

Ernst Franz Jokl as the Father of Physical Education in South Africa

Floris Van Der Merwe

University Stellenbosch

Ernst Jokl's imprint was so distinctive that half-a-century later students at Stellenbosch and elsewhere in the country still refer to Physical Education as "Jokkel." Besides being a pioneer in physical education, he also laid the foundation for exercise physiology and sports medicine with international results.

Ernst Franz Jokl was born in Breslau, Germany, on 3 August 1907. He qualified himself as a physical education teacher as well as a medical doctor before he emigrated to South Africa in 1933. In 1936 he also qualified as a medical practitioner in Johannesburg.

Jokl, as a former German track athlete, trained with the Witwatersrand University track and field team that won the national universities' championship in 1935. This resulted in Jokl being appointed at the University of Stellenbosch in 1936. His task was to found the first Physical Education Department at a university in South Africa.

In 1937 Jokl left Stellenbosch for Johannesburg where he established the Department of physical Education at the Witwatersrand Technical College. During the thirties, the interest taken in these Departments of Physical Education caused the Cabinet to establish a Governmental division to deal with physical education on a nationwide scale. This body was called the National Advisory Council on Physical Education and Jokl was instrumental in preparing a memorandum indicating the administrative structure and policy of "NARLO." Among the most important tasks were to compile a uniform syllabus and system for physical education in South Africa as well as to stimulate research in the country.

In both aspects Jokl did pioneering work. He compiled the first local syllabus, called *Physical exercises: Syllabus for South African schools* (1940). Although Jokl originally chose the British system of physical education for South Africa, he arranged an invitation for Niels Bukh to tour South Africa in 1939. This resulted in Jokl's syllabus being influenced by the Danish Primary Gymnastics.

During World War II, Jokl served as medical consultant to the South African Defence Forces and he worked closely with Dr. Danie Craven at the Physical Training Battalion. With others, Jokl undertook a scientific evaluation of the social and physical rehabilitation experiment at the Battalion.

As Chief Research Officer of the National Advisory Council of Physical Education Jokl was instrumental in stimulating research in physical education, sports medicine and exercise physiology. In his own words, "our contributions had acquainted the American Medical profession with clinical problems of sports medicine not before known to them." Lately, in Europe and the United States, numerous studies on the growth and physical efficiency of children, have been based on the methodology used by Jokl and his associates in the forties.

One of the highlights of Jokl's career was receiving the Buckstone Browne Prize of the Harveian Society of London, awarded for winning the British Commonwealth Essay Competition on "Evaluation of methods of Physical Education" in September 1942.