

Guest Editorial: How APAQ Was Born

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Background

1984 is the title of George Orwell's famous novel. It was also the year APAQ was born. Impact is competitive! So in this paper I will share my recollections of how APAQ was formulated during the months preceding the publication of its volume 1, issue 1. I am grateful for the invitation, and I hope readers will understand that little of this information is documented.

Remember, in the U.S. Congress a representative or senator might request a moment of "personal privilege." That is my request.

Although I shall focus on events prior to the publication of APAQ's first issue, there are places where I have added a little extra information to help those readers who may not be familiar with events that took place so long ago.

APAQ is 33 years old, but over a period of at least 45 years there have been many substantial changes in the development of our field of study into what I will for convenience call our "subdiscipline." Of particular importance for the development of this paper are changes involving the adapted physical activity (APA) graduate research training of future faculty, as well as the competence and performance of extant faculty, as I will explain.

Although the first issue of APAQ was published in January 1984, an APA journal, possibly having a different name, was nearly published some years earlier. In April 1980, as a professor at Louisiana State University (LSU), I attended the Annual Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children, in Philadelphia, PA. It was there that I met the acquisitions editor for Aspen Systems Corporation (ASC), a large Dutch publishing company, which was strong in the health-related fields, and expanding its special education portfolio. Having expressed the desire for APA to have a specialist journal, which it did not at the time, I was invited to submit a proposal. That proposal entered the evaluation process applicable to their journals and was favorably reviewed. After only a couple of months, I was informed that it had entered the final round of evaluation.

Although I did not know it at the time, the acquisitions editor had been diagnosed with a terminal condition. He quickly became very ill and died. Later I received a phone call from ASC, indicating that in-process material would not be

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continued. Thus, there would be no APA journal, and I filed and forgot about my proposal, for I had plenty to do at LSU!

Then, at the conclusion of the Annual Conference of the North American Society for the Psychology of Sport and Physical Activity, held at the University of Maryland, College Park, MD, in May 1982, I stood on the hotel sidewalk, awaiting airport transportation, talking to Rainer Martens, founder and, at the time, owner of Human Kinetics (HK). He asked me whether I had thought about developing a journal. I hope he didn't think I was rude, for I remember laughing, probably feeling shocked that my filed proposal might see the light of day again. I recounted the existence of the proposal and its history. "Do you still have it? And would you be interested in sending it to me?" Rainer asked me. I sent it less than a week later. In retrospect, I wish I had kept that document so that I could see how or whether my ideas have evolved.

It is appropriate and timely for me, on behalf of our APAQ family, to thank Rainer Martens and his HK colleagues for their strong and enduring support. In particular, Peg Goyette was so much fun to work with. Over the years Rainer has directed HK from initially publishing conference proceedings to becoming the world's largest producer of physical activity and health-related books and materials. Rainer clearly had great confidence in our field of study, believing that APA persons would support the journal, help develop our knowledge base, and contribute to APAQ's success. He set for APAQ the same rigorous standards as for other journals in the HKP fold. So we are eternally grateful for that. Rainer and HK, please continue your support!

I do not remember all the stages HK used in its evaluation process, but there was a continuing interest. Eventually, after I had clarified certain parts of the proposal, such as providing more detail about the intended audience and naming and evaluating the most likely competing journals, it was sent out for professional and academic review.

Experts in the field were asked two questions. First they were asked for their reactions to the proposal for a specialist journal. Specifically, HK wanted to know whether the field of study was thought to be sufficiently developed to warrant a scholarly journal. Second, they were asked who should be considered for the editor position.

Actually, when I learned about the second question, I was shocked and dismayed. Looking back, I must have taken it for granted that my proposal, if accepted, would result in my appointment. But that was naïveté writ large.

After a while I was indeed appointed editor. The time from proposal submission to my appointment as editor was very short. The target publication date for volume 1, issue 1, January 1984, was about a year away. Phew!

The Preparation Year

Support From Universities

As I try to recollect exactly all that had to be accomplished during that year, my mind blurs. I recall finding it nearly impossible to fit my new responsibilities into my existing full-time faculty position at LSU. I had neither an allotment of time for this new position nor personnel nor financial help. However, tasks that had to be done had to be done! (But there was no buyer's remorse.)

Luckily, the degree of institutional support provided to editors has changed over time. More and more university administrators realize the importance of faculty being nationally or internationally visible and the significance of such positions. As such, they are willing to award limited resources to an editor.

But in order to ensure support from university administrators, we should stop describing the activities of a journal editor, associate editor, or reviewer as just providing a service. What they do is a crucial part of the academic enterprise. Being an editor, associate editor, or reviewer is to be an academic gatekeeper for the development of quality research as it applies to the individual discipline or, in our case, the developing subdiscipline. We should be strong, consistent, and persistent in stating this truth.

Name and Structure of the Journal

As soon as HK announced that the journal would be published quarterly, a title was needed. I considered several options (one was *Movement Pathology Quarterly*), but that was somewhat pointless, because the focus of the journal had already been described in my proposal. The focus was to be on all types of appropriately adapted physical activity, in a broad range of settings, for individuals with a broad range of disabling conditions. Those features of the journal were woven into the original mission statement (see my editorial in issue 1, and the editorial policy in issue 1 et seq.). Thus, the title *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly* (APAQ) became the obvious choice, and HK agreed with it.

Certainly, it was important for me to appoint associate editors very soon. Originally, I had planned for the journal to be a blend of APA and therapeutic recreation (TR). Therefore, I appointed Claudine Sherrill, from Texas Woman's University, as the APA person, and Herberta (Herbie) Lundegren, from Pennsylvania State University, as a research-oriented TR person. None of us had any editorial experience, so it turned out to be a challenging, exciting, and scary time.

It was not a case of "first we'll do this, next we'll do that." Several topics had to be addressed simultaneously. There were no written policies. Claudine, Herbie, and I worked out together the way things were to be done. The conceptualization, formulation, and process for approval of official policies began many years later, mostly during Terry Rizzo's leadership.

I do not recall any discussion about the structure of APAQ. Specifically, I do not recall asking whether there would be separate sections for different types of papers submitted. However, by referring to the first issue of APAQ, and then comparing it with a recent issue, readers can see that elements of the initial structure have endured. However, I think it is time to discuss and rethink the individual sections of APAQ.

Three examples are offered to encourage discussion. First, the categorization of papers as "Research" and "Applications" now seems odd. I cannot remember the original rationale for the differentiation, but now it seems unnecessary. Many research papers have an applied feature or an application to practice in the field, and the applications papers often have research elements.

Second, it seems contrary to our mission for quality to include replication papers in the new Brief Research Reports section. Brevity does not allow for completeness; replication does not mean "similar to." And replication papers are already included as research papers. So clarity would be helpful.

And third, viewpoint papers, which were originally intended to encourage “commentary on current opinion, legislative regulatory concerns, and other professional trends,” are now subject to guidelines that are at least as rigorous as those for research submissions. That denies the original intent of the section itself, which was to support the efficacy of a certain amount of informed, experienced opinion (points of view).

In summary, it seems a good idea for the editor to reconsider the structure of APAQ, perhaps seeking input from former editors, among others.

Forming the Editorial Board

It was important to have a group of senior APA/TR academics form the editorial board. The eighteen-member editorial board had a whole range of responsibilities centered on the overall development of a scholarly journal. This included advocating and marketing, as well as encouraging potential contributors. Reviewing papers was expected from all members.

But who were the professionals who could provide this expertise? Who had the insights and research experience to be the role models in the development of a new journal that sought to publish the best APA/TR scholarship available? Academic gatekeeping was thought to be a critical responsibility. I asked for guidance regarding just who I should invite to board membership. For, after all, I had been in this country for only a short time and probably did not know everyone who possessed what I perceived as the relevant expertise. I had to know individuals in physical education, recreation, and special education, to cite just three obvious interest areas.

Some readers might not know that at that time the “publish or perish” performance expectation for faculty was only in its infancy, and it had been instituted at only a handful of North American universities. Few university faculty members had developed and completed state-, province-, or government-funded studies of real consequence; few faculty members had experience of reviewing papers for the most prestigious journals in what we now usually call kinesiology, leisure studies, and disability studies. Nor were there the number and range of established doctoral APA programs that exist today. Therefore, there was not a supply line of research-trained faculty with the appropriate background. So the selection of the initial editorial board members was somewhat of an experiment; an educated guess, perhaps.

At our annual meetings (held at the AAHPERD Convention), board members were very helpful in suggesting ways of developing APAQ. And they were very supportive of the progress being made. But it became clear as soon as submitted papers were being reviewed, well before the first issue was due to be published, that the bank of reviewers would need to be expanded. The range of reviewer areas of expertise needed to be expanded as well. Thus, almost from the very beginning, I had to find more volunteers to participate in a thorough academic review process. That proved to be fairly easy because the privilege of being invited to evaluate the work of colleagues was a given at that time.

I have not followed closely the way the division of responsibilities between the editor and associate editors has changed over the years, if in fact it has. But in those early months (and years), I reviewed and adjudicated every paper, regardless of who had prime responsibility for a particular submission. Of course, I usually

agreed with my colleagues. It was not a question of trust, just my ultra-conservatism (with a small *c*).

What to Publish?

We had to work very hard to acquire papers, and were not in a position to promote, suggest, or determine the topics to be covered. In particular, I made numerous telephone calls, attended numerous oral presentations, and had numerous discussions encouraging scholars and future scholars to develop their work and send it to APAQ.

Two questions were important: First, why would or should authors send their best work to an untested journal? Second, because some universities ranked journals hierarchically, how would an untested journal be considered meritorious?

The phrase *impact factor* was unknown to APA persons. Impact was about significance/importance. While I was never inundated with lots of papers, the emphasis was only on quality papers, not numbers.

From the start, there were few submissions from the TR field. None of us could determine why this occurred. Luckily, Herbie, originally chosen as a TR person, was very experienced in motor learning and APA. Therefore, her role evolved naturally.

Selecting Reviewers

The selection and functioning of reviewers was of immense importance in the early development of APAQ. Although we had no idea how many papers would be received and reviewed, it was never difficult to find (mostly) faculty members, who generally were eager to participate. Many told me that they felt it to be a privilege to evaluate the work of colleagues across North America. Of course, that should still be so.

It was some volumes later that APAQ devoted a whole issue to papers from overseas. Now APAQ is seen as the premier international APA journal.

Often, I knew the academic record of a potential reviewer, and inviting him or her was straightforward. Most research and/or field-based papers were developed by university faculty and were single-authored, unless another faculty member or perhaps a senior doctoral student had a very substantial part to play in the conception and conduct of the study. With faculty members who had established a record of publications on a theme, the selection was uncomplicated.

However, readers might note that thesis and dissertation chairs or directors advised students as part of their job, and those chairs or directors did not appear to believe that they had some sort of ownership (authorship) of the thesis or dissertation, as the case seems to be now. With the high proportion of multi-author papers, it is not always easy to identify just who has what expertise, making reviewer selection much more difficult to discern now than during my tenure as editor.

Certainly, from the beginning, APAQ sought to continually improve the quality of papers published and, thus, improve the depth of our APA knowledge base. The need for highly competent reviews is paramount. Therefore, I believe that doctoral students, as part of their training, must be shown how to evaluate research papers, and have abundant practice at polishing their expertise. They become our next researchers, experts, and reviewers, and so they must themselves be able to independently conceive researchable topics and fully conduct them,

rather than just be partners in research. Strong skill sets are prerequisites to be able to work independently, be sought as a potential collaborator, or invite colleagues to become part of a collaboration of strengths. Quality of review should follow quality research, and it will always be of prime importance if APAQ is to continue to improve.

Functioning and Evaluation of Reviewers

For the most part, reviewers did a satisfactory job by providing reviews that were detailed, thorough, friendly, and helpful to the editor, associate editors, and authors. Sometimes, however, a review would contain negative, almost hostile, language and attitude. Other times, a review would be incomplete, with just a few general statements and a recommendation that might not even be consistent with the review itself. To those reviewers, a second or third invitation was probably not given. There were occasions when I phoned and pointed out the inadequacies of the review. I did not enjoy that.

I am reliably told that some reviews even today are not of the quality needed. And I understand that quite a number of potential and current reviewers routinely turn down an invitation, making the time-in-review longer, and the ability to find reviewers more difficult. Third-choice reviewers probably do not provide first-class reviews. I did not have to contend with such a problem. But the duration of the review process and quality of reviews were problems from the beginning.

On appointment as a reviewer, a formal letter, indicating, say, a two-year agreement might be wise. But it has been my opinion for several years, that a formal, open, official reviewer evaluation is needed (an evaluation developed by APAQ persons might be appropriate). The evaluation would have a very heavy emphasis on the thoroughness of the review, but it would also take into account, to a much lesser degree, the timeliness of the response. This latter criterion can probably be most effectively addressed by the editor. These two features of the review process, review quality and time in review, probably need constant oversight.

An important point to remember regarding my descriptions of the timeliness of the review process is that, at the time, prior to the inaugural issue, communication between the editor and the associate editors, and between editors and authors was by telephone and by snail mail!

I also wish to comment on the guideline that the review process must be blind, providing no clue to the identity of the authors or reviewers. Prior to the publication of volume 1, the idea of “blindness” seemed appropriate. It was common practice and seemed to work well. But over the years, I have come to believe that the case for accountability is stronger than that for hiding behind the cloak of blindness. While I have not been consistent in my actions as a reviewer, I would like to see more reviewers identify themselves to authors (e.g., by signing the review forms).

The Review Process Itself

The question of how to develop and implement an evaluation process for submitted papers was critical from the very beginning. What would the review process be like? What official forms needed to be developed? How long should the review process

take? What feedback would we provide authors and reviewers? These were some of the critical questions that had to be answered.

The various stages of the review process were identified. It was decided that a letter acknowledging receipt of the submission would be sent within a few days of its receipt. I briefly reviewed each paper to see how questions of format were addressed, and whether the topic came within the purview of APAQ.

Associate editors and reviewers were asked to complete two forms. The first one contained the detailed responses (line-by-line) to the content of the paper. Eventually, that form, duly completed and unsigned, was sent to the authors. The second one, containing a summary statement and recommendation for acceptance or rejection, was for the editor only, and it was signed. Providing feedback to those involved in the review was and remains a very important task.

I had personal experience in the review process of several journals that reviewed my research. However, I had not considered the fact that few, if any, submissions are accepted for publication after just one review. Most papers require a second (or third!) review. Thus, in addition to the slow method of sending materials, and the fact that some reviewers are tardy with their reviews and that multiple reviews is needed, the review process took too long. Although authors expected their work to be evaluated in a timely way, some of them were tardy with their evaluation of the work of others.

After I had received the review and recommendation of each reviewer or associate editor, I examined all the documentation and composed a letter pointing out those elements for which extra work was needed. “Accept with major (or minor) revisions” became the most usual decision. For the second revision of a submitted paper, an important issue to be resolved was whether the reviewers would be the same as initially, or different, or a mixture. Readers can imagine the complexity of the process where a second or third revision was required (but still with the possibility of final acceptance).

In addition to the letter from the editor, the intention was to send to the authors copies of all reviews. But when incomplete or unsatisfactory reviews were received, I withheld the “poor” review and tended to present my requirements, point to a particular review (e.g., reviewer C), and inform the authors to pay particular attention to that review. I did not think I was cheating, but I wanted to safeguard the integrity of APAQ and shelter the writer of the “poor” review.

Talking to authors—whether by phone, letter, or at a conference—sometimes gave me a less than “my favorite person” reputation (ha!), especially when papers were not accepted. But many authors, the editor, and the associate editors were covering uncharted territory. We did our best!

D-Day (APAQ Day)

Eventually, the number of fully accepted papers necessary for the production of the inaugural issue was reached. Fortunately, the date when papers were required to be submitted to HK was some weeks away.

And so it happened: APAQ, volume 1, number 1 was published, in January 1984: What a relief! It was fun, but what about volume 1, number 2, number 3, and number 4? I did not know it at the time, but after completion of volume 1, I had six more volumes to produce. But that’s another story!

Closing Thoughts

Yes, 33 years and counting. Almost certainly, there are features of how the journal operates that will need to be improved. Among these could be a continuing concern over the selection, performance, and open evaluation of reviewers and associate editors. Of course, quality and timelines of reviews will always be crucial.

And . . . let us not take it for granted that HK will automatically continue its support of APA and APAQ. Support should be earned.

How do we make sure that APAQ keeps improving? Which criteria might be appropriate in such a determination? It is likely that these and other questions have worried every APAQ editor.

The quest for excellence will always be a constant for APAQ.