

‘Professional’ Handball Education and Practice in Ethiopia : Review of Related Literature

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Abstract

Despite the assumption that students are being prepared as ‘professionals’, little debate has been undertaken concerning the composition of ‘professional’ handball education in Ethiopia. This paper comments upon this absence of serious debate and seeks first of all, to review accepted perspectives of professions and professionals, and secondly, to consider the changes that may need to be applied in the contemporary setting, and finally, to reflect upon the implications of this definition for handball education in Ethiopia . The paper concludes that a definition which encompasses occupation, competency and behavior also reveals several weaknesses in the conventional Ethiopian curriculum, including limited common standards and an almost complete absence of ethical codes.

Keywords: *profession, professional, handball, Ethiopia*

1.Introduction

Different societies react to the capitalist imperatives of competition and material growth in varying ways. Industrial, western nations have responded to these pressures by institutionalizing and bureaucratizing their business practices, and creating a mass of management theories, administrative principles, and education programs. At the heart of this system of handball and education is a compulsive need to do things better and smarter; that is, to become more ‘professional’. However, exactly what ‘professionalism’ comprises as an outcome of the education process has not commonly been addressed, and when it has, it has usually been concerned with broad assumptions and sociological interpretations. In the world of handball education, the notion of developing ‘professional’ practitioners is a central assumption made by educators and students alike. However, while the handball industry is slowly relinquishing its demand for practitioners who excelled as players, substituted for ‘professionally’ trained managers, we in Ethiopia have seldom discussed the meanings behind our assumptions. This commentary, therefore, seeks to refine the assumptions underpinning this notion and highlight the implications for our education programs as a consequence of an improved awareness of the meaning behind the term ‘professional’. This commentary has also been encouraged by the paper authored by Warrior (2002) appearing in this journal, which considered the nature of higher education as a profession, and the relative position of sport. This paper concluded

that measuring standards of professionalism are contentious and, but also that quality and professionalism go hand in hand. We concur, and would seek to add to this important debate by considering the Ethiopian perspective, culminating in some suggestions about how notions of professionalism translate to operational content in a handball education program. In today's world of entrepreneurial and flexible business enterprises, professionalism is regarded as a prerequisite for success. Traditionally, professionalism has been associated with belonging to a profession, and therefore being a 'professional'. The early literature on professionalism refers to those who belong to a group that possess specific knowledge gained from education and training, provide an essential service that impacts on the community, and demonstrate a code of conduct that is enforced by a governing body (Larson, 1977). While elements of this definition remain, the contemporary sociological understanding of a professional has widened to encompass a larger, more diverse occupational span. The idea of professional handball has evolved into a methodology for competition and business success, and a set of assumptions about the content of education. For at least a decade and a half, the term 'professional' has also been used to describe expert competence (Mautz, 1988). Thus, professionalism refers to not only the sociological interpretation of an occupation (which emphasizes education, service and ethical standards), but also to the best, smartest, most efficient and effective handball education practices that can be employed in any given situation. By extension, the contemporary colloquial usage of the term implies that those educated to become professionals are the recipients of training that covers appropriate behaviour, as well as how to deliver quality services. As (Warrior 2002) points out, professionalism is inextricably linked to quality, which in turn, is about the values that are intrinsic to the profession itself. As a consequence, the proliferation of literature in handball over the past decade suggests that the term applies to a way of doing competition and business, and that to describe a person or a practice as 'professional' is to pay them the highest compliment in terms of expertise and competence (Arkin, 1992; Auld, 1994; Box, 1993; Davis, 1994; Parkhouse, 1981; Reed and Anthony, 1992; Smith and Stewart, 1999; Thibault et al., 1990; Zanger and Parks, 1990; Zeigler, 1983). As such levels of expertise or quality are justified, at least in part, by an underpinning education, and most certainly by those performing the educational services, can we conclude that handball education is delivering the levels of education that the term professional implicates? In Ethiopia over recent years, professionalism has been increasingly associated with sporting organizations. Clubs and sporting organizations must perform well financially, or at the very least remain viable, if they want to survive in the highly competitive world of commercialized sport. With this increasing emphasis on commerce, co modification, sponsorship and entertainment, many sport scholars in Ethiopia concede that elite sport has developed into a business that demands nothing less than specific, professional preparation (Mills, 1994; Westerbeek et al., 1995; Westerbeek and Smith, 2003). Subsequently, a more systematic and serious approach to the management of sport has emerged, which has culminated in an inexorable slide toward the implementation of business practices in the management of sporting organizations, and has led many handball practitioners and

educators to talk about increasing the level of 'professionalism' amongst graduates by encouraging them, through their sequence of studies, to emulate competitive, commercial, profit-driven enterprises. In other words, the marketplace itself adds pressures to institutions to conform to commercial measures of professionalism, which emphasize minimalist inputs, rationalist decision-making and a keen awareness of the financial interests of shareholders (Shilbury and Deane, 2001). However, while educators use the term 'professional' to describe the training that students receive in order to prepare them for the competitive world of handball, neither the specific competencies, nor the appropriate behaviors associated with professionalism have been identified in Ethiopian handball programs, beyond the nebulous learning objectives that appear in curriculum manuals. The salient questions that remain are whether we need to more adequately define what would seem to be a core objective of our educational activities, and in the absence of a definition, whether we have any benchmarks from which to measure our success in this Endeavour? In essence, we can conflate our commentary to a single, double-barreled question: although we use the term commonly to describe the outcome of our handball education process, do we really know what 'professional' means, and would a more precise definition aid in refining our program content and delivery? The different interpretations of the term 'professional' contribute to the difficulty in answering these questions. We therefore continue our commentary by returning to the origins of the term professional, a notion that is embedded in sociological meaning.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To investigate the professional handball education and practice in Ethiopia .
2. To identify the handball program in Ethiopia .

REVIEW OF LITRATURE

This paper the literatures which describe the topic. what is professions, professionals and professionalism?, Handball Education in Ethiopia and professionals and Handball Education are reviewed.

Professions, professionals and professionalization

The earliest attempts to define and understand the notion of professionalism were undertaken by social scientists. Carr-Saunders (1966), for example, differentiated professional groups into categories, while Parsons (1938), developed the concept of the professions by claiming that the professional type is the institutional framework within which the majority of important social functions are undertaken. He observed, as had Carr-Saunders before him, that the upper levels of industrial society, businessmen, were forming professions. Parsons viewed businessmen and professionals as comparable in the sense that their emphasis is on the most efficient and effective method of practice, they are characterized by their specific work, they are each limited to their own specific field of expertise, and they make decisions based upon reason and rules. The basic parameters

governing what it means to be a professional, namely productivity, specialization and systematization, were provided early in the century, even though they applied almost exclusively to men. The ideology underpinning professionalism seems to have changed little along the way. Barber (1965), focused on knowledge and ethics, while Larson (1977) emphasized competence and knowledge in specific areas. Vollmer and Mills (1966) vaguely noted that being a professional was related to a certain attitude, and Kornhauser (1962), argued that professionalism is characterized by expertise, autonomy, commitment, and responsibility. In North America, Soucie (1994) observed that professionalism is concerned with a quest for recognition and status in what was the first publication discussing the emerging field of Handball from the perspective of becoming a profession. For Soucie, the development of educational programs was pivotal, and he would be forced to claim that Handball has achieved the status of a profession, given that the tens of university programs available in the United States and Canada have grown to hundreds in the decade since . While there seems to be common acceptance of the general nature of a profession, the views on the manner in which professions fit into the social order differ considerably. Durkheim (1957), for example, saw professions as the predominant vehicle for individual self-interest to be withheld in favor of the needs of the community and the society. Education therefore, would be focused on training individuals to sublimate their own importance and best interest in favor of the community. On the other hand, Parsons, (1938) believed that professionals are no more altruistic than businesspeople or any other profit-seeking workers. Mannheim, (1936) developed the thesis that cultural life within the boundaries of 'free-enterprise', industrial, capitalist nations was becoming less attached to class identification, and more associated with the bonds of common education and professionalism. This viewpoint stood in opposition to the doctrine of Marxism, which advocated that irrespective of autonomy or detachment from any pre-existing social group, all remain within the confines of a class society (Marx, 1969). Laffin (1986), while acknowledging the traditional sociological pursuit for a definition of professionalism, viewed the concept differently. He recognized that the typical definition has comprised a set of qualifying attributes. However, Laffin criticised this approach because it 'assumes a consensual and static view of society' (1986:216). Caro (1992), on the other hand, championed the qualifying attribute approach. He suggested that in order to be a professional, one must possess specific expertise, appropriate educational qualifications, and behave within a comprehensive code of conduct. Sullivan (1995) went one step further. He concluded that professionalism forms a pivotal connection between individual acquisition of competence and the exercising of that competence for the benefit of society. In other words, professionalism is the glue that binds individual opportunity and the wider needs of the community to form a mutual and productive interdependence. Like Freidson (1994), Sullivan wanted to highlight the positive attributes associated with belonging to a professional occupation. The weakness in these perspectives is their reliance on occupational measures of professionalism. Thus, if a professional is one who emerges from an educational program, then the role of the program is one more of accreditation than competency-based training. Taking a more rationalistic view, several

business management authors have attempted to translate the traditional notions of professionalism into a distilled behavioral model. Mautz (1988), for example, recognized that two definitions of professionalism exist. First, he used the term approvingly to those who perform special kinds of service, while in the second he applied the term also admiringly, to describe those with extraordinary skill and motivation irrespective of the nature of the activity. Mautz hypothesized that this second application of the term explains the origination of the phrase 'he's (or she's) a real pro!' Mautz highlighted this usage by describing its application to sport: Here the word 'professional' is used in the same sense it is used so often in the sports world to describe the skilled, highly motivated, show-them-no-mercy and expect-none contestant who sees his competitors not as colleagues sharing goals and philosophy but as antagonists to be defeated. To such 'professionals', stress and pain are part of the contest, tools of the trade. In the competitive world in which we live, that kind of professionalism is much admired and well rewarded. Indeed, the ultimate measure of that professionalism tends to be one of compensation. We do have all-star teams and other means of recognition, but we judge the success of most competitors in financial terms. The market is the ultimate test. (1988:88) Mautz is not alone in his rationalized view of modern management professionalism. Arkin (1992), Box (1993), Davis, (1994), Hazard (1993), Jackson (1992), Linder (1994), Patton (1994), Romano (1994) and Watson (1994), similarly observed that the term's contemporary application is succinctly captured by the view that the ultimate test for professionalism is the market. They point out that the idea of professionalism that focuses on expertise, growth, profitability and competition has supplanted the traditional concept of a profession as an occupation, which demanded intangible levels of skill, effort, responsibility, wisdom, and a concern for the public welfare. The process of education is actually one that conveys the knowledge needed to perform efficiently and effectively in the market, as well as confer a certain financial value upon the educated. Although troublesome to quantify, professionalism has also variously been defined to include attitudes that reflect a commitment to certain standards of performance and behavior (Griffin, 1993; Peterson and Nisenholz, 1987; Vacc and Loesch, 1987; VanZandt, 1990; Weiss, 1981). We can see that the contemporary understanding of professionalism has evolved chronologically from political and sociological commentaries to market and rationalist models. The sociological model of professionalism can be viewed as a reflection of cultural practices which value skill, knowledge and the rewards associated with possessing competence. When we talk knowingly about developing 'professionalism' in our students, this is part of what we really mean. But professionalism in a market oriented sense is an attempt to translate specific skills and knowledge into financial rewards for the employer of a professional, educated individual. The dominant themes running through these models of professionalism are money, status, power and privilege; four pivotal motivators for young people to seek university education in the first place.

Handball programs in Ethiopia

Handball tertiary education in Ethiopia is relatively young, the first dedicated degree program having been introduced in 1999 as the one course in the university. Presently, in a market comprising 27 public universities, the institutions offer three-year, full-time bachelor degrees in sport science, with as the elective handball coaching in the area offered by all universities under the umbrella of more generic sport science studies. Similarly, of the all sport science majors available, and all are within applied sport science degrees and two are within sport management degrees. Most of the institutions offering sport management degrees or majors in the context of applied science, also offer similar qualifications in sport management. A total of around 1,500 students are accepted into some form of sport science and sport management bachelor degree or major each year. This now exceeds exercise science (human movement and physical education) as the most populated sport-related topic studied in Ethiopia. In fact, demand for Handball programs continues to grow steadily while exercise science is diminishing in terms of student interest. The composition of handball education in Ethiopia is relevant to professionalism for several reasons. In the first instance, there is no consistent philosophical basis from which its study has been founded. In general, those programs created with market opportunity in mind have been placed within sport science degrees. In contrast are those that have 'evolved' or emerged as a consequence of interest shown in the area by sport science or sociology trained academics. These were included initially as majors in sport science degrees, and more recently have become full degrees in their own right, albeit remaining within the same departments and faculties. As a result, the philosophy governing the education of sport science students depends upon the orientation of the degree and its academics. Most view handball as the exploitation of an emerging business, some see handball as the proficient organization and augmentation of elite athletic performances, and a minority perceive handball to be a social service to bolster sporting participation. To add another dimension of complexity, there is also a cluster of programs sympathetic to the latter two orientations described above, which take a broader view and see sport as a prominent but relatively small part of other ball game. Professionalism can therefore be fixed within at least three different philosophical approaches. The fact remains, however, that the impact of these assumptions and perspectives on professionalism is uncertain. In addition to philosophical differences, a second issue that might affect perspectives of professionalism and the subsequent composition of handball education is related to marketplace opportunities. Jobs in handball have been increasing over the last decade, culminating in the 2000 Sydney Olympics, after which the level dropped temporarily and has subsequently recovered (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999). The majority of work in the handball of sport is in the facility and event sport sector, which operate with a business orientation rather than one of performance development (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003). A third issue is also related to job opportunities, but has had a demonstrable impact on some handball programs. Some programs have taken a strong vocational approach to handball education, de-emphasizing theoretical learning and moving towards practical tools and operational thinking. This trend, encouraged strongly by industry and manifested in both field placements and

revised content, encourages a definitively outcomes-oriented approach to education. Professional education is reflected in the ability of students to find work quickly and immediately be able to make practical contributions. In contrast, those programs that have held firm against the trend have taken a broader view of professionalism, where education is not merely a function of practical performance the moment a student graduates, but is seen as a more holistic set of experiences that benefit a student throughout their entire career. The result of this trend has been a diminution in the gap between the post-secondary Technical and Further Education (TAFE) handball programs, which take a competency-based approach to teaching and assessment, and the traditionally more theoretical tertiary or university programs. If indeed professionalism is now being driven primarily by industry with a competency attitude, is university handball education really necessary, and does it have a responsibility to provide a professional education that goes beyond the satisfaction of a set of competencies on a checklist?

Professionals and Handball Education

To summaries so far, consistent with the indicative definitions of professionalism provided by recent literature, professionalism is viewed by Ethiopia handball educators on a behavioral, as well as occupational basis. The traditional sociological understanding of professionalism has been augmented, and perhaps even supplanted, by a more outcome-oriented managerial view, emphasizing the competencies required for successful operational results. It seems that the contemporary use of the term professional is indicative of a transition in handball education toward the managerial, competency view, underpinned by the prevalence of sport science degrees. If we were to adopt a comprehensive definition of professional education in handball, it would lead us to assume that we mean for students to take possession of an occupation or career rather than merely a job, with all the status and privileges that accompany it. Furthermore, the contemporary definition of the term 'professional' would also imply that our graduates are adequately armed with practical competencies, and prepared to engage in the world of operational management with all the tools and techniques they need to survive. Finally, a full definition demands that we prescribe a code of behavior to guide the ethical discharge of graduates' work. The occupation, competency, behavior triumvirate contained in a comprehensive definition brings with it several implications for the content and delivery of handball programs in Ethiopia . First, there is no universally recognized professional association for handball practitioners, although several have tried and failed. While there is an academic association, it serves to bolster research rather than dictate educational content. While we may assume that our graduates are engaging in an occupation, they are subject to no registration or ongoing accreditation. In this sense, we have successfully emulated the business professional, but have unsuccessfully differentiated our sport management graduates from other business graduates or generated any level of universal benchmark beyond the satisfaction of university requirements. Unlike lawyers, health practitioners

and accountants, for example, handball practitioners are not standardized in a global way. Second, although we as educators seem to be clear as to the content of curricula responsible for preparing students with ‘professional’ competencies, we have rarely discussed these amongst ourselves. Instead, the ‘standard’ curriculum is determined within each university and only seems to drift toward commonality through the widespread acceptance of prominent texts and the ‘osmosis’ that occurs as a result of social meetings and research discussions at conferences. Finally, there are few guidelines for the ethical practice of handball, beyond those enforced by law. In fact, of the one largest handball programs in Ethiopia, none provide teaching of business ethics or specific ethical issues in sport. In an Ethiopian landscape full of performance enhancing drugs, ambush marketing and questionable behavior of petulant superstars, graduates are largely left to fend for themselves when it comes to deciding what comprises a ‘professional’ code of behavior. While avoiding any overzealous proclamations about radical change or the need to impose ethical standards, even a short contemplation of some of our core assumptions about the outcomes of our handball education might be worthwhile. The notion of professionalism lies at the heart of such a discussion, in our view. Even a cursory review of the term’s history and contemporary use reveals that it is multi-dimensional and, probably, more complex than our assumptions imply. In particular, given the precision with which we typically expect students to learn aspects of handball theory, we are obligated to define clearly what we intend to deliver as part of a ‘professional’ education.

Conclusion

Clearly, as educators, we cannot control the occupational status of the handball ‘profession’, but we do play an important role. Similarly, a ‘professional’ code of conduct is the responsibility of the industry at large, but we may need to reappraise the seriousness with which we perceive the study of ethics, given it has so far been relegated well behind more prominent disciplines such as football and other sports. Indeed, if we are serious about providing a ‘professional’ education, we must also take some accountability in standardization across different university curricula. As ‘professional’ handball educators, committed to the levels of quality Warrior (2002) argued are intrinsic to a profession, we should be aware of these issues, so that, at the very least, we can discuss our assumptions with colleagues in other disciplines as well as students. Moreover, while the pressures imposed by industry to churn out graduates ready to contribute to the bottom line of increasingly commercially-oriented (but often not-for-profit) sport enterprises, we note that such an approach moves us away from a more rounded definition of professional handball education. We therefore favor a position wherein handball educators are prepared to communicate with, and if necessary, persuade industry to consider the long term value of graduates who are ingrained with more than a commercial perspective of their profession.

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