

P.E.: A Necessity or an Excuse?

by Ken Vink

This short essay should be considered a statement of opinion. Opinions are often the fruit of experience. My personal experience as a phys ed student (I considered myself more of a victim at the time) is not something I look back on with a glow of pleasure. In my time, Adams School students had an occasional "gym" class, and Grand Rapids Christian High School had no phys ed classes. My first real taste of phys ed was mandated by Calvin College. All able bodied students who were not veterans of the armed forces had to take two years of phys ed classes. The first year consisted of playing football outside in almost any weather. Those who in the judgment of the "coach" did not block and bump with sufficient vigor were sentenced to run around the field five times. The last five to make the circuit ran around three more times. My class so detested this "educational" experience, that we locked the coach in the locker room for a class period.

I continue to be amazed at the share of school resources devoted to "physical education." The "gym" is often the most expensive teaching station in the modern school, both in terms of construction cost and operational expense. Yet, it is something we must have. To deprive our children of phys ed as we now know it would be a terrible thing!

I continue to harbor a certain suspicion that there is another reason in addition to the "need" for physical education that engenders such support for the phys ed program. In our age and even in our circles, the interest in sports is close to an addiction. Interscholastic sports are followed with great interest in our schools. A place to identify, nurture, train, and encourage future basketball and other team players is certainly found in the phys ed program. In order to have a "well-rounded educational experience," we are said to need a good sports program. To have a good sports program, we need good facilities (gym, ball fields, track, etc.).

Opportunities for physical exercise and group activities and the manner in which they are taken has changed a great deal during the past two or three decades. Instead of walking to school, students must be bused or drive their own cars. Rather than mostly informal group activities, we must organize and provide "opportunities" for young people's activities. For all this we need elaborate and costly facilities. Walking is an activity viewed with disdain. Do we really have our priorities in focus?



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Brian Dykstra

TIME in its July 28, 1986 issue and *The Grand Rapids Press* in a recent article reported on a group of Fundamentalist Christian parents led by Vicki Frost which is bringing charges against the public schools of Hawkins County Tennessee. Quoting from *TIME*:

... the Fundamentalists want to shield their children from basic readers put out by the publishing firm of Holt, Rinehart & Win-

ston and used by 15,000 school districts in all 50 states. The group objects to the books in part because they “teach other forms of salvation, other than faith in Jesus Christ alone.” The parents demand that their children be allowed to use alternative textbooks more in line with Fundamentalist beliefs.

The Fundamentalists are also