

NOTES AND DISCUSSION

WHAT IS PHYSICAL EDUCATION?
—WHAT HAVE WE BEEN TEACHING IN P.E.?—

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Introduction

“What is P.E.?” “What sort of children are we helping to develop in P.E.?” The answers to these questions are thought to be clear. But as these questions continue to be asked they cause us concern, even though at times we do not take them too seriously.

I wonder how many researchers have struggled and are still struggling with these problems in Japan. The distinct aim of “Education Science” is to research practical problems in education with educational practices as the focus. If physical education researchers want to be part of education science then they have to face up to these practical problems.

The anxiety caused by these problems for P.E. teachers step not only from their individual lack of study but also, and more essentially, from the backwardness of research in P.E.

There are two features in my research which are new in this area. First, I analyse the current situation of P.E. practices to find out what P.E. teachers really have been teaching before asking the question “What *SHOULD* P.E. teach?” Secondly, I compare the results of this analysis with the essential characteristics of sport, which underpin P.E. as a subject and provide its content.

I. *What Have P.E. Teachers Been Teaching?*

In this section I shall classify those P.E. lessons, which have been reported by P.E. teachers in journals and books (about 300 reports) since 1970, into five categories. I shall outline their essential features and characteristics below.

Category A—As teaching sports techniques, teachers make their pupils consciously concentrate on their own and their classmates’ body movements, e.g., “Learning about the take-off in broad jump” and “Learning to dribble in basketball” by Kentaro Sasaki.[1] All these practices are intended to make pupils more aware of their body movements with the aim of improvement, i.e., as pupils learn to master sport techniques, they do so by thinking of what their body is, and is not doing.

Category B—As teaching techniques, teachers make pupils think about the rules and

competitive modes of sport being taught, e.g., “Creating the line-soccer (specially reformed soccer for children): let’s make rules ourselves (9 years old)” by Kikuo Uchimura[2] and “To seek the value of broad jump as teaching material” by Nakamori and Kato[3]. Uchimura wants to teach pupils that sports rules derive from promises made; but those promises can be changed. He encourages his pupils to make their own rules when playing ‘soccer,’ and persuades them that as their skills become better the rules will become more complicated.

Nakamori and Kato regard the take-off as the essential element in teaching broad jump. They have hypothesis that the origin of the take-off can be traced back to when man chased animals and sometimes was even chased by them over rivers and through valleys in the pre-historical age. Consequently they had pupils jump across a brook near their school knowing that the children would eventually distinguish between the water and the banks. In this simple way the pupils learn not only technical points but also some cultural modes of broad jump.

Category C—As teaching techniques, teachers encourage pupils to note the structure and the sequential pattern of the technique, e.g., “Broad jump for 12 years old” by Yoshiaki Murata et al[4]. They criticise many practices of teaching broad jump, because they feel that many pupils are passive and merely repeat positions offered by the teacher. They want pupils to grasp skills deeply by progressing from a feeling level to a logical thinking level. They help pupils to:

1. formulate a hypothesis,
2. think out of methods of testing,
3. experiment with these methods,
4. obtain a result, and
5. examine the result.

For example, in order to enable them to be better broad jumpers, pupils measure their strides and analyse them statistically. They arrive at a hypothesis—namely the change in running strides. They discover that ‘if the last stride is longer than the previous strides, they can jump further.’ This result differs from the common sense view held by adult athletes, but teachers accept it.

Category D—As teaching techniques, teachers concentrate on group interaction in thinking about the technique, e.g., “Guiding the learning group in P.E. through mat gymnastics” by Shojiro Shindo[5]. He says, ‘The main objective of P.E. is to teach pupils to think about their own skills,’ and on the basis of that we get pupils to ‘develop under the influence of their own group.’ He analysed the development of the relationship between the recognition of skills and their membership in a group. The first level requires the student only to describe their feeling, ‘my skill was . . .’ The second level is to get them to compare their skills with someone else’s, ‘my skill was . . . compared with someone’s.’ The third level is to grasp the structure and sequences of the techniques and to be able to point out to others in detail, ‘if we do it well, we need . . . and . . . and so on.’ At the first level they do not need the other members of the group but on the other levels they need their group because it enables them to reflect on their own skill levels and is necessary for deepening their recognition of skills.

Category E—This is not the same as the previous four categories because the teachers’ intentions and motives are not clear. If category D is the most excellent level then this category is the worst. Unfortunately many practices of P.E. are related to, and identified with,

this category E.

We should recognize that when other subject teachers criticize P.E., by claiming that it does not teach anything by merely permitting pupils play, they are referring to the category E.

II. *The Relationship between Those Categories and the Essential Characteristics of Sport*

I analysed P.E. teaching methods from the viewpoint 'What have they been teaching?' and concluded that there are five variations. The question is, "Can all four categories (except E because it is not recommended as a good teaching) exist simultaneously in the curriculum or should there be only one?" Both P.E. teachers and researchers need the answer to this question.

Before giving my answer to this question it is first necessary to look at the categories in relation to the essential characteristics of sport[6]. This is the second aspect of this paper.

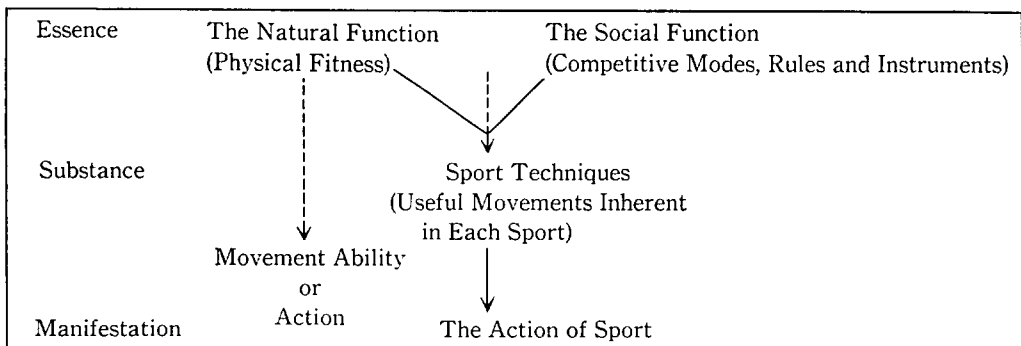
According to general educational theory, a subject exists only under the presupposition that its cultural base exists. Thus P.E. can exist because sports and gymnastics have already existed. The aims and objectives of P.E. reflect the characteristics of sports and gymnastics.

I have indicated that sport has two functions, (a) the natural function which develops our physical fitness and body movement ability, and (b) the social function which develops us mentally and socially and is composed of the competitive modes, rules and instruments (see Fig. 1). Together, these two make up the *essence* of sport. Sport not only has a social function but also a natural function, the primary demand being the need for physical activity.

The essence of sport emerges from the *substance* of sport, the sport techniques. Learning sport techniques means that we simultaneously learn both the social and natural functions of sport.

The *manifestation* of sport can be regarded as a game (e.g., soccer, volleyball) which consists of the techniques (the substance of sport) mainly, tactics and chances. For example

FIG. 1 THE STRUCTURE OF SPORT



to play soccer is to refer to the much more subjective idea that the essence of soccer reflects and symbolises the values and ideas that are part of a larger cultural context.

What relationship does sport have with the previous categories?

1. *Acquisition of techniques*

It is a commonly accepted that P.E. includes teaching sports techniques (the natural and social). The process of learning techniques is like sport as a totality, essence→substance→manifestation. Therefore, when we learn techniques, we become fitter, more physically capable and more conscious of rules and competitive modes even if we are not always consciously aware of this process.

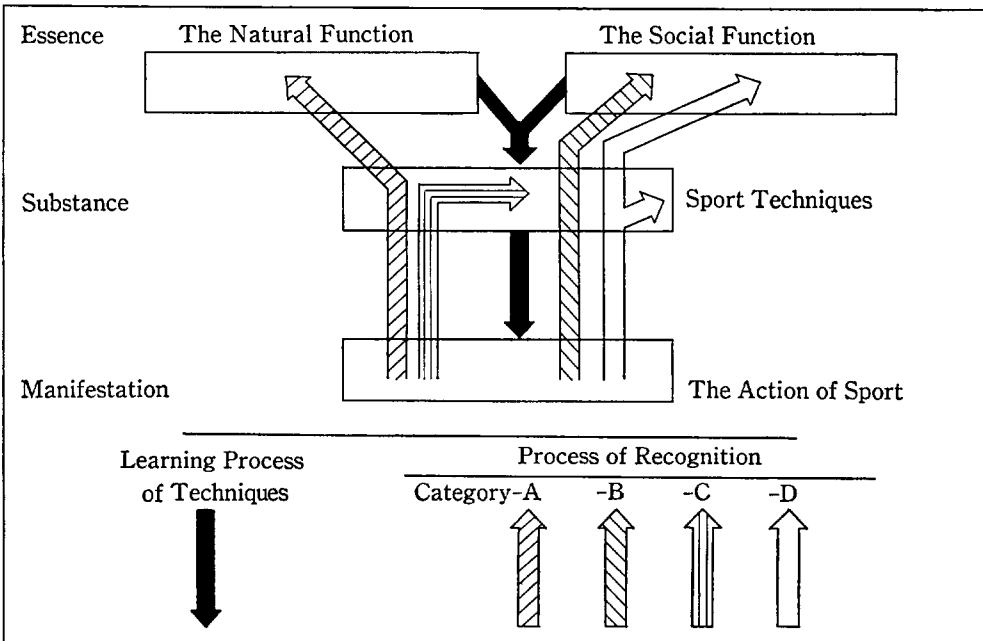
2. *Acquisition of recognition*

As the reader will notice, the criteria used by me to classify teaching methods relates to how the pupils see the situation. Thus in category A it is body conditions; in B thinking about rules and competitive modes; in C the structure and sequence of technique; and in D the relationship between the skills and group.

It is important that pupils recognize the learning process, as emphasized in categories A to D, because if recognition is only incidental and unconscious as in category E then the pupils have no clear structure and can not think correctly in learning P.E. techniques.

The important problem in categories A to D is 'What is the object of recognition?' Although the learning process in techniques and sports are the same, namely essence→substance→manifestation, the way in which pupils recognize the major learning criteria in techniques should be reversed, i.e., manifestation→substance→essence. (See Fig. 2)

FIG. 2 THE STRUCTURE OF SPORT AND THE P.E. PRACTICES



In category A the important part of the learning process is recognizing the critical aspect of the physical body state; in B it is recognizing the social function of sport (rules, competitive modes etc.); in C it is recognizing the structure and sequence in technique learning; and in D it is recognizing the fundamental relationship between the group and skill learning.

3. *Formation of groups*

The group is fundamentally important in teaching P.E., and many teaching methods are aimed at producing good group learning situations, although many group situations introduce social interaction at only a superficial level.

III. *Further Problems*

"What has P.E. been teaching?" I would reply, '*the acquisition of sport techniques, understanding of sports and the formation of group learning situation.*'

Categories A to D can be thought of as independent parts of physical education methodology. However, they sometimes co-exist in P.E. I believe that when talking about and planning what should be taught in P.E. one should consider how all the categories can be included. I do not think that one category is enough or that one category should dominate the others in a class.

In this paper I have analysed the main categories in P.E. methodology and contrasted them with the structure of sport.

Although it is possible to analyse the nature and functions of sport and to identify the different categories in teaching P.E. there is nonetheless still a necessity to recognize and explain the aims and objectives of P.E.[7].

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