Defining Adapted Physical Activity: International Perspectives

Yeshayahu Hutzler
Zinman College

Claudine Sherrill
Texas Woman’s University

The purpose of this study was to describe international perspectives concerning terms, definitions, and meanings of adapted physical activity (APA) as (a) activities or service delivery, (b) a profession, and (c) an academic field of study. Gergen’s social constructionism, our theory, guided analysis of multiple sources of data via qualitative methodology. Data sources were online surveys, APA literature, and expertise of researchers. Findings, with the identification of further considerations, were provided for each APA component to stimulate reflection and further inquiry among international professionals with diverse backgrounds.

Adapted physical activity (APA), a term introduced in 1973 by the founders of the Federation Internationale de l’Activite Physique Adaptee, evokes many meanings, depending on the contextual variables that affect discourse. Among these variables are history, country, native language, culture, education, and social interactions with others who may support different meanings. Of particular importance, according to social constructionism theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Gergen, 2000), are the social interactions through which meaning is acquired, changed, and sometimes transformed. Professional organizations offer opportunities for such social interactions and strive to promote common understanding of the specialized vocabulary used in the profession, occupation, or career that the organization serves (Reid & Stanish, 2003). Our study focuses on diverse meanings of APA and how contextual variables affect the construction of meanings and the processes of change.

Although many sources report definitions of APA (e.g., Doll-Tepper, Dahms, Doll, & von Selzam, 1990; Sherrill, 1988; Sherrill & DePauw, 1997), only Reid (2003) has systematically analyzed changes in definitions of APA and its most recent precursor, adapted physical education (APE). Reid began by examining conflicting definitions of APA (American Association for Health, Physical Education, and
Recreation; AAHPER, 1952; Sherrill, 1976). Simplified, the major difference was that AAHPER conceptualized APE as a school-based program of diversified activities (separate setting) for students who could not safely or successfully participate in the general PE program, whereas Sherrill (p. 4) emphasized that APA was “the science of analyzing movement, identifying problems in the psychomotor domain, and developing instructional strategies . . .” for anyone in any setting. The main controversy centered on choice of words program and science. Next, Reid examined the 1989 definition for the Berlin ISAPA (Doll-Tepper et al., 1990), a definition of APA by Sherrill (1993), and the expansion of Sherrill’s 1993 definition by DePauw & Sherrill (1994), which emphasized individual differences and person-environmental interactions rather than disabilities. Reid (p. 22) concluded that APA should be conceptualized as “adaptations that could facilitate physical activity across a wide range of individual differences.” Reid also discussed self-determination, choice, and self-regulation in APA. Reid’s analysis, although primarily a North American perspective, provides insight into a process that encourages critical thinking and thus influenced the authors of this article.

Definitions, for the purpose of this study, are statements of the meaning or significance of a word, phrase, or concept. Definitions typically provide the conceptual framework for a profession. Properly written, definitions (a) specify the dimensions and purpose of a profession, (b) delimit the boundaries of a profession’s knowledge base and practices, (c) clarify the nature of the service providers, and (d) indicate a target population meant to benefit from services. The construction of definitions is particularly challenging when a democratic process is used and persons from many countries are involved. Frequent turnover of board members in some organizations exacerbates confusion about, or lack of knowledge of, existing definitions and other components of the bylaws and constitution.

The International Federation of Adapted Physical Activity (IFAPA) Board of Directors devotes much time to strategic planning in regard to issues pertaining to definitions and priorities (IFAPA, 2004). Currently 20 board members interact in making decisions that affect APA. Countries represented on the 2005-2007 IFAPA board are Australia, Austria, Botswana, Brazil, Canada, France, Italy, Israel, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, France, and USA. The idea for this article originated as board members shared their diverse beliefs over several meetings. The authors of this article have participated in board meetings for more than a decade and thus have had rich opportunities for observation of social processes involved in the construction of definitions. Most professionals engaged in terminological and definitional processes in international settings can benefit from research, theory, and practice pertaining to critical and reflective thinking (Gergen, 1994, 2000). Of importance also is learning about historical context and considering variables that contribute to change in different countries. Following are brief examples of variables (e.g., organizational leadership, language derivation of key terms, sport federations, individual recommendations, and research journals) that have changed meanings in APA.

In the years following World War II, increased opportunities for travel, communication, and leisure led to changes in regard to physical activity philosophy. Sport learned in rehabilitation centers continued when veterans returned home, attitudes about what persons with disabilities can do changed, and the “Sport for All” movement began (DeKnop & Oja, 1996). The new sports emphasis promoted
a worldwide trend away from medically-oriented exercise toward recreative and competitive sport for persons with disabilities. In 1952, after 6 years of intensive committee interaction, the USA introduced adapted physical education to replace correctives in school programs. The resulting definition was “a diversified program of developmental activities, games, sports, and rhythms suited to the interests, capabilities, and limitations of students with disabilities who may not safely or successfully engage in unrestricted participation in the vigorous activities of the general PE program” (AAHPER, 1952, p. 15). Parts of this definition have influenced other definitions and still endure. The singular focus on school-based APE (rather than APA) in the USA has continued into the 21st century. APE thus can be considered a part of the APA movement, although the vision of the USA was limited.

The French-speaking leaders of Canada and Belgium who founded IFAPA in 1973 had a broader vision, which included many professions, age groups, and service delivery settings. IFAPA’s original purpose was “to give global focus to professionals who use adapted physical activities for instruction, recreation, remediation, and research” (Eason, Smith, & Caron, 1983, p. xi). In the 1970s, the concepts of adapt and adapted were believed to be well understood in French, English, and other Romance languages. Techniques for adapting activities, instruction, programs, and facilities were described in sources with such titles as corrective physical education, corrective sport, APE, sport therapy, and sports for the handicapped (e.g., Daniels, 1954; Lorenzen, 1961; Stafford, 1939; van Hal, Rarick, & Vermeer, 1984). In countries like Germany, Czech Republic, and Japan, whose languages were derived from different roots, adaptation strategies were used also, although the word adapted was not well understood (Doll-Tepper et al., 1990).

With regard to context, in the 1970s, no country yet had a federal law that required school physical education (PE) for students with special needs, but rehabilitation centers were making tremendous advances using sport (e.g., Guttmann, 1976; Natvig, 1980). Moreover, sport federations were providing social interaction, travel, and competition for persons with disabilities (e.g., International Stoke Mandeville Games Federation, International Sports Organization for the Disabled, and International Special Olympics founded, respectively, in 1957, 1963, and 1968). The sport setting, from the beginning, was a contextual variable that affected meanings, values, and definitions. Technology, as in that affecting the improvement of wheelchairs and prostheses, also affected meaning.

From the 1970s onward, different perspectives emerged around the world concerning adapted physical activities and the domains (instruction, remediation, recreation, and research) stated in the first IFAPA purpose (Eason et al., 1983). These perspectives, as well as terminology used before the 1970s, offer insight into current terminological diversity and related contextual factors. A definition of APA was, however, not mentioned until the last chapter of the proceedings of IFAPA’s 3rd international symposium, when Broadhead (1983, p. 330) stated,

. . . it is critical for me to discuss just what we mean by the phrase adapted physical activity, for I assume that it means much more than mere activities which can be adjusted to suit the needs of individuals and homogeneous groups . . . it includes education, therapy, and more, such as activities, settings, and interests which call to mind concepts like care, correction, development, learning, rehabilitation, and remediation.
Broadhead subsequently became the first editor of the *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly (APAQ)*, founded in 1984 by Human Kinetics. The name given this journal further strengthened the use of APA as an umbrella term (Porretta, Nesbitt, & Labanowich, 1993). In 1994, IFAPA selected *APAQ* as its international research journal, thus committing itself more fully to increasing the knowledge base of APA through research. Preceding this commitment was a growing emphasis on the use of theory to guide research and practice (e.g., Reid, 1989, 1990; Vermeer & Davis, 1995). The latter source illustrates the growing practice of persons from two countries (e.g., Netherlands, USA) collaborating in editing proceedings of research conferences that offer new perspectives on theory.

Textbooks have contributed immeasurably to the understanding of APA in that they touch the lives of so many university students (e.g., Block, 2000; Sherrill, 2004; Steadward, Wheeler, & Watkinson, 2003; Van Coppenolle, Simons, Neerincks, Vanlandewijck, & Verwilt, 1993; Winnick, 2005). By the 1980s, over 20 APE and APA textbooks were being used in the USA alone. In 1993, Sherrill changed the title of her 4th edition textbook to APA and began to work seriously on the construction of adaptation theory, using Kiphard’s (1983) concepts as her foundation. Sherrill’s opportunity to become acquainted with the work of a German scholar (i.e., Kiphard) came through IFAPA proceedings (Eason et al., 1983), an example of the importance of making international discourse available in print. While systematic analysis of APA terms and definitions in textbooks exceeds our space limitations, it is noteworthy that ultimately only one North American textbook without adapted in its title survived beyond three editions. This was *Special Physical Education*, Fait’s revision of his 1960 APE text, which most recently has been revised by Dunn and Leitschuh (2005).

Many variables have contributed to the current definition of APA by IFAPA. Foremost among these are the definitions of Sherrill (1993), DePauw and Sherrill (1994), and Reid (2003) and the composition of the IFAPA board during years when major changes in the by-laws were made. Life experiences of each board member who engages in dialogue with others have affected the following definition.

APA is defined as a cross-disciplinary body of knowledge directed toward the identification and solution of individual differences in physical activity. It is a service delivery profession and an academic field of study that supports an attitude of acceptance of individual differences, advocates access to active lifestyles and sport, and promotes innovation and cooperative service delivery programs and empowerment systems. Adapted physical activity includes, but is not limited to, physical education, sport, recreation, dance and creative arts, nutrition, medicine, and rehabilitation. (IFAPA, 2004)

How does this definition differ from the original IFAPA purpose? What contextual variables have contributed to change? Is the current definition credible and practical? Does it tell people what they need to know about APA? Is it too futuristic, considering that not all countries have the components of profession, academic field of study, and service delivery? Which perspectives of APA are relatively similar from country to country? What considerations appear most important in helping persons in different parts of the world to clarify terms, definitions, and meanings? Space limitations permit us to try to answer some, but not all, of these questions.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose was to describe international perspectives concerning terms, definitions, and meanings of APA as (a) activities or service delivery, (b) a profession, and (c) an academic field of study. These themes (or components), which come from the current IFAPA definition of APA, were examined, and further considerations were identified to stimulate involvement in the ongoing construction of terminology and meaning among professionals with diverse backgrounds.

Theory Guiding the Study

The theory guiding our study was social constructionism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), a conceptual framework for critically analyzing why and how the meaning of language is created or transformed over time, culture, and place through human interactions. Meaning, according to social constructionists, is constantly changed by relationships between and among such variables as age, race/ethnicity, gender, education, occupation, power, socioeconomic resources, and ability/disability as persons relate, react, and act toward one another (Gergen & Gergen, 2003).

Context, especially the historical and sociocultural, is important in social constructionism; however, context is recognized as constantly changing. Numerous theories of social constructionism are emerging, most associated with postmodern philosophy and its emphasis on relativity, subjectivity, and the search for many truths rather than one. Of these, we selected the theoretical framework of K. Gergen (1994, 2000) and of recent sources coauthored with his wife M. Gergen (Gergen & Gergen, 2003). In contrast to the tradition of statistical research, Gergen’s theory, like those of other postmodernists (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), emphasizes that all research is subjective (even when criteria guide decision-making) and insists that search for truths must be open to many alternatives and many voices. Whereas statistical research, when well done, ends with a conclusion and generalization of findings to samples that resemble the population studied, postmodern research emphasizes that population, context, and truth are constantly changing; thus there is no one truth to be discovered, but many truths.

Gergen’s theory is unique from other theories in that it emphasizes that relational responsibility in reality (and knowledge) construction should be directed toward improving the profession or knowledge base or whatever is being studied. Gergen also stresses that construction or meaning-making occurs as a partner or group process, never as an individual one. The construction of a definition must include receiver as well as a sender or writer. These aspects of Gergen’s theory provided guidance in making sense of the diverse ideas about APA as stated by leaders from many countries, which culturally might be expected to differ in meaning-making.

Method

Our method was qualitative research, predominantly a subtype known as discourse analysis (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001) that is typically employed with Gergen’s social constructionism theory. According to Smith and Sparkes (2005, p. 221),
“discourse is a set of texts (written text, spoken words, pictures, symbols, and artifacts) and the social practices of their production, dissemination, and reception, which bring an object into being.” The object that we focused on bringing into being and clarifying was the definition or meaning of APA with a focus on international perspectives. Gergen (1994, 2000) supports discourse analysis as “an inquiry which causes us to reflect critically and creatively in our common ways of life” (Smith & Sparkes, 2005, p. 224).

Of the many definitions of discourse analysis, we selected “a theory and method that looks at language in use and the broader patterns of human meaning-making that are resources for social actions, as well as the political resources” (Smith & Sparkes, 2005, p. 215). A particularly relevant guideline was to study “language associated with a particular topic or activity, such as the family of special terms and meanings around it; a study might focus on the language associated with a particular occupation such as social work or nursing” (Wetherell et al., 2001, p. 7). In contrast to other types of qualitative research, Gergen does not recommend firm conclusions, mainly because of his emphasis on the fluidity of data input, analysis, and interpretation (the principle of relativity). Rather the emphasis is on providing “further considerations” that will encourage continuation of the critical thinking process by larger and different groups. Space limitations prohibit citing Gergen references, but a list may be obtained from the authors.

Data Sources

Data sources were (a) published texts of primary sources, with emphasis on use of sources from as many countries as possible; (b) IFAPA board members whom we designated as experts; and (c) ourselves. The importance of acknowledging the researchers as data sources is emphasized in numerous texts on qualitative analysis (e.g., Gergen, all texts; Wetherell et al., 2001). Also recognized as a characteristic of qualitative research is the subjectivity of selection, analysis, and interpretation procedures. To offset inherent subjectivity, researchers emphasize the credibility or truthworthiness of sources. Following is information that documents credibility.

The publications we selected for analysis were (a) textbooks that had survived through three or more editions, (b) Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly (the official research journal of IFAPA) from 1984 on, and (c) proceedings of IFAPA seminars and other international or regional conferences that included discourse about definitions. Proceedings were defined as published books that included full length text of presentations. A limitation of the study was that texts were in English or German, because these were the languages that the researchers could read. However, analysis of our final reference list revealed that primary sources of leaders from 17 countries were used.

IFAPA board members were selected as experts who would provide responses to on-line surveys. Observations of the dialogue of these persons at board meetings over many years provided insight into expertise. We conceptualized board members as experts because (a) all had documented APA leadership in their own countries, (b) all were elected by IFAPA members as board members, and (c) all had published APA articles or books in English and in their native languages. Inasmuch as IFAPA is the only international organization of APA, it seemed reasonable that persons meeting these traditional criteria for leadership and scholarship would be
creditable sources for international perspectives. Ten board members representing six countries and five continents provided responses to the surveys.

The two researchers, important sources according to qualitative research methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), brought diverse backgrounds to the study. They represented different genders, ages, countries, native languages, academic backgrounds, and teaching and research experiences. They were similar only in regard to race (White), an earned doctoral degree, extensive professional travel, and holding the IFAPA positions of future and current president. This diversity enabled researchers to bring different perspectives to analysis and interpretation that, in turn, stimulated much discourse until consensus could be reached.

**Procedure**

Two surveys were sent to all IFAPA board members via e-mail during the period from December, 2002, through January, 2005. Copies may be obtained from the first author. Both surveys called for open-ended responses (i.e., the formation of definitions of APA). The first survey, sent out in December, 2002, asked one question: “What is adapted physical activity?” The second survey, sent out in April 2003, requested a response to “We would appreciate your contribution to this topic in sharing with us your definition of what APA is, or should be, in each of the following categories: APA as activity/service delivery; APA as a profession; and APA as a field of study/discipline.” Respondents were encouraged to use as much space as they wished and were asked for permission to cite their contributions in an article intended for publication.

Data collection and analysis proceeded concurrently as described by Wetherell et al. (2001), who stated “Analysis is not a distinct and separate activity; it is ongoing even at the time of selecting sources” (p. 38-39). The themes for results were established early in the study: (a) activities or services, (b) profession, and (c) field of study. These themes (components) are generally accepted (e.g., IFAPA by-laws; Reid & Stanish, 2003; Sherrill & DePauw, 1977). Therefore, inductive analysis was focused on discovery and examination of subthemes under the APA dimensions.

Initially, the researchers independently analyzed and took notes on both published sources and survey responses. As recommended by Wetherell et al. (2001, p. 38-39), we repeatedly read the sources, “noting features of interest but not settling on these. It involves working through the data over quite a long period, returning to them a number of times. . . . The researcher is looking for patterns but is not entirely sure what these will look like or what their significance will be.” We especially looked for patterns in use of same terms but by different individuals and of patterns in definitions having same or different meanings. We repeatedly traced origin of terms and meanings backward into time and forward again, each time analyzing changing contexts. As recommended in discourse analysis methodology, we focused not so much on categorization into subthemes as on the concepts involved and the theoretical underpinning, if any seemed to exist, for meanings of APA. We followed discourse analysis methodology also in developing sections titled *Future Considerations* and *Critical Reflections* rather than ending with a traditional conclusion.

When satisfied individually with our analyses, we independently wrote our version of results and discussion and sent it to our coauthor, who responded to
our ideas line by line. This process of back and forth reaction continued through 10 or more exchanges of the total manuscript in its early forms and numerous exchanges of parts of manuscripts. On two occasions, approximately a year apart, the researchers were able to meet face-to-face and spend 6 or more hours each time on resolving differences. When finally both researchers were satisfied with all aspects of the manuscript, it was submitted. After input from APAQ reviewers, we reread primary sources and survey responses and repeated the analytic procedure just described until, again, both authors were satisfied.

**Results and Discussion**

This section was organized under three headings, reflecting the themes leading this inquiry. Most headings have subheadings reflecting themes agreed upon during the qualitative analysis. Survey responses were presented first, when appropriate, followed by discussion based on study of published sources and participant observation.

**APA Activities and Services**

Some board members indicated that the term APA was not easily translated into their native languages. A board member from Japan stated, “We have much difficulty in translating the term *adapted physical activity* into the Japanese language . . . it seems to the Japanese people that the term *adapted sport* encompasses a variety of sports for people with disability and the elderly.” This notion is further established through the publication of a book in Japanese entitled *Science of Adapted Sport* (translated term) by Yabe, Kusano, and Nakata in 2004. APA periodicals are published in Asian countries in the native language. However, the term of choice in Japan is usually *adapted sport sciences*.

A board member from South America pointed out that APA is well established in Brazil’s 26 states that together support the Sociedad Brasileira de Actividade Motora Adaptada (SOBAMA). This title emphasizes adaptation of motor activities, as referred to by Rodrigues (1994), a term preferred over *physical*, possibly because several Portuguese and Brazilian leaders have specializations in motor behavior. SOBAMA maintains a website and a journal in Portuguese.

Board members from Canada, Australia, and the United States defined APA broadly as (a) “the body of knowledge that enables the creation of active living opportunities,” (b) “a set of attitudes and behaviors that leads to the participation of people with a disability in sport and physical activity,” and (c) “apart from the practice of adaptation, APA is a profession, a scholarly discipline, a service delivery system, and sometimes a program.” Several board members from Israel and Brazil envisioned APA primarily as physical activity “that requires adaptation” or “has undergone change” and “that empowers people to participate.” This reflects the centrality of adaptation practices that underlie many programs and service delivery systems. Relevant literature sources emphasize *activities* (all sources), *programs* (e.g., AAHPER, 1952; Doll-Tepper et al., 1990; Winnick, 2005), and *services* (Reid, 2003; Sherrill, 2004) as important constructs of APA.
Defining APA

The question, “What is APA,” elicited such responses as gymnastics, dance, movement, exercise, sports, games, recreation, and physical education. It appears, however, that regions conceptualize central elements of APA differently. North Americans typically identified only PE, recreation, and sports, probably because PE and hence APA, to them, connotes diversified activities (AAHPER, 1952) and thus there is no need to list activities separately. Additional terms suggested by board members from Israel and Brazil were games, gymnastics, exercise, and movement. The latter terms may be related to the stronger influence of movement education and psychomotor therapy in these regions.

While most responses related to type of physical activity, some referred to services. A board member from Japan specified, “Nowadays we have a concept of a service delivery system in school and rehabilitation settings. Professionals . . . pay more attention to advocacy, coordination of resources, and counseling in Japan.” An American board member specified, “The driving concept of APA should NOT be adapting physical activities in the gymnasium but adapting all of the processes involved in making services and empowerment possible. For example, planning, assessment, pedagogy, coaching, counseling, evaluation, and so on must be adapted.”

It was not surprising that some board members referred to central elements of theory advocated by Kiphard (1983), Sherrill (1995, 2004), Hutzler (2003), and Reid (2003), namely adaptation and empowerment (enablement). Reid (2003), in particular, posited empowerment and self-determination as important ideas in the 21st century paradigm for APA. Consequently, the challenge may arise as to how it would be possible for an APA service delivery system to possess an empowerment perspective.

Following are some APA definitions used widely from 1989 on. Organizers of the 1989 IFAPA symposium in Berlin emphasized activities in their definition: “APA refers to movement, physical activity, and sports in which special emphasis is placed on the interests and capabilities of individuals with limiting conditions, such as the disabled, health impaired, or aged” (Doll-Tepper et al., 1990, p. v). Approximately 800 professionals from 45 countries participated in the 1989 symposium and took this definition back to their respective programs. This definition was the first by IFAPA to identify a target population to be served by APA. The terminology used came from the World Health Organization.

Later, leaders of the European Association on Research into Adapted Physical Activity (EARAPA) defined APA in terms of movement experiences and motivation: “movement experiences (participation which may be motivated by therapy, rehabilitation, education, recreation, and/or competition) and their application is directed to the interests, needs, and capabilities of individuals with impairments, disabilities, and handicaps as defined by the World Health Organization” (Doll-Tepper, 1996, p. 598). Sherrill (1993), when changing the title of her textbook from APE to APA, stated, “[The term] APA recognizes that adaptations are needed for all persons with psychomotor problems, not just those labeled as disabled” (p. xviii). This statement revealed ongoing controversy about whether APA was for all or for the persons identified by the World Health Organization (WHO) criteria.

Goals of APA. The most widely used system for defining goals in terms of target population to be served comes from the World Health Organization (Ústún, 2003;
WHO, 2001), which provides criteria for classification, assessment, and intervention in health and disability. WHO (2001) specifies three major terms to describe range of potential limitations to person-environment interactions: (a) impairments of affected body structures and functions; (b) limitations in activities required for daily living, vocational engagement, and leisure time; and (c) restrictions of participation in socially appropriate activities. Functions, activities, and participation are related to the specific health condition (previously labeled as disease) and contextual variables including individual predispositions and environmental factors that could be perceived as facilitators (enablers) or barriers (limiters).

WHO terminology can be seen in board members’ statements that APA’s goals are “to participate in their activity goals related to the body movement culture” (from Brazil), “to restore and improve their function, participate, and pursue their activity goals” (from Israel), and “to practice activities despite their limitations” (from Israel).

A board member from Canada, in contrast, constructed a definition that deemphasized WHO (2001) terminology and avoided using the term disabilities (i.e., “create active living opportunities, regardless of their body function, or structure, and whether or not there are limitations of activity or participation.” A board member from the USA also ignored WHO terminology and indicated that “the goal of APA services was the adaptation of variables to facilitate the achievement of individuals’ aspirations in regard to movement outcomes, including attraction and support of exercise partners and making of friends through shared activity.”

**APA Recipients: Categorical vs. Noncategorical Approaches.** Debates about the merits of categorical vs. noncategorical approaches to terminology and APA service have been ongoing since the 1970s. Categorical approaches are those that use disability categories as the basis for definitions, course content, and textbook chapters, whereas noncategorical approaches support APA for all or alternative terms for specific target groups (e.g., consumers, clients, or partners). Most Board members from Non-English-speaking countries used such terms as “individuals with impaired conditions” (from Israel), “individuals with different conditions” (from Italy), or “people with various disabilities” (from Israel). In contrast, a board member from Canada recommended a noncategorical terminology that encompassed all individuals regardless of their diagnosed condition or degree of movement problems.

**Future Considerations.** The question arises whether the APA definition should refer to the general purpose of APA as services, supports, and empowerment made possible through adaptation, or be more specific, naming areas in which adaptation should occur. These might include instruction, task or skill analysis, physical and social environments, equipment, rules, and other variables. The end goal of this latter approach might be enhancement of opportunities for success and enjoyment in physical activity. Following this track further suggests that an APA definition should include the concept of empowering and enabling individuals with limiting structural and functional conditions to choose to pursue an active lifestyle at all ages through participation in physical activity.

Using International Classification of Function and Disability (ICF; WHO, 2001) concepts as a framework to assist conceptualizing APA services is another
challenge worth negotiation. It is likely that adaptation of physical activities and
related services in all contexts of APA (sports, recreation, dance, fitness, physical
education, rehabilitation) for all ages can be implemented in accordance with the
specific considerations of the ICF model (WHO, 2001). If APA definitions take into
consideration the ICF components and determine accordingly changes proposed in
services and supports (e.g., peer tutoring as an aid to large size class teaching), in
the equipment used (e.g., a larger diameter of ball to facilitate bouncing), in envi-
ronmental variables (e.g., decreased court size in badminton, a lower net height in
volleyball), in the task structure (e.g., wheeling instead of running, hand cycling
as an alternative to cycling), in rules (e.g., permitting the ball to bounce twice in
wheelchair tennis), and in instruction (e.g., physical guidance as an alternative
to verbal guidance), better understanding of these practices is warranted among
APA professionals. Further, use of WHO terminology may facilitate a common
language among APA and non-APA professionals that cooperate across service
delivery programs.

One example of how to integrate adaptation criteria and ICF terminology
is Table 1, addressing examples of APA practices used to facilitate activity and
participation goals. Different practices and activity goals are listed, describing
their significance to participants. An important consideration is how research can
be designed to validate practitioners’ use of these approaches and their impact on
participants. Such research might generate evidence-based practices, a high priority
in research on teaching (Odom et al., 2005).

APA as a Profession

Illustrative responses concerning APA as a profession follow: From Canada, “APA
is a service occupation and research enterprise, supported by a cross-disciplinary
knowledge base that empowers individuals with personal and/or movement dif-
ficulties to participate in instructional, recreational, and sport settings as well as to
engage in unstructured activity.” From Australia, “APA is a profession that seeks to
facilitate the inclusion of people with a disability in all levels of sport and physical
activity.” From Italy, “APA as an activity/service delivery should be delivered in
all ordinary schools by a physical education teacher who is specialized in APA.”
From Brazil, “As a profession, APA is a physical activity specialization in special
populations.” These examples show variety in the aspect of professionalism that
is emphasized.

According to Reid and Stanish (2003), criteria that a profession must meet
include “(a) an essentially intellectual operation, requiring depth of knowledge usu-
ally acquired through higher education and possessing considerable responsibility,
(b) based on knowledge that flows from research, (c) practicality, (d) self-organiza-
tion, (e) capable of communication, and (f) service to the public.” Several board
members indicated that they agreed with Reid and Stanish (2003, p. 205), who
reported that APA “exhibits most of the criteria of a profession.”

Many of today’s APA definitions now include a phrase describing who must
deliver APE and APA (e.g., specialists or qualified personnel). Board members
tended to address the knowledge component by referring to specialization. This
evokes several issues, namely whether jobs are available to accommodate such
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ICF Category</th>
<th>Significance to participant</th>
<th>APA practices</th>
<th>Service provider, level; track accent</th>
<th>Examples of activity goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body structure</td>
<td>Have physical foundation &amp; acceptable appearance</td>
<td>Prevent from deterioration, enhance or improve</td>
<td>APA specialist; accent on rehabilitation (European perspective)</td>
<td>Reduce weight; align posture; Increase bone density</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body function</td>
<td>Be able to perform</td>
<td>Prevent from deterioration, develop, improve</td>
<td>APA specialist; accent on rehabilitation (European perspective). In USA, this could be fitness training.</td>
<td>Restore range of motion; increase power; lose weight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity or task performance, related to physical activity</td>
<td>Doing meaningful tasks</td>
<td>Teach, train, coach</td>
<td>APA specialist teacher; General PE teacher / Instructor / Coach, each with additional APA knowledge; accent on education, recreation, &amp; sport</td>
<td>Reach for the ball; finish 10 laps in swimming; maintain position; cross the road; enter a bus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in physical activity for enjoyment</td>
<td>Being accepted as part of a reference group</td>
<td>Educate, reflect, empower,</td>
<td>APA specialist co-working with Class teacher / Social worker / Psychologist / important significant others; accent on education &amp; recreation</td>
<td>Participate in ball games; be assertive; be accepted among peers; achieve leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elimination of barriers to goal achievement</td>
<td>Having no restrictions, or opposition to participation (Equity)</td>
<td>APA practices</td>
<td>APA practitioner across levels together with social worker, volunteer community activist; accent on recreation &amp; sport</td>
<td>Change attitudes, set rules for; use law and affirmative action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Defining APA

specialists. If inclusion (i.e., serving persons with and without disabilities in the same setting with the same staff) is the philosophy of employers, then specialists may not be needed (Reid, 2003).

Board members were vague concerning relationships between profession and benefits of organizational membership. In social constructionism, it is important to understand and work toward realization of such relationships. Benefits include journals, position papers, standards, employment, rights, protections, continuing education, ethics, conflict resolution, and representation in government and legal affairs that affect a specific profession. Sherrill believed that the definitions elicited by the survey tended to emphasize the responsibilities of professionals but failed to mention benefits of organizations that help professions to become recognized, protected, and cherished.

**APA Professional Standards.** Board members indicated that a profession needs a clear set of standards for the purpose of certifying or licensing qualified professionals and for monitoring quality of service delivery in the field. Such standards usually come from universities or organizations. Two regions of IFAPA thus far have conducted large projects on standards underwritten by federal grants. The concept of standard used in the two projects was, however, different.

The Adapted Physical Education National Standards (APENS) were constructed in the USA to help resolve problems pertaining to job demands and professional preparation of qualified generalists and specialists (National Consortium for Physical Education and Recreation for Individuals with Disabilities [NCPERID], 1995, 2006). *Standards* were defined as 15 knowledge areas (e.g., motor development, teaching, assessment) with specific competencies for each area. Separate lists were presented for PE generalists and APE specialists. Standards were derived from input of 500 APE practitioners (Kelly & Gansneder, 1998). As part of the project, an annual, voluntary APENS examination was instituted to enhance quality of APE teachers. An underlying assumption was that certification from a respected national organization (i.e., NCPERID) for those able to pass APENS was a first step in quality control in regard to employment of practitioners to fill APE job openings.

The Thematic European Network on Adapted Physical Activity (DePotter et al., 2003; THENAPA, 2001) approached standards differently. Researchers surveyed 19 experts from different countries and then identified four professional tracks (physical education, sport performance, recreation, and rehabilitation) in which an APA specialization might be developed. Ten subject matter areas (e.g., applied assessment/evaluation; applied knowledge on disability, disease, injuries) were delineated for each track. Specialization was conceptualized as available at different levels of expertise: instructor, coach, physical education certificate, sport science diploma, master’s degree, and doctoral degree. The highest level described in detail was the European Masters Degree in APA (EMDAPA), also a project funded by the European Union. Names of APE courses and content to be included in course outlines were included in the final report.

**Professional Focus.** Survey responses indicated that board members, when defining APA, tended toward either the inclusion or the specially designed, separate program approach.

1. The inclusion approach. Board members indicated that cross-culturally, inclusion has many meanings and is extended to different persons in a variety
of ways. The inclusion perspective (sometimes presented as integration) shows increasing acceptance: in Canada (Active Living Alliance of Canadians with a Disability, 1994); Europe (DePotter et al., 2003); Norway (Sorensen & Kahrs, 2006; Australia (Downs, 1995; 2003); and Asia (Chen, Zhang, & Liu, 2004; Lin, 1999; Nakata, 1999). In the USA, inclusion is operationalized by concepts such as supports, accommodations, and adaptations in general PE settings and the philosophy of reciprocity. With respect to WHO’s (2001) vocabulary (impairments, activity limitations, and participation barriers), the inclusive view accents the participation component and accessibility to all types of life events for all individuals (see Table 1). The goal is to reduce attitudinal barriers as well as to build up personal powers and self-determination of participants with a disability (Reid, 2000).

2. The specially designed, separate program approach. This philosophy is upheld mainly for persons who need to learn skills not available in inclusive environments (e.g., wheelchair, walker, cane, or crutch sports) or for those with such severe disabilities that decision makers believe persons cannot fully or partially engage in mainstream classes. A board member from Israel noted that this type of program minimizes risk and potential damage to the individuals themselves and to others. It emphasizes the activity limitations component in the WHO model and encourages specialized pedagogy that focuses on wheelchair, cane, and walker adaptations to achieve goals that are developmental, cooperative, and competitive. Consistent with specialized programs are the terms sport therapy (Schüle & Huber, 2004) and psychomotor therapy (Kiphard, 1990; Probst & Van de Vliet, 2003), and sport with special groups (Rieder, Huber & Werle, 1996), which incorporate very similar contents to APA.

**Future Considerations.** Illustrative questions arising from our analysis follow. Should definitions include qualified (or an equivalent term) with qualified subsequently quantified as a measurable entity in supplementary material? U.S. law emphasizes that each profession specify minimum qualifications for employment and state objective measures. In APA, what might qualified professional mean in measurable terms? Should professional organizations provide certification and services that aid in standards being met? Considering the widespread implementation of inclusion, should the desired qualifications of PE generalists be in an APA definition? How can professional organizations like IFAPA help with these and similar issues? What research and/or position papers might IFAPA initiate? Within our profession, should equal respect and support be given to inclusion and specially designed, separate perspectives? How does a profession determine when it is becoming too specialized or too broad? Are the areas listed in the current IFAPA definition too broad (e.g., “physical education, sport, recreation . . . medicine, and rehabilitation”). What kinds of research have been conducted on APA employment within each area?

Crosscultural differences in answering these questions are expected. For increasing opportunities to construct services in as many contexts as possible, however, consideration should be given to how research can be used to validate APA practices in these areas (Odom et al., 2005) and the resulting findings can be disseminated to public and decision makers. An important consideration is how can we make the APA profession more visible and better understood?
Defining APA

APA as a Field of Study or Discipline

To avoid possible confusion on meanings in survey responses, we defined field of study or discipline as “the evolving knowledge base underlying and driving service delivery and activity provision to persons with personal and/or societal limitations. A board member from Australia indicated that this definition was totally unacceptable, particularly the last few words: “It simply reinforces the negative stereotypes of disability and does not do the discipline credit.” The alternative recommended was APA is a discipline that trains, educates, and prepares individuals to work in the field of sport and physical activity for people with a disability. The authors now would change the definition to “a knowledge base supporting the development of activities and delivery of services in the field of sport and physical activity of participants with disabilities.”

Analysis of APA literature reveals that discipline is used to refer to a field of study, a specialization, or simply advanced academic work (e.g., Mauerberg-deCastro, 1994-1998; Djobova & Dobreva, 2003). In support of APA as a discipline, Sherrill (1988), however, called attention to criteria that physical educators have used to justify adoption of the term discipline and, based on research by several colleagues, concluded that APA met seven criteria for an academic discipline. At the IFAPA seminar in Norway, Sherrill (1995) encouraged recognition of APA as a scholarly discipline with a unique body of knowledge and thereafter advocated conceptualizing APA as a discipline comparable to other university-based disciplines that offer doctoral study.

Sherrill and DePauw (1997) joined scholars in other sport science fields in describing their respective areas as a discipline or subdiscipline, indicating that APA began to emerge as a discipline in the 1990s. Their rationale was mainly the growing mass of crossdisciplinary knowledge, with specialized approaches, methodology, and doctoral-level specializations. This critical mass is continuing to grow (e.g., O’Connor, French, Sherrill, & Babcock, 2001; Porretta & Sherrill, 2005; Sherrill, 2004; Zhang, deLisle, & Chen, 2006). Moreover, Sherrill and DePauw (1997) believe that affiliation with any one discipline is too narrow, given the broad definitions of APA and its continued synthesis of knowledge from many disciplines. This seems to be especially true in Europe, where APA includes physical education, sport science, recreation, and rehabilitation as areas of subspecialization within APA (DePotter et al., 2003).

In contrast, Reid and Stanish (2003), using slightly different criteria from those of Sherrill (1988, 1995), concluded that APA “does not meet criteria of a discipline” (p. 224) and should be viewed instead as a crossdisciplinary field of study. Of major concern was that APA’s “research methods are largely borrowed from allied fields, it has not made significant strides in conceptual or theory development, and its terminology shares much with sport medicine, rehabilitation, physical education, or special education” (p. 224). Sherrill, DePauw, and others continue to disagree with Reid and Stanish.

Different from the crossdisciplinary view, some leaders tend to identify with one specialization: Winnick (2005, p. 4) stated that “Adapted physical education is viewed as a subdiscipline of physical education that provides for safe, personally satisfying, and successful experiences for students of differing abilities.” Block (2000, p. 17) defined APE as “a subdiscipline of general physical education that emphasizes physical education for students with disabilities.”
The critical mass of knowledge underlying the APA field of study or discipline can be seen in Europe and the USA. The European Master’s Degree in APA (EMDAPA), a project introduced in 1991 and currently involving over 30 European universities, represents a cross-European agreement among scholars who have determined the specific knowledge to be taught at the program’s base in Leuven, Belgium (Van Coppenolle et al., 1993). An extension of this program is the Erasmus Mundus, in which students also go to another European or overseas partner university for further study and research. In the USA, masters and doctoral degrees in APE have been available since the late 1960s, when federal grant money was made available for this purpose. Unlike the European network, however, each university program works independently in the construction of its curricula and standards. Textbooks used in APE/APA professional preparation are major indicators of the knowledge to be achieved (e.g., Sherrill, 2004; Steadward, Wheeler, & Watkinson, 2003; Winnick, 2005).

**Future Considerations.** The IFAPA definition recognizes APA as an academic field of study. An issue is whether field of study can simultaneously be a discipline and, if so, which criteria must be met and how should criteria be evaluated. In the USA, and perhaps other countries, the decision of a university to offer or maintain a doctoral specialization often rests with ability of its faculty to justify the field as a discipline. Support of professional organizations is helpful in such justification. Regardless, however, of whether or not APA is an academic discipline, its definition might include mention of such theories as disability, ecology, empowerment, self-determination, and adaptation. It seems worthwhile to consider including the word research in the definition. Every means possible should be used to expose students and practitioners to theory and research and help them understand that research is the major way to create knowledge. Inservice and continuing education for practitioners and scholars may be especially helpful. Emphasis should be given to the many different kinds of scientific methods and evidence-based practices that are accepted in the creation of knowledge (e.g., see diversity in the Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly).

Internationally, attention should be given to determining APA research priorities based on scholarly study of our existing knowledge base and on using existing theories or constructing new ones. Further, APA scholars may want to infuse APA knowledge into other health-related sciences and to consider whether or not clearer links and boundaries should be established between related areas of knowledge bases.

**Critical Reflections**

In accordance with social constructionism methodology, we end this article with reflections to stimulate further thinking rather than with a traditional section on conclusions. Constructionists appreciate that meanings in all phases of thought (even conclusions) are continuously changing. Following, however, are some issues that seem to be particularly important as persons at board meetings, faculty meetings, conference assemblies, and the like reflect on and discuss definitions and meanings associated with APA/APE.
1. APA will probably continue to thrive as a profession whether it is considered a crossdisciplinary field of study (or discipline) or a subspecialization of PE, sport science, or kinesiology.

2. The WHO categorizations of impairment, activity limitations, and participation restrictions with a person-environment international context may hold promise as the theoretical framework for integrating disability and movement studies and for specifying APA’s target population.

3. APA encompasses participation in many kinds of settings (inclusive, partially inclusive, and separate) throughout the lifespan. However, freedom of choice by different countries should be respected if rights are not violated.

4. Subspecializations of APA may include PE, sports, recreation, and rehabilitation. Some countries may prefer subspecializations in separate academic components such as special education and APA or occupational therapy and APA. Others may emphasize a crossdisciplinary approach. Professionals from different countries should be knowledgeable, respectful, and supportive of others’ approaches while striving for maximum sharing of ideas.

5. Standards for APA service providers vary by country and often depend on resources. Professional organizations should make available examples of standards that may be adopted. Such standards should require different competencies for specialists and generalists in diverse employment settings. Standards may also be established for volunteers and others who undergo specialized training.

6. APA is a field of study with unique theories and a growing research evidence base relying on a variety of biological, psychosocial, and ecological bodies of practical and scientific knowledge. The synthesis and application of knowledge from the full range of disability and physical activity/movement sources lead to the construction of a unique theoretical base.

7. In several countries, APA is not the preferred term. Terms such as ‘sports for the disabled’, ‘sport therapy’, and ‘psychomotor therapy’ may be appreciated as pertaining to a rather similar set of constructs. To enhance the knowledge base, persons may want to increase international communication and collaborative research concerning the diverse meanings of words often included in APA definitions such as ‘sport and disability’. Professional organizations and academic structures will influence these terms merging into APA or remaining unique entities.

References


