**Creating Positive Values Through the Promotion of Physical Activity Education**

By Earle F. Zeigler, Western University, Canada



Recently, SHAPE America President Stephen Jefferies invited me to offer some ideas about our field’s future direction. Although delighted to accept this invitation, as I gradually close out 75 years plus of professional involvement with our field, I confess that I look forward with mixed emotions. I won’t be around much longer and I find myself truly concerned about the future of our field. I say this even though I believe that we work in a field that could and should be at least as important to children and youth as any in the education sphere.

I don’t believe that we can state absolutely or precisely that such-and-such a program should be followed. Living one's life will always be (I hope) an art rather than a science. As we age we should follow the best available theory based on scientific findings. But although the opinions of educators, medical scientists, and social scientists all tend to point in a similar direction, often this advice is still based on inadequate or incomplete evidence.

*Nevertheless, I believe strongly that physical activity education (including intramural athletics and related health instruction), broadly interpreted and experienced under wise educational or recreational conditions, can serve humankind as a worthwhile social institution contributing vitally to the well being, ongoing health, and longevity of people of all ages.*

Despite my italicizing of this statement, sadly the message is simply not getting across to the population in the world’s advanced countries to such an extent that it is being implemented.

Every year, the journal *Quest* has devoted one issue to report the proceedings of the previous year's annual meeting of what is now called the National Academy of Kinesiology. The 2006 theme of the former AAKPE was "Kinesiology: Defining the Academic Core of Our Discipline." Michael Wade, from the University of Minnesota was the conference summarizer. His "Quo Vadis Kinesiology?" analysis summarized the essence of the event. Accepting the fact that the field “has at least tentatively decided to call itself kinesiology,” Wade pointed out our field’s highly disturbing lack of orientation is characterized by the absence of a clear statement of mission.

I immediately wrote him expressing some of the thoughts below.[[1]](#footnote-1) It seemed to me that we had some agreement as to the “rudderlessness” of the Academy and the entire field itself. But more specifically, it was the central focus that was so woefully inadequate! Members of the Academy are typically the self-proclaimed 100 "top, active scholars and scientists" of "kinesiology" in America! This is the scholarly group that deliberately separated itself in the early 1990s from the founding professional society, the one that spawned us all! (AAHPERD was originally created as the Association for the Advancement of Physical Education in 1885). Now, heading into my 76th year in the field, a field that has been searching for a "consensual name" for more than a century, I admit that I too thought that the question had been resolved. I can remember C. H. McCloy (arguably the top "physical educator-scientist" of the first half of the 20th century) saying: "To change the name away from physical education now would be akin to rolling back Niagara Falls.”

Today, I am trying hard not to become "un ancien." The National Academy of Kinesiology’s "status” is in a way something like that of the more recent International Association for Philosophy of Sport, another group of which I was president in an “earlier life.” The public doesn't know that the IAPS exists, the field of education doesn't know it exists, and physical activity educators and coaches worldwide don't know (or care!) that it's there either. Neither do the people from different "specialties" within each of these societies typically "speak" to each other during the year as well. All this leads me to wonder if I’ve missed any members of both societies who are *not* speaking or communicating with each other?” Hence my question is simply this: If these groups do not relate strongly to the public, to education, and to the established field of practitioners closest to the discipline they represent, *what good are they?[[2]](#footnote-2)*

So, in semi-retirement at age 96, I will continue – at least for a while I hope - to write for those in the field concerned about "physical activity education in exercise, sport, dance, and physical recreation–accompanied by related health education–for normal, accelerated, and special people of all ages."

As members of what might be called a quasi-discipline, quasi-profession, we want this for everybody. Certainly, we can get knowledge and assistance for fulfilling our mission from the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences--as well as a variety of professions and work specifically with them. Fundamentally, as I wrote recently: "As professionals *we don't know what we don't know* because the burgeoning knowledge component of our various sub-disciplinary and sub-professional components has gotten away from any one person!" Frankly, this is where our professional associations worldwide can and should be helping practitioners by providing "evolving ordered generalizations" of scientific and scholarly findings about developmental physical activity.

Presently, we lack the necessary support to work at all levels within the field of education (children, teens, adults, etc.) Our field specifically (!) for some fully unexplainable reason has been unable to flourish within education or develop in the larger society to work with adults, "middle-agers," and seniors. *Yet the dire need for regular planned physical activity (exercise!) for all throughout their lives is so obvious!*

What happened? The situation is as the late comedian Jimmy Durante used to quip, "Everybody's trying to get into the act!" Today, a cacophony of “other voices” has entered the picture to fill the vacuum. Even my Mayo Clinic Health Letters include sound physical activity education procedures (written by presumably unqualified medical person because there is no author attribution!) Not a week that goes by without some new study pointing out that regular physical activity can cure or improve "this or that" in people’s lives or lengthen their lives.

I am forced to ask further: What is going on here? How many graduates in the discipline of kinesiology (i.e., the study of movement) will actually be helping people in society to live better lives based on their qualifications as “movement analysts”? I’m certain that some will but where’s the evidence? Where is the proof that these kinesiology program graduates are helping people of all ages to analyze movement kinematically (much less understand such movement *kinetically*)?[[3]](#footnote-3)

Further, I would like to see the rationalization for the positions these graduates are engaged in. What positions do they hold? Where are they located? Do we really know? A small percentage does go to the units of professional education on campuses to become teachers in a system where their efforts will continue to be downgraded by their colleagues and public opinion. Why downgraded? Because *we* in the field evidently haven't "made our case" strongly enough. Any statement of the field of physical activity education’s mission should proclaim our hope that all people *worldwide*, people of all ages and conditions, actively will be involved with satisfaction in healthful and joyful physical activity.

If we were a truly respectable subject-matter field within the purview of the education profession, we would be able to guarantee the best type of developmental physical activity for children based on established principles. In 1951, speaking to the former College Physical Education Association, Dr. Arthur H. Steinhaus identified four "principal principles" of physical education. He explained that the term "can and does mean the most important or chief fundamental theories, ideas, or generalizations"(p. 5). With the steadily growing body of knowledge that has provided our profession with much more substantive knowledge base than existed at the middle of the twentieth century, it is now possible to claim that our "principal principles" have increased to at least fourteen (Zeigler, 1994,1995, 2011). These principles, as indicated below, give our field support for inclusion as a mainstay in the educational curriculum. Each one could form the basis for a section or subsection of the inventory being proposed:

**The Fourteen "Principal Principles” of Developmental Physical Activity Education**

*Principle 1:* *The "Reversibility Principle"*

The first principle affirms that circulo-respiratory (often called cardiovascular) conditioning is inherently reversible in the human body.

*Principle 2: The "Overload Principle"*

The second principle states that a muscle or muscle group must be taxed beyond that to which it is accustomed, or it won't develop.

*Principle 3: The "Flexibility Principle"*

This principle indicates that a human must put the body's various joints through the range of motion for which they are intended. Inactive joints become increasingly inflexible until immobility sets in.

*Principle 4: The "Bone Density Principle"*

This principle asserts that developmental physical activity throughout life helps significantly to maintain the density of a human's bones.

*Principle 5: The "Gravity Principle"*

This principle explains that maintaining muscle-group strength throughout life, while standing or sitting, helps the human fight against the force of gravity that is working continually to break down the body's structure

*Principle 6: The "Relaxation Principle"*

Principle 6 states that the skill of relaxation is one that people must acquire in today's increasingly complex world.

*Principle 7: The "Aesthetic Principle"*

This principle explains that a person has either an innate or culturally determined need to "look good" to himself/herself and to others.

*Principle 8: The "Integration Principle"*

Developmental physical activity is an important means whereby the individual can "fully involved" as a living organism. By their very nature, physical activities in exercise, sport, play, and expressive movement demand full attention from the organism--often in the face of opposition--and therefore involve complete psycho-physical integration.

*Principle 9: The "Integrity Principle"*

The principle of integrity implies that a completely integrated psychophysical activity should correspond ethically with the avowed ideals and standards of society. The "integrity principle" goes hand in hand with desirable integration of the human's various aspects, the so-called unity of body and mind in the organism as explained in Principle 8.

*Principle 10: The "Priority of the Person Principle"*

Principle 10 affirms that any physical activity in sport, play, and exercise sponsored through public or private agencies should be conducted in such a way that the welfare of the individual comes first (i.e., sport must serve as a "social servant").

*Principle 11: The "Live Life to Its Fullest Principle"*

This principle explains that, viewed in one sense, human movement is what distinguishes humans from the rock on the ground. Unless the body is moved with reasonable vigor according to principles 1-6 above, it will not serve a person best throughout life.

*Principle 12: The "Fun and Pleasure Principle"*

Humans are normally "seekers of fun and pleasure," and a great deal of the opportunity for such enjoyment can be derived from full, active, bodily movement.

*Principle 13: The "Longevity Principle"*

This principle affirms that regular developmental physical activity throughout life can help a person live longer.

*Principle 14: The “Physical Fitness & Learning–Correlation Principle”*

This principle affirms that mounting evidence is showing a positive relationship between physical fitness and what is termed as academic achievement (Zeigler, 2011).

**The Professional Task Ahead**

What, then, is the professional task ahead? First, we should truly understand why we have chosen this profession as we rededicate ourselves anew to the study and dissemination of knowledge, competencies, and skills in developmental physical activity in sport, in exercise, and in related expressive movement. Concurrently, of course, we need to determine exactly *what it is* that we are professing.

Second, as either professional practitioners or instructors involved in professional preparation, we should search for young people of high quality in all the attributes needed for success in the field. Then we should follow through to help them develop lifelong commitments so that our profession can achieve its democratically agreed-upon goals. We should also prepare young people to serve in the many alternative careers in sport, exercise, dance, and recreational play that are becoming increasingly available in our society.

Third, we must place quality as the first priority of our professional endeavors. Our personal involvement and specialization should include a high level of competency and skill under girded by solid knowledge about the profession. It can be argued that our professional task is as important as any in society. Thus, the present is no time for indecision, half-hearted commitment, imprecise knowledge, and general unwillingness to stand up and be counted in debate with colleagues within our field and in allied professions and related disciplines, not to mention the public.

Fourth, the obligation is ours. If we hope to reach our potential, we must sharpen our focus and improve the quality of our professional effort. Only in this way will we be able to guide the modification process that the profession is currently undergoing toward the achievement of our highest professional goals. This is the time, right now, to employ exercise, sport, dance, and play to make our reality more healthful, more pleasant, more vital, and more life enriching. By "living fully in one's body," behavioral science men and women will be adapting and shaping this phase of reality to their own ends.

Finally, such improvement will not come easily; it can only come through the efforts of professional people making quality decisions, through the motivation of people to change their sedentary lifestyles, and through our professional assistance in guiding people as they strive to fulfill such motivation in their movement patterns. Our mission in the years ahead is to place this special quality in our entire professional endeavor.

**What Should the Field of Developmental Physical Activity Do in the 21st Century?**

What should the field of developmental physical activity do--perhaps what must we do--to ensure that it will move more decisively and rapidly in the direction of what might be called status within education, and recognized status as a profession in society at large? Granting that unpredictable social forces will impact upon us, what can we do collectively in the years immediately ahead? These positive steps should be actions that will effect a workable consolidation of purposeful accomplishments on the part of those men and women who have a concern for the future of developmental physical activity as a valuable component of human life from birth to death. The following represent a number of categories joined with action principles that are related insofar as possible to the "modifications" that have been taking place in our field. We should seek a North American consensus on the steps spelled out below. Then we, as dedicated professional educators, should take as rapid and strong action as we can muster through our professional associations in America and Canada. These recommended steps are as follows:

*Define a Sharper Image*

Because in the past the field of physical (activity) education has tried to be "all things to all people," and presently doesn't know exactly what it does stand for, we should now sharpen our image and improve the quality of our efforts by focusing primarily on developmental physical activity--specifically, human motor performance in sport, exercise, and related expressive movement. As we sharpen our image, we should make a strong effort to cooperate with those who are working in the private agency and commercial sectors by helping them to get organized under a single national association with related state and/or provincial entities. This implies further that we will extend our efforts to promote the finest type of developmental physical activity for people of all ages whether they are members of what are considered to be "normal, accelerated, or special" populations.

*Agree Upon our Field's Name*

All sorts of name changes have been implemented (a) to explain either what people think we are doing or should be doing, or (b) to camouflage the presumed "unsavory" connotation of the term "physical education." Evidently the latter conjures up the notion of a "dumb jock" working with the lesser part of a tri-partite human body So instead we should focus primarily on developmental physical activity as defined immediately above while moving toward an acceptable working term for our profession. A desirable name for our under girding discipline would be developmental physical activity, and we could delineate this by our inclusion of exercise, sport, and expressive movement.[[4]](#footnote-4)

*Identify a Tenable Body of Knowledge*

Inasmuch as various social forces and professional concerns have placed us in a position where we don't know where or what our body of knowledge is, we will strongly support the idea of disciplinary definition and the continuing development of a body of knowledge based on such a consensual definition. From this must come a merging of tenable scientific theory in keeping with societal values and computer technology so that we will gradually, steadily, and increasingly provide our members with the knowledge that they need to perform as top-flight professionals. As professionals, we simply must possess the requisite knowledge, competencies, and skills necessary to provide developmental physical activity services of a high quality to the public both within education and also in society at large.

*Strengthen our own Professional Association*

Because for a variety of reasons there is insufficient support of our own professional association, we need to develop voluntary and mandatory mechanisms that relate membership in one professional organization both directly and indirectly to stature within the field. That organization is now the Society of Health and Physical Educators, (SHAPE America). We simply must now commit ourselves to work tirelessly and continually to promote the welfare of professional practitioners who are serving the public in the educational system and also in the larger society. Incidentally, it may be necessary to exert any available pressures to encourage people to give first priority to our own scholarly and professional group (i.e., SHAPE America), as opposed to those of related disciplines and/or allied professions. The logic behind this dictum is that our own survival comes first for us!

*Create Professional Licensing in our Field*

Although most teachers/coaches in the schools, colleges, and universities are seemingly protected indefinitely by the shelter of the all-embracing teaching profession, we should now move rapidly and strongly to seek official recognition of our endeavors in public, semi-public, and private agency work and in commercial organizations relating to developmental physical activity through professional licensing at the state or provincial level. Further, we should encourage individuals to apply for voluntary registration as qualified practitioners at the federal level in both the United States and Canada.

*Increase Harmony within the Field*

An unacceptable series of gaps and misunderstandings have developed among those in our field concerned primarily with the bio-scientific aspects of human motor performance. Those concerned with the social-science and humanities aspects, those concerned with the general education of all students, those concerned with the professional preparation of physical activity educators/coaches, and those connected with the professional preparation of sport managers–all at the college or university level–must strive to work for a greater balance and improved understanding among these essential entities within the profession.

*Improve our Relationship with Intercollegiate Athletics and Sports*

An ever-larger wedge has been driven between units of physical education and interscholastic and intercollegiate athletics in educational institutions where gate receipts are a strong and basic factor. Such a rift serves no good purpose and is counter to the best interests of both groups. Developmental physical activity available through the services of physical activity educators should remain separate from varsity sport in those universities where the promotion of highly organized, often commercialized athletics exists (e.g., NCAA Division I and II institutions). However, we must work for greater understanding and harmony with those people who remain interested in this enterprise. At the same time it is imperative that we do all in our power to maintain athletics in a sound educational perspective within our schools, colleges, and universities as is done in NCAA Division III institutions (e.g., Yale, Amherst).

*Strengthen our Relationship with Intramurals and Recreational Sports*

Intramurals and recreational sports is in a transitional state at present in that they haven’t proved that they are "here to stay" at the college and university level. Even as programs of after-school sport experiences at the high school level, intramurals haven't really taken hold yet, despite the fact that they have a lot to offer the large majority of “normal” and “special-needs” students in what may truly be called educational sport. Everything considered, I believe (1) that--both philosophically and practically--intramurals and recreational sports ought to remain within the sphere of the physical activity education field; (2) that it is impractical and inadvisable to attempt to subsume all non-curricular activities on campus under one department or division; and (3) that departments and divisions of physical activity education ought to work for consensus on the idea that intramurals and recreational sports are co-curricular in nature and deserve regular funding as laboratory experience in the same manner that general education course experiences in physical activity education receives its funding for instructional purposes.

*Guarantee Equal Opportunity*

Because "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" are guaranteed to all in North American society, as a profession we should move positively and strongly to see to it that equal opportunity is indeed provided to the greatest possible extent to women, to minority groups, and to special populations (e.g., the handicapped) as they seek to improve the quality of their lives through the finest type of experience in the many activities of our field.

*Hold high the Physical Activity Education Identity*

In addition to the development of the allied professions (e.g., school health education) in the second quarter of the twentieth century, we witnessed the advent of a disciplinary thrust in the 1960s that was followed by a splintering of many of the various "knowledge components" and subsequent formation of many different societies. These developments have undoubtedly weakened the field of (sport and) physical education.

*Applying a Competency Approach*

Whereas the failures and inconsistencies of the established educational process have become increasingly apparent, we will as a field within the education profession and a profession in society at large explore the educational possibilities of a competency approach as it might apply to general education, to professional preparation, and to all aspects of our professional endeavor in public, semi-public, private, and commercial agency endeavors

*Manage the Enterprise Better*

All professionals in the unique field of physical activity education (including sport) are managers--but to varying degrees. The "one course in administration" approach with no laboratory or internship experience of earlier times is simply not sufficient for the future. There is an urgent need to apply a competency approach in the preparation (as well as in the continuing education) of those who will serve as managers either within educational circles or elsewhere in the society at large.

*Develop a Sound Code of Professional Ethics*

In the course of the development of the best professions, the various embryonic professional groups have gradually become conscious of the need for a set of professional ethics--that is, a set of professional obligations that are established as norms for practitioners in good standing to follow. Our profession needs both a creed and a detailed code of ethics right now as we move ahead in our development. Such a move is important because, generally speaking, ethical confusion prevails in North American society. Development of a sound code of ethics, combined with steady improvement in the three essentials of a fine profession (i.e., an extensive period of training, a significant intellectual component that must be mastered before the profession is practiced, and a recognition by society that the trained person can provide a basic, important service to its citizens) would relatively soon place us in a much firmer position to claim that we are indeed members of a fine profession (Zeigler, 2007).

*Reunify the Field’s Integral*

*As one subject-matter field within the education profession,* there now appears to be reasonable agreement that what within the former AAHPERD was called the field of sport and physical education as well as physical activity and recreation, should be concerned primarily with developmental physical activity as manifested in human motor performance in sport, exercise, and related expressive movement. Hence, we must now work for the reunification of those elements of our profession that should be uniquely ours within our disciplinary definition of kinesiology.

*Study Cross-Cultural Comparison and Strive for International Understanding*

We had done reasonably well in the area of international relations within the Western world due to the solid efforts of many dedicated people over a considerable period of time, but somehow such “interrelationship” has declined seriously. Hence at present we need to redouble our efforts to make cross-cultural comparisons of physical activity education (including educational/recreational sport) while reaching out for international understanding and cooperation in both the Western and Eastern blocs. Much greater understanding on the part of all of the concepts of 'communication,' 'diversity,' and 'cooperation' is required for the creation of a better life for all in a peaceful world. Our profession can contribute significantly toward this long–range objective.

*Recognize Permanency and Change*

The "principal principles" espoused for physical education in the early 1950s by the late Arthur Steinhaus of George Williams College have in the author’s opinion now been extended from four to fourteen! All still apply most aptly to our professional endeavors; so, we must continue to emphasize that which is timeless in our work. Further, at the same time we should accept the inevitability of certain societal change.

*Improve the Quality and Length of Life*

Since our field is unique within education and in society, and since fine living and professional success involve so much more than verbal and mathematical skills, we will emphasize strongly that education is a lifelong enterprise. Further, we will stress that the quality and length of life can be improved significantly through the achievement of an acceptable degree of kinetic awareness and through heightened experiences in exercise, sport, and related expressive movement.

*Reassert our "Will to Win"*

The developments of the past 65 years have undoubtedly created uneasiness within the profession. Sadly they have also raised doubts on the part of some as to our possession of a "will to win" through the achievement of the highest type of professional status. Nevertheless, we must pledge ourselves to make still greater efforts to become vibrant and stirring through absolute dedication and commitment in our professional endeavors. Ours is a high calling as we seek to improve the quality of life for all through the finest type of developmental physical activity in sport, exercise, and related expressive movement.

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Biography: Earle F. Zeigler, Ph.D., LL.D., D.Sc. is a dual citizen of Canada and the United States. After 75 years of professional service divided equally between both countries, he writes primarily on North American human values, ethics, and personal decision-making. A past president (and Hetherington Award winner in 1989) of the National Academy of Kinesiology in America; an Honor Award winner of Physical & Health Education Canada (1975); a past president of the International Association for Philosophy of Sport; hon. past president of the North American Society for Sport Management (1986), and Recognition Award recipient of the No. Amer. Soc. For Sport History (2008), Zeigler was also Gulick Award winner (1989) and second Scholar-of-the-Year Award winner of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (1975-76).

1. I should explain my intense interest in the topic. I was inducted as a Fellow in the [then] Academy of Physical Education in 1966 and several decades later was elected president. Finally, I received its highest recognition: the Hetherington Award [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Oh yes, for a moment I forgot. Their societal publications are vital for individuals’ on-the-job promotion and for obtaining funds to attend conferences! [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Shouldn't that--by definition--be their function based on this Greek nomenclature? [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. As this essay is being written, the term "kinesiology" (from the Greek word kinesis) is looming ever larger in both the United States and Canada as a name for the undergraduate degree program in our field. However, it is most difficult to see this word catching on in the public schools. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)