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Still playing together(?): A recall to Physical Education and Sport History intersections

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Introduction

This paper briefly examines aspects of Physical Education's relationship with Sport History. Though of different parent disciplines, and not necessarily mutually exclusive entities, they share inherent synergies with regards to content, conceptualisation, inquiry and praxis. Of interest here are ways the disciplines have contributed in tandem to our understandings and articulations of active bodies and physical practices, and interest in the body/bodies as sites of meaning making. I consider how some Physical Educationalists, concomitantly with Sport Historians, approach their interdisciplinary links, and I highlight how key scholars have operationalised Physical Education's histories to legitimise and fortify the discipline's identity and work. Physical Education has also, evidently, provided Sport History with useful examinations of the body and demonstrated education's definitive structural force on physicality and physical agency. Symbiosis aside, fervent debates over the nature of the two fields not only shapes Physical Education and Sport History's contemporary identities, but raises questions about how the disciplines develop and adapt to changing trends, contexts and concerns. I conclude by echoing encouragement for Sport Historians and Physical Educationalists to reconsider how they might fortify their relationship in the future, forge a united approach to challenge conventional epistemes, and embrace new modes of enquiry.

Early convergences

During the mid-decades of the 20th century Physical Educationalists were demonstrating an evident historical appreciation for their subject matter; largely as part of the efforts to legitimise the subject's academic significance and value. Historical accounts of the discipline variously emphasised its antecedents in classical and modern/industrial physical cultures, bio-scientific foundations, educational and moral underpinnings, sporting associations, socio-cultural value, and, wider civic contributions. Scholars also showed interest in examining sports' histories and their relationship with physical practices embedded within formal education.¹ Early histories of Physical Education helped foreground our understanding about the body as *text* and pedagogical *context*, and, contributed knowledge of how educational processes shaped individual's lives and physicality.² Historical examinations have also stressed the influence of macro-structural, social and ideological

processes (e.g., governmentality and surveillance, the education system, militarisation, Muscular Christianity, bio-medical discourse, gendered practices) as driving forces within the discipline, and, emphasises ways the body has, at times, been plied and made pliable.³ This work also reminds us of how Physical Education's development is allied to the modernisation of sport and helps consolidate its place as a constituent aspect of Sports History.

(Inter)disciplinary concerns

Historical scholarship on Physical Education has been welcomed, yet the discipline's contributions to Sport History, and vice versa, has not been unproblematic. Areas of concern include Physical Educationalists' modes of inquiry, treatment of sources, respect for contextualisation, narrative construction and the representation of historical subject matter. In reference to varied approaches within Sport History, Professor Richard Holt identifies significant differences in how Physical Educationalists work as 'Sport Historians' (in comparison to academically trained Historians approaching sport).⁴ Although praiseworthy of avant-garde Sport Historians emerging via Physical Education, Holt laments entrenched disciplinary differences that have consequently led, occasionally, to shallow contextualisation of sport, the acceptance of superficial, 'grand', narratives (for example vis-à-vis modernization and development), and the production of weakly conceptualized representations. What Holt calls for, reinforcing trade conventions, is for greater contextualization. "If there is a single distinguishing feature in the treatment of modern sports by historians as opposed to others working the field of sport history", Holt suggests, "it is the insistence that sport must be fully contextualized, i.e. set in the widest possible relationship to the society in which it takes place".⁵ Good Sport Historians (Physical Education-based or otherwise) should also, Holt contends, seek opportunities for collaboration with other disciplines (e.g., anthropology, sociology, economics, literary scholars) which might yield fresh, nuanced and deeper insights into their subject matter. Holt's assessment here is a valid one though rehearses previous scholars' remarks about the relationship work still needed between Physical Education and Sport History, and, reminds about the utility of context for historical sport/physical culture research.⁶

Critical examination of the Physical Education and Sport History nexus has been a key consideration in Professor Emerita Roberta Park's work. An esteemed figure within both disciplines, Park's research offers much in terms of how the disciplines might advance in unison.⁷ In her sustained advocacy for Physical Education's academic integrity, Park has continued to champion the necessity for scholars to demonstrate historical appreciation when examining the genesis, evolution and future of their respective disciplines.⁸ In its quest for identity and legitimacy Physical Education could, Park suggested, benefit from improving its historical introspection and wider contextualisation.⁹ Similarly, Park calls for a broadening of Sport History to better account for the diversity of human physical experiences and practices. Good Sport History, for Park, is predicated on acknowledging historical conceptualisations of the body and its varied sociocultural meanings and referent points.¹⁰ Park's emphasis on historical context has also been reiterated by her contemporary, Professor Nancy Struna. Sharing Park's concerns for the two disciplines,

Struna was among the earliest sport scholars to pronounce the importance of context and need for continued disciplinary and methodological advancement.¹¹ Struna's work provided encouragement for scholars working in both fields to continually question their working practices and consequences for broader meaning making.

Physical Education lessons

The aforementioned concerns have not abated as scholars working within, and across, both disciplines reflect upon their fields, epistemes, practices and productions.¹² Beyond scholarly inquiry, the sport industry, formal physical education and physical cultures have, too, been continually confronted by forces (e.g., global and local political shifts, neoliberal capitalist development, and challenges to individuals' freedoms and liberties) that have caused uncertainty over what sport and Physical Education are and whose interests they inherently now serve. Physical Educationalists have done well, thus far, in reminding us of the body's utility as a political/politicalised text. Not unlike Sport History, Physical Education has contributed to our understandings of how historical forces and structures contour individual agency, marginalisation and mobilisation.¹³ Some Physical Educationalists are also eloquently evidencing how methodological practices from parent and allied disciplines (e.g., education, politics, ethnography, history, and media studies), comparative and international approaches, and macro (e.g., policy and context), meso (e.g., institutional frameworks) and micro (e.g., young people and practitioners' lives and experiences) structural frameworks can be utilised to better understand the discipline and its constituents.

The (echoed) call to play on

There is no specific issue here with Physical Education's *raison d'être* per se. The discipline's emphasis on conceptualisation of the body and physical practices, utilisation of educational philosophy and discourse, interest in morality and physicality, and concerns regarding politicisation of the discipline is important. My point, underscored by revisiting an old invitation for interdisciplinary dalliance, is that within its ongoing identity work more Physical Educationalists might work in conjunction with Sport Historians to produce an innovative, creative and generative space to mutually explore questions about who Physical Education and Sports' Histories might be for; whether Physical Education might be learning from its pasts; how the disciplines' intertwined histories might be mobilised to contribute to current sport and education debates; and, how scholars may best advocate historical agency in their narratives. Physical Education and Sport History are capable of producing excellent work independently and developing as distinct disciplines in their own right. As Park, Struna, Holt, Booth and others' recognised and encourage, and not unlike Kohe and Newman have suggested regarding Dance and Sport Studies intersections,¹⁴ however, there are benefits in playing together. Not least of all are opportunities that arise from our shared disciplinary interests in the physical and the performative. Ontologically, our collective project might first begin, however, by interrogating sources (either written texts or the body as text) *anew*, extending our conceptualisations and critiques of 'the body' as a knowable 'truth',

and reconsidering how our body (of) scholarship might be more ethically driven in affecting political ends. Such rethinking might, hopefully, precipitate much needed paradigmatic and methodological innovation.

Notes

¹ Fred E. Leonard, *A Guide to the History of Physical Education* (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1947); Deobold B. Van Dalen, *A World History of Physical Education: Cultural, Philosophical, Comparative* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1953); Charles W. Hackensmith, *History of physical Education* (New York: Harper Collins, 1966); Emmett A. Rice, John. L. Hutchinson, & Mabel Lee, *A Brief History of Physical Education* (New York: Ronald Press, 1969); June A. Kennard, 'The History of Physical Education', *Signs*, 2 no. 4 (1977), 835-842.

² Fortified, in part, by the legacy and work of the International Society of the History of Physical Education and Sport (ISHPES).

³ See, for example, Shen Liang & Fan Hong, 'Historical review of State Policy for Physical Education in the People's Republic of China', *International Journal for the History of Sport*, 29 no. 4 (2012), 583-600; Annette Hoffman, 'Between Traditions and New Challenges: 25 years of the International Society of the History of Physical Education and Sport (ISHPES)', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 31 no. 9 (2014), 970-975.

⁴ Richard Holt, 'Historian and the History of Sport', *Sport in History*, 43 no.1 (2014), 1-33.

⁵ *Ibid*, 22.

⁶ James A. Mangan, 'Prologue: Roberta J. Park, Polymathic and Polymorphic Pioneer: A Personal Appreciation', *International Journal for the History of Sport*, 24 no.12 (2007), 1501-1507; Roberta J. Park, 'Research and Scholarship in the History of Physical Education and Sport: The Current State of Affairs', *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 54, (1983), 93-103; 'Hermeneutics, Semiotics and the 19th Century Quest for a Corporeal Self', *Quest* 38 (1986), 33-49; Nancy L. Struna, 'E.P Thompson's Notion of "Context" and the Writing of Physical Education and Sport History', *Quest*, 38 (1) (1986), 2-32; Patricia Vertinsky, 'Epilogue: Roberta J. Park and the "Impossible dream": Keeping it Together for Physical Education and the Academy', *International Journal for the History of Sport*, 24 (12) (2007), 1724-1753.

⁷ For example, Roberta J. Park, 'Alternatives and "Other Ways": How Can Physical Activity Become More Relevant to Human Needs', *Quest*, 19, January (1973), 78-82; 'Research and Scholarship in the History of Physical Education and Sport'; 'Hermeneutics, Semiotics and the 19th Century Quest for a Corporeal Self'; 'Edward M. Hartwell and Physical Training at The John Hopkins University, 1879-1890', *Journal of Sport History*, 14 no. 1 (1987), 108-119; 'History of Research on Physical Activity and Health: Selected Topics, 1867 to the 1950's', *Quest*, 47 no. 3 (1995), 274-87; 'Cells or Soaring? Historical Reflections on "Visions" of the Body, Athletics and Modern Olympism', *Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies*, 9 (2000), 1-24; 'Science, service, and the professionalization of physical education: 1885-1905', *International Journal for the History of Sport*, 24 no. 12 (2007), 1674-1700.

⁸ As Vertinsky writes of Park, "through her determination the practice of historical study, in particular, helped serve as an intellectual bridge between the biological and socio-cultural aspects of the discipline of physical education", 'Epilogue', 1734.

⁹ Park, 'Research and Scholarship'.

¹⁰ Park, 'Research and Scholarship'; Vertinsky, 'Epilogue'.

¹¹ Struna, 'E.P Thompson's Notion of "Context"'.

¹² Douglas Booth, *The Field: Truth and Fiction in Sport History* (New York: Routledge, 2007); 'Sports history: What can be done?', *Sport, Education & Society*, 2 no. 2 (1997), 191-204; William H. Freeman, *Physical Education and Sport in a Changing Society* (4th ed.) (New Jersey: MacMillian, 1992); Anthony Laker (ed.) *The Future of Physical Education: Building a New Pedagogy* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Robert A. Mechikoff & Steven Estes, *A History and Philosophy of Sport and Physical Education* (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1993).

¹³ John Evans, Brian Davies & Jan Wright, *Body Knowledge and Control: Studies in the Sociology of Physical Education and Health* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Michael Gard, *The End of the Obesity Epidemic* (London: Routledge, 2010); Barry Houlihan & Mick Green, 'The Changing Status of School Sport and Physical Education:

Explaining Policy Change', *Sport, Education & Society*, 11 no. 1 (2006), 73-92; David Kirk, 'The 'Obesity Crises' and School Physical Education', *Sport, Education & Society*, 11 (2) (2006), 121-133; Stephen Thorpe, 'Crisis Discourse in Physical Education and the Laugh of Michel Foucault', *Sport, Education & Society*, 8 no. 2 (2003), 131-151.

¹⁴ Geoffery Kohe & Joshua Newman, 'Body commons: Toward an interdisciplinary study of the somatic spectacular', *Brolga: An Australian Journal about Dance*, 35, December (2011), 65-74.