed by Wood and Williams, began to make itself felt. Also, sports, athletics, and team games received emphasis because of war experiences” (Zeigler, 1951, p. 191). “Physical education and sports had acquired a firm educational status which commanded considerable respect for their potential accomplishment in the preparation of youth for life in American society” (Van Dalen, Mitchell, & Bennett, 1971, p. 473). As you are aware, this status continued into the 1980s, but questions are being raised today.

The professional nature of the American Physical Education Association has made changes as the field has grown over the years. The Research Quarterly was first published in 1930 to transmit information of new research to the profession. Then, in 1937, the umbrella was broadened as our name was changed
to the American Association for Health and Physical Education. In 1938 the canopy was further broadened to include recreation; hence, AAHPER. Colleges and schools of physical education began to change their names to HPER. Thus, they too had their umbrella structures, and the allied departments enjoyed an umbrella-like, protective canopy.

**Recent Modifications and Developments**

It is important to remind ourselves that we have used umbrellas as a concept for many years. Zeigler (1991) stated, ‘Julius Caesar is purported to have said [posthumously], ‘A funny thing happened [to me] as I entered the Forum!’ Our profession might say today, ‘A funny thing happened as we left the sheltering umbrella of starting down the path toward our becoming a fully recognized profession!’’ (p. 206). Those of us under that umbrella did find shelter, but that did not mean that we were complacent about our expanding field.

Recently, Newell (1990) referred to academic societies and the potential (or lack of it) for political input. In assessing 14 academic societies, of which the National Association for Physical Education in Higher Education (NAPEHE) is one, he said,

Thus, the field of physical education is left with the academic power distributed and defused through a group of small subdomain societies; the political power, or the potential for it, is left housed under the *umbrella* [italics added] of the increasingly irrelevant professional society of AAHPERD. (Newell, 1990, p. 240)

Newell’s message speaks for itself, but once again there is a reference to umbrellas. This umbrella (AAHPERD) has more than 35,000 members!

Since Henry (1964) wrote his response to Conant on the subject of disciplines in the mid-1960s in an effort to help our field delineate ways to become more academically respectable, the specialized areas under our umbrella have grown rapidly. To date, hundreds of articles on the subjects of discipline, profession, consensus, integration, segregation, interdisciplines, cross-disciplines, power, and turf have been discussed repeatedly. Many of these papers have appeared in *Quest* (NAPEHE) and *The Academy Papers* (the American Academy of Physical Education). These papers have been submitted by colleagues from college and university departments with an almost unbelievable number of different titles, titles that presumably identify to others what it is we are about. (Razor and Brassie, 1990, reported that 119 units had title changes in the past 10 years.)

You may be saying, ‘The title we have depends on where we are. We need this title to gain respectability and status; we do more than merely train teachers.’ We all appreciate this fact. We have known for years that specialization in our field entails the study of human movement in physical activities such as exercise, sport, games, play, aquatics, dance, and athletics. All of this is designed to produce (or provide) fitness, improved health, enjoyment, relaxation, enhanced performance, competition, or meaning for the person involved.

Another contention is that we are academic—that is, scholarly—people. Indeed, it is important to have this as a major goal in institutions of higher
learning. It is disturbing, however, that most professors in the so-called research institutions immediately close their umbrellas and rev up their disciplinary bumbleshoots when the term *profession* is mentioned. Moreover, when they do this, they reopen their personal umbrella with only one segment or strut functioning. I applaud the efforts of the varying subdisciplines to develop strong scholarly societies, but I shudder when I realize that the protection of the entire umbrella is being lost in the process. The message comes through loudly and clearly: If I as a colleague am interested or involved with professional preparation programs or professional organizations, I must not be a scholar or researcher. Perhaps one becomes overly sensitive in this regard; maybe this impression is being created because travel money has been restricted in recent years.

**A Vital Need for Consensus**

The time has come for us to reach a consensus as to what it is we are about. We all recall that Alice asked the Cheshire Cat where she ought to go from her present destination. The cat’s response is now folklore: "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to" (Carroll, 1985, p. 54). I believe the time when we should have decided where we want to get to has passed.

There has been increasing difficulty identifying the body of knowledge for students enrolled in our undergraduate programs. This problem was compounded when we provided more specialized areas for MA, MS, and PhD programs. We are even hard pressed to know how many programs are offered in our field in the United States. Newell (1990), quoting from the 21st edition of the *College Blue Book*, indicated 508 departments offering BS degrees. (Razor and Brassie, 1990, reported 614 different responses from 1,317 questionnaires sent.) Whatever the number and whatever the result, any criticism we may have is made in the face of the fact that the professional practitioners in the field are the products of our programs. If we finally offered a consistent curricular structure as to what knowledge, skills, and competencies we want for our students, we would be able to evaluate whether they are prepared to serve society in their future professional positions.

**Progress in the Teaching/Learning Realm**

Fortunately, the quality of research in the area of program development and instructional methods, or *pedagogy*, has been improving steadily. A welcome outlet for this branch of study is the *Journal of Teaching Physical Education (JTPE)*, which,

provides a forum for discussion and research articles which focus on the teaching process and teacher education in physical education. It is intended to serve students, teachers, teacher educators, and administrators as an outlet for scholarly communication on teaching in physical education. (Editorial Policy, *JTPE*, 1989)

(PPCF; Jewett & Bain, 1987), to a unique development in the area of program development. This framework was developed and fostered by Ann Jewett along with many colleagues and former students. The PPCF endeavor began in the 1960s with support from AAHPER. Others who contributed significantly to the initial theory development have been recognized by Jewett and Mullan (1977, p. vi).

For some time now, scholars and scientists have expressed concern over the gap between theory and practice in our field (Kneer, 1986). Efforts are being made to close that gap, but, as scholars concerned with pedagogy, we should remember that the clients need to be part of the process as we coordinate efforts to improve the quality of our programs. The schools and the students themselves make up the laboratory settings, and they should benefit from what we learn about teaching individuals to become effective and efficient movers through meaningful, holistic educational programs.

We hear time and again about the impact one aspect of sport psychology can have on psychomotor development. The clientele is out there, but where are the results? I am not naive about what is happening in school programs of physical education, but I am still waiting for programs with a strong instructional activity emphasis. Reading about the importance of active engagement in physical activity is beneficial, of course, but it does not take the place of regular activity that involves learning skills for fitness and enjoyment. Only soundly based instruction of "lifeskill" activities will produce the growth and development that are important for all youth.

I am cognizant that efforts to improve have been made, but as an overall profession we have not communicated effectively to our various publics, including administrators and parents, the vital importance of physical education for school-age children. The recent report of the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1990, p. 128) stated that the 1988 enrollment for public schools was more than 50 million and that private schools involved slightly more than 8 million boys and girls. Future projections are even higher. What an outlet we have; what an impact we could make by delivering effective and efficient professional services to all young people.

The Winds of Change Are Blowing!

Even Mary Poppins was aware of the winds of change—and so we too must be alert as we seek to help people live more meaningful lives. The need to help people experience improvement in their lives through meaningful physical activity is growing. We now know that early, regular physical activity is helping people to live longer. The life expectancy of all people in the United States in 1990 was 75.6 years (72.1 for males, 79.0 for females), and this figure, too, is increasing.

To return briefly to the school-age end of the life continuum, I can report some exciting developments brought about through activities sponsored by several professional organizations. For this reason I must take issue with my colleague Karl Newell, who decried AAHPERD as being irrelevant. For example, Hanson (personal communication, February 20, 1991), in a report to the AAHPERD membership, told of the early childhood thrust that has become the central focus of various professional units. The Commission on
Children's Dance of the National Dance Association (NDA) carried out a successful International Early Childhood Creative Arts Conference in December 1990 in Los Angeles. The NDA was a sponsor, the conference was partially funded by the U.S. Head Start Bureau, and a number of worldwide leaders were in attendance representing dance, art, childhood education, and physical education. Also, the Council on Physical Education for Children (COPEC) of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) has several broadly based projects underway regarding an appropriate developmental curriculum for children ages 3 through 12. Empirical, scientific investigation can provide the capstone to these professional undertakings. It can be done, and it is being done (kudos to Margie Hanson of NDA and AAHPERD).

All of us are aware of the arbitrary political decisions made recently regarding the continuation of certain academic programs in physical education/kinesiology and recreation in Oregon and Massachusetts (U.S.) and in British Columbia and Alberta (Canada), respectively. There hasn't been a sufficient number of incidents yet to detect a pattern, but whether our label is physical education or kinesiology doesn't seem to be the inciting cause for elimination or transfer. It seems to be more a case of declining revenue and of which unit has the lowest student enrollment, which is the most vulnerable politically, and which is most poorly understood from the standpoint of the basic arts-and-science mission. (At the University of Illinois, our dean, Mike Ellis, told me he too was nervous about the future. So should we all. Where is my umbrella?)

Despite everything, I believe we will survive. Even though for 25 years we have been urged to come to consensus as to what we are and where we are going (Zeigler, 1967), we now are finally being forced to hone in on our basic elements—to decide what it is we profess to do and what it is we actually do, and then to move to mesh theory and practice more effectively and efficiently. We should not try to be everything to all people. Some drastic decisions may have to be made. However, the scholarly and scientific work we do must cut across the humanities, social sciences, sciences, and professional schools (e.g., education) in an applied way that offers sound guidance to our professional endeavors.

Park (1990) told us that the medical field is identifying its scientific and professional areas in an improved way. Sage (1984), in the Fourth Dudley Allen Sargent Lecture, stated that the same is happening in English and biology. If they can do it, we can do it. We must do it. In speaking of our field, Sage referred to the structural model that has evolved in higher education. I offer his thoughts to you as one model with which you may wish to identify:

One role is to provide a general education experience for every student's personal-social enrichment and liberal education. A second role involves the study of a particular subject matter for understanding and advancing knowledge about that discipline. Third is the role of professional preparation of persons who wish to apply the subject matter to occupational tasks of some kind. These three roles—general education instruction for all students, understanding and advancing knowledge in a field of study, and occupational preparation—cut across most current fields of study in higher education. (Sage, 1984, p. 119)
Sage concluded with a warning that, unless we keep these three roles firmly in mind, our field could well become an ‘‘endangered species’’ in higher education, and this is happening in some locations.

At the outset I told you that Mary Poppins was affected by the changing winds. We too have been affected by these same gusty and at times ferocious winds. We will survive if we reach consensus as to what’s under our umbrella, if we strive to anticipate crises, and if we make appropriate changes before disaster strikes. So, along with Mary Poppins, let’s hang on to our umbrellas and trust that the prevailing weather will be bright and balmy.

References


