

The Physical Education and Sport Curriculum in the 21st Century: Proposed Common Denominators

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Abstract

Looking to the 21st century, the investigator enlarges on a position developed more specifically over recent decade through historical and philosophical analysis: the belief that the profession of physical education and sport should strive for global consensus on the specific competencies every child needs in educational experience mandated by his/her respective country. The investigator builds further on Deweyan pragmatic tradition that (1) play, art, and work all relate to the young person's active occupation, and (2) that no significant difference should be made as to the educational significance of any of these aspects. He explains by example how this can be carried out within the physical education and sport curriculum. It is argued further that purposeful human movement in exercise, sport, dance, and play should be regarded as one of the 12 essential components of general education. Finally, this specific component of general education relating to this field should itself be broken down into eight areas of competency in which selected competencies should be achieved through theoretical and laboratory experiences resulting in measurable performance levels as part of elementary, middle, and secondary education. These eight "common denominators" are recommended for worldwide consideration by the profession of physical education and sport and those professions that are allied to it (e.g., health & safety education).

Looking to the 21st century, the time is ripe for the profession to seek global consensus as to the

developmental physical activity competencies every child and young person needs in his or her educational experience that is typically mandated by his/her respective country (Zeigler, 1982).

This developmental theory is based on Deweyan pragmatic tradition that (1) play, art, and work (as defined below) all relate to the active occupation of the young person, and that (2) no significant difference should be made as to the educational significance of any of these aspects. This tradition can be carried out within the physical education and sport curriculum through *purposeful human movement* in exercise, sport, dance, and play as one of the 12 essential components of general education. Further, the specific component of general education relating to this field as part of elementary-school, middle-school, and high-school education should itself be broken down into seven broad areas of competency. These areas should be further subdivided into selected specific competencies that should be achieved through theoretical and laboratory experiences resulting in measurable performance.

Despite the efforts of many, the situation in physical education and educational sport in educational institutions may well continue to deteriorate in the years immediately ahead. Education is literally reeling at present because of increases in certain negative social forces caused by a changing social environment. However, because of what is now known about the potential beneficial effects that properly conceived developmental physical activity in exercise, sport, and related expressive movement can have on

people of all ages and conditions, we should not—we *dare* not—as a profession become pessimistic.

We should have no doubts about the wisdom of striving to create a social situation in which the salutary effects of appropriate developmental physical activity will be introduced into people's lives. However, humankind's needs will be met IF—and ONLY IF—(1) public support for our efforts is earned, and (2) highly trained leadership is made available regularly to maintain such public support in the effort to bring about these desirable educational and developmental outcomes.

As professionals, we already have a good understanding of the effects of physical activity as demonstrated by the steadily expanding quantitative and qualitative type of investigation that has been carried out over the past 50 years. However, a full understanding of our endeavor as developmental physical activity professionals can only become possible through an ever-greater and stronger understanding of how the social sciences and the humanities can also influence our work as well. Obviously, the bio-science aspects of developmental physical activity are highly important, but people need to understand also that in the final analysis a more balanced, across-the-board approach to scholarly investigation is required to help us achieve the field's true potential in the service of humankind.

The concept of "growth and development" has been well understood and applied for decades in the field of physical education and sport. To meet this obligation the profession's basic responsibility is to do its best to provide every child and young person with competencies that will provide a firm foundation for joyful and healthful involvement in developmental physical activity throughout life. Reaching this goal may seem achievable eventually at first glance, and yet we all know that more careful analysis indicates that such achievement will undoubtedly be most complex.¹

Definition of Terms

The term "play" is currently used in so many different ways that careful qualification is required so as to make clear what meaning is intended when the word is used. In this paper both the underlying meaning of the concept of 'play,' as well as that of the concept of 'competency' will be considered. Also, it will be necessary to explain the concepts of "art" and "work." Finally, it will be shown how (what may be called) "play competency" fits into a pattern of general education undergirding what should be the lifestyle of most people in an ever-increasing complex world society.

Play

Although the word "play" has been defined in a great many ways, as it relates to physical education, sport, and recreation it has typically meant free movement, exercise, or action by way of recreation, amusement, or sport (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language, The*, 2nd Ed., 1987, pp. 1484-1485). This is how the term will be used here.

Art

The word "art" has many definitions, but will be defined here as "human skill as the result of knowledge or of practice" (*Oxford Universal Dictionary*, 1955, p. 102).

Work

The term "work" may be defined best for this analysis as "an action involving effort or exertion directed to a definite end" (*Oxford Universal Dictionary*, 1955, p. 1920).

1. The interested reader is urged to consider carefully (in the work cited in the references below) the chapter titled "Curriculum theory and program development." It was written by a leading curriculum theorist, Dr. Ann E. Jewett. The results of her investigation in this aspect of the field over a period of decades can be most helpful in promoting improved understanding of necessary theory that must undergird all effective curriculum practice.

Competency

Finally, a precise definition of the term “competency” has been provided by McCleary & McIntyre (1972) as “the presence of characteristics (or the absence of disabilities) which render a person fit, or qualified, to perform a specified task or to assume a define role; to be competent is to possess sufficient knowledge and ability to meet specified requirements in the sense of being able, adequate, suitable, capable” (p. 352).

A Play-Work Continuum Approach

Throughout history there has unfortunately been a strong tendency in everyday living to dichotomize the concepts of ‘play’ and ‘work.’ Even in the various dictionary definitions, including both synonyms and antonyms, they appeared then and now as a *discontinuum*. These two concepts may be placed on a *continuum* rather than a *discontinuum* as follows:

Frivolity—Play—Work—Drudgery

As Brubacher (1976), who argued for this approach in his writing, explained:

Work and play tend to overlap toward the middle of the continuum when work can be pleasant and play can be toilsome . . . similarly, at the drudgery end, it is all constraint, and at the frivolity end of the continuum the freedom becomes license.

John Dewey’s pragmatic position is in this same tradition. It entails work, play, and art (see Definition of Terms above) as the three important aspects of an individual’s occupation—with work being the most important. Keeping in mind, also, that the person becomes a robot when the vital connection between work and product is cut, Dewey argues that both play and art present opportunities for the “governance” of the person’s occupation in keeping with its planned outcome. He reasoned that “work finds its educational

significance in its humanization of man” (Brubacher, 1969).

Dewey believed further that a child’s active involvement in school should not be thought of as schoolwork that is tedious and laborious only. Following this line of thought, work, play, and art should all relate to the active occupation of the boy or girl—and, most importantly—there should be no sharp or significant difference as to the educational significance of any of these aspects. If work becomes too burdensome, efforts should be made to infuse it with the spirit of play and art to the extent possible. Art, for example, should be viewed as “work permeated with the play attitude” (Brubacher, 1969, p. 36).

Aspects of a Person’s “Active Occupation”

Building on the above ideas expressed by Dewey and Brubacher, a model (defined here as a recommended standard or example for imitation or comparison) was developed to explain the possible relationship between the young person’s involvement in work, play, and art as part of his or her active occupation. As described, the model is constructed as a series of continua with which that person may face when confronted with varying types of decisions to be made when presented with choices during his/her life.

Starting with Level I, the unified organism (young man or woman) is confronted within the educational system and in society at large with opportunities for five types of educational/recreational experiences as follows:

- (1) physical education-recreation interests
- (2) social education—recreation interests
- (3) “learning” education—recreation interests (including hobbies)
- (4) aesthetic and creative education—recreation interests
- (5) communicative education-recreation interests

ASPECTS OF A PERSON'S "ACTIVE OCCUPATION"

(1. PLAY -----2. ART -----3. WORK)*

FREEDOM-CONSTRAINT CONTINUUM FREEDOM-----LIMITED FREEDOM-----CONSTRAINT
 (No FREEDOM)

LEVEL IV

AMATEUR-PROFESSIONAL CONTINUUM AMATEUR-----SEMI-PRO-----PROFESSIONAL

LEVEL III

GOALS CONTINUUM SHORT RANGE-----MIDDLE RANGE-----LONG RANGE

LEVEL II

CATEGORIES OF INTEREST

LEVEL I

THE UNIFIED ORGANISM

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Physical Education-Recreation Interests 2. Social Education-Recreation Interests 3. "Learning" Education-Recreation Interests 4. Esthetic Education-Recreation Interests 5. Communicative Education-Recreation Interests |
|---|

- John Dewey Reasoned That "Work Finds it Educational Significance in its Humanization of Man." He Believed Further That a "Child's Active Occupation, in School Is Not Regarded as Tedious, Laborious Schoolwork." Work, Play, and Art All Relate to the "Active Occupation" of the Boy or Girl, and No Significant Difference Can Be Made as to the Educational Significance of Any of the Aspects. Art, for Example, Is "Work Performed with the Play Attitude."

TABLE 1

J.S. BRUBACHER, 1969

The young person undergoes typically a general education experience and a professional education experience within the formal education system in which there are both required and elective courses. These two types of experiences are supplemented and enhanced by a variety of recreational experiences where there is usually considerable freedom of choice unless parents superimpose their own requirements on the developing young person.

As a result of these basic educational-recreational experiences, the young person eventually makes decisions about which educational-recreational interests he or she wishes to pursue further (see Level II of Table I above). In other words, the person's educational-recreational interests will involve decisions at the goals-continuum level (II). These decisions involve whether to become involved on a short-range, middle-range, or long-range basis.

Such "decisional involvement" conceivably then causes the individual to move ahead to Level III that is designated as the amateur-professional continuum in one or more types of educational-recreational experiences at one of the amateur, semiprofessional, professional points on the continuum. For example, based on the model developed in Table 1, if a boy plays baseball after school, his goals would be short range at first and therefore conceived as play. If he continues with his interest in high school and university and were to receive an athletic scholarship to attend many colleges or universities in the United States, play might soon take on many of the aspects of what we now call "work." (Note: Athletic scholarships are offered for university students in only *several* countries in the world.)

Thus, as a result of the decision to accept remuneration in the form of an *athletic* scholarship, this young man or woman might then be considered a semipro with at least middle-range goals in the Level I Categories of Interest designation of "Physical Education-Recreation Interests." This would be logical because of (1) the time spent, (2) the level of performance

achieved, and (3) the fact that he or she was being supported monetarily throughout the higher-education experience for performing the sport skills mastered. The person's decision at Level I had been made to place emphasis on motor performance with the result that the individual eventually was subsequently placed also somewhere in the middle of the other continua (Level II, III, and IV).

Finally, then, there is a possibility, albeit a extremely slight one, that the young man would be drafted by the major leagues in baseball and actually be signed to a professional contract. If such were to be the case, the decision made at Level I to develop his motor performance skills in the sport of baseball would move this person to the far right of the continua at Levels II, III, and IV. In other words, baseball would become his long-range goal; he would become a professional baseball player; and there would have to be a large degree of constraint in regard to the amount of time he would necessarily spend on the sport to succeed as a major league player. A similar model could be developed for men and women involved in other professional sports.

Of course, the same situation would prevail for the remaining four (possible) aspects of a person's "active occupation" that might be chosen by a man or woman. If the individual were to select what might be called a "balanced experience," he or she would make a judicious selection from the *five* types of educational-recreational experiences available. Such selection would then logically result in similar, and *consistent* location on the three continua at Levels II, III, and IV. For example, this same young man described immediately above, might also be interested in postage stamp collection—a so-called *learning* recreation interest—at Level I, but then subsequently decided to make this a *short-range* goal at Level II (Goals Continuum). He would then probably remain as an *amateur* at Level III, and would have little constraint and considerable freedom at Level IV to exercise his interest in stamp collecting. All sorts of

combinations are possible, of course, depending upon the choices a person might make at the lower two levels. However, it is most important to be realistic in one's choices so that the possibility of self-actualization at the desired level remains open as long as possible.

General Education Competencies

With Dewey's thoughts in mind about on the variety of forms of "active occupation" that should be introduced as part of the child's general education, McDermott's inclusion (1973) of a paragraph from a selection about the role of the school curriculum taken from pp. 6-29 of Dewey's *The School and Society* (1899) is highly pertinent to the question of general-education competency:

We are apt to look at the school from an individualistic standpoint, as something between teacher and pupil, or between teacher and parent. That which interests us most is naturally the progress made by the individual child of our acquaintance, his normal physical development, his ability to read, write, and figure, his growth in the knowledge of geography and history, improvement in manners, habits of promptness, order, and industry—it is from such standards as these that we judge the work of the school and rightly so. Yet the range of outlook needs to be enlarged. What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy (p. 455).

Dewey's discussion of both the individual and social aspects of a child's early education coincides with the underlying function or purpose of general education delineated by Snyder & Scott (1954) in mid-twentieth century. They recommended that general education should

prepare the student "to participate as an enlightened person and cultured citizen in a democracy" (p. 120). Under the general-education heading, they listed 11 "life competencies" or skills as "problems to be met" (another aspect of Dewey's approach to education) by the student. For example, one of these life competencies was listed as "to maintain a satisfactory social and emotional adjustment," and the specific experiences that should be provided to "meet this problem" are recommended (see pp. 123-124).

If play, art, and work all related to the active occupation of the developing person, general education competencies should result from a "balanced" experience in which the young person does indeed make a judicious, even-handed selection from among the five types of educational-recreational experiences that can be made available. In this way it should be possible theoretically for the student to achieve the recommended life competencies of a general educational-recreational nature.

The problem that arises at this point is that somehow those in control of public education have not felt it necessary to prove to young people—and to taxpayers!—that general-education experiences in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences would actually bring about a *quid-pro-quo* result. Thus, there has been an ever-increasing demand for more technical and/or professional courses that will prepare students for employment. And now that the public educational system is under more attack and scrutiny than normal, the general-education experience has been watered down inordinately.

The response to this "downgrading" would seem to require spelling out exactly how the results of general education can indeed provide the individual with a premium in subsequent life enrichment. It may seem crass to the educational elitists to have to prove that general education can improve a person's life both intrinsically and extrinsically, but isn't that omission precisely what is lacking in our overall educational curriculum?

If educators and the public at large will accept the premise, then, that all those years spent in earning passing grades in academic courses should actually bring about measurable achievement in what we are calling "life competencies," is not the logical next step to delineate these competencies or skills precisely? In this article it is not possible to tackle this entire general-education problem in this way. The analysis will therefore be delimited to those "play competencies" within general education that a student should attain during his or her years as a student in the schools and universities.

To improve the listing of play competencies in keeping with the goal being recommended here, the following *problem to be met* is offered as #4; "to appreciate the potential of, and to develop to the extent possible and desirable, one's kinesthetic awareness through participation in purposeful human movement in sport, dance, play, and exercise" (see Table 2)

Competency in Human Motor Performance

The mere statement of the "problem to be met" by the student as "the development of kinesthetic awareness" is important, of course, but it is not sufficient either for those who should understand more precisely what this should mean within the general-education experience, or for those who will be teaching such "purposeful movement in sport, exercise, and expressive movement." On the assumption, then, that there needs to be a number of "selected competencies" to meet this "problem," the following seven quite specific competencies are recommended:

1. To develop competency in planning and executing a personal fitness program involving endurance, flexibility, strength, and bodily poise. (Note: This should also involve special physical education for the possible correction of remediable defects, and desirably an adapted exercise and sport program for those with permanent handicaps.)

2. To develop competency in the fundamental human movement skills, including the development of kinesthetic awareness through rhythmic and other expressive activities.

3. To develop competency in swimming and aquatic activities, including the capability to save oneself and possibly someone else in an emergency.

4. To develop competency in self-defense, including the capability to protect oneself and others in an emergency.

5. To develop competency in a competitive team sport.

6. To develop competency in carry-over sport activity, including the learning of indoor and outdoor leisure skills for the promotion of fitness and enjoyment.

7. To develop competency in the implementation of the health-knowledge aspects of sport, exercise, and expressive movement.

Once again, the mere listing of these seven selected competencies is not sufficient. It is additionally highly desirable that the physical education and sport teacher have a progression to follow in the implementation of a competency-based program (see Table 3). Such progression offered by Snyder and Scott (1971) moves from the listing of the (1) *function* of an area of general education being considered, to (2) the *problem to be met*, to (3) *selected competencies needed* to resolve the problem, to (4) the *subsequent selected experiences*, and to (5) the *resource areas* that can be called upon to use and/or supplement the teaching/learning situation (pp. 120-130). Of course, this same progression can be called upon for the achievement of any of the other competencies (e.g., to develop competency in the fundamentals of human movement or to develop competency in self defense.

A Plan for the Achievement of Play Competencies

Even if it would become possible to gain universal agreement on the most desirable aspects

AREA OF GENERAL EDUCATION

FUNCTION: TO PARTICIPATE AS AN ENLIGHTENED PERSON AND CULTURED CITIZEN IN A DEMOCRACY

PROBLEMS TO BE MET BY STUDENT


- 
1. TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL LIFE OF HIS/HER COMMUNITY, STATE OR PROVINCE, NATION, AND WORLD
 2. TO CONDUCT HIS/HER PERSONAL AND CIVIC LIFE CONSISTENTLY WITH ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND DEMOCRATIC IDEALS
 3. TO MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY HEALTH
 4. TO APPRECIATE THE POTENTIAL OF, AND TO DEVELOP TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE AND DESIRABLE, ONE'S KINESTHETIC AWARENESS THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN PURPOSEFUL HUMAN MOVEMENT IN SPORT, DANCE, PLAY, AND EXERCISE
 5. TO BE SKILLED IN THE ART OF COMMUNICATION
 6. TO MAINTAIN A SATISFACTORY SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL ADJUSTMENT
 7. TO DEAL INTELLIGENTLY WITH THE PHYSICAL WORLD, TO APPRECIATE THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD, AND TO APPLY THE PHYSICAL SCIENCES TO EVERYDAY LIVING
 8. TO PARTICIPATE IN VARIOUS FORMS OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION, AND TO UNDERSTAND AND ENJOY ART, MUSIC, LITERATURE, AND OTHER AESTHETIC EXPERIENCES
 9. TO USE CRITICAL AND CONSTRUCTIVE THINKING AND REASONING IN MEETING LIFE SITUATIONS
 10. TO DETERMINE A LIFESTYLE THAT TYPICALLY WOULD INCLUDE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FAMILY, BUT WHICH ALSO IS A PERSONAL MATTER TO BE DETERMINED BY THE PERSON CONCERNED
 11. TO MEET PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITIES IN AN INTERDEPENDENT WORLD AND TO FOSTER WORLD PEACE
 12. TO CHOOSE A VOCATION THAT WILL BE SOCIALLY USEFUL, INTERESTING, SATISFYING, AND WHICH WILL UTILIZE PERSONAL ABILITIES.

TABLE 2

(Adapted from R. A. Snyder and H. A. Scott, Professional Preparation in Health, Physical Education, and Recreation. Westport, Ct: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1971, pp. 120-129)

AREA OF GENERAL EDUCATION

FUNCTION: TO PARTICIPATE AS AN ENLIGHTENED PERSON AND CULTURED PERSON IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY



PROBLEM (TO BE MET BY STUDENT



TO APPRECIATE THE POTENTIAL OF, AND TO DEVELOP TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE AND DESIRABLE, ONE'S KINESTHETIC AWARENESS THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN PURPOSEFUL HUMAN MOVEMENT IN SPORT, DANCE, EXERCISE, AND PLAY

SELECTED COMPETENCIES NEEDED TO MEET THE PROBLEM



FOR EXAMPLE,

TO DEVELOP COMPETENCY IN PLANNING AND EXECUTING A PERSONAL PHYSICAL FITNESS PROGRAM INVOLVING ENDURANCE FLEXIBILITY, STRENGTH, & BODILY POISE

SELECTED EXPERIENCES TO DEVELOP THE COMPETENCIES



FOR EXAMPLE,

BASED ON AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF DEVELOPING ENDURANCE, FLEXIBILITY, STRENGTH, & BODILY POISE, THE STUDENT IS GUIDED PROGRESSIVELY THROUGH SELECTED EXPERIENCES TO HELP HIM OR HER ATTAIN A MINIMUM COMPETENCY IN EACH OF THE FOUR CATEGORIES OF PHYSICAL FITNESS



RESOURCE AREAS

FOR EXAMPLE,



AUDIO-VISUAL AIDS

GYMNASIUM & POOL EXPERIENCES

EXERCISE EQUIPMENT DEMONSTRATIONS AND EXPERIENCES



TRAINING METHOD EXPERIENCES INDOORS AND OUTDOORS

OTHERS

of a person's active occupation (Table 1), on the inclusion of purposeful human movement in sport, exercise, and expressive movement as a basic component of general education (Table 2), and on the progression to be followed to bring about competency realization (Table 3), this would obviously not be sufficient to bring about full realization of these play competencies and skills. An overall plan of attack would be required to guarantee such accomplishment.

Thus, if the basic assumptions offered here were to be considered acceptable (Tables 1, 2, and 3), it would then be necessary to determine what performance levels would be required or acceptable at which of the educational levels (i.e., elementary school, middle school, secondary school, and higher education). It would also be necessary to specify the actual program content and the instructional methods, the latter involving a problem-solving strategy leading to the achievement of desired performance levels (i.e., the organization of the specific steps and recommended progression to be followed in the learning experience). Further, those concerned need to evaluate the actual attainment of specified competencies. Finally, the entire process should be evaluated periodically to insure its efficacy (McCleary & McIntyre, 1972, pp. 53-59).

The Possible Relationship Between Consensus and Progress

It would be ideal to be able to state that the achievement of these play competencies had been accomplished by every child and young person. Even their achievement by a steadily increasing percentage of students would represent true progress. Certainly such an accomplishment would be more than mere progression in curriculum theory and practice. To ascertain if such change may be called progress, there must be measurement annually to verify that advancement had been made from one level to a

higher one. It should not be too difficult to develop criteria by which progress in the achievement of the seven specific competencies can be measured and evaluated. However, whether such achievement would be viewed in the long run as basic to the highest general education goals is still a debatable question. Of course, this would not be the case for the large majority of professionals working in physical education and sport.

One great problem still faced by the profession lies in the determination of consensus among the conflicting philosophical stances or positions extant today (see Zeigler, 1989, Appendix A, pp. 387-400). Of course, informal educational goals and teaching methods, first, and then formal ones have been a source of conflict since the dawn of humankind. Unfortunately, however, the field of physical education and sport has been proceeding "amoeba-like" for far too long considering the body of knowledge about the benefits of developmental physical activity that has been amassing steadily in the last half of the twentieth century (Zeigler, ed. & au., 1994, pp. iii-viii).

Proposed Common Denominators

In conclusion, in this paper some eight "common denominators" are recommended for worldwide consideration by the profession of physical education and sport and those professions that are allied to it (e.g., health & safety education) as follows:

1. That *Regular Physical Education and Sport Periods Should Be Required for All Young People Through (Approximately) 16 Years of Age (Grade 10).*
2. That *Human Movement Fundamental Through Dance and Other Expressive Activities Are Basic During the Required Period of Education.*
3. That *Physical Vigor and Endurance Are Important for All Ages, and That the School*

Should Develop Progressive Standards from Prevailing Norms.

4. That Inherited and Acquired Physical Defects Should Be Corrected as Possible at All School Levels Through *Exercise Therapy* Based on Medical Counsel. Where Advisable, Adapted Physical Recreational Experiences Should Be Available.

5. That All Children and Young People Should Be Taught to Develop a *Positive Attitude Toward His/her Own Health* and Toward *Community Hygiene* in General.

6. That All Children and Young People Be Helped to Understand That Exercise, Sport, Dance, and Play Should Be Employed Regularly Throughout Life as an Integral Part of the *Worthy Use of Leisure*.

7. That Boys and Girls (And Young Men and Women) Should Have a *Sound Experience in Competitive Sport* During Their Educational Development.

8. That Character & Personality Development Is Vitally Important to the Overall Development of the Young Person, and That Therefore it Is Especially Important That *All Developmental Physical Activity in Exercise, Play, Dance, and Sport at the Various Levels Should Be Guided by Men and Women with High Professional Standards and Ethics* (Adapted from Zeigler, 1989, pp. 185-186).

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