



A Scorecard for the Health and Physical Education Profession

Jeff Emmel

National Executive Director

This article formed the substance of a presentation made to the SHAPE Conference at Flinders University recently. Jeffrey Emmel, National Executive Director of ACHPER, provides some interesting observations around the questions of how well we do as a profession and how well respected we are as professionals.

I have often asked myself - how strong, respected and influential is our profession when we have to stand up and be counted? However when I come to look at ways to assess the impact of what we achieve as professionals, I find it difficult to find a starting point. This sort of analysis requires more attention than I can give here so I have examined some of the popular views regarding professionalism and the attributes of a professional that certainly cause us to be introspective and more circumspect about the ways we behave and are perceived.

How do we describe our profession?

It is clearly difficult to define and describe a Health and Physical Education profession because firstly it represents a diverse set of learning disciplines. We stand astride health, sport and education (and the Arts) and are leaders in learning related to active and healthy living. We draw on our evidence base from physiology, exercise science, sociology and education and more increasingly from neuro-science. We have been influenced over the past decades by the philosophies of the National Fitness Councils, the 'Movement' movement, Daily Physical Education, Games Sense/TGFU, issues around sedentary behaviours, obesity epidemics, brain science, post-modernism and of course the politics of health, sport and education.

Stratton and Mitstifer (Leading Edge Mentoring) provide an excellent starting point by describing the characteristics of a profession. They make three key points:

- A value orientation to service for the welfare of society
- Abstract knowledge used 'adaptably' and skilfully in the area of service
- Autonomy in decision making leading to action relative to service

You can quickly see the common use of the term 'service' in each of these points and immediately you are drawn to the notion of professionalism or professional behaviour. It is the collective strength of these behaviours that comprise our professional strength and defines us as a profession. Being part of a professional association with visibility and presence and being prepared to contribute to this collective is a significant indicator of the health of our profession. What we do on a day-to-day basis in our workplace is also significant as is the way we treat colleagues and students in our care.

You can be highly professional, inconsistently professional and unprofessional. Just because you work in the HPE profession doesn't automatically qualify you as a professional, nor does membership of an association. You have to earn your stripes and be judged. It's a very personal as well as a public thing.

According to Stratton and Mitstifer, in order to be a true professional we need to

1. Demonstrate the three characteristics of a profession outlined above
2. Participate in a unified professional membership
3. Identify and eliminate anti-professional developments.

They go on to say, and I fully agree, that a professional will pay dues out of their own pocket to organisations for the privilege of being a practising professional. You couldn't frame it in better terms – the privilege of it all. I have experienced this privilege along with countless longstanding members of ACHPER over the years. They recognise that their professional association is the cooperative agency through which their profession is advanced and they can be part of it. Of course we have all witnessed incongruous behaviours, those who would claim to be professionals but demonstrate little respect for students or colleagues, but that is the stuff for another day.

With all this in mind I tried to come up with the list of attributes that I believe best describes a good professional.

- A thinker and scholar
- Committed to personal growth
- Appreciates personal responsibility – a good shepherd mentality
- Enthuses others
- A propensity to share
- A leader
- A mentor and supporter
- Demonstrates influence or contribution 'outside the job'.

When I compared them with other descriptions I wasn't far off the mark although the categories of professionalism I came across were quite specific and referred to attributes under ethical, altruistic, responsible, intellectual and committed.

Despite the hundreds of attributes you could use here are some of the best used to describe professional behaviour by the countless number of scholars, human resource experts and psychologists with interest in this area.

- Behaves unselfishly and spends time beyond the call of duty
- Devotes time and practice to the interests of others

- Interacts with colleagues to gain new perspectives
- Shows respect for others views
- Strives toward self improvement
- Contributes to the knowledge base
- Demonstrates appreciation for scholarship and research
- Demonstrates a positive attitude towards colleagues, students
- Belongs to and takes an active role in a professional organisations
- Identifies with the profession when it is praised and criticised
- Stands up for the profession's philosophy and practice in the workplace and to the public

The significance of these attributes certainly prompted me to do some self-rating and I can only recommend it as a good process to undertake. I have come to the conclusion that in the end the strength of our profession is measured by the level of introspection of each person who is a part of it. Yes, the performance of our professional association is of great importance too but the way individuals perceive themselves as professionals underpins all of this. The scorecard for our profession requires us all to put ourselves under the microscope.

Praise where due

In concrete terms I am prepared to stick my neck out and give some gold stars to the:

- academics who fight for the rightful place of teacher education in universities and seek to share their expertise
- teachers who fight for the student's curriculum entitlement in HPE
- professional associations that try to:
 - influence government thinking and policy
 - improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools
 - engage members in professional activities and issues

Formative roles

ACHPER has certainly played its part at a National and state and territory level. Over many years it has developed, managed, or contributed in partnership to the following initiatives.

- ACHPER National Health and Fitness Survey
- Daily Physical Education
- Jump Rope for Heart
- Senate Enquiries into Physical Education and Sport
- National Professional Development Program (NPDP)
- Better Health Outcomes for all Australians
- Crawford Report Future of Australian Sport
- National Junior Sport Policy Framework
- National Preventative Health Task Force
- National Childhood Obesity Task Force
- Various Obesity summits
- Government Guidelines for PA and Healthy Eating
- Role of ASC
- Drug Education Advisory Committee
- Rethinking Drinking Alcohol Education Kit

- Review of University Courses
- National Teaching and Leadership Standards
- Qatar Strategic Development and Curriculum development.
- PNG PE and Pikinini Sports Review
- Pre Election Preventative Health Policy Forum ALP
- ACARA / National Curriculum development
- Child Safety Guidelines in sport and physical activity
- On-going state and territory branch professional learning activities.

Making more of what we have

Despite this record no profession can sit on its hands and there are many challenges that require our attention. There is an ongoing need for broad and comprehensive advocacy and stewardship and we must continue to not just be part of National Curriculum development but to positively influence the nature of that development through our advocacy for a curriculum entitlement in HPE for all Australian students. ACHPER's National Curriculum Working Group will continue to lead the way.

Another challenge is to expand our evidence base by working closely with Universities. Our claims must be valid and like other education-based professions we can be criticised for taking liberties in our interpretations of research and evidence. We don't exist to resolve the obesity problem. We acknowledge this but we are broader than that and must not continue to use this as the *raison detre* for what we stand for or do.

Recently an ACHPER Review Committee discussed the notion of adopting a structure that would allow members to become 'Chartered and Certified', a concept adopted by other professions that could well be linked to the developing professional teaching standards being developed in Australia. We must also explore new ways to bring our people together in partnerships and of course persuade and enthuse students to become part of the profession.

It will be important to resist any further demeaning of HPE University pre-service courses and staff and ACHPER has already lent its support to a couple of universities in this regard. It will also continue to provide quality professional learning for members and colleagues with a view to meeting professional standards of teaching. Finally we must continue to provide considered advice to governments and communities

The price of ACHPER membership is very reasonable and of course tax deductible but the price we pay for lacking professionalism is much greater. As individuals and collectively we could be perceived as lacking cohesion and purpose and not perceived as formidable, influential or expert. Our advice may not be valued and sought after as it is now. This affects the quality of partnerships we can attract and sustain. The reasons for maintaining the health of our profession are compelling.

In summary

We have a wonderful profession and what we value and stand for counts but it continually needs explaining. This demands our constant attention and response as individuals and as a collective. There is both strength and a weakness in our diversity but our professional association is respected and sought after and even envied by others in some ways. Given all of this I urge you to take the self-rating exercise. Some of us are not visible enough and the time is here when we need every hand on deck.