

University of New Hampshire

University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository

Kinesiology Scholarship

Kinesiology

1-1-1992

The preparation of physical education majors in adventure activities

Karen J. Uhlendorf

Michael A. Gass

University of New Hampshire, mgass@unh.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.unh.edu/kinesiology_facpub



Part of the [Kinesiology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Uhlendorf, K. & Gass, M.A. (1992). The preparation of physical education majors in adventure activities. *Physical Educator*. 49 (1), 33-38.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Kinesiology at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Kinesiology Scholarship by an authorized administrator of University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. For more information, please contact Scholarly.Communication@unh.edu.

The Preparation of Physical Education Majors in Adventure Activities

Karen J. Uhlendorf and Michael A. Gass

Participation in adventure activities has experienced tremendous development in the United States within the last 30 years (Ewert, 1989). One profession that has been affected by this development is physical education. Whether it be with the inclusion of outdoor activities that are readily accessible to schools (e.g., bicycling, skiing, orienteering, outdoor ropes courses on school sites) or through the actual modification of gymnasias to create adventurous learning environments (e.g., indoor ropes courses, rock climbing walls, initiatives), the use of these activities has become quite common in physical education. Some of the reasons for this development include:

1. The growing emphasis in physical education programs to offer activities that lead toward the development of lifelong activities.
2. The increased emphasis in physical education curricula to provide students with activities that produce cardiorespiratory benefits.
3. The increased popularity and resulting demand for outdoor adventure activities.
4. The increasing recognition of the powerful influence that properly conducted adventure experiences can have on emotional and social growth.
5. The relatively low cost for participants to continue certain outdoor leisure activities after the completion of school (e.g., bicycling, backpacking).

Recognition of this development has also in-

fluenced the training of prospective physical educators. In the most recent revision of the guidelines for training physical educators (1987), the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD), the College and University Physical Education Council (CUPEC), and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) established that one of the areas where graduating professionals must be able to demonstrate skill and knowledge to a point where "they can plan, implement, and evaluate" physical activity is in the area of "outdoor leisure pursuits" (*JOPERD*, 1987, p. 70). The area of outdoor leisure pursuits can probably best be defined as *activities conducted in natural and adventurous environments that lead to the physiological, leisure, or affective development of an individual*.

While this area of physical activity has achieved a tremendous amount of growth and was identified as one of the five critical focuses for physical activity training, it has become apparent that many physical education pedagogy students are experiencing difficulty in achieving competence in the area of outdoor leisure pursuits. In an initial investigation of the ability of physical education pedagogy programs to teach outdoor leisure pursuits, Uhlendorf (1988) found that only 44% of responding programs offered outdoor adventure courses to physical education majors.

The inability of physical education pedagogy programs to fulfill this requirement has also been evident at other professional levels. Attempts to implement the new NCATE guidelines revealed a great deal of confusion over what is meant by this competency area. The committee charged with reviewing programs'

Dr. Uhlendorf is a faculty member at Johnson State College.

Dr. Gass is a faculty member at the University of New Hampshire.

abilities to reach this standard for teacher training found the following:

1. Most of the proposals the committee critiqued were not doing very well in reaching the outdoor leisure pursuits guideline.
2. Most institutions were trying to use other types of activities that were not appropriate to fulfill this category. The most common misuse was aquatics.
3. There was not a lot of history in what was accepted and what was not accepted, but most programs were not initially accepted in this category.
4. There was a strong need for clarification of what constituted outdoor leisure pursuits to help those programs submitting information (D. Pease, personal communication, March, 1989).

This committee also stated that while there was no initial opposition to this guideline when it first appeared, there seemed to be more of a growing faction against this requirement (D. Pease, personal communication, March, 1989). Some institutions involved in the review process were dissatisfied with this guideline and stated that their department had no plans to include the teaching of outdoor leisure pursuits in their physical education teacher training program. Other programs expressed an interest in fulfilling this NCATE requirement, but didn't possess the faculty qualified to teach such a course. Some programs found it necessary to rely upon part-time instructional staff to teach this class in their pedagogy curriculum (D. Pease, personal communication, March, 1989).

While these initial and informal analyses are somewhat helpful, they leave a variety of unanswered questions. The purposes of this paper are to clarify the role of outdoor leisure pursuits in physical education teacher training programs by (a) determining if current physical education preparation programs have adapted their curricula since 1987 to meet changing needs of physical education pedagogy majors in the area of outdoor leisure pursuits, (b) recommending content areas that should be included if physical education pedagogy programs want to insure

the appropriate training of professionals, and (c) highlighting questions needing to be addressed by the field in light of current changes in this professional competency area.

Methods

A cover letter and brief questionnaire were sent to 416 colleges and universities in the United States that possessed teacher certification programs in physical education. These institutions had supplied previous data in an earlier study of outdoor adventure leadership and programming preparation in physical education degree programs (Uhlendorf, 1988). This two-page questionnaire sought updated information about course offerings and student enrollment as well as the respondents' perceptions about their program's compliance with the 1987 NCATE guideline on outdoor leisure pursuits competence. A total of 210 questionnaires with usable data were received (50.5% response rate).

Results

Changes occurring during the two-year span between the year NCATE introduced its new guidelines (1987) and 1989 are apparent in comparisons of data obtained from the 210 institutions participating in both surveys. Table 1 shows that the proportion of responding institutions that offer at least one outdoor pursuits course to physical education teacher certification majors jumped from just over half in 1987 to two-thirds in 1989. Even though some programs (14) actually dropped these courses in the intervening two years, more than three times as many (47) initiated such courses in the same time span.

Table 1
Institutions Offering Outdoor Pursuits Courses to Physical Education Majors (n = 210)

	1987	1989
Institutions offering outdoor pursuits courses	107 (51.0%)	140 (66.7%)

The study results also raised the question of whether physical education majors were taking courses offered in outdoor pursuits. An example illustrating this point came from data provided by 86 of the institutions offering outdoor pursuit courses in 1989. A majority (67%) of these respondents indicated that no outdoor pursuit courses were required for their physical education pedagogy majors. In fact, respondents estimated that almost 60% of all physical education pedagogy majors graduating between 1987 and 1989 had never completed any type of outdoor leisure pursuits course even though these courses were available in the curriculum as electives.

Finally, respondents were questioned on their perceptions of their program's compliance with NCATE's guideline of competence in outdoor leisure pursuits (see Table 2). One-hundred-fifty of the physical education teacher certification programs that responded in both 1987 and 1989 possessed current NCATE accreditation. The representatives of only about half of these programs (i.e., 74) believed their program would meet the outdoor leisure pursuits guideline if evaluated by NCATE at that time. Over three-quarters of the NCATE accredited programs had no plans to change

their curriculum to help students achieve competence in outdoor leisure pursuits, including a large majority of representatives who felt their program would not meet the NCATE standard. Of those with no current plans for change, almost half the representatives felt their department should make such plans.

Discussion

The study revealed that an increasing number of physical education teacher preparation programs offer opportunities to their majors to at least become acquainted with, if not competent in, outdoor leisure pursuits. It is still largely up to students, however, to select these courses since so few programs consider them requirements—and many physical education majors do not choose to take these courses. The ramifications of this are obvious: There are still a great number of neophyte physical education teachers who have not been prepared by their college programs to plan, implement, or evaluate outdoor leisure pursuits in schools.

The study also revealed a reluctance on the part of physical education pedagogy programs to make curriculum changes that would help students achieve such competence. It remains unclear whether this reluctance is due to (a) an unwillingness to embrace outdoor leisure pursuits as a viable part of the physical education curriculum, (b) a lack of qualified staff to teach courses, or (c) an inability to incorporate these courses into the curriculum because of the many other constraints (e.g., the increasing number of requirements) facing teacher education curriculum planners.

Recommendations

One factor contributing to the apparent reluctance to require outdoor pursuits training for physical education majors may be that curriculum planners are unsure about what content should be considered for inclusion in a teacher preparation program. Outdoor pursuits competencies for physical education majors can be grouped into 11 content categories. Buell (1981) identified the following compe-

Table 2
1989 Respondents' Answers to Questions About the NCATE Guideline on Outdoor Leisure Pursuits and Future Curriculum Development Plans (n = 150)

	Yes	No	Don't know
1. If evaluated by NCATE today, would your program meet the guideline regarding competence in outdoor leisure pursuits?	74 (49.3%)	69 (46.0%)	7 (4.7%)
2. Does your department currently have any plans to change the curriculum with regard to helping students achieve such competence?	34 (22.7%)	113 (75.3%)	3 (2.0%)
3. If your department has no plans, do you believe it should? (n = 113)	52 (46.0%)	53 (46.9%)	8 (7.1%)

tency areas as important or essential for entry-level outdoor leaders:

1. Philosophical, Historical, and Theoretical Foundations
2. Outdoor Adventure Leadership and Instructorship
3. Counseling, Human Service, and Human Development
4. Program Planning and Development
5. Outdoor Skills and Abilities
6. Environmental Awareness, Understanding, and Action
7. First Aid and Safety
8. Administration and Supervision
9. Facilities, Equipment, and Supplies
10. Professionalism
11. Assessment and Evaluation

Depending upon the particular pedagogy program's philosophy and focus, courses based on these content areas should provide a good starting point for curriculum development. Safety, outdoor leadership, and outdoor skills should be emphasized within the courses.

Programs considered to have model curricula for preparing physical education majors in outdoor adventure pursuits use several courses as the vehicles to deliver these competencies (Uhlendorf, 1988). The most common activity-based courses offered were canoeing, cross-country skiing, climbing and rappelling, SCUBA, backpacking, cycling, and orienteering. The most prevalent theory and/or methods-type courses included outdoor education, outdoor leadership, outdoor adventure education, and a practicum in outdoor adventure.

Because of the overlap of many physical education and outdoor adventure topics (e.g., first aid, administration and supervision), existing courses in the pedagogy curricula may already address many of outdoor adventure pursuits competencies (Uhlendorf, 1988). Additionally, other topics (e.g., history and philosophy of outdoor adventure) can be integrated into the existing curricula or added in the form of new theory or skills courses. General college courses can also contribute to related competency in areas

such as environmental awareness or human development.

Probably the most appropriate model for teaching outdoor leisure pursuits would include both skill and theory components in two courses that could be required of all physical education teacher certification majors. The first of these is an activity-based survey-type course focusing on skill acquisition, basic knowledge of the activity, and fundamental instructional techniques that are specific to the teaching of outdoor activities. Students would receive more general pedagogy training as part of their overall teacher preparation curriculum. Activities selected for inclusion in this course should be decided by the teacher preparation institution based on the philosophical stance taken by the department. The content of the course should be selected according to the goals that can be achieved through various outdoor pursuits (e.g., fitness, leisure, or affective development), the opportunities available as determined by environmental factors (e.g., cross-country skiing probably should not be part of the curriculum at Key West University whereas wind surfing might be more logical), and the activities that are likely to be implemented in surrounding school systems (Gass, 1989).

The second course should include, among other things, an introduction to the history, philosophy, theories, and methods of outdoor adventure education and an overview of outdoor pursuits programs in the context of public school physical education curricula. Specific topics should include legal considerations and safe practices, leadership techniques, logistics, transfer of learning, group dynamics specific for outdoor adventure activities, etc. (Gass, 1989).

While it may be difficult for physical education pedagogy programs to devote two courses to the preparation of pedagogy majors in outdoor leisure pursuits, this model provides a structure of the type of knowledge and competency levels needed to train professionals that can plan, implement, and evaluate appropriate outdoor leisure pursuits. Given this design and with appropriate curriculum planning, it is possible for physical education pedagogy programs

to provide appropriate preparation for students by integrating concepts of outdoor leisure pursuits into other courses as described earlier and devoting one course to cover the concepts that cannot be easily integrated into other portions of the curriculum (e.g., skill development).

Closing Concerns

Is a guideline like the one implemented by NCATE successful in achieving the goal of ensuring that physical educators are prepared in outdoor leisure pursuits? Many physical education teacher preparation programs have experienced difficulty being initially approved by NCATE in the outdoor leisure pursuits category, and the data collected in the present study indicated that few programs have plans to chart another course in this regard.

Recently the title of the competency guideline has been changed to "lifelong leisure activities" (e.g., camping, hiking, backpacking, skiing, skating, canoeing, walking, frisbee, bicycling, etc.) in an attempt to clarify the language, avoid the interpretation of "team sports played outside" drawn by many programs, and yield to the concerns of urban teacher training programs that state that they have difficulty in training their students in outdoor settings and that their students will not be able to use wilderness-based activities in their future job placements in urban schools (J. Young, personal communication, May, 1991). It is important for the field to examine the consequences of this decision and possible redirection of professional training. Such scrutiny might raise the following questions:

1. In making these changes, is the original intent of the competency area being "softened," allowing less adventurous activities to be substituted? Is there a potential loss in the effectiveness inherent in adventurous activities by including this new direction?
2. Is it possible that the definition of "outdoor leisure pursuits" as used by NCATE to review teacher preparation curricula in physical education may have changed to meet the existing curricula rather than to

meet the needs of prospective teachers and their future students?

3. Is this revision an accommodation to meet the current qualifications of the physical education faculty, who may be unprepared to teach outdoor adventure pursuits? It would be unfortunate indeed if a change of the competency area would be based not on student need but on higher education faculty members' unwillingness or lack of opportunities to retool in this area.
4. Is the field overlooking the many applications of "outdoor leisure pursuits" that are applicable to the urban setting? One such model program is the UMPA program by Project Adventure, Inc. that is specifically designed to adapt ropes course elements into the urban physical education classroom (e.g., Rohnke, 1981, 1984, 1989).

The authors hope that these questions and others related to future adaptations of physical education pedagogy programs will be considered to keep the intent and effectiveness of these educational experiences intact. There are multiple benefits in including outdoor leisure pursuits in physical education programs and it is hoped that pedagogy programs will rise to the challenges facing them in including this valuable educational medium in the training of future physical educators.

References

- Buell, L.H. (1981). *Research series: Outdoor adventure leadership competencies for entry-level and experienced-level personnel*. Greenfield, MA: Environmental Awareness. (Also as The identification of outdoor adventure leadership competencies for entry-level and experienced-level personnel. Doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 42, 1046A).
- Ewert, A. (1989). *Outdoor Adventure Pursuits:*

- Foundations, Models, and Theories*. Columbus, OH: Publishing Horizons, Inc.
- Gass, M.A. (1989, April). *Recommendations for teacher education programs*. Paper presented at the national convention of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, Boston, MA.
- JOPERD. (1987). Guidelines for the undergraduate preparation of teachers of physical education. *58* (1), 70-71.
- Rohnke, K. (1981). *High profile*. Hamilton, MA: Project Adventure.
- Rohnke, K. (1984). *Silver bullets*. Hamilton, MA: Project Adventure.
- Rohnke, K. (1989). *Cowstails and cobras II: A guide to games, initiatives, ropes courses, and adventure curriculum*. Hamilton, MA: Project Adventure.
- Uhlendorf, K.J. (1988). An investigation of outdoor adventure leadership and programming preparation in physical education baccalaureate degree programs (Doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1988).
- Uhlendorf, K.J. (1989, April). *The status of outdoor pursuits in teacher education programs*. Paper presented at the national convention of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, Boston, MA.