

Historical Perspective on Contrasting Philosophies of Professional Preparation for Physical Education in the United States

by

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The main objective of this study was to offer some historical perspective on contrasting philosophies of professional preparation for physical education in the United States. It was hypothesized that there were contrasting positions or stances, and that they could be classified roughly as “progressivistic,” “essentialistic,” or be based on a “philosophy of language approach.” To accomplish his objective, the writer combined one technique of historical method — a “persistent problems” approach — with two techniques of philosophical method — a combination of “structural analysis” and “ordinary language” approaches.

The history of professions in general was reviewed briefly, with teaching singled out for special attention. Then a brief summary of the history of professional preparation for physical education in the United States was presented with emphasis on a variety of problems that have occurred. The third part of the presentation involved an enumeration of selected historical problem areas in teacher education in physical education, and this was followed by a comparative analysis of the philosophical positions in educational philosophy that seemed to underly the contrasting positions. The following eleven problem areas were identified on the basis of the writer’s ongoing historical assessment of professional preparation for physical education: (1) course emphasis — technique or content?; (2) “competency approach” vs. “courses & credits approach”; (3) relating language analysis to the competency approach; (4) specialization or generalization in the curriculum?; (5) election vs. requirement in the curriculum; (6) influence of competitive athletics; (7) discipline emphasis vs. “professional preparation”; (8) the bio-science vs. the humanities-social science conflict; (9) the accreditation of teacher-preparing institutions; (10) involvement of students in evaluation process; and (11) pattern of administrative control.

On the basis of ongoing historical investigation and philosophical analysis, it seems possible and reasonable to draw the following conclusions: (1) that physical education is considered typically to be part of the teaching profession, a field of endeavor that has many of the earmarks of a true profession; (2) that professional preparation for physical education has undergone a process of emergent evolution over the past 113 years during which time it has been influenced by a variety of social forces; (3) that greater progress may have been made in the United States than elsewhere in professional preparation for physical education, but that there are strong influences evident at present that may retard the field’s progress seriously; and (4) that the most serious problems confronting professional education for physical education in the United States at present are as follows: (a) the need to graduate *competent, well-educated*, fully professional physical educators and coaches; (b) the need to develop *sound* options within the professional curriculum in which *specialization* is

encouraged; (c) the need to *control* competitive athletics for both men and women in such a way that the entire educational process is *strengthened*; (d) the need to develop a *sound body of knowledge* in *all* aspects of physical education and sport; and (e) the need to implement fully *democratic* administration.