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on Disability sport and adapted physical activity

edited by Ejgil Jespersen

Introduction

This special issue of *Physical Culture and Sport*, entitled 'Disability sport and adapted physical activity,' contains articles by people affiliated with the Centre of Adapted Physical Activity Participation Studies (CAPAPS) at the University of Southern Denmark. The Centre was established in 2011 for a four-year project in order to promote the interdisciplinary study and practice of adapted physical activity participation for persons with disabilities.

While the concept of 'handicap' is outdated in the English language due to its perceived pejorative connotation, the term remains widely used in Denmark. From the perspective of Physical Culture, the term's origins are interesting, namely in sports starting with betting interests in horseracing. Jørn Hansen outlines the changing history of the concept of 'handicap' in sports. The concept starts from being understood as a disadvantage imposed on talented contestants to make the competition more equal, to becoming more closely related to the concepts of 'invalid' and 'crippled'. It is then replaced by classification in disability sports and by disability in general. Therefore, the history of the concept may also be interpreted as the "sportification" of society through movement culture.

Henning Eichberg challenges the understanding of disability in terms of equality and categorization, as well as normalization and deviance. He points to 'ableism' as a possible negative view of disability. Thus, he changes his focus to ways in which disabled people play and how this might be associated in his novel way of thinking with a kind of phenomenological approach. Also worth noting are his efforts to relate a universal human condition of dis-ease to cultural differences that don't end up with bare cultural relativism.

The following six articles focus on particular issues and studies of target groups for movement activities. Linn Therese Ramsland describes a case study of a one-footed elderly man in a wheelchair. Despite being physically disabled, he leads an independent life thanks to his active attitudes towards life in general and towards his way of dealing with nature and the outdoors as a resource for meaning construction in particular. Ageing results in decreased mobility and independence, but the case study demonstrates that by being active and curious, elderly people can prevent disease, reduce disability, and increase wellness.

Michael Fehsenfeld writes of his studies on how social workers apply sports and physical activity programs as a vehicle for the social inclusion of outsiders. The underlying assumption is that interactions between diverse social groups can generate social capital that can potentially function as a social lever for socially disadvantaged groups. The findings suggest that strategies aimed at social inclusion through sport and physical activity need to consider social context. Meaning is not produced in splendid isolation, but is largely ascribed in social relations providing, at best, not only a feeling of connectedness, but also a sense of belonging.

Anna Staal and I have studied how young people with mental problems are active in sports and physical activity and thus handle their problems in their own ways. While research in the field typically focuses narrowly on instrumental use of exercise and effects of a controlled intervention, we explore the lived experiences of physical activity and the meaning and relevance it has for individuals in their everyday lives. The findings are discussed in relation to the concept of recovery. The findings especially focus on exercise as a form of self-care strategy, as an opportunity to create social relationships, and as a way to become part of meaningful social activity.

Jim Toft offers a phenomenological understanding of healing processes in physical activity based upon case studies of patients with schizophrenia. He argues that there is a strong correlation between the body and the mind, but takes a point of view other than what has been adopted by prevailing scientific research. Consciousness has a bodily core of self that, for people with schizophrenia, is less well embodied in the consciousness than compared to psychologically well-functioning people. Sports and physical activity can, however, help facilitate this healing relation. The study thus contributes to qualify the treatment chosen for people with schizophrenia and to qualify the understanding of the role of the body and physical activity in consciousness and relief.

Jing He and I write about the embodied nature of autistic learning and the implications for physical education. Instead of having a disembodied and individualistic point of view, we suggest that autistic learning has an embodied nature, and that the autistic experience of learning may actually be inherently meaningful for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). These individuals strive to make sense of some basic disturbance and re-establish some form of coherence with the world, though this may only be possible in the form of delusions or autistic withdrawals. From an embodied learning point of view, it also makes sense how spontaneous imitation – but not instructed imitation – can boost the development of children with ASD. This perspective has important implications for the organization of physical education.

Finally, I focus on the Sport for All idea and argue how a universal inclusive approach to sports participation is preferable in the long end for a special needs approach in segregated or integrated settings. The argument is based upon a survey of sports/exercise participation in Denmark with a special focus upon people with impairments. The universal approach is associated with the understanding of universal design and the priority of inclusion in mainstream sporting activities in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

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Guest editor