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Maximising World-Wide Networks for greater APA Gain

An Examination of Current Developments and Training Programmes in Adapted Physical Activity (APA) from an International Perspective

Schools, research centres, rehabilitation centres, hospitals, sport clubs, Paralympic Games, and World Championship competitions – adapted physical activity (APA) research and applications can play an integral role in each of these diverse environments. The degree to which APA is applied, however, varies from nation to nation.

Diversity is inherent in the field of adapted physical activity. This relatively new area of sport science draws upon and articulates with a number of different disciplines – including pedagogy, psychology, management, architecture, history, medicine and movement sciences (DOLL-TEPPER/DEPAUW 1996). Moreover differing disabilities are addressed for all age groups and findings are applied to the full range of activity – from rehabilitation, to physical education and elite sport. Additionally, social and political factors influence the degree to which individuals with disabilities are integrated into mainstream environments (SHERRILL/WILLIAMS 1996). Given these contextual issues, it is not surprising that the realisation of APA applications and the university and training programmes for students in APA around the world vary significantly.

On a world-scale, there is no doubt that rapid developments and significant advances mark the short history of adapted physical activity. In order to ensure that the evolution of this field continues to meet the needs of all persons with disabilities in the next millennium, training programmes must advance accordingly and communication networks must be strengthened world-wide. This paper aims to examine the current issues characterising the development of APA from an international perspective. Building on the idea that international and multidisciplinary collaboration is important for progress, a successful international APA University degree programme – the European Masters Degree in Adapted Physical Activity – is discussed. Finally, the implications for Germany and an outlook for the future development of APA are formulated.

Balancing Diversity and Specialisation

How specialised should training and university programmes in APA be? Educators and professionals in most fields often have to maintain a careful balancing act – ensuring that the appropriate specialised skills for a particular environment are built upon a broad, comprehensive knowledge base. This dilemma is particularly manifest in the diverse field of APA and is also directly related to international social and political differences. SHERRILL and WILLIAMS (1996) note that: „sport is increasingly recognised as a basic human right“ (44), however the meanings of terms such as integration and inclusion are socially constructed and thus „vary by individual, time, and context“ (43). For example, in countries where integration is increasingly present in societal structures (Canada, USA, Australia, Finland and most European countries), the training programmes for pro-

fessionals working in schools and sport clubs is generally broad-based, emphasising the concepts of integration, adaptation, and general epidemiology (DOLL-TEPPER/SCORETZ 1997; DOLL-TEPPER 1996; DEPAUW/GAVRON 1995). This type of training is appropriate because professionals must be able to adapt to and work within a wide variety of work environments.

On the other hand, when integration is not a common practice in the societal structure, professionals generally work in more specialised environments, such as schools for blind or deaf children, wheelchair sport groups, etc (DOLL-TEPPER/SCORETZ 1997). In this case training programmes emphasise specific and detailed epidemiology geared for specific populations and are often carried out by disability sport clubs or organisations. Additionally, specialised qualifications are required in rehabilitation environments and elite training situations where specific features of the disability must be taken into account.

Integration and Multidisciplinary Collaboration

The degree to which APA is integrated into mainstream course work or considered in other sport science fields is closely linked to the differing social and political environments described above. In countries where integration is required by law (Canada, Norway, USA) all students studying physical education receive APA training (SHERRILL 1993; BELITZ 1998). A recent initiative in Canada is a successful example of co-operation between federal and provincial governments and a non-profit organisation for persons with disabilities. (Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability). *Moving to Inclusion* is a school-based resource which provides leading-edge information in the field of Adapted Physical Education. These materials have been distributed to each of Canada's 15,000 schools for teachers' reference and are used in college and university teacher training programmes.

In many other countries, however, co-operative initiatives such as this do not yet exist and APA studies are completely dependent on the personal interest of students and faculty (DOLL-TEPPER/SCORETZ 1997, 1998). Differences are evident at the national level as well as the local level.

Likewise, the level of communication and collaboration between professionals and researchers in APA and in other sport science disciplines varies significantly and continues to rely on personal initiatives. Despite the proven benefits of holistic and comprehensive research and intervention perspectives, multidisciplinary research continues to be a rarity. Gradual changes in North America and Western Europe are evident and research on APA and disability sport can now be found on some non-APA conference programmes. There is no doubt room for improvement in this area.

Research vs. Practical Applications

Where should the focus be? On research, maximising progressive visions and advanced technology? Or on hands-on applications and contact with target groups? Nations and individual universities vary in the emphasis applied to research and practice. Often, these issues, particularly in training programmes, are considered an either/or dichotomy. The key to success is, however, balance and communication. Now that research at a high level is an integral part of the field of APA, it is of utmost importance that open lines of communication between researchers and practitioners are maintained. Useful research and effective interventions rely on dialogue between these two camps.

Whereas some degree programmes, such as the European Masters described below, are aiming to combine research and practical experiences, time and cost restrictions remain a challenge for both students and faculty. In most countries, training programmes at the undergraduate level emphasise practice. Students are acquainted with several research techniques and resources, but the emphasis is on how the knowledge available can best be applied. Additionally, many students in North America are required to actively apply their knowledge as volunteers in the community, enabling them to experience several different APA environments. These 'service hours' are part of the formal degree requirements.

Involvement in APA research studies normally begins at the graduate level and subsequent degrees depend upon research experiences and reports. In most all countries, research is concentrated in universities, where the infrastructure and contact with other research projects creates an optimal environment for scientific study. The challenge now is to maintain links between research laboratories and the 'field'.

Initiatives such as the European Research Registrar have been put in place in order to increase awareness about the research that is being undertaken. Researchers are encouraged to collaborate and communicate whenever possible to avoid replications. Practitioners may also consult this resource for relevant information (DOLL-TEPPER/DEPAUW 1996).

A Progressive Step in Europe – the European Master's Degree of Adapted Physical Activity

A 1990 analysis of European professional training in adapted physical activity brought many important and disturbing findings to the foreground. It was evident that there was a lack of qualified professionals in this area and there was dispersed research and inconsistent, often limited course selections for students wishing to pursue careers in APA. It was clear that there was a need for co-ordinated efforts and improved, more comprehensive academic training opportunities in Europe. This realisation led to a „joint venture“ of representatives from 9 different European countries in 1991: the initiation of the postgraduate programme „European Master's Degree in Adapted Physical Activity“ (EMDAPA). This degree programme was founded as an ERASMUS programme and it is currently based on the Socrates programme. EMDAPA is hosted by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium (VAN COPPENOLLE et al. 1993).

Within the past 8 years, this degree programme has expanded to include 30 different universities and, in recent years, students from other regions of the world also regularly participate. The Katholieke Universiteit Leuven has accepted students from Israel, New Zealand, Japan, Canada and South Africa into the programme and EMDAPA continues to become increasingly recognised internationally.

The following universities are participating in the 1999-2000 EMDAPA programme: Amsterdam, Athens, Barcelona, Berlin, Besançon, Bruxelles, Dortmund, Granada, Grenoble, Groningen, Heidelberg, Jyväskylä, Kaunas, Kobenhavn, Köln, Leuven, Lille, Limerick, Lisboa, Lleida, Loughborough, Louvain La Neuve, Maastricht, Montpellier, Newcastle, Olomouc, Oslo, Prague, and Utrecht (VAN DE VLIET 1999).

EMDAPA aims to combine the resources and expertise of professionals throughout Europe in order to offer students comprehensive and state-of-the-art information. Lecturers present current findings and resources from their areas of expertise and students learn from each other, sharing experiences from their respective countries and previous training.

Tab. 1: The European Masters Degree in Adapted Physical Activity

| | Phase 1 Preparation | Phase 2 General Courses | Phase 3 Specialisation | Phase 4 Practical Work | Phase 5 Research/Thesis |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|---|---|
| Location | Home university | Katholieke Universiteit Leuven | Kath. Univ. Leuven | Host & Home University | |
| Emphasis/ Content | – knowledge of APA practices in home environment – to be shared with class – basic knowledge of research methodology and pathologies | – theories, applications and current information on: international developments, sociology, research methodology, management and comparative studies – overview of key issues and research themes in the following 3 areas: physiological disorders, psycho-social disabilities, sensory-motor disabilities | – specialised information on epidemiology and intervention strategies – practical experiences, visits | – involvement in research project – contact with target group – guidance from professionals & host professor – structuring research goals and procedures – compilation of data – preparation of report | |
| Time | before arrival in Leuven | 6 weeks | 6 weeks | ca. 6 months | |
| Goals | – general preparation – international understanding/awareness | to offer the students a complete overview of the field of APA and enable them to choose a field of interest to focus | in-depth study in an area of the student's choice | – practical involvement – interaction with the target group | – evaluation of research data – application of APA theories – communication of results and implications |
| Examination/ Requirement | – oral exam upon arrival in Leuven – class presentation | choice of one of the three specialisation areas | oral and written examinations covering information from Phases 2 & 3 | Material for thesis | Masters Thesis |

Students with a degree in physical education or physiotherapy may apply. The course work is conducted completely in English and all applicants are required to send proof of their English language capability.

Structure and Organisation of the EMDAPA Programme

EMDAPA is a one-year (12 month) programme divided into several phases described in detail in table 1. The Preparation Phase, before the student arrives in Leuven, is very important. First, he/she must become acquainted with the APA structure in his/her home country in order to present this to classmates. Secondly, the intention of the organisers is that all students have a good background in the areas of research methodology and pathologies.

Taking the 'specialisation dilemma' into account, the EMDAPA programme includes a general overview of the whole field of APA (Second Phase: General Courses). International aspects and developments are emphasised with visits from numerous professors and students are given a taste of all aspects of this field to broaden their own knowledge base.

After this intensive 6-week period, each student is required to specialise in one of the following three areas: physiological disorders, psycho-social disabilities and sensory-motor disabilities. The remaining duration of the programme then concentrates on then chosen specialisation. During the Third Phase (Epidemiology and Intervention), students are presented with more detailed information relating to their area of choice. Visits and practical experiences are organised whenever possible. During these 6 weeks, students learn about current research projects from visiting professors and choose a project to participate in for the final two phases. At the end of this Third Phase, all student are required to pass written and oral exams in both the general topic areas and their chosen specialisation.

The final two phases are connected to each other: Phase Four includes practical training and Phase Five involves the research and thesis report preparation. Both of these phases take part at a host university of the student's choice. Students work with professors and professionals to gain practical experience with a specific target group and participate in a research project. In cooperation with specialists at the host university and their home university, students prepare a comprehensive research-based Master's thesis. This thesis is presented for evaluation at the student's home university.

Results to Date

A constant number of students (ca. 20-30) continue to participate in the EMDAPA programme each year. This manageable number includes well-rounded representation of different nations and allows for visits and practical application opportunities. The programme is becoming increasingly international giving students the benefit of a variety of experiences and diverse perspectives of colleagues from around the world. Most importantly, students obtain their information from professionals from across Europe who teach in their areas of specialisation. This structure is the optimal method of facilitating international communication and increasing awareness about the resources and networks that exist in adapted physical activity world-wide. When the APA network expands and is strengthened, access to infor-

mation increases and all professionals benefit. Furthermore, students have the opportunity to take part in high quality research projects in an area of their choice.

The results to date are very good: graduates are applying the knowledge and experience gained from EMDAPA in jobs at universities, schools, administrative bodies and rehabilitation/sport centres. Continued and intensified involvement in the field is exemplified by the large percentage of graduates who regularly present their research and current projects at the International Symposium of Adapted Physical Activity organised every two years by the International Federation of Adapted Physical Activity (IFAPA).

Key Issues affecting the Success of the EMDAPA Programme

Logistics

Clearly, the logistical challenges of running an international degree programme are plentiful. Students are credited from their home university, so the requirements for each participating university must be taken into account and the pre-requisites must be universally understood, accepted and met. Additionally money (and lack thereof) affects the quality of the programme. Funding opportunities vary from country to country, resulting sometimes in an over participation of students from one country and limited representation of students from other regions.

Finances also play a role in the participation of professors. One of the key strengths of the EMDAPA programme lies in the wealth of intellectual and practical resources the visiting professors bring to Leuven during the three month course period. Unfortunately, support from the home university of each participating professor varies. There is very limited financial support from the EMDAPA programme itself for travelling professors and, for the most part, they are responsible for securing their own financial assistance. It can be said that it is the personal commitment of the professors involved that keeps this unique programme alive. The majority pay for travel expenses from their own pocket and travel to Leuven during semester holidays to contribute to the course work. This factor leaves the programme in a vulnerable and insecure state.

Language

Language difficulties do arise and it will likely be necessary to establish a consistent testing method in the future and/or offer additional assistance. In order to accommodate more students in their native language, colleagues in French speaking European countries have established a shorter programme that is conducted in French. Although lacking in international qualities, regional programmes, such as this French initiative, may play a more important role in the future in order to bridge some national boundaries.

Research

The course outline described above illustrates the compromise that the EMDAPA programme aims to make with respect to emphasising both research and practical applications. In the end however, the programme is primarily research-oriented. This corresponds with other Master's degree programmes internationally and often complements the practical backgrounds of the physical education/physiotherapy graduates who participate in the programme.

The success of the Research phase depends, however, on the co-operation of the participating universities. Due to the relatively short 6 month time period of this part of the curriculum, it is recommended that students join on-going research projects. Unfortunately, there are often only limited possibilities available. This factor, the proactive participation of participating universities, must be taken into account in the future development of the programme.

Implications for Germany

This paper examined key characteristics of the field of APA and focused on one successful international degree programme. This information is meant to enhance the foundation for development of APA in Germany and facilitate German university administrations, professional organisations and researchers in effectively advancing APA in Germany to suit the local social and cultural context. Taking the needs of Germans with disabilities into account, as well as the social structures and expectations, the appropriate degree of specialisation and integration must be determined and the appropriate focus on research and practice in the training programmes must be established and regularly evaluated.

The fact that a joint venture between nine European universities eight years ago is now an internationally recognised degree programme illustrates the growing importance of sharing information across national borders and the value of international collaboration. There is no question that different contextual situations have different needs, but much can be learned from the experiences and advances in other regions of the world. Moreover, unified action and advocacy are much more effective than singular initiatives.

In this respect, it remains crucial that sport scientists and practitioners in Germany continue to be open to international developments by contributing to the international body of knowledge and accessing the wide range of information networks. The EMDAPA programme is one means of strengthening the APA network. German students and faculty continue to participate regularly. Other essential components of the information network include: conferences, Internet List Serves, data bases, sport science journals and monographs. Regional projects and publications are also relevant and initiatives such as the Sport Information Centre for Persons with Disabilities (Informationsstelle für den Sport behinderter Menschen). Since 1991 this Centre has been operating as a successful 'joint venture' supported by the Berlin Government, the Institute of Sport Science at the Free University of Berlin and the German Sport Federation. The Centre is a very valuable resource in Berlin and can certainly serve as an excellent example for other countries and regions.

There are also many practical means by which professionals, students and professors can contribute to this

field on an international scale. A growing number of initiatives world-wide are eager to involve APA students and professionals from Germany. One such programme, SCORE, is based in South Africa. Through SCORE, the organisers recruit volunteers to work in schools and community sport programmes in less-privileged areas. The aim is to establish and enhance physical education classes and sport opportunities for local children and youth. Physical education and sport for children with disabilities in developing countries are rare. In this respect, volunteers with quality training who are willing and able to work with these children, local teachers and sport administrations can make an important and lasting impact on the health of the community.

On an international scale, many factors will significantly affect the development of APA, including: technological advances, enhanced communication and information circulation, the growing population of the elderly and the increasing acceptance of individuals with disabilities into society. APA will become more and more relevant. Germany has much to contribute to this new field of sport science through research, applications and intervention strategies. Likewise, German scientists, professionals and students also have much to gain from the experience and work of sport scientists in other nations. There is no question that the efforts of professionals in this field play an important role in enhancing the capacity and improving the quality of life of *all* individuals world-wide.

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