

Aaron Molineaux Hewlett



A Conversation with Aaron Molyneaux Hewlett and his Friends

Heaven's Gym #1 is located just inside the pearly gates. Ropes, ladders, trapezes, and other apparatus unfamiliar to new arrivals hang from the ceiling and walls. Most new arrivals prefer to train further out in modern gyms that look more like our own here on earth. Old-timers like Aaron Molyneaux Hewlett train at HG #1. He and his friends are generally uninterested in our terrestrial follies, but patience and civility are still the general standard in Heaven. If we listen, they will speak.

THOMAS: Excuse me sir, I'm looking for A. Molyneaux Hewlett.

HENDERSON: So you are. And what do you know of him?

THOMAS: He directed the first gymnasium at Harvard College during the mid and late-1800s. Are you Edwin Bancroft Henderson?

HENDERSON: Yes I am. Folks rarely ask about Professor Hewlett and me any more; especially you white guys. Who are you, and what do you know of me?

THOMAS: I'm a physical educator, and I think you and some other forgotten pioneers in my profession have much to teach us earthlings about physical education and life in general. I know you were born in our nation's capitol on November 24, 1883. You were the product of many peoples, but the white community considered you colored. How would you describe your ancestry?

HENDERSON: One of my great-grandfathers was an American Indian. My father's father was Portuguese, and my mother's father was a highly respected white citizen in Williamsburg, Virginia. Her mother was that gentleman's slave. Which race do you suggest that I subscribe to?



Young man Hendsen

THOMAS: I think you represent the best of all races. What was it like growing up in the Capitol around 100 years ago?

HENDERSON: I went to school at the foot of the Capitol grounds and often visited the Library of Congress and the Congress. I spent my childhood reading the works of great authors and poets. Inside the halls of Congress, I learned that some politicians did not think much of colored folks. Two senators in particular often referred to "damned niggers" in speeches on the floor. Another once shot at a colored man who would not move to the rear of a streetcar.

THOMAS: How did you become interested in physical education?



Henderson and family

HENDERSON: I graduated from the colored M Street High School in 1902 and then finished first in my class at Minor Normal School which later became Minor Teachers College. The only physical culture teachers during my first high school years were women. One was Miss Anita Turner. She was a graduate of Dr. Dudley Sargent's School of Physical Training at Harvard and the first certified black female physical educator in America. She convinced me to attend the Sargent Summer School. I enrolled in the summer of 1904, and got a job waiting tables at Dr. Sargent's boarding house, where I came to know him well. Sargent and his instructors introduced me to calisthenics, dumbbell drills, wand exercises, club swinging, medicine balls, and a variety of gymnastics skills he learned from his relentless study of the numerous physical training systems that were competing for supremacy at the time. We also studied the rudiments of athletic games that eventually dominated physical education after the "Battle of the Systems."

THOMAS: What was the Battle of the Systems?

HENDERSON: Here comes my teacher, Dr. Sargent. Sir, would you explain to this rookie what the Battle of the Systems was about.

SARGENT: It was a philosophical war, Son. When your nation's physical education profession was born in the 1860s, it emphasized education *of* the physical. In other word, the purpose of physical training was to create strong, supple and disciplined citizens who could move well. By the early 1920s, sports and games took over, and physical education became much less than it could have been.

THOMAS: What's wrong with sports and games?

SARGENT: They are only a piece of the physical culture formula.

THOMAS: What exactly is physical culture?

SARGENT: Physical comes from the Greek *physikos*. It means natural. Culture is from the Latin *cultus*. It refers to divine worship. In other words, *cultus* is the search for and celebration of the divine unknown, and *physikos* refers to the laws that govern the body's mortal journey through life. Don't you people study the linguistic roots of your profession any more?

THOMAS: No sir.

HENDERSON: Too bad. If you don't consider the linguistic, historical and sociocultural roots of your profession, how do you expect to form a rational purpose, paradigm and vision?

THOMAS: Then what is physical education?

SARGENT: Education comes from the Latin *educere*. It means, "to lead out." Life is all about time, space, change, and movement. In other words, it's all about behavior. Learning is an enduring change in behavior, or in the capacity to behave in a given fashion, which results from practice or other forms of experience. Curriculum comes from the Latin *currere*. It means to run a course or a race. It's all very physical.



Dr. Dudley Sargent

THOMAS: How does physical education relate to the general concept of education?

HENDERSON: Education has three overlapping domains. In other words, we educate a child in mind, body and emotions. These are called the cognitive, motor and affective domains. Failing to properly educate them in one impacts on the other two.

THOMAS: American children are growing fat, deformed and clumsy.

HENDERSON: Dr. Sargent and others warned it would happen, but, by the time I was out teaching in the early 1900s, the public wanted only sports and games.

THOMAS: What else is there?

SARGENT: Professor Hewlett is here now. He's my senior. Ask him. He was the first director of the Harvard College Gymnasium built in 1859. He taught there until his death in 1871. He was a mulatto of very fine physique and estimable character, and he is still a very good gymnast and remarkably good boxing instructor.

THOMAS: Why do Americans move so poorly?

HEWLETT: Physical education can be divided into three content areas. Restorative arts bring the body toward its optimal state of harmony and compensate for the stresses of daily life. Martial arts teach appropriate responses to external aggression. Sports, games, theoretical bodies of knowledge and dance make up the pedagogical category. I left earth in 1871. Henderson and Sargent tell me the bottom fell out by around 1920, and America discarded two-thirds of the physical education formula.

THOMAS: I have a photo of you taken in the late-1860s. Some exercise equipment and a pair of boxing gloves surround you. What are you trying to tell us?

HEWLETT: The clubs, medicine ball, dumbbells, and wand are the four horsemen of hand-held exercise tools. The clubs benefit the shoulder girdle and supporting muscles. Mine were heavy, but you should begin with only one or two pound clubs. When you hold the little ball in your hand, you have added one more joint to the series that begins with the shoulder. By swinging the clubs in a rational manner, you awaken full and graceful range of motion in each joint.

THOMAS: Do you mean the shoulder, elbow and wrist?

HEWLETT: Even the fingers are mobilized with some movements.

THOMAS: How many different movement patterns are there?

HEWLETT: I only knew a few hundred. Others knew more.

THOMAS: Would you describe it as circular weight training?

HEWLETT: Yes. The centrifugal force of the clubs draws the arms away from the centerline of the body while the rational motions awaken the joints and teach the arms how to move freely. Strength, speed, agility, and precision are byproducts of club swinging.

Medicine balls strengthen the body's core and develop the capacity to move with explosive power. Dumbbells facilitate muscular endurance, and the wand is used for flexibility training. The boxing gloves are handy against earthlings who find their way here and bother me with too many obvious questions.

These items used on the ground prepare the human body for three-dimensional motion in space. By hanging from your limbs and mobilizing three dimensionally in space, the body can become functional, balanced, poised, and beautiful.

THOMAS: We don't do that at all.

HEWLETT: Tough luck.

THOMAS: Mr. Henderson, how did you become the first black male physical educator in the Washington schools?

HENDERSON: During my last high school year a white ex-wrestler was appointed to teach the boys at the M Street School, and later a track coach teaching white boys at the Central High School was appointed to teach colored boys one day each week. Upon returning from Harvard, I took the examination for physical training, passed and took the place of the last white teacher in Washington's Negro schools. I taught in the elementary schools three days a week and two days at the high school where I also coached the athletic teams. From 1904 I taught in and became head of the Negro Schools. I later directed physical education, safety and athletics for the public schools of Washington, D.C. I retired in 1954.

THOMAS: I have read that America employed restorative and martial training during World War II.

HENDERSON: Talk to Dr. Charles H. McCloy about that. Here he comes. Dr. Sargent trained him too. McCloy and a handful of other geniuses led the way in military physical training during World War II.

THOMAS: I understand you were one of the few physical educators calling for an emphasis on rational physical training between the late 1920s and WWII.

McCLOY: I would have spoken sooner, but I went to China in 1913 and didn't get back until 1926. When I returned, physical education was a mess. The gyms had become empty boxes. Basketball ruled. Tennis, bowling, golf, and other lopsided sports were also popular. Most Americans had poor posture, and far too many were unprepared or unfit for military service. It broke my heart to see so many fine young men going off to World War II physically deficient. The nation struggled to get fit. After the War, we drifted back to a physical mediocrity that favored sports and games. The Korean War caught us off guard again. Who are you anyway, and how do you know of me?

THOMAS: I began studying physical education at a community college in 1963 and later moved to a

teachers college for around a year. Then I left school and volunteered for the draft. I went to the Infantry in 1967. Two years later I came back and enrolled at The University of Iowa. I stayed for around ten years, and completed a BS and MA in physical education. I eventually completed an Ed.S. and Ed.D. from Northern Illinois University.



Dr. Charles H. McCloy

McCLOY: So you know I chaired the Department of Physical Education at The University of Iowa for many years?

THOMAS: Yes sir. You died in 1959. When I arrived ten years later, your name rarely came up. The Physical Education Department discarded several boxes full of your books and papers. I took them home and have been studying the history of physical culture ever since.

McCLOY: So then, you might know what we do here in HG #1.

THOMAS: I know enough to realize that I know very little. If you and your friends will help me, I'll pass your wisdom on to folks on earth who know even less than I about the motor domain and its role in cultural evolution, devolution and revolution.

McCLOY: I doubt that your corrupted democracy can survive even if your nation found the courage to change immediately.

THOMAS: How must we change?

McCLOY: Democracy is not necessarily kind to all its citizens, such as those who will not work and other social parasites. Among the standards of democracy perhaps you should include the survival of the fit. This does not necessarily mean fit from the standpoint of fitness to make the greatest contribution, but fit in so far as the individual is socially minded and willing to do his or her best. The softheaded dysgenic policies, so frequently found among sentimentalists in The United States, that preserve for the socially unfit full liberty to propagate their kind are not necessity corollaries of democracy as such. The level of democracy is dependent upon the general level of the people. Genetically deficient children will never understand or learn the principles advanced physical culture.

THOMAS: That very issue is being discussed now here on Earth. It seems that marginally intelligent people in the USA are making more babies than smart people. You have been dead since 1959. How do you know it is happening?

McCLOY: It had already started when I was alive. I warned about it then.

THOMAS: But the motor domain is one-third of education. Through it we can improve mental and emotional intelligence. Learning is basically a change in behavior, and even the dumbest people can be trained to behave better. If you and your friends can teach those of us on Earth how to employ physical education to our advantage, nurture can surely correct at least some of the damage that poorly managed nature has brought us.

HEWLETT: It's worth a try. I hope you can. If you didn't notice, pearls are missing from the Pearly Gates, and we're seeing more and more litter on our Streets of Gold. It's the new arrivals. You mortals spend a lifetime trashing your Mother Earth and then come here thinking you can do the same. You had better change your ways or get ready for severe punishment. Your Heavenly Father is already unhappy about the way you treat your Mother. He is also disappointed that you abuse your Holy Temple. Now you are trashing Heaven, and that might push Him over the edge.

THOMAS: It is true. Up to two-thirds of all our plant species on Earth will be extinct in the next fifty years if we continue to destroy the Planet. Frogs all over the nation are being born deformed. Scientists say it is a warning to us humans. It does seem as though we are killing our Mother Earth who gives us our life. It is also true that many of those who call themselves religious feel no responsibility to protect our Mother Earth or to keep themselves fit.

HEWLETT: Thomas my friend, the great philosopher Herbert Spencer, recently said to me concerning you earthlings, and I agree, that you earth people do not realize the truth that as, in that life of yours, the physical underlies the mental, the mental must not be developed at the expense of the physical. Perhaps nothing will so much hasten the time when your body and mind will both be adequately cared for, as a diffusion of the belief that the preservation of health is a duty. Few of you seem conscious that there is such a thing as physical morality. Men's habitual words and acts imply the idea that they are at liberty to treat their bodies as they please. Disorders entailed by disobedience to Nature's dictates, they regard simply as grievances: not as the effects of a conduct more or less flagitious. Though the evil consequences inflicted on their dependents, and on your future generations, are often as great as those caused by crime; yet you do not think yourselves in any degree criminal.

THOMAS: Physical culture is really very important, isn't it? How did humanity get so lost, and how can we make ourselves wise before it is too late?

HEWLETT: Social conditions influence the development of physical education, but it is also true that physical education likewise has the power to change social conditions. You will first need a sound paradigmatic foundation.

THOMAS: A what?

HEWLETT: A paradigm is a pattern that allows us to understand the nature of complex interactions. The human body is a temporary vehicle through which mystical Unity and its subordinate stages are experienced, and all that is taught about the body's role in this hierarchical process of mind-body evolution might be called physical education. As children grow and develop, they tend to mirror the actions of those around them. They are molded and shaped by Earth's natural and cultural forces such as furniture, clothing, gravity, and the movement of those after which they fashion their own motor patterns. Physical education is the systematic training that provides the cultural guidelines for adult motor habits, and schools are the center of that education. Paradigms can be hard to see until the dominant assumptions are challenged. Paradigm shifts occur very gradually as advocates of the old view die off.

THOMAS: Will you show me the physical education paradigm?

HEWLETT: What are physical education's three content areas?

THOMAS: You mentioned earlier that they are restorative, martial and pedagogical.

HEWLETT: That's correct. Equal emphasis must be given all three, and this content must be aimed toward the interpersonal and transpersonal dimensions. This balance and buoyancy allows physical education to play a key role in situating physical culture upon leisure. *Skole* is the foundation, and it must be solid and

symmetrical in order to allow physical education and physical culture to maintain a relatively effortless balance.

THOMAS: I don't know what any of that means.

HEWLETT: Let's back up and take a closer look at the three content areas. Restorative arts bring the body toward its optimal state of harmony and compensate for the stress of daily life. Martial arts teach appropriate offensive and defensive responses to external aggression. The pedagogical content area includes sports, games, theoretical bodies of knowledge, and dance.

Physical education can also be divided into three areas of function. Humans are unique to all other living creatures on earth because they have the capacity to immerse themselves in the needs of groups and ideals larger than themselves. At the personal level you focus on your individual health, comfort, and physical gratification. Here the self is felt to exist at the borders of your skin and the limits of your personal desire. Personal motivations can easily be reduced to self-indulgence, but they can also serve to stimulate healthy life habits.

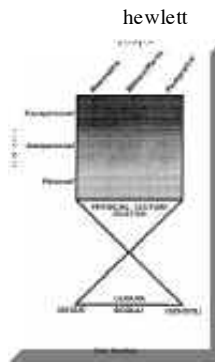
At the interpersonal level, your attention turns to the needs of others. It may be confined to family, neighborhood, gender, race, and so forth. Higher development brings awareness that it is the duty of all able citizens to be physically and mentally prepared to defend the highest ideals of their nation and to contribute productively to its future. Further growth will lead to the realization that national borders are superficial boundaries within an interdependent family of living organisms who share the earth.

Transpersonal awareness is better understood once you come over here to the other side with us. Cultures vary greatly in the development and understanding of obvious and subtle physical techniques that contribute to the spiritual quest. Transcendence brings the uninterrupted, moment-to-moment realization that all things are divinely One. In other words, Man is a rational creature, the Lord of all creatures, and a creature which is the image and the joy of its Creator. Unfortunately, if you don't learn most of what you need to know before you cash in your body, you will not do very well once you get here.

We have a yogi up here named Sri Aurobindo who used to tell people on earth that the perfection of the body, as great a perfection as we can bring about by the means at our disposal, must be the ultimate aim of physical culture. Perfection is the true aim of all culture; the spiritual and psychic, the mental, the vital and it must be the aim of our physical culture also. If our seeking is for a total perfection of the being, the physical part of it cannot be left aside; for the body is the material basis; the body is the instrument which we have to use. I think he nailed it, don't you?

THOMAS: Yes sir. So then, physical education has three content areas and three levels of motivation. We need to focus on all three content areas and reach for the higher levels of human motivation. Is that right?

HEWLETT: That is correct, but there is more. It is true that the restorative, martial, and pedagogical content areas of physical education are fueled by personal, interpersonal, and transpersonal influences. Together they provide a content-motivation pattern for the physical education concept. When combined with classical definitions of culture and leisure, a paradigm begins to emerge.



Ideal paradigm

I mentioned earlier that culture is from the Latin *cultus*, which means the search for and celebration of the divine unknown. Leisure is related to the Greek word *Skole*, the Latin *Scola*, and the English School. In other words, Leisure means school.

In order for mankind to become transcendent, he needs to first take care of his basic needs. That is why humankind created society, made laws, and divided the labor. With food, clothing, shelter and some assurance of safety, mankind was then supposed to spend his time searching for and celebrating the divine unknown. That is why the philosophers said that leisure is the basis of culture. Too much emphasis on the personal function and pedagogical content of physical education upsets the delicate balance between culture and leisure. Balance is maintained by an equal emphasis on restorative, martial, and pedagogical content and an emphasis on the highest functional regions, with gradually diminishing emphasis on the lower levels. If it is not corrected, the society will self-destruct. First you people on earth must realize why you are alive, and then you must educate yourself physically, mentally, and emotionally.

THOMAS: So then, how can people on earth learn what you and your friends do here in Heaven's Gym #1?

HEWLETT: Read old books and employ a little reason. The real battle will not be with ignorance. Everything I and the others knew still exists on your earth. The battle is with mediocrity. It tries to destroy everything below and above it.

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