

MISSION, OMISSION and SUBMISSION

in PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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At the eve of New Year's, one tends to get nostalgic. It is a time for resolutions. How much more so at the eve of a new decade.

Except that this time, this paper, instead of enunciating future promises for which no one can be held responsible, is a declaration of indictments.

Indictments of the conduct of the field of physical education, past and present. This is observable, analytical and also measurable.

Let those among us who have been dedicated to the "cause" or see themselves as such not get alarmed. Let them be vindicated, but it purges not the field itself, the collective conduct as reflected by what we do and what we say. Behavior exhibited by thousands and thousand of teachers coast to coast; teachers who are our product. They have all been in our classes.

So, we begin with us. We begin with Teacher Education, that branch of the academic world which is responsible for many of the inadequacies and agonies in our classrooms and gymnasias.

Do not cringe, do not sit in righteous indignation, do not despair – time has come for us to look at ourselves with boldness, frankness and even with what seems to be momentary cruelty. It is quite obvious that we cannot continue on this path, in this direction, and in this manner.

The target of this paper was identified, the direction clear. Now, the spirit of the paper. The title: Mission, Omission, and Submission in Physical Education is not a mere organizer dividing the statements into clear compartments; rather it represents the very essence of the tragic failure of a field intrinsically laden with great potential.

So—Mission, Omission, and Submission guide the spirit of this statement. A statement intended to serve as a position paper; an invitation for written and oral dialogues concerning the conduct of the field today! The conduct of so turgid a field, a field so proud of being a mirror of society—a mirror that reflects SELECTIVE image adorned with the halo of myths and attributions. A field that, like a carrousel, is going around and around to the monotonous syncopations of tinny sounds, and slowly lulling its riders into a pleasant, dreamy world of semi-consciousness.

But let me not lull you into the carrousel syndrome. Let us examine what we in fact have created and have been teaching to teachers.

Historically, physical education might best be depicted as a mass of pliable, pulsating, chameleon material whose inherent behavioral characteristic is to latch on and/or absorb other bodies. This mass lacks an independent internal framework which would give it recognizable shape and structural strength. As a result of its structural deficiency, the mass is susceptible to being manipulated and reshaped by external forces. These forces could be congruent with and friendly to the mass, but they could also be incongruent with, alien to or vested invasions of the mass's environment. As a result of its deficiencies, the mass has developed a weak frame of reference and so it is unable to clearly detect the intentions of the exerting force. It even has more difficulty resisting and rejecting the shaping forces because the mass itself is constantly searching for its own identity. It looks to the forces to fulfill a need. A need to strengthen a nebulous image. In its search for an identity, it actually seeks out, readily acclimates, basks and coos in the warm hands of its manipulators. It has been cajoled and deluded into feeling it has some

This process of redesigning cannot afford to be a replay of the way physical education evolved up to now. Original attempts to identify, (what it is?), resulted in the transplanting of a number of structural instances and/or ideologies that were developed in other social arrangements. None of the existing recognizable structures were entirely acceptable to the new environment. It resulted in the selection of bits and pieces of various structures and they were attached to each other to form a different structure. The resultant product had internal inconsistencies and inherent environmental conflicts. It was open for attack and attack they did.

These attacks left additional uncertainty and some voids. This allowed people, as individuals or as collective bodies, to decide what should fill the empty spaces. It resulted in a precedent which said that it's all right to develop one's own idiosyncratic bag.

Most of the innovations in our field have been primarily "a little bit of this and a pinch of that". This means it continues to be morally and ethically correct for anyone to devise personal and indigenous formulas (recipes) based on their rationale. What makes it even more peculiar is that this personal product is usually very difficult to challenge because who is to say their rationale is any less valid than those which presently exist.

The plight of not having an internal framework or consistency is augmented with other problems such as: 1) the discrepancy between what the academic world sees as important and what physical education sees; 2) between what education says should happen and what really occurs in the gymnasiums of America; and 3) the continued attacks on physical education and its affiliates by various social agencies and/or prominent people. This has resulted in the development of a weak professional image.

The uncertainty that goes along with a weak image has produced a number of pressures, anxieties, fears, frustrations, threats to the profession (individually and collectively). It has caused a professional “neurosis” and has resulted in an elaborate system of emotional and professional defense mechanisms.

The professions compensating behavior seems to have taken on the tone of trying to be all things to all people. This identity search has resulted in physical education embracing a number of “Odd Bedfellows”. Their relationship seems to be explained and approved in three ways: 1) Justification by Association 2) Justification by Absorption or Proliferation 3) Justification by Uniqueness.

Justification by Association is an identity seeking technique which is supposed to allow this profession to shine a little brighter because it reflects the light given off by an established, accepted discipline or profession.

Physical educators are not physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, biologists, physiologists, and/or para-medical people, not by training, not by knowledge and not by function. Each of the above professions has a function in our society which is unique to them. Just because we should and do utilize their knowledge does not make us pseudo (anything).

Physical educators are not religious leaders, military trainers, fashion designers, policeman, or judges and therefore, the profession’s preoccupation with rigid imposed standards regarding personal appearance, ideas, interests, aspirations and/or abilities does not give it more legitimate image. Teachers must become sensitized that uniforms, cut of clothes, haircuts, facial hair, beliefs, likes, dislikes and ones motoric contribution to a

selected environment are not the criteria by which you judge people and their worth to society.

Physical educators are not athletic coaches, athletic trainers, recreational leaders, or athletic officials. The essence of athletic competition and recreation are different and they have unique structures of their own.

Physical education may use similar tools, but how they are used should be the significant difference. This is not meant to imply that a person cannot act in a dual role, but rather that the professions cannot afford the luxury of the association. Athletics and recreation have the more clearly defined structures and have greater internal consistency. Therefore, they tend to influence and dominate physical education.

Justification by Absorption or Proliferation is another way that the profession has attempted to make their being more acceptable. This technique is to make ones self so large that you offer a formidable foe by size. Anyone who then decides to challenge it must be willing to challenge all that has been absorbed or proliferated. Today, it is almost impossible to challenge physical education without encountering God, the Flag, the Country, Motherhood, Purity, Goodness and maybe even, Apple Pie.

In the name of physical education, we deal with and profess expertise in such things as: Military Fitness Training, Presidential Fitness Training, during class athletics and intramurals, during class coaching, dating, marriage, sex, drugs, safety, first aid, athletic training, weight control, nutrition, biology, physiology, driver education, rhythms-dance, movement education, body builders, perceptual training, motoric development, etc. Is this what physical education is all about?

This absorption-proliferation process is diluting in itself, but we compound it with our preoccupation with such practices as:

1. Preservation of subject matter.
2. Adherence to organizational patterns that were devised for a particular philosophy.
3. Conformity to imposed requirements of uniforms, showers, pace, rhythm and other behaviors.
4. Presentations of the “all knowing” authority figure around which the class pivots.
5. Promotion of the concept of esprit de corps.
6. The correct form or way of doing it.
7. Excusing from class members of athletic teams.
8. Developing competitive climates, where child vs. child is the order of the day (with the spoils going to the winner and sometimes additional penalties for the loser).

These practices, as well as others, have placed this profession on record as seeing subject matter instances above people, group needs above individual needs, group conformity above individual expression, group control above self control, authority decisions above self decisions and dependency above independence.

The entire profession continues to skate on thin ice when it tries to justify its being by sighting its uniqueness (Justification by Uniqueness). What is it that is Unique? It is the subject matter, the child, the tools, the product, the medium, or is it really just the set of assumptions and attributions that make us different.

Couldn't other social agencies do exactly what we do? Isn't our being in the school setting the only really unique thing in this profession? Aren't we so much like several of the more dominant off springs - Athletics - Recreation - Physical Skill Training - that some other agency could and maybe should do it?

Certainly, at this juncture of the profession's development, one might legitimately ask, "What is Physical Education, in its present form, doing in the American Public School"? This question is presently being asked by the academic world about College - University required physical education programs. When, what is being done is compared to current educational theory and practices, the incongruencies become clear and any uniqueness becomes relatively unimportant.

This same question will be asked of Elementary-Secondary school programs and the future of physical education might not only depend on how we answer, but, who asks the questions to initiate the process of change.

Is the future of this profession: MISSION? OMISSION? or SUBMISSION?

Let us examine further by identification of Paradoxes which not accidentally exist in physical education but Paradoxes deliberately perpetrated in the field. (The assumption of deliberateness provides for the existence of some rationale for the conduct of the field; if things have been happening in this field in a haphazard, non-deliberate way, then indeed, it needs high level scrutiny).

PARADOX #1: Philosophy and Curriculum

To repeat her "The Philosophy" of physical education or even to attempt to quote a collection of re-worded objectives, aims, principles and the like would be to bore you

and to insult my colleagues, the book writers, the reiterators of that assemblage of noble and nebulous statements fed to our undergraduates as purposes, as direction, as dictum.

Had our curricula remotely approximated the philosophy, it would have been enough. Had the curricula moved in that direction, it would have been enough. But, our curricula moves in the opposite direction to the philosophy stated. This polarization can be illustrated by the following examples:

1. Generally speaking, the field of physical education in its mission statements has allied itself with the general objectives of American education. Objectives which proclaim “Education of all and for all” as their pillar of strength and purpose.

When one examines the practice and the programs in schools, it becomes quite obvious that the movement experiences are not designed for all. In fact, they are a-priori designed for exclusion! Exclusion, not inclusion is the principle guiding the practices of experiences in American Gymnasia. (For a detailed statement about Inclusion and Exclusion in physical education, see Mosston, 1969).

Let us retell the story of the high jump used as an educational experience. The discussion here is not concerning the use of the high jump in athletic competition whose philosophy and practice are congruent in the use of the exclusion principle. We are examining the design of the high jump experience in light of the stated educational objective.

The horizontal arrangement of the rope (or bar) becomes after several “innings” as excluder of most participants. If the raising of the bar continues, it becomes an excluder of all! A rather incongruous design based on opposite philosophical statement.

The emphasis here is on the word design. We have designed it!! We have been teaching this design to generations of teachers. We have caused millions of children to be excluded from this contributing activity.

Instead, let us examine an alternative design. Let us hold the bar on a slant, so that it will represent variable height with its intrinsic quality of inclusion. Experimenting with this alternative with children all over the country has yielded the following observations:

- a) All children participate (this includes children with various limitations – physical, perceptual, etc.).
- b) All children participate willingly (this arrangement accommodates the motivation to begin!).
- c) All children experience success – frequent success. (they always, let me repeat – they always begin where they know they can be successful).
- d) The availability of CHOICES in height always provides mobility.
(This arrangement accommodates for Motivation to continue).
- e) All children become engaged in competition – in fact, they discover two kinds of competition, each with its asset and liabilities. They learn to make decisions for themselves in regard to their readiness to choose the particular kind of competition: competition against one's self and competition against another.
- f) This arrangement never excludes the top performers.
- g) In summary – All children are always included!!

Multiply this example by a thousand and figure out the kind of programs we

could have, had it not been for a deliberate OMMISSION!! (The issues of exclusion and pressure on children are treated in (1), (2), (3) Mosston (1969) suggest that “every decision made by a teacher in every act of teaching has the consequence of inclusion and exclusion. These decisions serve as a powerful and sometimes irreversible antecedent to what actually occurs to the learner, for or against the learner”.

Mosston (1969) further accuses physical education with the charge of mass exclusion when he states:

“Our field of human movement intrinsically possesses and produces the quality of high visibility. The difference between those who can and those who cannot is quite apparent. The most indicting aspect of the visibility factor is its range of exclusion which potentially includes so many: the extreme somato-types, the handicapped, the unwilling, the racially different and combinations of all these. Indeed, the physical educator, particularly the one who has been brought up with the professional myth of Greek standards of beauty, harmony and perfection, must learn to grapple with the reality of a pluralistic society and re-examine his notions of standards and norms”.

2. Now, in addition to having been an a-priori excluder of people, American physical education’s curricula has been intellectually dishonest. The intellectual purpose of education in a free society is to seek the truth and not to present scattered and carefully selected instances as the whole truth. That means that any field of knowledge, any discipline seeks to discover and organize all of its possible instances into the largest conceivable structure. Then, and only then, the smaller parts, the sub-structures fall into place and can be used and taught.

The primary function of intellectual activity is to go beyond, to search for the unknown. This further means that decisions concerning the FEASIBLE and the DESIRABLE must be carefully weighted and often postponed when it comes to the inquiry into the structure of subject matter in a given curriculum.

Thus, intellectual honesty dictates that an assembly of all possible responses and instances would constitute the largest structure.

Any assembly of feasible responses and instances invariably represent a lesser structure or sub-structure (such as basketball, wrestling, gymnastics, etc.) due to functional limitations superimposed on the selective process. This can be seen in physical education by observing all the sub-structures that have made the content of the field; sub-structures that singularly and collectively constitute less than the sum total of movement possibilities.

Still a lesser assembly of responses and instances is derived when measures of desirability are applied to the selective process. These measures of desirability in physical education have too frequently been results of decisions based on personal taste or power position, agreed upon aesthetic standards of a compromising committee, the politics of a local, state or national professional organization, and indigenous traditions of teacher education programs of various colleges.

All these sources of decisions concerning feasibility and desirability are paradoxically incongruent with intellectual integrity of seeking the possibility. Mosston (October, 1969) As an example let's examine the area of Gymnastics as we know it to appear in books, in courses of study and as we see it performed. To focus on the issue,

let's take one small aspect of Gymnastics. Let us talk about the “mount unto the parallel bars”.

As a rule, this aspect of Gymnastics is presented as a collection of mounts (exercises) predetermined by some authority usually representing the “desirability” dimension. These selected, confined, limited, and often scattered mounts have become the representations of how man should get on the parallel bars. Again, as a model for competitive Gymnastics designed to pitch all individuals against a single performance model (the desirable model) and thereby exclude all those who cannot reach the model – it is acceptable. As a model for educational purposes true to intellectual investigation of the possible, it must never be used. It EXCLUDES potential subject matter.

Intellectual expansion (and in this case it will be manifested through expanded physical experiences) demand to approach the parallel bars as an environment with which man interacts!

The question is not “how do I perform the few selected mounts?” The question is, “How do I, man, interact with this environment?”

The concept of interaction is in the focus – the variety of mounting instances only represents this interaction. It is quite obvious that the possibilities are theoretically infinite. The number of mounts which result from all possible combinations of variables of posture, direction, speed and the variable conditions of the environment itself is great, again, theoretically infinite. This, then, constitutes the subject matter. This is the intellectually honest based upon which course of studies using this environment can be developed.

Multiply this example by a thousand and multiply it by the number of environments with which man can interact via the medium of movement and you get a different picture of the possible curricula.

PARADOX #2: Groupism and Individuality

One of the more obvious aspects of physical education classes is its focus on the group. Just about everything is geared for the group – class organization is done for the group; in fact, individuals are usually manipulated so that the end result of the organizational maneuver will satisfy the group arrangement.

Uniforms are imposed so that the group will look good. (We shall return to uniforms later).

Equipment is distributed to fit the group organization; quite often as the expense of individual learning. It is quite a prevalent picture in gymnasiums where 10% of the equipment and floor space is used in order not to spoil the group arrangement – the group control. (One can see this waste of space, equipment, time and consequently non-learning in units such as basketball, tumbling, etc. where only a portion of the available equipment is used while the rest is either arranged neatly on the dolly in the corner of the gymnasium or hidden in the “secret” cabinets in the director’s office).

Control and discipline are attempted through the group. Systems of REWARDS and REPRIMAND (R&R) have been devised where group pressure is either overt or implicit.

The group, or the concept of groupism has been elevated in physical education to almost an unshattered level and undisputed value.

However, on a slightly deeper analysis, when one examines what such procedures, such beliefs do to people, one discovers that they intrude upon and often violate the very essence of INDIVIDUALITY. The superimposition of group arrangements, group standards, group morality, group aesthetic value always intrude upon the right and the very ability of the individual to make choices.

The individual must conform or his conduct is identified as Deviant Behavior.

Melvin Tumin in his article, “Popular Culture and the Open Society” (1957) says,

“Real creativity is viewed with suspicion and distrust because it means, above all, difference, intolerance, an insistence on achieving an individual identity. Real feeling is viewed with equal distrust and hostility because it almost always means bad manners, spontaneity, unpredictability. Lack of realism, failure to observe routines. Well-rounded, adjusted, happy – these are the things we are told it is important for us to be. No points, no sharp cutting edges, no despairs and elations. Just nice, smooth billiard balls, rolling quietly on soft green cloth to our appointed webbed pockets, and dropping slowly into the slots under the table to be used in the same meaningless way in the next game. Chalk one up for mediocrity. For it is the only winner in this game”.

Schwab (1969) in a paper entitled, “On the Corruption of Education by Psychology” discusses group dynamism as a doctrine of education and says:

“Once a group is fully formed, he has little or no status as an individual in his own right but only as a member of the group. It is the group that

determines what will be done and, in effect, does it. And it is the group character; furthermore, that determines what is acceptable and unacceptable, good or bad, true or false”.

He further states that:

“The very nature of inquiry, whether scientific or practical, is thus altered. It ceases to be a procedure whose ultimate measure is the completeness and verity of the knowledge acquired. It ceases to be a process whose fruits are measured by careful nurtured diversities of criteria. It becomes, instead, a procedure whose ultimate measure is the continuing and increasing solidarity of the group.

Physical education abounds with instances, procedures, units and programs that exemplify this statement. In fact, we have even developed words, phrases and slogans that create public shame for anyone who does not adhere to the group doctrine.

We have even gone further than that. We often violate the PRIVACY of our students. For example: consider the organizational arrangement of classes by height. Height is a personal thing, it is of one’s own, it is private. How does a person who happens to be quiet short feel when he is always MADE to stand first in line? Day after day – year after year –always under the visual scrutiny of the teacher. Or, conversely, what about the very tall who is always at the end, never close enough to enjoy the warmth of the teacher?

Let us consider the privacy of appearance? There are only 3-4 professionals left in our civilization that REGULATE attire and superimposes a uniform. By what divine right does a teacher demand of all her girls to wear black leotards? What about the girl who

knows she looks best in blue? Or the boy who prefers to wear long pants because his own self-image does not permit him to appear in shorts?

By what right do we violate the privacy of movement-personal movement? Movement for self-development, movement for self-expression or movement for whatever purpose?

Everything we do in the gymnasium is OPEN, VISIBLE, AVAILABLE to the eyes of friend or foe.

In fact, the very architecture of our gymnasium is a violation of privacy. One can observe libraries, laboratories, even classrooms where nooks, booths, and corners are available for private involvement and participation in individual, personalized acts of learning. But not in physical education.

One can conceive of different designs for gymnasiums; with low, partitioned, small areas, different levels, different lighting, different colors – areas conducive to personal engagement in learning about oneself, areas available for the student's choice and need. Areas which do not invite public pressure and stigmatization, but rather areas which invite fuller participation and involvement of self. Van Cleve Morris (1969) addresses himself to this issue thus:

“...Consider the matter of privacy and quiet reflection. How much opportunity is there in a typical school in America for a youngster to sit still and quiet and go over the personal choices he must take that day?....We have related gregariousness to the status of a moral commitment for today's youth. It is now suspicious behavior to declare that one wants to be alone”.

A few words about two more paradoxes – in the spirit of Mission, Omission and Submission:

PARADOX #3: Men and Women in Physical Education

It is quite clear that the “separatist movements” in this field belong to a different era, to past social, economic and certainly philosophical condition. Elizabeth L. Cless (1969) decries the situation and says:

“Higher education in the United States was designed exclusively for the white, upper or middle-class male. Its procedures, its rigid uninterrupted time table, and its cost all but prohibit its use by women despite well meaning, sometimes desperate, twentieth century attempts to provide appropriate schooling for every qualified American citizen”.

Paradoxically, men and women in physical education

