

THWARTED VISIONS: THE PHYSICAL CULTURE OF GUSTAV TECHOW

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When Arnold Schwarzenegger, actor, champion body builder and successful businessman was appointed early in 1990 as chairman of the President's Council of Physical Fitness and Sports in the United States he promised to do all he could to make the 1990s the 'Fitness Decade'. The major target group in this ambitious campaign would be young Americans and the primary message would call for a 'return to daily, high quality physical education in our schools'.¹ Among several astute observations related to the lack of cardiovascular fitness, flexibility and strength in American youth, Schwarzenegger was clearly keen to proclaim his view that there is a marked distinction between the provision of 'a good sports program and a good physical education program'.² It was to be his intention during his visit to all states to encourage parents, in particular, to become more active in demanding physical education for their children in the school systems.

In 1986, Elizabeth Murdoch, writing on the future of the physical education curriculum in England, expressed her belief that time was running out for the subject and that 'it [physical education] has either to declare itself with as coherent voice as possible that it knows where it is going or it will disappear'.³ The contemporary scene in Australian physical education contains elements of the problems observed and promulgated by Schwarzenegger and Murdoch. Since 1986, and the initiative by the Australian Sports Commission to introduce 'Aussie Sports' into primary schools, it has become highly appropriate for Australian physical educators, and their professional association, to review their position on the nexus between physical education and sport.

The question must be asked about the degree to which sport will be allowed to become the major, or sole component of physical education, or as Evans comments in a recent article in the ACHPER National Journal, a substitute for physical education.⁴

At least one university in Australia has revealed its concerns about the current status and image of physical education. Staff at Deakin University ran a three-day workshop in October 1991 on the theme 'Australian Physical Education in Crisis', a forum hoping to identify the nature and the extent of present problems. It may be timely to reflect that the case which advocates regular, co-ordinated and organised physical activity operated under skilled leadership is not new, and has a considerable history in Victoria. And only on rare occasions since the middle of the nineteenth century has drill, physical training or physical education enjoyed popular support and recognition in education curricula. *Mens sana in corpore sano* may have been religiously broadcast but it has been apparently hard to put into consistent school practices. Gustav Techow, whose death came one hundred years before Schwarzenegger's Presidential appointment, might serve as a reminder today of the arguments to be fought and the goals still to be achieved by those who believe that physical education is an important and integral part of education.

Techow's Visions

The obituary notice carried in the *Australian Schoolmaster and Literary Review* of June 1890 marked Gustav Techow's death on 25 May at Jolimont Road, East Melbourne, with a brief review of the major achievements in his life and added the short and minor reference to his work as a 'Victorian teacher of gymnastics' at the Nation Gymnasium in the grounds of the East Melbourne Cricket Club.⁵ This tepid assessment of Techow's involvement with Victorian education did less than justice to the former officer of the Prussian army who had dedicated his second career to promoting the view that all children in the colony's schools had

the right to an effective and organised system of physical exercise. In an evaluation of Techow's case for recognition as the pioneer of physical education in Victoria it might be argued that the use of the more modern nomenclature is out of historical context and inappropriate: his era was one when the various systems of physical exercise produced a number of easily confused and interchangeable terms - drill, military drill, class drill, callisthenics and gymnastics. To some degree each system borrowed ideas from the others and at times there was considerable overlap in the content of the programs offered by any one system. But Techow was familiar with each system and referred to them all in his published works on gymnastics and fencing, though his manuals tend to be largely explanations of teaching methods and program content.⁶

Techow first came to prominence in the colony with his appointment as Director of the National Gymnasium in Melbourne in 1864. It was in this institution that several hundred teachers and pupil teachers were to be trained in gymnastics and military drill under Techow's guiding hand.⁷ But hidden from public gaze was Techow's long battle with the Victorian Education Department to provide a more liberal and meaningful interpretation of physical education in the elementary school system. He announced this concern as early as 1865 when his *Manual of Gymnastic Exercises*, for use in the Common Schools, revealed elements of his fundamental philosophy:

The subject of physical education, long consigned to neglect, is beginning at last to obtain a share of that attention which its importance demands. It has become a recognised fact, that the body can be educated as well as the mind; that the one is capable of improvement by culture as the other.⁸

In later years Techow must have regretted such a presumptuous evaluation of the progress being made by physical education, especially when he came to review the government's responses to the progressive ideas and plans he was to propose for the development of the subject in the colony's schools.

Techow's brief practical manual discloses the source of his misplaced optimism in the 1860s. The text was largely given to descriptions of the activities and methods of teaching in three areas - free standing exercises, apparatus gymnastics and medical gymnastics. Each of these activity areas was experiencing growth and progress in European school systems, therefore it was not unreasonable to believe that Victoria would follow the leads given in Sweden, Germany and England - nations that a young colony might profitably imitate. In his manual Techow refers to Ling, MacLaren and Roth and he was obviously influenced by the concepts of all three, as well as his native training in Jahn's Turnverein movement. Before his immigration and arrival in Australia in 1854 Techow had visited Sweden and observed Ling's gymnastic systems, and though he criticised MacLaren's military treatment of gymnastics and Roth's medical gymnastics as being unduly narrow and limited in their approach and application, he used many of their ideas in his own work.⁹

In his brief later memorandum *Gymnastics for State Schools*¹⁰, Techow again revealed his thoughts concerning the broader role of physical culture and he paid due homage to ancient Greek idealism. The aim of gymnastics was the 'harmonious development of all bodily faculties, the result of which is health rather than specific strength'.¹¹ If Techow also showed that he was bound to the conventional teaching methodologies of the day by insisting upon 'strict discipline', 'proper performance' and 'correct starting positions', there was equally strong emphasis upon grading the exercises to the age of children, making progression with the activities, and then adding the distinctive reminder that 'joy and cheerfulness' should not be excluded from lessons in the gymnasium. The memorandum discloses a partiality for Ling's gymnastic ideas but quite importantly Techow makes the point that a place should be found for playground games in school programs and then daringly suggest that on occasions the teacher should join in with the physical activities of the children.

The National Gymnasium

At the beginning of the 1860s Techow was an active member of the 'Duetsche Turnverein', the gymnastic club that had been formed in 1860 in Russell Street, Melbourne, with Ernst Metzger as the first instructor. At this time close to ten thousand Germans had settled in Victoria and the Turnverein was a cultural and social link to their ethnic origins.¹² In March 1864 Techow established his first National Gymnasium in the annexe of the old Exhibition Building, virtually little more than a large wooden barrack. It was here that Techow ran his first course of training in military drill and gymnastics for male teachers in October 1865. His payment was initially set at £75 per annum by the Board of Education but by 1868 Techow had assumed the prestigious title of 'Lecturer of Gymnastics' and boosted his salary to £300 per annum.¹³ Teachers and pupil teachers were able to take a free course of instruction, consisting of two evening sessions per week over a four month period, and thereby sit the examinations for the special certificate which qualified them to teach classes of children in one or both of the practical subjects. The quickly established popularity of the in-service courses at the National Gymnasium was no doubt partly due to the ability of successful graduates to claim extra salary under the payment-by-results scheme operating in the Board's schools.

By 1867 Techow was able to persuade the Board of Education to let him conduct the first course for women, and then at the expense of the Board, to move the National Gymnasium to a new site close to Wellington Parade and the Melbourne Cricket Ground. But Techow's relationships with the Board of Education and its successor, the Victorian Education Department, over the repair and general upkeep of the Gymnasium were never easy. Techow was increasingly frustrated in the 1870s in his efforts to get the Education Department to keep to its agreement to take on repairs to the building and the surrounding fences.¹⁴ The declining physical state of the building drove Techow in 1881 to suggest a further move of the National Gymnasium to new and

more permanent quarters. The radical proposal to the Education Department was set down in a printed memorandum which called for 'the erection of a Gymnasium and Swimming School in a part of the Exhibition Buildings'.¹⁵ The Education Department and the trustees of the Exhibition Building responded slowly to this plan though James Grant, as Minister of Public Instruction, did ask his administration for a tentative costing on the gymnasium but not on the swimming pool. Even more ambitious was Techow's plan for a new indoor facility to house a training college for the preparation of specialist physical education teachers and a physical training centre for the children in the city schools. These last schemes gained solid support from the head teachers in the Melbourne schools. In a petition to the Minister in 1881, forty-nine head teachers signed a letter giving full backing to Techow's precocious initiative and stating their own belief 'that it is desirable that our national system of Education should be supplemented by systematic instruction in Gymnastics and swimming' and the 'opportunities for physical education at present were inadequate'.¹⁶ Although the Minister met with a deputation of interested parties and backers of Techow's scheme, his promise to 'consider the matter fully' never came to anything more than this because economic arguments settled any further action on the plans.

A System of Physical Education

The most emphatic pronouncements of Techow's views on physical education were set down in a series of letters he addressed to the educational department and the government between 1872 and 1884. In these communications with his principal employer Techow divulged his passionate concerns for bodily training and how this could be integrated into the main stream of education already offered in the colony. As director of the National Gymnasium and in almost daily contact with teachers, Techow was well aware of the real state of affairs in the schools in regard to the amount of regular physical exercise being

given to children. His belief in systematic programs of exercise led Techow to remind the Department in 1874 that the Education act of 1872 which brought state control to elementary education had set as one of its principal goals the 'union of corporal and mental excellence'.¹⁷ Techow obviously felt that he had little to fear in bluntly describing what the true picture was of physical education in the schools of Victoria, and he openly declared to the Minister:

The arrangement of the defunct Board of Education have been simply maintained - Training classes for teachers at the National Gymnasium, the introduction under the name of Class Drill of a few elementary exercises in marching and extension movements and the granting of bonuses for the efficient teaching of extra-classes in extra-time.¹⁸

It was clear that Techow was both frustrated and disappointed with these minimal efforts and that no new initiatives had emerged from an Act purporting to herald a new era of education into the colony. In the general election of 1871 the Education Bill was the most prominent issue and point of argument and Angus Mackay, a major architect of the Bill, contended that it 'would establish a system of education second to none in the world'.¹⁹

There was no equivocation in the Director's mind of the fact that it was an elementary law of human education for the body to be allocated its rightful place, and the Education Department had to replace the 'sporadic and more or less abortive attempts' made up to that point on physical education.²⁰ If the youth of the colony was to develop, there was a need for a 'sound system of bodily education' but Techow forcefully rejected the view that military cadet training should be an integral part of that system.²¹ The fashionable trend of establishing military cadet corps in the colonial Public Schools had begun to be adopted in the elementary schools of New South Wales by 1873, and in turn, Victoria had become exposed to the arguments detailing the benefits to be gained from accepting militarism into state education. John Elkington, district inspector in the metropolitan area, had strong support from his fellow

inspectors in Victoria when he called for an extension of military drill in schools to prevent the spread of 'general boorishness' and 'personal violence' in society which was making the schoolmasters' task in preserving order more difficult. The most effective remedy and counter to these disruptive elements was seen to lie in an externally imposed discipline, inculcated through military drill while at school, which carried with it the attendant benefits of recognition to all 'constituted authority'.²² Techow scornfully dissented from the lead given by New South Wales because he could see no justification in Australia for organising its youth into military schemes, nor the 'conversion of boys, at public expense too, into swaggering miniature soldiers'.²³

Such progressive views were perhaps surprising from a former German military cadet and army officer who was now principally employed in the military drill training of teachers at the National Gymnasium. But Techow's strong opposition to militarism in schools and its concomitant teaching methods forming part of children's education was based upon his practical knowledge of the subject and his perceptive observation that drill was 'deadening to the mind stiffening to the body'.²⁴ He had come to the conclusion that there was a 'stolid sameness of drill' that was in 'complete opposition to the legitimate varieties of 'true exercise'.²⁵ The concept of 'true exercise' was vigorously pursued by Techow and became a central aspect in his schemes for the building of indoor gymnasiums at schools, organising programs of swimming instruction for all children and establishing a college of physical education for the training of specialist teachers.²⁶

The initial reaction to some of Techow's ideas was not entirely unfavourable and Robert Ramsey and Collard Smith, the responsible Ministers of Public Instruction in 1876 and 1877, spoke with a degree of enthusiasm about the building of ten gymnasiums at the largest of the metropolitan schools. It was perhaps more than coincidence that the Victorian Institute of Teachers had also written to Ramsey in August 1876 deploring the lack of physical education in state schools. They

supported Techow's call for the building of gymnasia at all schools²⁷ but Ramsey claimed this was impossible because of lack of funds, he then responded with the counter offer of ten gymnasia, or the building of a gymnasium at a school where the average daily attendance exceeded five hundred pupils. The scheme advanced to the point where Charles Topp, the chief inspector of schools, listed the ten schools to be favoured with a gymnasium but when the financial realities of even this compromise scheme became known the plans were quietly put to one side and eventually forgotten. Only one school was to benefit from this welter of correspondence and activity: in 1878 a small gymnasium was built at the Central School in Spring Street, a token salve to a difficult education problem. But for the remainder of the nineteenth century teachers and several district inspectors who were keen to promote a greater recognition of organised physical education for mainly desk-bound children were hampered by a continuous lack of practical activity areas, outdoor and indoor, and rudimentary equipment.

Techow's pleas for a broader and more liberal interpretation of physical education in Victoria's schools were conveniently lost in the labyrinths of a highly bureaucratic Department of Education faced with continuous financial problems. A fledgling system of public instruction was more intent and pre-occupied with providing the rudiments of a purely mental training for the children of the colony, an enormous task that was framed within a political climate and a public opinion that called for and supervised a value-for-money approach to a new free education system. At the height of his reforming zeal, Techow's manual *Gymnastics for State Schools*, published in 1877, highlights the difficulties he faced in attempting to have this subject accepted as a normal component of the school curriculum. The original decision by the old Board of Education to add gymnastics to its courses of study had never been adequately explained and the lack of a *raison d'être* proved to be a constant handicap. Successive governments simply baulked at the cost of building gymnasiums. Techow's espousing of gymnastics had its own quiet merits

but the message lacked the dynamic flair of a Mathias Roth to publicise the subject's physical and educational benefits.²⁸ Nor could Techow produce the expertly staged mass gymnastic displays that characterised Madame Bergman-Osterberg's efforts in London which captured the approval of the public and royal observers. Early in the 1880s Swedish gymnastic ideas on the physical development of the body influenced English thinking because the system carried the ultimate virtue in the eyes of parsimonious central and local government-economy. Large masses of children could be drilled in relatively small open-air spaces with little or no equipment. These factors were the decisive and controlling influences upon the progress of physical education in the two education systems. It would be the exercise of government and education department economies, apathy, and a frailty of educational rationale that would obstruct Gustav Techow's bright hopes for Victorian physical education.

The inability of Techow to convert those in charge of state education to the cause of physical education is not surprising. The subject had no general acceptance in the theoretical structure of elementary education and it had yet to appeal to the colonial administrator as an essential element of a liberal education. Nineteenth century education engaged in 'subject dualism', an ideal whereby 'school instruction' was geared to the development of a disciplined intellect through a group of elite subjects. It was implicit in this concept that all other subjects were 'extras', marginally useful, but not of the essential quality of school business. In contrast, sport in the private secondary schools was considered more than a welcome relief from the mental exertions of the classroom and had been assigned to the cultivation and inculcation of a 'colonial manliness'; organised games had achieved wide acceptance and overall approval for their intrinsic merits - an ability to influence character and moral development.²⁹

The task of Schwarzenegger today, and that of Murdoch and physical educators in Australia, is not dissimilar to that encountered by Techow. In the promotion of physical education, how are its activities to be conceived and what is their nature? This question is the source of much confusion. The term 'physical education' implies a body-mind division, false as this may be, and emphasises the eternal quandary of whether physical education is part of education or something that somehow is related to education. Physical educators have been reminded constantly that education is predominantly concerned with, and deals in the development of, forms of thought and knowledge that are essentially valuable, whereas the activities of physical education make little, or no contribution, to these critical processes. The claim is made that the cognitive content of physical education is 'internal' and contained within its activities; games are for pleasure and morally unimportant because they are detached from day-to-day life experiences.³⁰ Consequently, physical education fails to pass the cognitive and moral tests which mark the value and worth of education. It is against this background that Schwarzenegger will take up his quest for quality physical education in schools. Perhaps being more concerned with practical affairs at the expense of philosophy has cost physical educators dearly. Best points out that philosophy 'should be regarded as the development of rigorous, critical, independent thinking and this means practice'.³¹ Here's to more practice!

NOTES

1. A. Schwarzenegger, 'The problem of children today, by Schwarzenegger', in *Sunday Age*, (Melbourne) 15 January 1991, p. 24.
2. *ibid.*
3. E. Murdoch, 'Future trends in physical education curriculum', *British Journal of Physical Education*, 17.3 (1986) 85.
4. J. Evans, 'Sport Education: Is it physical education by another name', *ACHPER National Journal*, 127, (1990), 18.
5. *Australian Schoolmaster and Literary REview*, x1, 132 (1890), 183.

6. G. Techow, *Manual of Gymnastic Exercises*, (Melbourne: Geo. Robertson, 1866).
7. In 1881, sixteen years after the first training course at the National Gymnasium, Techow estimated that 800 teachers had gained qualifications under his tuition. Victorian Education Department Archives, *Special Cases Index*, no. 623, letter dated 11 May 1881.
8. Techow, *Manual*, p. XI.
9. *ibid*, pp. XII-XI.
10. G. Techow, *Gymnastics for State Schools*, (Education Office, Melbourne, n.d. [1877]).
11. *ibid*, pp. 1-2. Archibald MacLaren had written that in physical education 'it is health rather than strength that is the great requirement of modern man.' A. MacLaren, *Physical Education*, (Oxford, 1895), p. XXXVI.
12. See J. Daly, 'German turnvereins in Australia in the nineteenth century' in *Proceedings*, First Australian Symposium on the History and Philosophy of Physical Education and Sport, (Melbourne: Preston Institute of Technology, August 1980), pp. 54-67.
13. L.J. Blake (ed.) *Vision and Realisation*, (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1973), pp. 299-300.
14. Victorian Education Department Archives, *Special Cases Index*, no. 623, G. Techow, National Gymnasium, Letters to the Education Department, 1876-1884, 'Teaching of Drill, Gymnastics and Maintenance of Gymnasium, East Melbourne.'
15. *ibid* no. 778.
16. *ibid.*, no. 623, Metropolitan Head Teachers, Melbourne, September 1881, Letter to the Minister of Public Instruction.
17. *ibid.*, no 623, G. Techow, letter to the Minister of Public Instruction on 'Drill and Gymnasium in the State Schools,' 13 January 1874.
18. *ibid*.
19. *Education Gazette and Teachers' Aid*, 'Education act of 1872 - Mr Angus Mackay's Part,' vol. 26, no. 4, 27 April 1926, p. 133.
20. *Special Cases Index*, no. 623, G. Techow letter of 13 January 1874.
21. *ibid*.
22. *Victorian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 3, 1875-76, Report of the Minister of Public Instruction 1874-75, p. 164.
23. *Special Cases Index*, no. 623, G. Techow, 13 January 1874.
24. *ibid*.
25. *ibid*.
26. *Special Cases Index*, no. 623, G. Techow, letter to the Minister of Public Instruction on 'The Establishment of Swimming Schools', 15 August 1874; letter to the Secretary of the Board of Education in 'Plan for organising and teaching a System of Physical Education in State Schools', 23 May 1876; and 'Memorandum on the erection of a Gymnasium and Swimming School in a part of the Exhibition Buildings', March 1881.
27. Techow's plan of the indoor gymnasium show a facility 70 feet long, 30 feet wide and 20 feet high, housing fixed and portable apparatus. See *Special Cases Index*, no. 623, Submission to the Secretary of the Board of Education, 1 November 1876.
28. See P. McIntosh, *Physical Education in England since 1800*, (London: Bell), pp. 99-100.

29. See R. Crawford, 'Athleticism, Gentlemen, Empire: L.A. Adamson and Wesley College', paper prescribed to Sporting Traditions IV Conference, Melbourne Cricket Ground, August 1983.
30. R.S. Peter, *Ethics and Education*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966), Chapters 1 and 5. See also P.H. Hirst, 'Language and Thought', *Proceedings*, The Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, (1966).
31. D. Best, *Philosophy and Human Movement*, (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1978), p.8.