

Physical Education: Trends in Secondary School

IT would appear that the horn of plenty and the age of automation have conspired insidiously against the masters they serve, the American public. They have loosed upon society a new and unusual peril whose nature is so pernicious that we cannot believe its consequences. Sedentary living is truly a peril to society. It has gradually emerged in our rapidly changing cultural patterns under the guise of improved living standards. Because of the ingenious and inventive mind of man, the cultural habits of our entire nation have changed to the point where physical exertion has become decreasingly important.

The Situation: Soft Youth

Time and prophecy have inexorably come to pass and suddenly we are aware that the boys and girls of this generation do not score as high on standard physical performance tests as did their parents a generation ago. The tests given to entering male freshmen at Pomona College, in California, since 1925 indicate the atrophying forces of inactivity which

are imposed upon our youth. Other colleges throughout the nation support these findings. There is additional evidence from the California Physical Fitness Committee which compares the performances of children in the early 1930s with those of 1958 on the Neilson-Cozens *Achievement Scales in Physical Education Activities*.

The reasons for the difference are obvious. Formerly, children exercised their bodies more than do present day boys and girls. The children of yesterday walked more, climbed, and played games such as "Run, Sheep, Run," which required muscular strength and endurance. Today, there is, inadvertently, a major stress on inactivity. Children ride, where formerly they walked. They sit before television, whereas previously they played active games. The fact is that youth are physically soft. Philosophers, historians and sociologists throughout the ages have admonished that the companion of physical softness is moral laxity.

It is remarkable what can be done with young people when they are motivated and given the opportunity to excel in physical activities. Here are the results of three events in the 1912 World's

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Olympic Track and Field Championships and, for comparison, the results of the same events in high school competition in San Diego County, California, in 1962, fifty years later.

Event	San Diego		Difference
	Olympics 1912	County 1962	
High Jump	6'4"	6'4"	0
Broad Jump	23'11 $\frac{1}{4}$ "	23'7 $\frac{1}{4}$ "	-3 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
Pole Vault	12'11 $\frac{1}{4}$ "	14'3 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	+1'4"

The great Jim Thorpe was incomparable in those days but he would be hard pressed to compete favorably with the best of high school boys today. By similar comparison our girl athletes are superb. The 1960 United States Women's Olympic Swimming Team was the finest ever assembled. They smashed world records with casual abandon, yet, the average age was approximately 15 years!

Encouraging Trends

If the athletes can attain marks of this quality, surely the average child should improve upon the efforts of his parents. Perhaps the Kraus-Weber test results did more to publicize the condition of United States' children than any other single item. Hans Kraus compared results of physical performance tests for strength, flexibility and agility of American and European children of elementary school age. The results indicated that European children excelled in these exercises. The publicity resulted in the creation of (former) President Eisenhower's "Youth Fitness Council" in 1957. President Kennedy has continued and reinforced the council and has given it considerable prestige.

Current indications of program improvement are both numerous and gratifying. Perhaps at the head of a long list

of positive action is the Youth Fitness Council. Its recent manual, *Youth Physical Fitness*, and other publications are widely circulated to public and private schools and to recreational agencies, advising of the undesirable conditions and how to improve them. The council is advising the nation through television announcements and educational films. The heavy response for informational materials is indicative of an interested public.

The American Medical Association constantly points to the importance of the fitness of youth through its various publications and in its convention topics. On June 28, 1962, their House of Delegates adopted a resolution which declared that the Association, through ". . . its state and local components should reemphasize their support of local school and college youth fitness programs. . . ."

The American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation has taken an important leadership role in the improvement of the fitness of youth. Some of its many contributions are the publication of a textbook for secondary schools entitled, *Physical Education for High School Students*, 1955; the development of a *Youth Fitness Test Manual* accompanied by national norms; an amazing amount of research findings described in its *Research Quarterly*; a platform calling for improved standards for teacher training and supervision; the development of training films for school and public use; and numerous national conferences specifically geared toward the improvement of policies and techniques in the educational experiences of elementary, secondary and college training.

Teacher training institutions have upgraded their programs to better prepare their graduates for conditions they will meet. For years, gymnastics, including

calisthenics and its other relatives, had been held in light regard in many colleges and universities. This was more particularly true in the case for women. Also, track and field for girls had received little or no attention. Today a college curriculum is suspect if it does not prepare its women teachers to handle these activities, for they are now held in high esteem by the foremost curriculum experts.

Secondary schools are developing a distinct nationwide pattern by increasing the personal fitness, or conditioning-type activities. Old fashioned calisthenics, designed to condition the body, leads the list of returnees to the modern curriculum. The junior high school curriculum of the future will continue to provide diversified experiences, emphasizing personal fitness, a variety of team sports and some staple individual and dual activities such as aquatics, handball, track and field, stunts and tumbling. High schools are adding conditioning activities and are emphasizing individual and dual activities beyond the tenth grade.

Techniques have improved and will continue to do so. Enlightened school administrators realize that teachers must have adequate working conditions. This involves an appropriate class load of 40 to 45 students, preferably in the same grade, and a suitable teaching station for each class. Where best results are realized, the students are given ability tests for grouping purposes. These tests are both numerous and available. In larger schools the students are tested and placed in homogeneous sections with a teacher in charge of each section. This permits more uniform and rapid progress, facilitates progression in subject matter, and eliminates many disciplinary problems.

Team teaching has been conducted with varying degrees of success. One of the more successful plans calls for a master teacher, his staff and teacher aides assigned to them. The aides may be college physical education majors whose schedules permit two to four hour daily assignments for at least one semester and preferably for the school year. Each semester program is carefully planned and reviewed by all teachers involved. Facilities, stations and activities to be taught are meticulously arranged in advance. Students in the team sport program are placed in large groups (tailored for facility accommodation) and placed with a teacher and a teacher aide. This permits the other teachers to spend time with smaller groups of students who need individual attention, such as with gymnastics.

Challenges for Progress

Testing is now receiving more attention than formerly. The American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation's "Youth Fitness Test" is now universally employed, and the national norms are quite current and readily available for comparison. Results of tests should be made known to students and to their parents. Self-testing is encouraged in the better programs. This is motivated by posting charts showing expected performances at various ages and grades.

Television is contributing to new attitudes among students. Through it they observe exceptional performances in national and international sports events such as gymnastics, soccer and Olympic competition. Other news media are also stimulating interest in this field.

In many respects it is gratifying to contemplate the forces of mechanization

and automation replacing the physical efforts of man. Nevertheless, it is also sobering to comprehend the erosive effects of sedentary living upon him. Man is an organism and therefore requires physical activity. The best minds of the world, from the Greeks to the present, have extolled the benefits of exercise.

The schools of the nation have a positive mandate for decisive action. The unfortunate physical condition of young people today has been made undeniably clear. Cultural changes have completely overwhelmed society to the point where no longer are neighborhood conditions conducive or safe for play. Only at the nation's schools is it possible to have the three essentials necessary to correct the impaired condition: facilities, trained personnel and the children.

A basic curriculum for this purpose will embrace the following: (a) conditioning exercises, including appropriate calisthenics, developmental exercises, weight training (for boys) to achieve specific muscular strengths; (b) gymnastics, including stunts, tumbling, apparatus, free exercise, rhythmic drills and posture training; (c) aquatics, embracing self-preservation, water safety, life saving and swimming proficiency; (d) team sports; (e) individual and dual sports; (f) rhythms, including round, square, folk, social and modern dance; (g) recreational games; (h) combatives for boys (but not to include boxing); and (i) testing, both group and individual. Adapted or corrective classes should also be provided for those students physically unable to participate in the regular classes.

School leadership has the responsibility of determining whether the program at hand is really doing the job. If there is any doubt, an objective evaluation should be conducted to determine

the effectiveness of the program. In this evaluation study, it should be determined whether there are (a) competent teachers; (b) facilities commensurate with the stated objectives; (c) adequate teaching stations; (d) a broad curriculum embracing the activities necessary to achieve the objectives; (e) a program for all students; (f) a marking system that measures the progress of students; (g) a testing program for classes and a self-testing program for individuals; (h) appropriate supervision; and (i) safe and healthful conditions.

Is there effective department leadership for program organization and implementation? All aspects of the program must be considered and planned by the year for best facility use, class organization, activity scheduling and progression factors.

What percent of the student body is experiencing physical education? Too many individuals confuse an athletic program with physical education. Some school districts confuse the two to the extent that the boy who participates in athletics is excused from physical education. In reality he should be excused from the latter only if he maintains a desirable degree of physical fitness as measured by standard tests and can provide evidence of satisfactory knowledge and skills in the basic program.

What provision is made for testing? An effective program will employ this component regularly. It will be found that it motivates students (and teachers), provides a medium with which to compare, engenders the understanding of parents and adds stature to the program.

Is there an adapted program to satisfy the individual needs of the physical variants? These boys and girls are per-

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of foreign language teaching, science and mathematics.

Of particular interest is the chapter on mental health and discipline. Dealing with a topic of major concern to all preparing for teaching as well as those active in the profession, this section offers realistic guidance toward establishment of a classroom climate conducive to learning.

Invaluable to the beginning teacher is Chapter 5, "Planning for Classroom Instruction." The discussion of unit planning and daily planning incorporates practical suggestions for curriculum improvement, evaluation, and teacher-pupil cooperation.

Reporting pupil progress is often a source of anxiety to those new to teaching. Techniques of this aspect of the school program are often inadequately

treated in volumes of a similar nature. However, here the authors give specific guidance in conference techniques, stimulate questions regarding pupil appraisal and clearly describe methods in current use.

Comprehensive coverage of major areas in elementary education, a selective bibliography plus study helps for each chapter make the volume a valuable resource appropriate for the college classroom and also provides a base for in-service programs with experienced teachers.

Competently the authors have contributed a well-illustrated, readable, highly useful text worthy of study by anyone interested in better education for the nation's children.

—Reviewed by MARJORIE E. JARVI.

Secondary School

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haps in greater need of directed exercise than the others. These classes should be one-half the size of regular classes. Various state departments and large city districts have excellent adapted materials which are readily available.

There must be constant in-service teacher training and other opportunities for professional growth, including curriculum development by the teachers themselves. Under proper guidance such efforts frequently attain excellent results.

Competent supervision is essential in order to keep the program properly oriented. Principals have a duty to become reformed concerning the objectives of physical education and the basic program through which these are realized. A preconceived notion that athletics is the elixir for this attainment is a common fallacy. When in doubt, principals should consult their state directors of physical education.

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