

The Case for Physical-Sports Training as Aesthetic Education

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This paper draws upon ethnographic research to examine physical training—or sport—and its implications for education. By education, which etymologically derives from the Latin, *educare*, I am invoking the notion of personal edification. Therefore, I conceive of education as a process whereby the person involved undergoes and experiences growth and development in a physical, intellectual, as well as ethical and cultural sense. Education as described here is therefore holistic, being simultaneously intellectual, somatic, moral, and aesthetic.

Because of the opportunity it provides for whole-person development, cultivating mind, body, and affective sociality (self-other relations), I submit that physical training is imbued with significant educational potential. Put differently, physical training is necessarily an educational activity that is seldom recognized as such, neither by those working in sport nor in education.

This paper therefore challenges common understandings of both education and sport, domains that are typically demarcated from each other. The separation of the intellectual from the physical is in line with the tradition of the

European Enlightenment, specifically, the mind-body dichotomy associated with Rene Descartes. To be sure, Descartes' binary opposition conceives of an exalted Reason that is sundered from the Body, in turn spawning a model of education that is skewed towards the training of the intellect, reason, and *logos* vis-à-vis the body, feeling, and *eros*.

The paper deploys ethnographic and auto-ethnographic data and draws from my observations of, and as participation in, various physical training and sporting activities over the course of a year. Although I am arguing for the educative potential of all physical training activities, my references here will only be made in regard to the training activities associated with tennis.

The activity of tennis training warrants special mention as I spent up to five days a week during this period teaching it to children. My emphasis on tennis also derives from the fact that I was a former national-level tennis player with a brief professional career. Because of this experience, I maintain a special interest in the sport. Nevertheless, I should reiterate the central argument that underlies this essay: all physical-sports training activities have the potential to edify individuals and their communities. Physical training is thus educative.

Since this educative potential of sport has remained largely under-valued and under-explored by sporting and educational fraternities alike—praxis consonant with the separation of mind and body that characterizes the dominant global culture—the purpose of the present project is to re-appraise and re-appreciate the educational nature of sports and, more generally, of physical

¹ I am grateful to Kyle Greenwalt and Joseph Harroff for their comments on an early draft of this paper, and for convening the John Dewey Society panel at the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division conference in Philadelphia in January 2020 where it was then presented. I am also much indebted to my team of colleagues at Sport Management Group, Thailand –

Rungnapa Surached, Chantra Urai, Anan Puakpiboon, and Jakraphong Thongyai - for their ongoing collaboration and generous support for this research project. Finally, I would like to thank the promising young students who actively participated in his tennis-training classes in Sydney, Australia, in 2018-19. I am solely responsible for all errors in the paper.

training.² Specifically, my ethnographic research seeks to document the social-ethical attributes that tennis and physical training cultivate at the personal and interpersonal level.

This essay begins with a discussion about why our dominant practices of education are inadequate. Drawing upon my ethnographic research of the past year, I then offer how we might move beyond these shortcomings of modern schooling and sport to improve both the ways we learn and play.

I submit that physical training warrants the attention of those who work in the fields of education and sport since there is considerable potential for fruitful cross-fertilization between them. I discuss my use of sport and physical training for the cultivation of somatic, intellectual, emotional, aesthetic and social awareness, which I believe is consonant with the aims of a successful holistic education. I conclude by signalling the direction of future work around this topic.

The Putative Aims of Modern Education

This section sets the context for the paper by drawing attention to the shortcomings of the preponderant practices of modern education. These shortcomings are especially glaring in the

context of today's overarching socio-political-economic and ecological crises. In January 2020, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists set the Doomsday Clock—a symbol of the gravest perils confronting humankind, to a hundred seconds before midnight to indicate the very thin line that separates us from catastrophe. This near-midnight setting of the Clock is unprecedented since the organization's 1947 founding, with the threats posed by climate change and nuclear war being identified as most imminent.^{3 4} On the political economic front, the world has seen the neo-liberal project of globalization of roughly the past four decades, and especially the Wall Street-instigated financial crisis of 2008/09, result in staggering levels of social inequality on a world-scale.^{5 6} For instance, Oxfam reported in 2019 that the world's richest 26 people owned as much as 3.8 billion people - the poorest half of humanity. Significantly, the number of billionaires has doubled and increased their wealth by \$2.5 billion a day in the last ten years since the 2008 financial crisis.⁷

Given this intersection of political economic, social, and ecological crises, we might ask how our preponderant models of education and sport are relevant to each other and to the general evolution of society. What do sport and education have to do, if anything, with such societal trajectories? Is it not common, after all, for contemporary education to simply be regarded

² A caveat should be foregrounded regarding the use of the terms, "sport" and "physical training." Although there is an important distinction to be drawn between the two, with a meaningful difference residing in both their aims and nature, I shall be bracketing these essential differences and using the two terms interchangeably in this paper.

³ Science and Security Board, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, *It is 100 seconds to midnight: 2020 Doomsday Clock Statement*. (Illinois: Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 2020). <https://thebulletin.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2020-Doomsday-Clock-statement.pdf>.

⁴ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Global Warming of 1.5 degree C*. (Switzerland: IPCC, 2018).

⁵ Loewenstein, Antony, *Profits of Doom: How Vulture Capitalism is Swallowing the World*. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2013), and Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁶ Mishra, Pankaj, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017).

⁷ Oxfam Briefing Paper, *Public Good or Private Wealth*. (Oxford: Oxfam, 2019). file:///F:/Publications/Sport%20Project/[Oxfam%202019%20Report]_Public-Good-or-Private-Wealth-Oxfam-Report-Embargoed-0001GMT-21-Jan-2019.pdf

as vocational training—the training for one’s future job? And is sport not often simply a means of play (and entertainment), a release from the drudgery of work?

Owing to the ideology of individualism that disproportionately shapes the current neo-liberal (and neo-conservative?) socio-political milieu in which we live, the individual has been exalted as the fundamental unit of society at the expense of more collectivist or communal visions. This has resulted in a trend towards the privatization of education, in which the latter has come to be perceived as an exclusively individual responsibility. In other words, education has become an asset that allows individuals to set themselves apart from the field in the marketplace. Such a view militates against the notion of education as a more collectivist endeavour dedicated to the improvement of group (social) life.

Naturally, such developments have changed popular perceptions of education, with the view of it as a public good—a non-exclusive commons—gradually giving way to the widespread acceptance of it today as a commodity, to be bought and sold by individual economic agents in the marketplace. Indeed, such a development accounts for the phenomenon of education as the lucrative global business it is today, with the world now rendered an educational marketplace composed of by knowledge-commodity producers and consumers alike.⁸

Whether explicitly acknowledged or otherwise, it seems reasonable to think that education

is conceived of by producers and consumers with at least four goals in mind. These goals are overlapping and are, in fact, sometimes contradictory. These educational goals may be listed as follows: personal development, civic integration, vocational training, and, finally, the fostering of critical thinking. Allow me to elaborate.

First, any educational enterprise must aim at

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some form of personal development. This seems to be consistent with Dewey, who writes of it as “a fostering, a nurturing, a cultivating process.”⁹ He adds, “all of these words mean that it implies attention to the conditions of growth. We also speak of rearing, raising, bringing up—words which express the difference of level which education aims to cover ... we speak

of education as shaping, forming, molding activity.”¹⁰ This conception of education is also affirmed by Whitehead’s observation that, “valuable intellectual development is self-development.”¹¹

These ideas of education-as-personal development also resonate cross-culturally and reach back in time, not least to classical Confucian teachings. In the Fourth Book of *The Expansive Learning* (*daxue* 大学), for example, Zhu Xi (1130-1200) writes:

There is the important and incidental in things and a beginning and an end in what we do. It is in realizing what should have priority that one gets to the proper way... From the emperor down to the common folk, everything is rooted in personal cultivation. There can be no healthy

⁸ Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, State, and Higher Education* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), and, Raewynn Connell, *The Good University: What Universities Actually Do and Why It’s Time for Radical Change* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2019).

⁹ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (Aakar Books: Delhi, 2004): 11.

¹⁰ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*: 11.

¹¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929): 1.

canopy when the roots are not set, and it would never do for priorities to be reversed between what should be invested with importance and what should be treated lightly. This is called knowing the root; this is called the utmost wisdom.¹²

The notion that personal development should form the foundational basis of any educational endeavour thus appears well-established.

A second goal of modern education is civic integration. This is the explicitly political goal of producing citizens who identify with and are committed to the progress of the nation. Corresponding with this objective, it is believed that education should cultivate civic-minded citizens capable of contributing to the social, economic, political, and cultural improvement of the nation. Naturally, this would be a priority of national education ministries.

There would, nevertheless, be ambivalence among some about civic integration. Particularly among the ruling elites of a given society, it would tend to be tolerated only insofar as it remains functionalist and maintains “business-as-usual,” but would be opposed when disruptive of the established order. For this reason, the civic or democratic aims of education have historically tended to be partial at best, and disingenuous in the form of lip-service at worst. For the ruling strata, particularly, it is a goal best limited to discourse or high-sounding rhetoric. I shall return to this point below in our discussion about education and critical thinking.

There is also a third important goal—the vocational training element—of education. This is also closely and explicitly aligned with the educational objectives of nation-states and their policy-makers, who conceive of the education and schooling of individuals as being closely intertwined with the training of a workforce

capable of contributing to the national economy that is embedded within an inter-state system of global capitalist relations.

Finally, education is also commonly associated with the desire to produce an informed population equipped with critical thinking skills enabling them to critique, reform, and improve the nation’s social and political systems. Yet, as with the aim of civic integration, critical thinking is replete with political implications. Cultivating an enlightened population would tend to be viewed by ruling elites to be double-edged, if not verily undesirable, since such an elevation of social consciousness could engender conditions which ultimately undermine their dominant social standing. Accordingly, as with the educational goal of civic integration, society’s ruling elites would tend to view critical thinking with ambivalence, if not outright suspicion.

I have identified here several commonplace goals of education. These goals can be seen to be cutting across the different scales of our human experience, occurring simultaneously at the levels of the individual and personal on the one hand, and the collective and institutional on the other. Although micro-level aims of education, such as personal development and critical thinking, are often implied concurrently alongside macro-level ones, we may note in most instances of universal education around the world that they are often subsumed by the more macro-level, institutional concerns of political economy.

For example, since personal educational aims such as the cultivation of critical thinking skills is antagonistic to the institutional goal of producing a compliant workforce, the former aim tends to be of a lower-level institutional priority than the latter, often to the point of its disappearance. It is typically felt, particularly by society’s ruling elites, that the aims of personal development

¹² Cited in Roger T. Ames. “Confucianism Deweyan and Pragmatism: A Dialogue”, Tang Chun-I Visiting

Professor Lecture, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 10 January 2020.

should be subordinated to what they consider “societal progress.” This is arguably because insofar as the ruling establishment is concerned, the more person-oriented educational goal of critical thinking has the potential to engender social outcomes with “dangerous” political consequences for them.

This discussion suggests that opinion about the aims of education would invariably differ, subjected to the interests of class, politics, and economics that stratify our individual and collective existence. Additionally, the emphasis given to each of the educational goals mentioned above would vary depending on whether the entity concerned is providing an education or receiving it. Again, such a divergence of aims stems from the different motivations of the various interest groups concerned. Hence, even though personal development would usually be an implied—if not explicit—goal of institutional educational providers, the latter tend to consider it an individual attribute which ought to be subordinated to society’s imperatives.

Indeed, because the idea and practice of universal, compulsory education is associated historically with the modern age and the corresponding rise of the nation-state, most programs of universal education (i.e. compulsory schooling) have been skewed towards the aspirations of national development, most primary of which entails the accomplishment of economic development. Such an economic orientation has given schooling—typically equated with education—a functionalist character, resulting in today’s predominant conception and practice of it as vocational training.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that students and parents alike should conceive of a good education in similarly functionalist terms. A good education is simply one that bolsters an individual’s chances for economic success. Operating in such a commercially-and-capitalist driven cultural environment, educational institutions too have had to catch on. They have themselves evolved into business-like enterprises, if only to survive in an increasingly competitive marketplace.¹³

We lack adequate space here to deal with the predicament of contemporary sport. Suffice it to say, the commercialization of sport that has accompanied its professionalization has accelerated in our age of digital media, resulting in sports markets that are global in scope and character today.¹⁴ As with education, sports have become big business. Accordingly, sporting success is today more than ever being measured in terms of elite professional performance on the world-stage, with the latter success translating into unprecedented wealth for relevant stakeholders, including sports-event managers, officials, athletes, coaches etc. Owing to the professional and commercial developments of sport and their subsequent dissemination through global media, the expectations of elite-performance and commercially-driven sport have been normalized. Professional sport has furnished the preponderant popular cultural understanding not only of how, but why, sport is played. While this mediated, commercially-driven understanding of sport has led to the exponential growth of sports markets, it has also limited – if not, skewed – the imagination concerning the aims and nature of sport.

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¹³ Slaughter and Rhoades, *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy*.

¹⁴ See S. Janaka Biyanwila, *Sports and The Global South*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) and also, David M.

Carter, *Money Games: Profiting from the Convergence of Sports and Entertainment*, (Stanford: Stanford Business Books, 2011).

It is not uncommon to find, for example, that beyond the intermediate-level, young athletes (and their parents) who continue in a sport tend to measure their success in terms of competition performance, a standard duly set by elite-level, professional sports. In line with this, the typical goal of sports training is limited to accomplishing superior athletic performance and to attaining sporting victory. Of course, this singular goal is internally consistent with the aims of modern sport, to the neglect of much else, including its educative and pro-social attributes. But this is perhaps unsurprising given the monopoly that elite professional and commerce-driven conceptions of sport exercise over the public imagination.

The global conundrum that sport encounters is thus analogous to that which education finds itself. Whether in the sports-field or in the classroom, the unrelenting pursuit of so-called superior—competition-based—performance has basically occurred to the exclusion of all other considerations. This has resulted in an asocial outcome that is highly exclusive. Hence, whether in the pursuit of academics or athletics, the “winners” are feted while “losers” take the hindmost. Meanwhile, economic markets govern educational and sporting activities in line with such an exclusionary, competitive logic in order to apportion their concomitant economic spoils to their respective stakeholders.

Because such market-oriented mechanisms dominate in the organization of education and sport, holistic education and convivial play can only be a wishful afterthought, to the detriment of whole-person development. This predicament seems to resonate with Dewey’s observation that, “In many cases—too many cases—the

activity of the immature human being is simply played upon to secure habits which are useful. He is trained like an animal rather than educated like a human being.”¹⁵

Functionalist Education and Civilizational Crises

While a functionalist and utilitarian conception of education might suffice for the reproduction of the prevailing socio-economic and political system, its limitations have become apparent, as noted above.

This is especially the case in the present, when an enduring crisis of the capitalist economy has spawned severe structural unemployment and economic inequality, in turn, precipitating a widespread dissolution of community and society, particularly in the West.¹⁶ In the meantime, as these social rifts have been deepening, an apparently irreversible, planetary-scale ecological crisis has been unfolding. Significantly, this ecological crisis has called into question the sustainability not only of modern capitalist civilization, but of planetary life itself, with the imminent climate changes projected to make earth uninhabitable.¹⁷

In other words, as neo-liberal economic globalization has proceeded apace over roughly the past forty years, allowing profit-seeking and cost-sensitive corporate employers to relocate around the world at whim, the world’s labouring populations, not generally endowed with either the same privilege or facility of physical mobility, have had to bear the costs of diminished wages, tenuous employment, and job insecurity.

¹⁵ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 14.

¹⁶ Mishra, *Age of Anger*.

¹⁷ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Global Warming of 1.5 degree C*. See also Bill McKibben, *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?*, (New York:

Henry Hold and Company: 2019) and Peter Wadhams, *A Farenell to Ice: A Report from the Arctic*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2017).

It is also by virtue of such institutionalized, pro-corporate global economic arrangements that increasing segments of the population in the so-called developed, post-industrial economies of the West have been rendered superfluous by the economic system, a predicament that has been exacerbated following the 2007/08 financial crisis.¹⁸

Indeed, the “financialization” of the economic system appears to be the fundamental cause for the shrinking “real” economy, leading increasing numbers to eke out an existence under systemic conditions of chronic unemployment, under-employment, and under-remuneration, of which debt – in both personal and public domains – has become the consequence. Hudson has described this finance-instigated outcome to be characterized by asset-price inflation followed by debt-deflation. In other words, rising asset prices benefitting a creditor class which, in turn, translates into the heavier debt-burdens of a debtor-class.¹⁹ As more of the latter’s income is used for debt-servicing, less is available for spending on goods and services, leading to a contraction of the real economy. Austerity is necessarily imposed as more of an economy’s income is used to pay down debt. It is owing to these financial dynamics that we see income and wealth disparities reach their crisis proportions today.

While a stagnant global macroeconomy presents a social crisis at the macro-level and a personal crisis at the micro-level, particularly when populations are almost exclusively dependent upon its vigour for a means of livelihood, there are more daunting challenges yet. Unlike the economy, which is a social institution that can

theoretically be made and unmade with the requisite collective will, the ecological laws that govern our natural planetary systems are immutable, and we ignore them only at our peril.

Little wonder that we now face the prospect of irreversible and abrupt climate change threatening to end not only modern capitalist civilization, but human life on Earth, with the sixth mass extinction already underway.²⁰ So drastic is our ecological predicament that even the United Nation’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has recently had to sound the alarm, conceding that we only have about a decade—until 2030—to rein in atmospheric greenhouse-gas levels to restrict projected global warming within the manageable bounds of an average 1.5 degree Celsius global temperature increase.²¹

The 1.5 degree Celsius threshold is critical since the failure to keep global warming increases within such a threshold will lead to cascading effects that will likely spell the end of planet earth as our habitat.²² Despite such a dire prognosis and the obvious emergency it signals, there seems to be consensus among economic and political elites that the business of capitalism-as-usual can and will continue.

And while political paralysis festers at an institutional level and ecological disaster looms, this all seems to be reflected in and reproduced by trends in contemporary education and sport, especially in the manner that sporting and educational processes each serve to inculcate the ethos of competitive individualism so necessary for the perpetuation of capitalism.²³

¹⁸ Mishra, *Age of Anger*.

¹⁹ Michael Hudson, *Killing the Host: How Financial Parasites and Debt Bondage Destroy the Global Economy*, (Petrolia: Counterpunch Books, 2015).

²⁰ Gerardo Ceballos, Paul R Ehrlich, Anthony D Barnosky, Andres Garcia, Robert M Pringle and Todd M. Palmer, “Accelerated modern human-induced species

losses: Entering the sixth mass extinction,” *Science Advances*, Vol.1, No. 5, (2015).

²¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Global Warming of 1.5 degree C*.

²² McKibben, *Falter*.

²³ Slaughter and Rhoades, *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy*.

Additionally, with each of these pursuits insulated from the larger societal context, the consequence is a certain institutionalized ignorance, apathy, and incapacity that prevails across global society. Hence, we appear either collectively unable to recognize the seriousness of the crises that beset us, or if such recognition does exist, are apathetic or unable to make the necessary adjustments to stop our acceleration towards the precipice.

in our inability to resolve them. The preponderant education system's failure to equip us with either the means to prevent or resolve contemporary crises is but surely an indictment of modern education. At the least, it can be said that functionalist education deprives us of the capacity for critical self-reflection and understanding, making it a challenge for us to recognize problems and to identify their causes, much less prefer viable solutions.

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It would be fair to say that the current crises of socio-economy and ecology, and more, our apparent helplessness in resolving them, is an indictment of our preponderant mode of education. This is a mode of education that is firmly grounded on functionalist and utilitarian principles.

Indeed, the flourishing global educational industry would suggest that while our capacity to generate knowledge is seemingly prolific and without bounds, wisdom remains in thoroughly short supply. Our formal educational systems appear to have ceased being educative as a result of their functionalist nature. This is not entirely surprising. As Dewey has observed, social arrangements that are vitally social are educative until they become “cast in a mold and run in a routine way.”²⁴

Moreover, our dominant education systems are revealed to be inadequate not only in the ability of the abovesaid crises to manifest, but also

A more holistic education would prepare the student for the vicissitudes of life which, invariably, is an emergent process fraught with unknowns, ambiguities, and uncertainties. The idea that education should entail an emphasis on a preparation for life is underscored by Whitehead, who notes: “There is only one subject-matter for education, and that is Life in all its manifestations.”²⁵ This broad conception of education is affirmed by Dewey, who considers as its remit the whole range of human experience, including “customs, institutions, beliefs, victories and defeats, recreations and occupations.”²⁶ Dewey believes that a holistic, life-centred education should facilitate the perpetuation and revitalization of these experiences, noting that “education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity or life.”²⁷ In other words, education is—and ought to be—intimately connected to life-processes, suggesting an unceasing and open-ended socio-cultural evolution.

²⁴ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*: 6.

²⁵ Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*: 6.

²⁶ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*: 2.

²⁷ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*: 2.

That an intimate connection should exist between education and life, especially, shared life, is echoed by Illich, who submits that education should “heighten the opportunity ... to transform each moment of living into one of learning, sharing and caring.”²⁸ This last point about the desirability of an education which highlights our co-operative, co-respective, co-existent and, hence, convivial possibilities is noteworthy. Illich seems, in fact, to suggest that it is these moments of shared and intersubjective experience that make life meaningful.

Of course, the Confucian tradition is nothing if not about cultivating virtuous relations. Hence, we witness within it an emphasis on the inextricability of education to human life, and of the latter to vital relationality. As Ames argues, “One becomes human by cultivating those thick relations that constitute one’s initial condition, and that locates the trajectory of one’s life force within family, community, and cosmos.”²⁹

This emphasis on shared experience as found in the Confucian teachings as well as by Whitehead, Dewey, and Illich, stands in contrast to preponderant functionalist and economic orientations of education which, regrettably, provoke our antagonistic, competitive, and individualistic instincts.

So how do we educate for personal development beyond the functionalist and economism of the market? How do we cultivate the propensities—dispositions—for more autonomous ways of being? How do we equip ourselves to grapple with the increasing uncertainties of life, which require discipline, determination, resilience, patience, awareness as well as analytical and problem-solving abilities? And how do we do all of this without losing our taste for

cooperative behaviours that take joy in “caring and sharing”? This, I believe, is where physical-sports training has an important role to play.

Physical Training for Personal, Social, and Ethical Development: Ethnographic Observations from the Tennis Court

I have offered above that physical-sports training consists of an important opportunity for the cultivation or embodiment of important life-skills and ethical qualities. The emphasis on the corporeal draws from the recognition that our existence as persons are, in the first instance, expressed in and through our physical bodies. As Scheper-Hughes and Lock have observed, “The individual body should be seen as the most immediate, the proximate terrain where social truths and social contradictions are played out, as well as a locus of personal and social resistance, creativity, and struggle.”³⁰

Such an emphasis on the body also resonates with the Confucian (or *ruxue* 儒学) position of “embodying our experience” (*ti* 体).³¹ The importance that *ruxue* places on the body (*ti* 体)—as a being-and-becoming-in-the-world—is based on the holistic cosmological understanding that the person, in her psycho-social-physiological entirety, transforms the world in her experience of it. Indeed, this emphasis on the body and embodiment can be observed as being characteristic of the classical Chinese canon. The Expansive Learning (*daxue* 大学), for example, exhorts “personal cultivation”—or *xiushen* (修身)

²⁸ Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Education, 1971).

²⁹ Roger T. Ames. *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary*. (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2011): 87.

³⁰ Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret M. Lock. “The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology.” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, Vol 1, No.1, (1987), 6-41.

³¹ Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*: 21.

—as the means to becoming consummately human. The term for personal cultivation, *xiushen* (修身), of course, directly implicates the body, for it literally translates as “cultivating body.”

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Moreover, perhaps going beyond the Western conception of the body as an individual or individualized physical entity in time, Ames argues, *a la* the classical Chinese tradition, that the body should be thought of as the provenance of culture and as a conduit for its intergenerational transmission. Hence, *ti* (体) and *shen* (身), two different Chinese terms for “body”, aptly signify it in its different moments: as embodied (in its *ti* 体 understanding) in the world on the one hand, and in its lived-form (in its *shen* 身 understanding) on the other. The Chinese appreciation of “body” in its different moments suggests an ever-unfolding process of emergence: that in our embodiment in the world through our living in it, we are making and re-making civilization at the same time we are perpetuating it.

This brings up the intimate connection not only between life-process and education; it also illuminates how our bodies intrude into the interplay between them: in particular, how we as embodied entities in the world serve as vehicles of cultural transmission through time.

Having established the importance of the body and physical training for holistic education, I move now to more practical matters. This section is primarily ethnographic and draws from

my experience on the tennis court over the past year, teaching general physical skills – involving primarily strength, co-ordination, balance, proprioception - and tennis-specific, hand-eye and racket-ball skills to primary school-aged children. The observations I have made below in a coaching capacity have also been complemented by my previous experience as an entry-level professional tennis player. They highlight aspects of the physical-sports training experience that are educational, edifying at the levels of personal and social-community existence.

As the educational opportunities of physical training are too plentiful to be itemized in this paper, my observations and analyses are confined only to the early phase of the training I experienced with children-beginners. That said, I believe that my analyses could disclose the more generic developmental and educational potential of all physical-sports training regiments.

I am presenting my observations in the sequence that the typical physical-training session on the tennis court proceeded. This sequence of activities can be broadly described to involve the following: warm-up exercises, hand-eye-foot co-ordination exercises, and mini-tennis.

In physical-training, exercises can be classified according to whether they are performed individually or in groups (of two or more). In keeping with such configurations, the ensuing benefits also accrue accordingly, with individual exercises yielding a sense of personal reflexive self-awareness and group exercises cultivating self-other, pro-social benefits. That is, regardless of whether these exercises are accomplished individually or in a group, I submit that they are educative in different ways and at different levels. Allow me to illustrate.

1) Warm-up Exercises

Training routinely begins with participants performing a set of warm-up exercises between the

baseline and net on the tennis court. The exercises include jogging, side-steps, carioca-steps, knee-lifts, a variety of arm swings (swinging arms across the body, forward loops, backward loops, up past the ears) a variety of lunges, duck-walks in the forward direction and then backwards, hopping on one leg and then the other, animal crawls, etcetera.

2) Hand-Eye-Foot Coordination Exercises

Warm-up exercises may be followed by a series of hand-eye-and-foot coordination exercises deploying the hands and feet. These exercises involve participants working in groups of two, who alternate between tossing and catching (or kicking) the ball. Hence, one tosses the ball while the other catches it. This toss-and-catch exercise should be followed by a toss-and-kick exercise following an identical pattern. In both catching and kicking variants of the exercise, participants should use both sides of the body (i.e., using the left hand and foot to catch and kick respectively, and doing the same on the right side).

It should be evident that these exercises involve parts of the body and movements that are not usually deployed in everyday activities. They afford us the opportunity to work both left and right sides of the body, improve proprioception, and develop greater somatic awareness.

Analysis of Warm-up Exercises: Self-Awareness

Since the body is “in” the mind and not as the Cartesians postulated, separated from it, these physical exercises inevitably also develop the

mind, conditioning it to react and respond to sudden changes in one’s balance and spatial location.³²

In my observation, students’ routine performance of such physical exercises instils bodily and mental discipline. It also allows students to develop a general awareness of sequence and process, especially when observing their progress accomplishing various athletic skills, beginning with the less difficult, then moving to the more complex. This progression is consistent with the process of developing expertise, and in participating in it, students are given the personalized—and embodied—experience of becoming skilled. Students should here be made aware of their learning, skill-acquisition and development of expertise and recognize it as a gradual, step-by-step process.

The basic routine of (mostly individual) warm-up exercises takes around ten minutes, but the inclusion of hand-eye-and-foot co-ordination (mainly group) exercises means that these two rudimentary segments of physical-sports training can take up a significant portion of the session. The entire physical-sport training session may be dedicated to these basic exercises, particularly in the case of beginner athletes and young children, since they develop all-round skills that would constitute the generic and foundational athletic base from which more complex and specialized skills can be learned.

3) Advanced Hand-Eye Exercises

Typically, when the warm-up and hand-eye-foot coordination routine has been completed, the session proceeds towards more tennis-specific skill exercises and games. For beginners, the progression should be towards more hand-eye

³² See Mark Johnson, *The Body In the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), and also

Daniel H. Lende and Greg Downey, *The Encultured Brain: An Introduction to Neuroanthropology*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

coordination exercises involving the hand and ball. The most basic exercises here, also to be performed individually, would involve bouncing the ball. This can first be done upward, with an open palm, then by turning the palm over, downward, against the ground. The aim is to bounce the ball as many times as possible, with the demonstrable ability to consistently bounce it roughly ten times in a row as a sign of the young student's competence.

At this point, the student might repeat the exercise of bouncing the ball, but now using a racket instead of her palm. Again, these exercises should be attempted using both right and left hands.

Analysis of Advanced Hand-Eye Exercises

The attempt at ambidexterity—and holistic development—is made not only for more symmetrical and balanced physical development, it is also to allow the non-dominant side of the body to experience the movements undertaken by the dominant side of the body. The experience is aesthetic: it is corporeal as well as mental. Moving and using the body in a way that is unfamiliar opens one up to the strange and uncertain, which, as noted above, are important aspects of an education for life.

The promise of learning through analogy and metaphor is foregrounded here: our constant exposure to uncertainty in our rituals of play, over prolonged periods, is believed to better prepare us for the realities of quotidian life. In other words, rehearsing our responses to uncertainty in the safe space of play instills a mental and physical fitness to deal with it at times of existential crises.

The site for physical training thus fittingly becomes a site of life-training, and the “game”

becomes a metaphor for life. The education that transpires via physical training thus occurs through metaphor and analogy as our physical-sport training experiences are invoked to structure our experiences in another domain, in this case, life itself.³³ The general human capacity to deploy imagination for analogical learning means that all forms of physical training, even of the most general kind, are replete with educational potential.

Returning to our racket-ball exercise, it may be generally noted that the ability to bounce the ball more than ten times consecutively suggests that the player has attained considerable racket control and acquired the necessary hand-eye coordination to proceed to the next stage, the game of “mini-tennis.”

4) Mini-Tennis Exercise

Mini-tennis is a group exercise, and one of greater technical and physical complexity than the activities described up until this point. It involves the student engaging in a rally with a partner on the opposite side of the net, akin to playing tennis but on a miniature scale.

The game is described as “mini-tennis” because it is confined to a reduced area of the court, the service area, which is the space between the net and the service-line. Specifically, the game involves players on one side of the net attempting to control the ball with their rackets to their partners on the other side, all the time keeping it within the improvised boundaries of the court.

To begin the exercise, the two players are positioned close to each other on opposite sides of the net. The emphasis in the game here resides in controlling the ball, with each player's objective being to sustain a rally of as many shots as possible. The parameters for this exercise, such

³³ Johnson, *The Body In the Mind*: xiv-xv.

as the distance between players, should remain variable to suit different levels of competence.

Hence, beginning with players positioned close to each other across the net, they can progressively move further away from each other and towards the service-line when they have acquired the requisite control. I typically request that students accomplish a rally totalling 20 shots from up-close before they move further apart. The goal is to gradually move towards the service-line, and if consistency and control can still be maintained, eventually to the baseline.

Analysis of Mini-Tennis: Shared Intentionality and Co-operation

The variety of skills—mental, physical, and technical—simultaneously called upon to accomplish something as basic a game as mini-tennis should be evident. At the mental level, the players' desired aim of controlling the ball back and forth across a short distance implies the need for the qualities of anticipation, attentiveness, and concentration.

In the process of playing the game, one is also afforded many opportunities for learning, not least, from one another's errors. The capacity for remedial action invokes the skills of observation, self-awareness, reflexiveness, and analysis. Hence, whenever the circumstances are fitting, the instructor should be explicit that the ultimate object of the game is to develop such aesthetic qualities of self-and-other awareness. When the development of somatic consciousness becomes the aim, it becomes clear that mini-tennis—or tennis, for that matter—no longer remains merely a game or sport; it becomes an educational occasion whose object is nothing less than the formation of an aesthetic and ethical subjectivity, one intended as a preparation for life.

At the physical and technical level, the student is required to watch the ball, move to it, and

prepare to contact it with her racket. Naturally, the student has to wield the racket with sufficient dexterity in order to return the ball. In the meantime, players need to become aware of the ball's flight through the air and its movement after it bounces, which is variable and constantly varying along the parameters of speed, height, spin, and placement.

The player is required to conscientiously adjust his or her position in relation to the ball, invoking not only the attributes of anticipation as well as mental and physical control, but also problem-solving and decision-making skills in a timely fashion. Moreover, whenever an error has been committed, signified by the failure to control or return the ball, the instructor should encourage players to understand the cause of error, and to seek to correct for it. Such practice over time is expected to enhance the players' analytical, reflexive, and adaptive abilities, not only with respect to the actions and strategies of oneself but to those of one's partner as well.

It pays to highlight to students that success in this game of mini-tennis is achieved collectively, in cooperation, rather than being conceived of strictly and parochially in terms of individualistic, dog-eat-dog, competition. Even if an element of competition were introduced into the game—for instance, by bidding players to attempt to outlast the opposition in rallies—this should be conceived more in terms of a personal challenge, involving each player's commitment to the effort of sending the ball over the net one more time. Here the focus should be on achieving excellence in accomplishing such a task, which involves multiple skills simultaneously: mental, physical, and motor-control.

This objective requires that players give their undivided attention to the task immediately on hand—keeping their focus on the ball in play, a task offering them the opportunity to discover the value of commitment as well as deep, meditative concentration. Although players stand to

reap most if they are to discover the value of these qualities for themselves, it would be appropriate for instructors to explicitly mention their importance, since the instructor's reminders in this regard would facilitate players' attentiveness to the correlation between their mental states and their athletic performance, thereby engendering greater self-awareness and learning.

As for the explicitly cooperative and collaborative aspects of mini-tennis, I have mentioned that it is a game premised on ball control, where one player strives to return the ball to the other with the aim of sustaining the rally. This is a collective outcome. Although one player invariably prevails in the rally vis-à-vis the other, such an outcome does not detract from the fact that the joy and pleasure derived from the exercise resides in both players' being able to keep the ball in play. This involves continued cooperation between the players and originates from the innate human capacity for shared intentionality to begin with. As Tomasello has observed, "In shared cooperative activities, we have a joint goal that creates an interdependence among us – indeed, creates an 'us'."³⁴

The game is therefore, in the first instance, made possible by the players' inadvertent collaboration. Pointing this out allows players to recognize what they can accomplish when cooperating for common purpose.

The game also offers the opportunity for players to learn to accept and grapple with what would be the different game-styles or styles-of-play of others. In sum, there is during this social occasion of play the opportunity to observe, appreciate, accept, and live with the differences of

others, which are inherent in the diversity that makes us human.

It is again commended that the instructor makes explicit these cooperative and win-win attributes of the mini-tennis game. This is in case players, who have been inured to the values of capitalism, conceive of it as another competitive exercise. Herein lies the educational mission of physical training: it is to underscore that education and learning occur in the process of play with others. Moreover, it is also to afford en-

lightened instructors (teachers) an opportunity to remind their students that the highly individualistic and competitive obsessions of modern

sport are but one way of structuring play, one that militates against the cooperation, caring, and sharing required for cultural edification.

The purpose of the game of mini-tennis being outlined here serves as a contrast to the aims of modern sport; its goal is to transform the moment of play into a social and educational occasion. As prescribed here, the game of mini-tennis seems to be in line with Illich's view of education as "one of learning and sharing."³⁵

Although our games of mini-tennis feature only minimal and very basic instructional content with regards to tennis technique, this tends not to be the case in the context of a typical tennis lesson. It is after all reasonable to expect that students expect substantive instructional content when taking tennis lessons. That said, I have noted that when training veers towards technical performance, the original aim of using physical-sports training to cultivate life-skills usually becomes subsumed by performance concerns. Because this focus on technical excellence is a characteristic concern of modern sport, I believe it

The site for physical training thus fittingly becomes a site of life-training, and the "game" becomes a metaphor for life.

³⁴ Michael Tomasello, *Why We Cooperate*, (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2009): 41.

³⁵ Illich, *Deschooling Society*:7.

important to underscore the distinction that separates the notion of sport from more generic physical training.

Whereas (modern) sport is weighted with an emphasis on the outcome of a competitive process, it is an activity that I am here deploying for the purposes of education. Admittedly, my own tendency to get carried away with technical performance bespeaks my own social conditioning as a former elite athlete. That said, de-emphasizing this exclusively performance-centred orientation of sport is one of the explicit aims of this project, and it is for that reason that the game of tennis is here incidental and deployed as a means of education. The object, to be sure, is to deploy physical training for holistic personal development—physical, mental, ethical, and aesthetic—rather than athletic competence, even if the latter would be a logical outcome of the exercises prescribed here.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to make the case for deploying physical training for education, with the latter being conceived here as constituting holistic personal development instead of the grade-advancement associated with schooling.

Common understandings of education are often synonymous with schooling, which I have diagnosed as being typically functionalist in its intent and insular in its means. As an important symbol of education, schooling is a modern institution typically concerned with producing subjectivities amenable to the economic-growth imperatives of the capitalist world system. This paper has called into question the efficacy of such a model of education, especially in our times of political-economic, social, and ecological crises.

I have in fact argued that the ongoing three-fold crises of political economy, society, and ecology-nature testify to the abject failure of our

preponderant functionalist model of education. Functionalist education comes up short not only in terms of its enduring failure to equip their recipients with the economic wherewithal to take care of themselves and the environment that constitutes their habitat, they have also failed in intellectual and ethical terms.

Because a functionalist education instils neither an intellectual nor aesthetic appreciation of who we are as a species, or how we might thrive relationally with human and non-human others, we are seemingly unable to grasp the scale and urgency of our current predicament, let alone find a way out of it.

Having provided an account of the present state of planetary (dis)order and the role that functionalist education has played in abetting it, this paper has made the case for the educational promise of physical training. This was done by deploying physical training specifically and explicitly for the purpose of education. By recognizing, contra the Cartesian worldview, that the body and mind are not separate but symbiotic, the conception of education conceived here is holistic by re-emphasizing the paramount importance of personal development in the educational enterprise.

Such a conception of education restores the body to the mind and vice versa, thereby affirming the notion of somaesthetics. By commending physical training as an educational activity, I draw attention to the symbiosis between body and mind that are concurrently being vitalized in the physical-sports training process.

Drawing from my past physical-sports training experiences as well as my research instructing young children on a tennis court more recently, I submit that a physical training regime can facilitate personal development, especially when pursued with self-conscious educational intent. Aside from the obvious development of physical and technical skills, I have observed the vast potential for the following qualities—

dispositions—to be cultivated in the process: proprioception (i.e. greater awareness of one's body in space); bodily and mental discipline; general appreciation for sequence and process as well as understanding of cause and effect; aesthetic sensibilities; greater tolerance for difference and diversity; anticipation, attentiveness, and alertness; problem-solving and decision-making skills; and, finally, a sense of commitment, responsibility, and enhanced social and co-operative abilities.

It is important to note that because these intangible, subjective, and cultural dispositions are cultivated in the bodily process of physical training, they signify a form of embodiment quite unlike more rationalist modes of learning that occur in typical classroom settings. Indeed, it seems reasonable to expect the dispositions cultivated to be enduring in virtue of their being corporeal.

Moreover, because the learning that takes place via physical training is bodily, gradually becoming embodied, it is constitutive of students' subjectivities in their human becoming. That is, learning that is embodied literally *makes* the person. In this important sense, physical training is integral to the constitution of the human subject, a subject whose agency is given by the ability “to choose” cultural ways of becoming as opposed to being restricted by the subsistence constraints of pure biology.

To be sure, the dispositions being cultivated are believed to be culturally and ethically edifying, consistent with education as understood in the holistic sense of personal development. Because the student-athlete tends to develop these qualities gradually and often unconsciously (or sub-consciously), it is worthwhile for the instructor to help bring to the student's consciousness what could otherwise be obscured from him or her. After all, the educational experience of physical training is most likely enhanced when students realize that the training of which they

partake constitutes an opportunity for personal and social growth. That is, the educational moment is redeemed when the instructor draws a connection between the experiences that arise during physical training with the circumstances that constantly emerge in life.

Here, learning occurs through analogy. When such an analogy is made explicit by the instructor, the conditions are set for the student-athlete to potentially see physical training in a different light: not only as a means of conditioning the body, mind, and soul, but, practically, also as an opportunity to develop and sharpen one's abilities in responding to life's vicissitudes. This is training and a rehearsal in the quintessential sense, for it is simulation that is repeatable under the controlled and controllable conditions of play.

I hope to have made the case for the importance of physical training for a holistic, aesthetic education, the sort which prepares one for modern life and its multiplying and confounding challenges. The virtue of physical training lies in its development of physical, mental, and aesthetic attributes as embodiments, which implicates personal cultivation, literally, as bodily cultivation (*xiushen* 修身).

Finally, it would seem that the task ahead for such a project is practical: as I have done with tennis, it rests with studying carefully the many different physical training disciplines to document just how each can contribute to the education of persons in the holistic sense invoked throughout this paper.

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