

PHYSICAL EDUCATION FOR HEALTH

Radio Program

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"Personality and Character development in Physical Education" (Dr. V. W. Lapp)

Physical Education is usually thought of as being the work carried on in a gymnasium, and athletics are usually considered as consisting of the major sports that are performed before paid audiences and which receive the publicity to be had in the sport pages of the newspapers. However, the term physical education includes athletic and gymnasium activities as well as other physical activities performed on the play grounds, parks, etc.

When I say physical education has in its program greater possibilities for personality and character development than any other subject in the curriculum, I mean that athletics are to be included as a part of physical education. Let me repeat the statement in another way. I believe that the teacher of physical education has greater possibilities for doing good in the development of character than any other teacher in a public school system, a college or a university.

I do not want to be quoted as saying that all physical education teachers are actually doing the most good at the job of personality or character building because I know they are not, and it is not so much the fault of the teachers and coaches as it is the fault of those who train these teachers, the fault of those who hire these teachers, and the fault of the public which makes demands on these teachers so that they weaken their own characters and those of their pupils in an attempt to satisfy the public.

Several years ago I wrote a curriculum for a high school and as an introduction I wrote that character is caught, not taught. I thought I had coined a phrase and was proud of myself, but on looking into physical education philosophies I found that others had used this term. However, I am convinced that it is still true. Character is caught and not taught. All the preaching and talking that a man can do on sportsmanship will be of little avail if the ones to whom he is preaching know that when he plays tennis he never gives a line ball to his opponent or that when he plays golf he only counts every other stroke.

In mentioning the word preaching an illustration of this point comes to mind. A young minister came into a town in the fall and built up his young people's work to a very high plane. By spring he was the ideal of the boys and girls and they fell in line readily when he suggested some playground ball teams for the Sunday School. Leagues were organized and this young athletic preacher pitched for one of the teams in an older league. All lost respect for this man because every ball was a strike and every man was out. The umpire was never right, etc. This minister lost in two weeks of playing all the good he had preached into his church flock in six months. His usefulness was over.

I repeat, character is caught and not taught. May I illustrate the power of imitation? Only last fall a little incident brought this forcefully to my mind. A little three-year-old boy clad only in a small undergarment was seen kicking a box about a vacant field. It was very funny and the neighbors called the child's mother who captured him and, after getting the rest of his clothes, took him home. When asked what he was doing he said he was playing football, and after much questioning it was discovered that he had seen two men playing catch and one had taken off his shirt. He too had taken off his blouse to play, but his clothes were so constructed that his pants came off with his blouse. A harmless incident, yet the