Overcoming Obstacles to Collaboration and Integration in Physical Education

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This paper identifies subdisciplinary fragmentation, academic elitism, and negative stereotyping as obstacles impeding the process of collaboration among different groups within the profession of physical education. It provides examples of projects in which academics interacted among themselves and with physical education teachers, classroom teachers, and volunteer coaches. To the extent that these interactions reduce fragmentation and allow academics and practitioners to act as equal partners in the process of problem setting and problem solving, they are offered as ways to "connect" in physical education and as a basis for professional integration.

In a 1985 issue of the Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance dealing with the problems of professional fragmentation, Shirl Hoffman characterized physical education as "a disconnected society of professionals and academics in search of ways to 'reconnect'" (1985b, p. 17). The purpose of this paper is to identify obstacles that impede collaborative efforts in physical education and to show how these obstacles affect interaction among academics (university faculty) and between academics and professionals (volunteer coaches and teachers) in the process of problem setting and problem solving. Three examples of interaction are presented. They are a 13-year collaboration between college faculty and volunteer coaches aimed at providing enjoyable experiences for children participating in Little League baseball (Rees, Feingold, & Barrette, 1991), a continuing project designed to encourage cooperation between classroom and physical education teachers when teaching fitness to elementary school children (Feingold, Rees, & Barrette, in press), and a case study of interaction between a college professor and a group of school physical education teachers who, together, revitalized a stagnating physical education program (Barrette, Bradt, Hagan, King, & Penale, 1991). To the extent that barriers to professional unification, such as subdisciplinary fragmentation, academic elitism, and negative stereotyping, are confronted and sometimes overcome in these examples, about the Authors: C.R. Rees, R.S. Feingold, and G.T. Barrette are with the Department of Physical Education and Human Performance Science at Adelphi University, Garden City, NY 11530.
this paper offers possible ways to "connect" in physical education. These connections can also lead to a more integrated profession.

**Obstacles to Collaboration and Integration**

At the risk of oversimplification, reviews of the state of the physical education profession during the latter half of the 1980s have been characterized by gloom and doom. Some critics have noted a lack of consensus about the goals of our profession and disagreement over how to achieve these goals (Hellison, 1985; Hoffman, 1985c) and have predicted dire consequences ranging from fragmentation (Greendorfer, 1987) and deprofessionalization (Lawson, 1985) to extermination and death (Bressan, 1979; Hoffman, 1985c).

Greendorfer (1987, p. 57) has identified the root of the malaise as "a fundamental disagreement over what our knowledge base and the focus of inquiry should be." The knowledge base she referred to is missing because the profession cannot agree on a unifying concept encompassing our subject matter that might include sport, dance, movement, and exercise. This lack of a common focus is accentuated by the organization of knowledge into independent and narrowly conceived subdisciplines that have more in common with the parent discipline than with physical education. In the present arrangement, a department of physical education may house sport psychologists, sport sociologists, sport historians, and exercise physiologists, among others. Their research interests may be much closer to other psychologists, sociologists, historians, and physiologists than to each other. The focus of inquiry is as likely to be top-class athletes, recreational runners, or white rats as it is to be children in physical education classes. Doing research that tests sociological, physiological, or some other theory, presenting it at specialized meetings, and publishing it in the scholarly journals of the parent discipline may increase the academic credibility of the researcher but does little to advance the development of a unified body of knowledge in physical education. Hoffman (1985a) has criticized this "longitudinal" organizational structure that impedes the development of a "horizontally" integrated body of knowledge.

Other scholars agree with this view. Hellison (1985) has argued that the subdisciplinary perspective leads to fragmentation because scholars in physical education are "walled up" inside their specialist areas and have little dialogue with departmental colleagues or physical education practitioners. An interest in the health and leisure of the whole person, the central mission of physical education according to Hellison, is lost under this subdisciplinary model. A similar position has been taken by Ellis (1988). He has suggested that the goal of physical education should be to understand the body and its functions, societies' sport and games, and how to apply this information to a healthy life-style. Specialized knowledge as it is currently developed by the subdisciplines does not guide practitioners toward this goal.

The subdisciplinary movement has been based upon what Greendorfer (1987) has called a scientific quest for knowledge. The epistemological thrust of this research has tended to be empirical and positivist, which assumes that there is one reality, the scientific reality, that takes precedence over all others. Legitimate knowledge is scientific reality, which is "value neutral" and "factual" (see Sparks, 1985). Those with access to scientific knowledge have the key to answering important questions in physical education.
Acceptance of this model has not, however, been universal, and the primacy of the scientific view of the truth has been questioned by scholars, particularly in the social sciences (Chalip, 1990; Martens, 1987; Sparks, 1985). This has led to disagreements between scholars within subdisciplines about what direction research should take (Ingham & Donnelly, 1990; Yiannakis, 1989) as well as between subdisciplines (Sage, 1987). It has also been pointed out that, under the philosophical assumptions of positivism, the mind is perceived to be totally separate from the body and superior to it. Such a philosophical stance, which places bodily experiences such as physical activity in a secondary role relative to the cerebral process of thinking, is not a very strong starting point from which to develop a unified knowledge base for physical education (Meier, 1979; Osterhoudt, 1984). Indeed, it has led to what Meier (1979, p. 197) has termed “the treadmill image of sport,” in which the human body is reduced to the status of an object to be altered and manipulated or an obstacle to be surmounted.

This debate has important implications for research and practice in physical education. When a more phenomenological approach has been offered, it has been met with resistance, especially from the biosciences (Sage, 1987). If philosophical and epistemological differences have caused disagreements among faculty in physical education departments at the university level, an emphasis on science has widened the rift between scholars and practitioners in our profession (Hellison, 1985; Lawson, 1985). Specialized knowledge may enhance a scholar’s status as a researcher, but scholars and practitioners live in different worlds. Lawson (1985) has indicated that researchers and practitioners are socialized differently by their work organizations. For example, practitioners work in client-centered organizations where the reward system is based on equality; researchers tend to work in professionally centered organizations and are rewarded on merit. The first organization stresses service, the second knowledge. Practitioners and researchers also experience different work roles. Practitioners tend to be generalists and communicate knowledge, provided it works for them; researchers tend to be specialists interested in testing knowledge and applying universal rather than particular criteria to judge its usefulness. Given these differences, each group may see the other as irrelevant. Researchers perceive practitioners as limited by their unique situation; practitioners perceive researchers as giving complicated and unintelligible answers to useless questions. At worst, researchers are stereotyped by practitioners as elitist, and practitioners are stereotyped by researchers as dumb.

Specialization and fragmentation are symptoms of an ideological disturbance in which the relevance of physical education is questioned. According to Lawson (1984), these problems are characteristic of a one-sided concern with the ability of physical education to solve problems instead of a more balanced consideration of problem setting as well as problem solving. If academics in physical education do not start asking the right questions (as opposed to answering the wrong ones), the profession will fail to address problems that laypersons feel important. The assumptions of positivism, the emphasis on science, and the subdisciplinary organization of knowledge has transformed the frame of reference from applying knowledge to developing knowledge. This change is reflected in departmental names. What used to be called a department of physical education may have become a department of human performance science, movement science, or kinesiology. Lawson (1984) suggested that a concern with problem
setting will help us question the assumptions underlying the scientific model that has alienated practitioners and, in doing so, develop a more inclusive model for our profession.

Echoing Lawson's (1984) call for more attention to problem setting, Chalip (1990) also endorsed more collaboration between researchers and those that are being researched. He noted that only through such collaboration has there been significant change in social policy concerning problems such as racial prejudice and rape. Scientists are not God and do not have access to "the truth." Their view of reality is not omnipotent, and they are subject to the same forces as the people they study. Furthermore, disciplines (and also subdisciplines) are not etched in stone but are merely a convenient way of organizing knowledge in academic institutions. There are no uniquely sociological problems, and social scientists from related disciplines need to work together as well as with practitioners.

A fragmented knowledge base, segregated in subdisciplines that are aligned vertically with the parent discipline rather than horizontally within physical education, has reduced cross-disciplinary interaction. The popularity of the orthodox science approach to the development of knowledge (Martens, 1987) has elevated this epistemology over others and has led some academics in physical education to think that they have all the answers.

But practitioners and academics are beginning to realize that without each other they cannot successfully set or solve problems in physical education. In such conditions, academics collaborating among themselves and with practitioners are developing superordinate goals, goals that cannot be achieved without the successful cooperation of different groups (Rees, 1985; Sherif, 1958). When this occurs, the stage is set for interaction that will reduce negative stereotyping among academics and practitioners in physical education. This is particularly likely in projects requiring intimate and long-term interaction and where the in-group members are exposed to multiple members of the out-group repeatedly behaving in a manner that disconfirms prevailing views of the out-group (Stephan, 1987). Such collaboration can empower widespread change in physical fitness, sport, and physical education and form the basis of an integrated profession.

This brief review has identified fragmentation, elitism, and negative stereotyping as obstacles to interaction among academics and between academics and practitioners. This interaction is an important aspect of the process of professional integration. Although increasing integration was not the initial motive for involvement, the following case studies do illustrate how these obstacles to integration can be confronted and reduced.

Connecting Academics and Volunteer Coaches: The South Queens Project

The story of the South Queens' Little League workshops, a 13-year collaboration between the faculty of a local physical education department (Adelphi University) and the volunteer managers and coaches of Little League District 27, has been told in some detail elsewhere (Hilgers, 1988; Rees et al., 1991). It is used here to demonstrate the problems encountered when initiating and sustaining interaction between academics and practitioners, and it also demonstrates the
breakdown of subdisciplinary divisions that can occur when a sport sociologist, an exercise physiologist, and a pedagogist come together to develop a coordinated presentation for volunteer coaches.

The initial contact between the faculty and the coaches occurred in an atmosphere of hostility and mistrust. A derogatory comment to the effect that volunteer coaches sometimes did more harm than good, wrongly attributed to one faculty member, had been duplicated from a local newspaper and circulated to the district managers by the district president just before the first meeting. As a result, the unsuspecting faculty representatives had to face a barrage of comments from the managers questioning why they (the faculty) were “interfering.” Under these circumstances, to react by suggesting that the faculty had all the answers about how to coach Little League baseball would have been quite foolhardy. It would also have been untrue. One faculty representative, raised in a different culture, knew next to nothing about baseball.

The faculty representatives did respond by raising some important issues in youth sport (e.g., “problem” parents, coaches arguing with officials) that needed to be dealt with if the players were going to enjoy themselves. A suggestion was made that the faculty and key members of the district organization meet to discuss ways to solve these problems with a view to developing workshops for the managers. This suggestion was enthusiastically accepted by the president of the district and some of the more moderate managers, who were themselves concerned about these and other problems.

The initial impetus for the project, then, grew out of a concern, shared by the faculty and key administrators, for improvements in the organization of Little League baseball that would eventually benefit the participants. Over the next year, several planning meetings were held in which representatives of the faculty and the district developed the form and substance of the workshops. Through this interaction it became clear that both groups were genuinely interested in youth sport and needed each other. The faculty could provide substantive knowledge and expertise in the theoretical aspects of performance and behavior; the managers and coaches could provide a practical framework upon which the theoretical information could be based.

A year after the initial meeting, the first workshops took place at Adelphi University. There were four 1-day-long sessions devoted to fitness, injuries, social values, and pedagogy. To promote discussion and a sense of group cohesion, the faculty and 30 managers devoted 4 Saturdays in a row to the project. The decision that all faculty making presentations should come to all the meetings was made for several reasons. It reinforced the “shared ownership” theme: That is, because the faculty and managers were all in this together, they should ask and answer questions together. Also, this shared ownership concept applied to the substance of the workshops. For example, what the sports sociologist said had a great bearing on what the pedagogist said and vice versa. With all the faculty there all the time, they could begin to develop an integrated approach for the application of subdisciplinary knowledge to the issue of children’s participation in organized sports.

The reaction to these workshops was very positive by both faculty and managers. Both groups had stereotyped preconceptions that would be expected to affect the encoding process during interaction. This expectancy-confirmation bias (Stephan, 1987) was reduced under the conditions of intimate interaction
provided by the workshops. Faculty discovered that the managers were genuinely interested in the welfare of children in sport and had valuable experiences and ideas to share. Managers were surprised that the faculty did not preach to them and that faculty were also interested in the practical problems of Little League baseball. At the end of the fourth session, faculty were surprised that almost all the managers agreed that four sessions were not enough time for the topic. Managers expressed surprise that their initial fears about the nature of the workshops had not been confirmed. The overwhelming majority of them had not been educated past high school and were fearful of going to college and being subjected to "book learning." The belief that the substance of the workshops would be too theoretical for them was not realized because of the shared ownership approach and the question-and-answer format.

Subsequently, the shared ownership theme has sustained the workshops, although the form has been periodically revised. One principal goal has been to reframe (Lawson, 1984) the questions about youth sport, from a model that tries to increase the skills of the best players so that the team can win the maximum number of games (professional model) to one in which the participation and enjoyment of the maximum number of children is the goal (educational model). At the request of some managers, one large part of the pedagogical session dealing with the techniques of hitting has been dropped and simple pointers about swinging the bat have been incorporated into more general pedagogical principles about how to teach the skills of baseball during practice and provide positive reinforcement during the game. This change allows more time to discuss specific problems about how to organize practice and deal with undermotivated children and overmotivated adults, another suggestion from the practitioners.

Knowledge from the subdisciplines has been integrated toward this end. Pedagogical information is linked conceptually to principles of motivation in youth sport. Managers are asked to consider how to increase opportunities for children's success in youth sport (emphasizing process not outcome, setting individualistic performance goals) and decrease the potential for stress created by the professional model. This theme is maintained in the physiology-based part of the program in which the problems of how to make fitness fun for children and how to deal with injuries sustained by children in sport are discussed (see Rees et al., 1991). By focusing on the child as a whole, a horizontal integration of knowledge has been achieved, and what used to be subdisciplinary walls have been broken down. Of course this did not happen immediately. It is a continuing process based upon many years of involvement with the project, communication, and respect for one another.

Not only the substance but also the form of the workshops has been changed. Because Little League baseball is very popular, and the turnover rate among coaches and managers is high (Weiss & Sisley, 1984), the workshops have attempted to reach a large number of adults. To facilitate this goal, the time has been reduced to 1 day, and the rate of participation has been increased. Now between 100 and 200 managers and coaches attend each session. Obviously, direct interaction has been reduced by this approach, although the question-and-answer format is still used as much as possible. This lack of intimacy is less problematic than might be thought because the workshops are now very much part of the shared reality of being a volunteer manager or coach for District 27. Over the years, these workshops have received positive publicity with articles in
the *New York Times*, *Newsday*, and *Sports Illustrated* (Hilgers, 1988) and coverage on a national television talk show (Sonya Freeman, "Live from L.A.,” April 20, 1988). At each workshop, coaches and managers from other Little League districts in Manhattan and on Long Island attend as guests. Their appreciative comments help to reinforce the idea that what goes on in District 27 is special. Many managers in this district are committed to the educational mode, regularly attend the workshops, and require new coaches to attend as part of their socialization into the world of volunteer coaching.

Through long-term commitment to the superordinate goal of making baseball enjoyable for children, academics and practitioners have cut through stereotypical barriers. Practitioners have reduced their stuffed-shirt image of faculty, and faculty have realized that most Little League managers do not fit the stereotype of the driven coach but are sincerely interested in the welfare of children. In the process, hundreds of thousands of children may have been affected positively. To paraphrase Clifford Geertz (1972), the workshops are now part of the culture of Little League District 27, part of the story that the managers and coaches tell about themselves. They are also part of the culture of the Adelphi faculty.

**Connecting Classroom and Physical Education Teachers:**

**The Elementary School Fitness Project**

Previous framing processes in physical education concerning the body-mind relationship have already set the agenda for how to solve the problem of fitness. If the mind is superior to the body, then thinking takes precedence over movement. If the body is perceived as a machine controlled by the mind, then the problem of physical fitness is solved through training or "tinkering with" the body (Lawson, 1984, p. 55). Under this model, the goal of physical fitness is to devise efficient training systems and measurement tools. For example, the emphasis is placed more on the ability to accurately identify a score in the 30th percentile of the AAHPERD Youth Fitness Test and less on the effect of that information on the subject’s self-concept and subsequent involvement in physical activity. However, Corbin (1990) has suggested that fitness awards based on the attainment of specific normative standards (e.g., the 85th percentile) on motor fitness tests have done little to motivate all but the best children to become regularly involved in exercise, and he has recently demonstrated that positive feedback about fitness increases intrinsic motivation (Whitehead & Corbin, 1991). Such results demonstrate the need for physiologists and psychologists to collaborate on fitness measurement and promotion. This collaboration could be part of a team of public health professionals if physical education becomes allied with the public health movement (Ellis, 1988; Morris, 1991; Sallis & McKenzie, 1991), a development that would underscore the need to reduce the obstacles to professional integration.

The elementary school fitness project, like the youth sport project already mentioned, began with the task of reframing the problem. This was done at several levels. First, the members of the state’s Heart Association, who had initiated a fitness module for use by the elementary school classroom teacher, had to be convinced that the physical education teacher should also be included.
Then classroom and physical education teachers had to be brought into a cooperative relationship in the problem setting and solving phase. As part of this process, they needed to reject the mechanistic model of fitness and concentrate on how to make the fitness process enjoyable for the student and the teacher. In addition, they needed to eliminate the stereotypical view that the physical education teacher is only interested in skills and fitness and not concerned with the broader effects of these characteristics on the physical and mental health of children.

Resistance to the idea that classroom teachers and physical educators should develop a cooperative approach to fitness came in several ways. Because the original Heart Association teaching modules had been prepared for classroom teachers only, the American Heart Association’s state affiliate-level staff did not understand the need for physical educators to teach fitness and nutrition concepts to elementary school children. They also had to be convinced that the modules themselves, although important, should be considered chiefly as support materials for the teachers. Even members of the planning committee had different views of how to develop the workshop. This diversity was not surprising because the membership reflected the multidimensional character of fitness: The committee included a school physical education director; a school superintendent; university faculty with expertise in physiology, pedagogy, and sociology; a classroom teacher; a school nurse; and an emergency room nurse. At one stage the physical educator on the committee indicated that, during the workshop, she would present the physical education perspective on fitness. One nurse’s reaction was that the classroom teachers would not be interested in what the physical educator had to say and that it would be better to keep the two groups of teachers separate. Only after prolonged discussion was the idea of cross-disciplinary communication and discussion accepted as a realistic goal for the workshop. As in the youth sport example, committee members agreed to the “equal partnership” idea, and interaction in pursuit of the superordinate goal of planning a successful workshop helped to break down previously held stereotypes.

As a result of 8 months of interaction, the committee was able to identify goals and the means to achieve these goals. Members agreed that they wanted to promote lifelong involvement in physical activity. In order to prepare for this, elementary school children would need to have positive fitness experiences and be able to make personal fitness decisions based upon understanding basic fitness concepts such as the relationship between intensity (heart rate) and duration (time). This approach required more than just allowing time for children to do calisthenics and learn fitness facts. The committee agreed on a prevention approach to cardiovascular disease that included developing a positive attitude toward physical activity among elementary school children (Blair, 1985), giving children positive rather than negative experiences in physical activity, encouraging cooperation between physical education and classroom teachers in teaching and reinforcing fitness concepts, and using fitness test data to document changes in individual performance rather than to compare performances across the whole class or to some national norm (Fox & Biddle, 1988). The underlying philosophy was to replace the traditional mind-body, knowledge-performance model with one that stresses the integration of the child’s physical, mental, and emotional being.

A first step in instituting such a program has been the development of a day-long workshop through which elementary school classroom and physical
education teachers could design cooperative programs for teaching fitness in an enjoyable way. Fifty elementary schools sent at least one classroom teacher and one physical education teacher to the workshop. As an incentive, the teachers would receive $100 worth of fitness curriculum material from the Heart Association if both classroom and physical education teachers attended.

Although the workshop included sessions on philosophy, pedagogy, and evaluation (see Feingold et al., in press), the central purpose was to place classroom and physical education teachers in a cooperative relationship. Each pair of teachers was asked to develop a fitness concept that could be reinforced in an innovative way in the gymnasium and the classroom. It was intended that this cooperation would be continued by the teachers in their own school, and we have been impressed by the development of several collaborative efforts begun as a result of the workshop. Specifically, three school districts have received grants for curricular reform inspired by the project, and many districts have reported successful cooperative efforts in which activity units have been developed to accompany units on the heart and nutrition, social studies, and math. Still in its early stages of development, this connection between classroom and physical education teachers has great growth potential as teachers interact informally and share their ideas with colleagues at Heart Association workshops and at professional conferences.

As an example of the type of interaction necessary if the public health model is to be developed, this project illustrates the problem of fragmentation, elitism, and stereotyping identified earlier. Physical education teachers may have to fight negative stereotyping not only from classroom teachers but also from different elements of the medical profession. They can be helped by faculty who are interested in applying specialized knowledge to the problems of children’s health and fitness. These faculty also have the opportunity to break down stereotypes held by doctors and other health professionals.

Connecting Teacher Educators and Practitioners: The Niagara Falls Project

The need for collaboration among teachers at different levels of the educational system has been recognized as an essential element of successful educational reform (Kirk, 1986; Martinek & Schempp, 1988). Through such interaction, academics (e.g., college professors) and practitioners (e.g., teachers and school administrators) develop a common understanding of problems and a shared vision of how to solve them. Collaboration requires that the traditional gap between the two cultures of physical education (the academic and the practical) be bridged. The relationship between theory and practice is no longer oppositional, but dialectic, with each sphere of knowledge informing the other (Kirk, 1986).

The Niagara Falls project (Barrette, 1987; Barrette et al., 1991) is an example of such collaboration. It is a 7-year ongoing association that has connected a teacher education professor with a group of physical education teachers and administrators in one school district. This has led to greater interaction among teachers, an enhancement of their professional status, and better physical education programs.

Niagara Falls is an urban school district comprising nine elementary, two middle, and two high schools. Under the direction of one district coordinator of
health, physical education, and athletics, 33 certified physical education teachers service over 9,000 students. In 1983, a curriculum-review task force completed a highly critical evaluation of the program. The report emphasized the lack of clearly stated learning objectives across the district and identified serious problems in curricular articulation between elementary and secondary levels. In addition, the report expressed concern about the limited professional development opportunities for the staff and concluded that the physical education program was in urgent need of curricular redesign and instructional reform.

As a result of this report, the district coordinator assembled a steering committee of six physical education teachers and contacted an Adelphi University faculty member for assistance. Following a day-long visit with the Niagara Falls administrators and teachers, a commitment was made to initiate a 2-year collaborative project to redesign the physical education program. The general plan was to articulate the elementary and secondary curriculum. If this project proved successful, collaboration could be extended to improve instructional practices. As it turned out, the project was indeed extended, and it continues today.

During the 1st year of the project, the faculty member worked with the steering committee on curriculum development. Subsequently, members of the steering committee, acting as "turnkey trainers," shared this material with their colleagues. From time to time the university faculty member led workshops for all the teachers in order to deal with specific problems arising out of curriculum issues encountered by the steering committee. Over the first 3 years, the faculty member met over 33 times with the steering committee or with larger groups (reflecting 40–50 days of interaction).

Although the collaborative process was sometimes tedious and frustrating for everyone, the outcome was extraordinary. By 1988, the staff had developed a K–12 curriculum and elementary and secondary teaching manuals. The collaboration had also moved on to questions of teaching effectiveness, and workshops were developed for improving instructional techniques. Together, these curriculum and instructional elements form the basis of the present physical education program.

One long-term aim of the collaboration has been to shift the emphasis away from interaction between teacher educator and the committee members and toward interaction between the teachers and administrators who would eventually be responsible for curriculum planning and development. There is evidence that this goal is being achieved. The school district now publishes a monthly newsletter for physical educators, has initiated an exchange program through which physical education teachers from different schools can visit each other's classes, regularly holds in-service workshops directed by the staff, and recently reviewed the entire K–12 curriculum. School administrators (e.g., the district coordinator, principals, and superintendents) have noted a growth in professionalism, cohesion on the part of the staff, and a renewed sense of enthusiasm, particularly among veteran teachers. They attribute this increased pride to the interaction that has occurred as a result of the collaborative process (see Barrette et al., 1991, for details of the assessment process).

Recently, members of the Niagara Falls project have shared their experiences with colleagues at a professional meeting (the AIESEP/NAPEHE Congress in Atlanta, January 1991) in which they were perceived as authoritative sources by colleagues who wanted to initiate their own collaborative projects. This experience further reinforced the belief that their program is special and boosted
their perception of themselves as responsible professionals. Commenting in the
February 1991 newsletter on the feedback received by the Niagara Falls teachers
after their presentation at the conference, the editor said,

University personnel were extremely interested in the work which we have
accomplished and even more so in how, as a group of individuals, we were
able to work together, set goals and accomplish those goals over such a long
period of time. . . . Basically, since 1989-90 we've been on our own with
little collaboration [from the teacher educator]. In that time we have contin-
ued to make changes and additions to our programs. . . . Everyone on our
staff rightfully should be proud of their contributions and accomplishments.
Believe me, we're not just a good department, we're a "GREAT" depart-
ment! ("World Congress," 1991)

The Niagara Falls project began as a short-term collaboration between a
teacher educator and a small group of physical education teachers. Working as
equal partners toward the goal of improving physical education in the district,
the teacher educator and the physical education teachers overhauled the curricu-
lum and developed an in-service training program. This shared experience led
to the development of mutual trust, respect, and commitment, which also charac-
terized the relationship among the teachers as they assumed greater responsibility
for the project. What the teachers accomplished in planning and translated into
action has had a positive effect on children in gymnasiums and playing fields
across the Niagara Falls district.

Summary

Acknowledging the uncertainty characterizing the current status of physical
education, Lawson (1989) has recently endorsed the attempts at professional
integration that characterize this paper. He feels we should temper the disagree-
ments over the state of the field and search for new frames of reference and
opportunities to agree and cooperate. Opportunities for professional integration,
either toward a public health model or in other directions, imply that academics
in physical education will increase cross-disciplinary interaction. As universities
become more concerned with the need to show their relevance to business (Gold,
1981) and the community, administrators are likely to encourage interaction
between faculty and the public.

Ellis (1988) has suggested that professional fragmentation is reduced by
the very nature of the interaction between academics and practitioners because
the public is unaware of the divisions within physical education and academics
have to adapt to this perception. Certainly the Little League volunteers did not
divide coaching up into subdomains of knowledge (e.g., physiology, pedagogy,
sociology), and, because of this, the onus was on the faculty to develop an
integrated approach. Fragmentation was also reduced in the fitness project when
faculty agreed on a multidimensional model of fitness that crossed subdiscipli-
nary boundaries in physical education and in the Niagara Falls project when the
faculty member consulted with departmental colleagues on questions concerning
physiology and special education.

The three case studies show academics and practitioners interacting as
equals in the process of problem setting and solving: developing and sustaining
workshops reinforcing an education model for Little League, setting the agenda for the fitness project, and planning and instituting curriculum reform in a school district. As a result of this interaction, academics have a higher regard for the integrity of volunteer coaches than before the South Queens project started. Similarly, the professionalism, motivation, and independence of school physical education teachers has impressed the faculty member involved in the Niagara Falls project. Negative stereotyping of academics by practitioners may have undergone similar modification. Furthermore, commitment to professional integration has been strengthened among the academics. Curriculum reform now taking place at the departmental level has the goal of reducing subdisciplinary boundaries.

Because the original intent of the projects was to collaborate with practitioners to improve conditions for consumers, formal assessment was not a high priority. Assessment can be part of future interaction, although such assessment is likely to be a complicated process (see Chalip, 1990, pp. 175-176). If one accepts the premise that the purpose of education is to move from a state of dependence to independence, then both the South Queens project and the Niagara Falls project have been successful. The elementary school fitness project is still in its early stages, but a feedback workshop is planned for fall 1991. In Niagara Falls, for example, the conditions of interaction have changed from a situation in which the teachers were initially dependent on the faculty member to one in which there is now collaboration on professional papers and presentations. Several curriculum innovations have been instituted by the teachers independently (Barrette et al., 1991). Because of the large turnover in volunteer coaches, the faculty may still be seen as the experts at the Little League workshops; however, some managers are committed to the education model as a result of their long-term involvement in the workshops and practice what they preach. To some extent they have become role models for the neophyte coaches (Rees et al., 1991).

In summary, the examples of connecting described in this paper have shown (a) how professionals in different contexts can mutually benefit from a process in which they are accepted as equal partners, (b) how academics trained in different subdisciplines can cooperate to develop a model that crosses disciplinary walls, and (c) how, through cooperative effort, academics and practitioners can address important educational issues in sport, fitness, and physical education. They also show that it is possible to reflect on our profession with guarded optimism.

References


