

Introduction to the Special Issue on the State of Kinesiology: Musings of Prominent Professionals in the Field

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Criticizing the state of physical education, the precursor of kinesiology, and its development over the previous half century or so, James Conant, a former president of Harvard University, proclaimed in 1963 that he was unimpressed with graduate programs in the field and that they should be eliminated (Conant, 1963). Soon after, concerned in part with some of the issues identified by Conant, Franklin Henry, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, advanced the notion that physical education should be an academic discipline based on theory and consisting of a distinct body of knowledge (Henry, 1964). During the next 2 decades, physical education focused its efforts on legitimizing itself as an academic discipline. What ensued was a spirited discussion of what should constitute the specific body of knowledge in physical education. Such epistemological locus would, as put in a conference devoted to the topic, “gain [physical educators] greater recognition in the academic world” (Zeigler & McCristal, 1967, p. 80). This discussion ultimately led to the emergence of highly specialized subdisciplines within physical education with their own professional organizations and accompanying conferences and publication outlets. By the 1980s, the deepening of the subdisciplinary specialization had promoted fragmentation and dispersion, and physical education was no longer perceived as an appropriate descriptor for the field. A renewed, and predictably rousing, epistemological debate within the discipline generated starting in the 1990s, an increasing consensus that “kinesiology” was a more apt descriptor for its mission. Yet, despite what seems an irreversible trend toward the use of “kinesiology” built over the last 30 years, there are lingering problems, to the point that some kinesiologists contend that their discipline’s “self-understanding is as contentious and fractured as ever” (Twietmeyer, 2012, p. 4; for a brief account of the history of physical education and kinesiology since the 1900s, see Schultz, 2021).

This special issue aims, as indicated by its title, to explore the state of kinesiology, albeit it also extends into anticipations of what the future might hold for the discipline. It follows sport historian Mark Dyreson’s admission that when beginning to prospect the present and prophesize the future, he is condemned to begin where historians always begin—in the past (Dyreson, 2007). Dyreson not only acquiesces to his condemnation but also implies that such prospecting and prophesizing should always begin with the past. This is precisely where this special issue begins. Fourteen prominent kinesiologists from a variety of subdisciplines muse about their long and distinguished careers in the discipline. Autobiographical in nature, these intimate narratives reflect on

what motivated the authors to become involved in the discipline, how their personal and professional trajectories unfolded and intermingled, and what their major challenges were, as well as accomplishments, during their careers. Also discussed is how these individuals influenced kinesiology and how kinesiology influenced them and what suggestions they have for the future of kinesiology and their colleagues, particularly beginning scholars. An aspect of this special issue that makes these 14 narratives especially apposite is that they unfolded during the long period of dramatic changes prompted by the early 1960s push to transform physical education into a more reputable scholarly domain. That is, these 14 kinesiologists both experienced and drove these changes, the effects of which still linger to the present day.

Unsurprisingly, a common thread running through the 14 narratives is a passion for engaging in physical activity and sport born early in life, one that years later resulted in an equivalent passion for studying and teaching these phenomena. In almost all cases, dedication to both passions led to much joy and meaning in the personal and professional lives of the authors. However, unique circumstances and the historic times in which the authors’ stories were embedded also provoked some unexpected twists and turns, tests, adaptations, disappointments, and disillusionments, both personal and professional. These 14 narratives do not shy away from these complexities. Thus, the reader learns of how the authors grew up in Australia, Canada, Germany, India, the United Kingdom, and the United States and the sinuous roads they traveled in order to find and make their academic homes in either Canada or the United States. The reader also learns how, once in these locales, life in academia was rewarding but also formidable. Because of the dramatic changes taking place in kinesiology, none of the authors were impervious to the disputes brought about by the discipline’s transformation. It is not surprising either that, given their complex tales of achievement and, to some degree, strife, the authors do not necessarily agree on the status of kinesiology and what its future might portend. Reflecting epistemological tensions, power dynamics, and trends in the field, the 14 narratives show, broadly speaking, a diminished optimism regarding the status and future of the discipline. Natural-science kinesiologists see them as brighter than social-science kinesiologists, who, in turn, see them as brighter than humanities kinesiologists do. To reverse this situation, as two of the authors propose, kinesiology should promote subdisciplinary boundary crossing and bridge building and a humbling approach to lower and break down subdisciplinary caste walls, signaling that all subdisciplines are needed to provide more complete answers to the questions kinesiologists ask.

Beginning with the past, as recommended by Dyreson, the 14 narratives included in this special issue collectively provide rich insights into the state of kinesiology and speculations about its

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future. The reader thus learns about the personal and professional life of prominent kinesiologists. While appreciating these individual lives and enjoying the authors' stories—which makes constant reference to kinesiology's historical temporality—the reader is able to better understand the complex present of kinesiology as much as the varied prognoses for the discipline's future. In the process, historian Carl Becker's (1915) probably most cited line that the value of history—that is, the interpretation of the past—is not scientific but moral because “it prepares us to live more humanely in the present and to meet rather than to foretell the future” (p. 148) comes alive. Along this line, historian Joyce Appleby (1998) asserted something that these 14 narratives also insist on: that history “is powerful because we live with its residues, its remnants, its remainders and reminders” and because it is liberating (pp. 12, 14)—liberating because the reader is no longer ignorant of the past and its implications. Through the authors' stories, professionals in kinesiology would be, or at least could be, better prepared, paraphrasing Becker, to live more humanely the discipline's present and meet its future. To conclude, I would like to thank the authors for their willingness to contribute to this special issue, in which they were asked to write essays far different from the scholarly work they typically produce, and for their promptness in responding during the review and editing process. Finally, I would also like to thank Dave Wiggins, Editor-in-Chief of *Kinesiology Review*, for

his invitation to edit this special issue and for his valuable assistance in putting it together.

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