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Balls, Barbells and Sock Poi: The Progression of Keeping Fit

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Biographical Statement

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Abstract

While fitness is defined in keeping with the necessary physiological and morphological capacities to engage in vigorous physical activity, there tends to be a weighting of cardiovascular capacity, muscle strength and endurance, joint flexibility and low body fat that is in keeping with elite performance in a restricted range of competitive sports and artistic disciplines. The inherent ageist bias of fitness definition becomes readily apparent when desirable, vigorous physical activities are considered across a life span and where fitness, so physiologically and morphologically defined, is regarded in inevitable, age-referenced decline. A supplementary view is taken in this paper, with fitness being defined more broadly as the requisite functional capacities, movement capabilities and activity disposition to engage in a very wide array of physical activities that will appeal differently across the life span. Focusing on the life stages of childhood, late adolescence and early adulthood, and middle to later adulthood, I portray individual, social and ecological aspects of keeping fit that can be incorporated in school curricula to better realize lifelong health and wellness goals.

Keywords: fitness, life stages, interactivity, physical activity programs

Résumé

Des balles, des haltères et des bolas en tissu : l'évolution de la condition physique

Alors que la définition de la condition physique est associée à juste titre aux capacités physiologiques et morphologiques requises pour s'adonner à des activités physiques vigoureuses, on tend à associer la capacité cardiovasculaire, la force et l'endurance musculaires, la souplesse des articulations et le faible taux de masse grasse aux performances des athlètes d'élite dans un nombre limité de sports compétitifs et de disciplines artistiques. Le préjugé âgiste inhérent à la définition de la condition physique devient d'autant plus évident quand des activités physiques désirables et vigoureuses sont prises en compte en rapport avec des étapes de la vie et quand les aspects physiologiques et morphologiques de la condition physique sont liés à un inévitable déclin associé à l'âge. Cet article propose une autre perspective en adoptant une définition plus large des capacités fonctionnelles, des capacités motrices et de la perception de l'activité physique requise pour s'adonner à une très large gamme d'activités physiques à diverses étapes de la vie. Mettant l'accent sur les étapes de vie que sont l'enfance, la fin de l'adolescence et le début de l'âge adulte, l'âge mûr et l'âge avancé, cette étude examine les aspects personnels, sociaux et écologiques de la condition physique qu'on peut intégrer aux programmes scolaires dans le but de favoriser l'atteinte d'objectifs de santé et de bien-être tout au long de la vie.

Mots clés : condition physique, étapes de vie, interactivité, programmes d'activité physique

Introduction

There is a curious comparison between humans and horses. Over the past fifty years, winning race times for humans have improved on average twelve to thirteen percent for distances from the mile to the marathon, while winning times at the racetrack have improved on average only four percent for horses (Gardner, 2006). In spite of the developments in exercise science, nutritional and biochemical knowledge, and the great advances in training technologies, it appears that horse fitness, more so than human fitness, is largely a matter of maintaining physiological and biomechanical capacities for strenuous exercise. Admittedly the comparison breaks down when we consider all the variables involved, nevertheless it raises an interesting point about our human preoccupations with *getting* fit. Were we to romp and frolic in pastures from a very early age, as many horses still do, our physical fitness would also be a natural condition of being alive based upon a capacity for vigorous physical activity that we simply try to keep. *Staying* and *keeping* fit while channeling our physical capacities from contracting, stretching, twisting, turning, rolling, crawling, and toddling into running, leaping, landing, climbing, swinging, throwing and catching in disciplines of swimming, gymnastics, dance and all kinds of games and sports would take precedence over *getting* fit.

Keeping Fit

My purpose in this paper is, initially, to consider fitness as fundamentally a capacity for movement that we should strive to *keep* as much as we feel impelled to engage in practices of *getting* fit. The whimsical title of the paper, and the narration of playing at different times with 'balls, barbells and sock poi,' is intended to suggest a life stage perspective on keeping fitness that makes any particular fitness goal seem socially, culturally and chronologically relative. Not to be confused with "a life course approach" (Ben-Shlomo & Kuh, 2002) in the bio-mathematical sciences with its narrow focus on reproductive fitness, although certainly related to the "life course determinants of health" (Raphael, 2009) that mostly accentuate the social, economic and cultural limitations on health and wellness, a life stage perspective affords a broader treatment of human fitness and one that shows fitness to be understood differently at different chronological stages of one's life. That which is possible physiologically and anatomically at twenty years of age does not necessarily put the eighty-year-old person in fitness decline. By the same token, that which the octogenarian does to stay fit is of quite a different kind and degree of intensity to the twenty-year-old's choices. All of which is not to fully relativize fitness and make it simply a function of age, let alone individual interpretation. There remain significant physiological and morphological indicators of fitness as well as pathological indicators of the lack of fitness. There are qualitative assessments that can be made of feeling fit, along with the accepted quantitative measures of cardiovascular function, muscle strength and endurance, joint flexibility and body fat percentage (Lloyd & Smith, 2005; Smith & Lloyd, 2006, 2007), and there are fundamental kinetic pairings and movement patterns that are the basis of keeping fit and that extend from the exploratory motions of childhood vitality into the movement disciplines of adulthood (Lloyd & Smith, 2004, 2009, 2012). Rather than relativizing it, a life stage perspective serves to

broaden the terms of fitness and open up a wider and more inclusive array of fitness-keeping activities and interactivities. Another way of putting it is to say that fitness is a condition of active living, contextualized by social, cultural, and economic determinants of heath, specified by significant physiological and morphological indices, yet defined essentially by a maturing, experientially-referenced *disposition* towards physical activity.[1]

Some comparison can be made with Margaret Whitehead's notion of "physical literacy' as "the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to maintain physical activity *throughout the lifecourse*" (Whitehead, 2010, p. 5, my emphasis).[2] Particular attention can be drawn to phases of the lifecourse during which certain kinds of activity are preferred. Each of us may well be on "a personal journey," taking up those activities that are "appropriate to [one's] endowment" (p. 67), however these choices are made in keeping with social, cultural and developmental "affordances" (p. 52) of physical activity throughout the lifecourse. Fitness indeed requires particular knowledge and understanding, specific physical competencies, and sufficient motivation and confidence, but an enduring inclination to move vigorously, strongly, enduringly, with varying degrees of flexibility, agility and self-composure requires differing kinds of knowledge and understanding over a lifetime, and differing competencies, motivations and confidences at various stages of one's life. In other words, we are disposed to keeping fit as the extension of an innate, animate constitution, however such extension takes variegated form, allowing for increasingly refined feelings about oneself and one's connections with others, and affording multiply-directed and life-affirming energetic flows (Smith & Lloyd, 2006, 2007; Lloyd & Smith, 2006, 2009, 2012).

The following account illustrates a progression of keeping fit activities and interactivities, which, by and large, have been incorporated directly within school-based Health and Physical Education (HPE), Health Related Fitness (HRF) and Daily Physical Activity (DPA) programs. They are indicative of an even wider range of games and sports, rhythmic activities (including dance), gymnastics, and individual and dual activities (including combatives, martial, flow and circus arts) that are recommended across provincial curricula. While I intend this present account of keeping fit to be suggestive of a broad, inclusive range of program activities, my primary purpose is to draw attention to what such a wide selection of activities can provide in terms of both fitness-based, personal and social-emotional benefits.

This portrayal of fitness pursuits looks autobiographically and circumspectly (e.g. Denzin, 1977; Pinar, 2012) at three life stages in the dispositional maturation of fitness choices and, thus, at an evolving conceptualization of what fitness entails. The narratives

[1] An activity disposition can be defined initially by the Aristotelian virtuous "tendency" not to be drawn into, say, the vice of "slothfulness" (see Aristotle, 1967; Hampshire, 1951). But such a value-laden disposition also carries the pre-reflective, embodied sense of "attunement" in which one's physicality is progressively attuned to activity contexts via the pleasurable mood that accompanies vigorous and sustained physical activity (cf. Heidegger, 1967). It is in keeping with both the explicit attitude as well as the lived, experiential sensitivities that an activity disposition makes fullest fitness sense.

[2] A "lifecourse perspective" is also the preferred one of the World Health Organization (WHO, 2012) where "rather than artificially categorizing life into stages such as 'middle age' or 'old age, it assumes that we age from the moment we are born" (p. 4). My contention in this paper in preferring the term 'life stage' is that, in addition to the convenience of dividing populations into age groupings for statistical purposes, there are somewhat experientially distinguishable stages in life that are indicative of physical activity choices.

that illustrate these life stages are based on my fitness experiences as a young boy, youth, and then adult in my twenties living on the east coast of Australia and, subsequently, as an immigrant to Canada, residing for the past thirty years in the two most westerly provinces. These narratives are about culturally-afforded fitness pursuits and certain ones that carry, to some appreciable extent, gender determinations. Yet for all their geographical, cultural, socio-economic, and gendered specificities, they still illustrate changing life stage practices of fitness and are intended to evoke, for others, consideration of their own activity choices and thus to provoke a more lifewide as well as lifelong conceptualization of keeping fit.

I title the next section of the paper 'fitting for' and anchor this futural sense of keeping fit with a childhood illustration of broad, fundamental kinetic capability. While not necessarily illustrative of contemporary childhood activities, this illustration remains consistent with the enduring advocacy of fundamental movement patterns and skills being taught to children (e.g. Graham, Holt-Hale and Parker, 2012). In the following section on 'fitting in,' I consider the tightening of fitness definition around activities that pertain to the track, the rink, the playing field and, most especially, to the gym. Such activities of late adolescence and early adulthood are determinative of prevailing notions of fitness that rest on individually-demarcated and physiologically-based fitness parameters. The curricular limitations of this view of fitness are exposed in the subsequent section on 'fitting with' where I address the importance of physical *interactivity*. It is proposed that fitness-producing activities of breathing, balancing, timing and touching develop not only kinetic powers of efficient movement but also kinesthetic capacities for connecting with others. Such activities beyond playing fields and gyms fulfill a life stage requirement of daily physical interactivity in middle and later adult years that seems no less important for children and youth. Each of these life stages informs a life-wide and life-long progression of keeping fit activities and interactivities that teach us, in age-appropriate and developmentally-connected ways, what fitness is for.

Fitting For

> *We play ball games in elementary school – French Cricket, Wall Brandy, Dodge Ball, Hand Tennis, Rounders, Tether-Ball, California Kick Ball, Leader Ball, Tunnel Ball and some with odd names like 'Queenie, Queenie' and '7-Up.' But my favorite is a game of ricocheting a tennis ball off a metal garbage tin lid. We stand on all sides of the lid that has long since surpassed its function of containing refuse. Its beaten shape provides angles and curves to deflect a ball we throw at it from every direction. A throw may deflect the ball over our heads or skim the ground at ankle height. We are on our toes, ready and waiting. A point is scored for a catch on the full, yet no sooner does someone take the lead than we redouble our efforts to ricochet the ball elsewhere. But inevitably, one of us reaches ten points and wins the game. Someone calls "Game on!" and we begin again. The game provides an excellent foundation for fielding in cricket and throwing and catching in baseball. But we know this game simply as a recess activity, filling the allotted time with shouts and yelps and the exuberances of dynamic play.*

> *I practice the motions of this game on the verandah at home. The tennis ball ricochets from the wall, sometimes off the deck, with my fingers positioned to spin it inwards, outwards, over and under. The repetitive motions are rhythmically mesmerizing, and like those who shoot basketballs over and over again on their driveway courts, the ball comes to express a unity of form and function. Next day at school we play once again our 'garbage lid' game with even greater proficiency. This we know in the joy of taking the formerly impossible catches.*

Friedrich Froebel (1895/1985) pointed out the unity of form and function that playing with balls affords. Spherical shape and associated color, coupled with all the activity possibilities of motional effort, direction and position, attest to the value of this primary plaything, this first 'gift' for the child, and the primary pedagogical tool in the education of young children. Froebel started with a yarn ball on a string rather than a tennis ball, and in other cultures these balls may traditionally be of deer hide, sheep bladders, solid rubber, tightly-bound tissue paper, or any other malleable, usable material at hand. The key purpose is that it should engage children's interests and their imaginations. "The ball is one of the first means used in awakening and developing the dawning consciousness and growing faculties of the child" (Wiggin and Smith, 1895/2010, p. 28).

Now it may be objected that ball games are not necessarily fitness promoting, and that there is confusion here between 'health-related fitness' and 'skill-related fitness' components. But this objection rests on a definition of physiological and morphological fitness that may be too constraining. What if fitness is more than the capacity to function efficiently and expresses the capabilities of kinetic expression across a diverse range of activities? What if physical fitness could be expressed as the ability to function efficiently and creatively in activities with balls, sticks, bats, hoops, mats, ropes, and any conceivable plaything with which the primary body motions, locomotions and manipulative actions can be developed? Certainly the current promotion of "physical literacy" attempts to include "a variety of movements [that can be learned and performed] confidently, competently, creatively and strategically across a wide range of health-related physical activities" (PHE, Canada, 2011). "Physical literacy," according to its key theorist, is essentially about the "embodied" experience of movement and its essential contribution to health and life-long, active living (see Whitehead, 2001, 2007, 2010; also Lloyd & Smith, 2014). Yet one wonders if such breadth is kept in view when the potential range of activities that fit us out for living dynamically and creatively with others are confined to "fundamental movement and sport skills" that are so regionally and culturally-defined (Canadian Sport for Life, 2011) and, furthermore, when the assessment of physical literacy is confined to individually-focused indices of physiological and morphological fitness exhibited predominantly in games and sports (Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group, 2014).

A particular feature of "physical literacy" that harks back to Froebel's sense of education and the ball game example is the affordance of sustaining interactions with others. Just as "many of the ball games are well fitted to unite the whole community of children, older and younger, in a common aim, a common purpose" (Wiggin and Smith, 1895/2010, p. 26), so are "physically literate" persons those who can "make healthy, active choices throughout their life span that are both beneficial to and respectful of themselves, others, and their environment" (PHE, 2009, p. 7). These purposes of personal and social responsibility, cultural sensitivity and ecological stewardship are indeed

laudatory aims for school-based HRF, PE and DPA programs. An inspection of Provincial curricula across Canada shows mention of these aims, yet there remains a mismatch with the curricular means of achieving them (Thomson and Robertson, 2014). The practical question pertains to how this 'interactivity' can be fostered in programs that focus on individual practices and individual achievements. Is there not something to be gained from the interactivity of young children and how these children come together in playful engagement that can be incorporated within the formal programs of HRF, PE and DPA? Furthermore, "[t]he ball is more purely a plaything than anything which the child receives in the kindergarten, and its mobility is so charming, it so easily slips from his hands and travels so delightfully far when dropped, that exercises with it soon become riotous if not carefully guided" (Wiggin and Smith, 1895/2010, p. 24). What curricular and pedagogical frameworks might be developed to best harness these rushes and gushes and bursts and surges of movement consciousness (c.f. Smith, 2007; Stern 1993, 2004, 2010) and channel them into sustaining engagements with others?

Fitting In

> *Whereas games, sports and outdoor recreations have been the preferences in my childhood and adolescent years, it is 'the gym' that calls most strongly in my later teen years. The weight room, in particular, holds the promise of gaining strength and muscle mass, 'body building,' 'bulking up,' through 'loads,' 'repetitions,' and 'sets.' Indices of fitness are the maximal loads in bench presses, squats and dead lifts. Personal bests! It is all about 'pumping up' to fit a body image reinforced in Joe Weider muscle magazines and to fit within a culture of late adolescence and early adulthood where size really seems to matter. Meanwhile the 'gains' of this fitness regime are muscularly evident. Keeping these gains becomes an obsessive compulsion to work out, exercising outside the gym to remain 'cut' and 'ripped,' and curtailing former fitness activities that are not otherwise fittingly 'freakish.'*

The pursuit of 'hulkish' fitness is not necessarily representative of late adolescence and early adulthood. Such muscularity pertains to male 'gym junkies' – those mostly able-bodied male youth and young men whose identities become integrally tied to an evidently strong physique. This fitness 'look' is consistent nevertheless with the general appeal of gyms and their regularly programmed 'step,' 'aerobic,' 'spinning' and 'ball' classes and with any number of other activities from 'hot yoga' to 'kick boxing' that celebrate body image. The parade of Lululemon-clad young women and muscle-shirted young men (although all are not so young) provides an imagery of fitness that is about body shaping, getting buff and feeling good about one's physical fit in the wider society where, if physical looks aren't everything, they are certainly a significant factor in an image-saturated world. Beyond physiological, anatomical and morphological functioning, fitness is about feeling a certain way about oneself and one's relations with others. It is essentially about fitting in.

This imagery of fitness contrasts with the inactivity of increasing percentages of youth and adults and, by comparison, seems a healthy alternative if not an antidote to the appeal of sedentary pursuits. Computer game playing and on-line interactivity are singled out as the nemeses of healthy and active living for children, adolescents and adults. Yet, rather than dismiss these latter activities as being less worthy than going to the gym,

perhaps we might consider their interactive appeal and how this interactivity might be cardio-vascularly and muscularly enhanced. What comes of a fitness that is so single-mindedly self-absorbing? What is left of the laudatory goals of social and personal responsibility of HRF, DPA and PE programming when the mirror and the weight scale are the points of fitness referral? It seems we may be overlooking the physical experiences, indeed the embodied senses, of interactivity that held such promise in childhood for the sake of achieving a restrictive sense of fitting in.

Fitting With

> *Horses have become a big part of my adult life. Horse riding, groundwork and liberty play are the activities that now comprise my fitness pursuits. Such is the interest that I have become reshaped for these activities. Riding requires core strength to hold a balanced, aligned posture in the saddle. It requires radial extension from the core muscles to the seemingly independent musculature of the shoulders, arms and legs that is unconstrained by tight pecs, buff biceps and contracted triceps, and by shortened hip flexors, tight adductors and calves that cannot stroke the belly of the horse. Joint flexibility and kinesthetic responsiveness are key to the rider's 'three-point seat' and the independence of the 'aids' used to connect with the horse's movements. The circulations of energy between hands and legs that bring up the life of the horse into dynamic dressage collection require a fittingly supple, composed, morphologically-attuned body. Rider fitness is expressed as poise in the saddle and enacted through the almost undetectable use of aids to prompt the horse's increasingly refined half-passes, pirouettes, tempi changes and gait transitions. Riding, whether Western, English, Classical or Competitive Dressage, is experienced as fitting with the horse (cf. Smith 2010, 2014a, 2015 in press).*

Such interactive fitness need not be developed only in riding. There are a range of activities that can create the kind of tactful, kinesthetic feeling and subtle body language that horse riding affords. The relaxation necessary to feel the horse's movement and prompt the suppling motions is, first and foremost, a function of breathing. Yoga, swimming, and running, especially where the breath is consciously felt, are activities well suited to creating the rider's relaxed attitude. The rider's 'seat' and the postural 'plumb line' through the ear, shoulder tip, hip and ankle can be cultivated through BOSU, teeter-totter, ball balancing, slack lining and unicycling. Independent hands can be encouraged through timings and rhythms of juggling and poi. Meanwhile, interactive touch can be felt in partner exercises, mirroring activities, paired dance, contact improvisation, wrestling and various martial arts such as judo and aikido (see Smith, 2014b). These activities of breathing, balancing, timing and touching are not only geared to riding fitness, they are illustrative of activities that develop a feeling for fitness that can be applied more broadly to a range of sports, games, dances and pastimes.

Poi twirling is one such activity. Another Youtube phenomenon, this activity has gained wide participation from the simplicity of twirling balls in knee-length socks to the dramatics of creating circular patterns of light with fire poi (or the safer LED-light Glow poi). The appeal of this activity is its rhythmical ease, beginning with motions much like single rope skipping, and progressing to figure-of-eight weaves, wraps and unwraps, isolations, turns and body repositionings that create endless possibilities of skill

progression. Poi twirling is a fitting activity for developing the kinesthetics of rhythm, timing, cadence and accent.

> *I am introduced to poi twirling by a circus arts performer. It is not an activity I would have thought to try, but its relative easiness is appealing. Single time forward swings of the poi, keeping them parallel at my sides, soon allow for reversing the motion. Crossing the poi in front of my body, tracing a figure of eight pattern, it takes little time to do this right and left handed, until, both at once, I can do the three-beat weave, then the five-beat one. Reversing this pattern, turning the poi in the opposite direction, is a little more challenging, yet this soon comes easily, fluidly, until the weaves behind the back are manageable. And so the skills build through the kinesthetic deepening of awareness of where the poi are moving, and in what relation they are to each other and to my own body positions. It takes no more than a matter of days before a repertoire of poi twirling can be shown to others.*

What strikes me most about poi in presenting this activity to others is that it suggests an 'interactivity.' Poi twirling can be done for oneself, or as a performance for others, but its greatest possibilities seem to be as an invitation to move rhythmically with others.

> *I introduce a group of middle-aged teachers to poi twirling as a morning activity break in a professional development workshop. Later in the day we take another activity break and head out for a walk. A number of the teachers bring the poi with them, amusing some elderly passers-by who want to try it. They, too, find the activity rhythmically pleasing, making comment on its resemblance to skipping motions and the delights of childhood play. The poi practice provides interactive openings where there would otherwise be simply a fitting social distance between strangers.*

Poi twirling is an activity fit for public consumption. So, too, are hooping, bo stick twirling, rope spinning, flag waving, and any number of rhythmical activities we can now access on the internet. Coupled with the afore-mentioned activities of breathing, balancing, timing and feeling, these activities extend the notion of fitness, beyond individual physiological status, beyond individual morphological appearance, to the idea of fitting kinesthetically with others.

Fitting To

The meaning of fitness becomes a little blurry in this life stage exposition. Activities that target specifically cardiovascular capacity, muscular strength and endurance, joint flexibility and body mass begin to look rather myopic. For what purposes are such physiological functioning and anatomical developments necessary? And if suitable purposes can be found, how will they stand the test of time?

A curricular progression of keeping fit would thus acknowledge childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, as well as middle and late adulthood activity preferences, while not having any particular activity preference set the gold-standard for lifelong fitness. Pioneers of keeping fit into the advanced years of life, such as George Leonard (1974) and Emilie Conrad (1997; 2007), stressed that the exercise, sport and physical activity forms most heavily promoted and that continue to dominate the DPA, HRF and PE curricula are, in fact, preventing children and youth from achieving the level of functioning, feeling, forming and flowing consciousness of which they are inherently

capable. George Leonard, who instigated the "new games movement," wrote: "I now realize I've had the kind of physical education since forty that my imaginary physical education instructor might have offered when I was ten" (Leonard, 1974, p. 27). He advocated "lifelong physical activities" of, say, jogging, hiking, swimming and cycling, along with games, sports, martial arts and meditative practices that can be pursued by everyone and that foster the "joys of fine physical conditioning" (pp. 19, 29). Emilie Conrad went further in emphasizing the motional fitness that is key to the continual regeneration of bodily vigor, particularly for those who have lost functional capacity. Her "continuum" approach to fitness stresses free form, fluid motions as the means of addressing the rigidity and sometimes the paralysis that ensues from repetitive, ingrained movements. Action patterning is eschewed, and the constraints of counts, loads, tempos and directions removed, for the sake of restoring the generative motions of breathing and sound resonancing, and the fluid motions of the body that ebb and flow in keeping with the "gel-sol exchanges" of inspiration and expiration (see Conrad, 2007, pp. 177, 246, 261, 284, 296-298). Such approaches would have each of us question any activity as definitive of fitness parameters and any curricular progression as strictly essential to fitness promotion. Well may we find that we are not so different from horses after all, were we to think of keeping fitness and embellishing it through a multitude of movement forms rather than seeing ourselves always, and to a greater or lesser degree, in a fitness deficit in relation to constrictive physiological parameters and narrowly defined activity choices.

The implication for school-based activity programs is that children and youth will be best served if fitness is promoted not just as the antidote to inactivity, nor as the primary means of fitting into desired cultural images drawn from popular sports and physical disciplines, but as a significant register of an activity disposition that is expressed freely and fluidly, and through which we develop kinesthetic sensitivity toward others.[3] Children and youth can be taught activities that enable them to feel good about themselves, and to fit with others, and even with other species, in physically responsive and mutually beneficial ways. The mantra of 'daily physical activity' (DPA) can be extended to 'daily physical interactivity' (DPI) (Smith, 2011) with curricular attention paid to ways of engaging with others, in the tactics and strategies of game play, and within the kinesthetic awareness of those moments of interplay when games and sports and dance become more than just the pursuit of personal satisfactions (Lloyd & Smith, 2010). A life stage perspective positions school-based activity programs as providing the foundational fitness sensibility upon which an ever-changing array of activities and interactivities can become meaningfully fitting to one's life.

Conclusion

Physical fitness is initially, and frequently throughout our lives, ahead of us. Our delayed psychomotor development, coupled with the socio-cultural limitations imposed on dynamic vitality, mean that we inevitably need to get fit. Swaddled babies, children

[3] This evolving activity disposition bears some resemblance to the inculcation of "physical activity habits" that Douglas et al. (2014) outline for children and adolescents in "comprehensive school health" programming. These authors provide very useful guidelines for inculcating such habits as are amenable to maintaining "active lifestyles." But their emphasis on the behavioral automaticity of physical activity habituation warrants some contrasting stress on the fuller, relational development of an activity disposition within and beyond k-12 schooling.

restricted to homes and congested neighborhoods, and 'wired-in' adolescents whose daily lives are defined largely by sedentary pursuits, become the victims of the 'inactivity epidemic' with all its related health risks (e.g. Hales, 2007, 108-113; Coalition for Active Living, 2004; Pan-Canadian Public Health Network, 2013). Decreasing fitness levels and increasing numbers of overweight and obese people are being reported in various national surveys (e.g. Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2014). The remedy, getting fit and healthy, is then an almost Sisyphean task of measuring up to recommended standards of physiological and musculoskeletal functioning and seeking to improve skin-fold and weight measures of body fat composition.

The task is complicated further when we consider the many ways of attaining some version of physical fitness. Explosive muscular strength gains in the weight room may be conducive to wrestling and football but not necessarily be amenable to the muscular endurance required for soccer and ultimate. Sprinting fitness based on fast-twitch, muscle fiber concentration and anaerobic cardiovascular capacity contrasts with the slow-twitch, aerobic attributes of the marathoner. Well might we ask: what image of fitness do we want to attain? Widely recommended means of getting fit (e.g. CSEP/SCPE, 2012) are invariably tied to certain kinds of culturally-valued activities that provide direction for achieving an optimal level of physiological functioning and an optimal development of constitutive morphology. Getting fit is very much about fitting into certain kinds of activity.

Amidst all these challenges of getting fit, we can again compare horses and humans and, in particular, be reminded how horse racing overshadows all other equine pursuits. Horses gymnasticized for dressage competition, those strengthened with explosive power for show jumping, horses balanced for reining and cattle cutting, those performing with flexibility, agility and rhythmic training in circuses, staged shows and parades, as well as carriage horses and those trained for teamster pulling competitions, are of minority interest compared to the cardiovascularly gifted 'Secretariats' and 'Barbaros' of the horse racing world. But what if physical fitness, whether of horses or of humans, were not tied so closely to certain culturally-valued activities for which physical fitness becomes, in the end, quite activity-specific? What if fitness were considered less a matter of fitting into defined parameters of physiological functioning and body composition and more a matter of filling out one's inherent capacities for movement in a wide variety of activities? Such variety would even raise questions about the necessary fitness gained through current recommendations of daily physical activity for the wide range of physical *activities* and *interactivities* that might be enjoyed. As well as gyms with their single-use weight machines, spinning cycles, treadmills and elliptical trainers, think of the social conventions, interactive plays and team tactics of games and sports, and the socializing of fun runs, group fitness classes, and one-on-one personal training. Stretch that thinking a bit further to imagine the kinetic, aesthetic, kinaesthetic and energetic dynamics of interacting physically with others in synchronized swimming, partnered dance, pairs diving, sculling twos to eights, climbing on belay lines, and baton changing on the track. An even broader range of activities and interactivities may help revive something of the idea of keeping fit as an attentiveness to the multiple ways and means by which we preserve the capacity for self-movement and movement with others with which we are born (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009, 2011).

Have I stretched the notion of fitness beyond any recognizable definition? The word was used initially by Herbert Spencer (1897) in the context of the survival of the fittest. That evolutionary coinage, though indicating a lingering sense of what fitness is about in physiological and morphological terms, seems increasingly suspect in the twenty-first century when we consider the challenges of sustainable living and come to the realization of what an antagonistic, individualistic, winner-takes-all ideology has wrought.[4] The progression of keeping fit that is indicated in this essay is not about that ideology of progress. It indicates, instead, a progressivist philosophy for healthy and active living at the individual, partner, group, community and even interspecies levels. Fitness can be defined initially as having the physiological capacities and morphological capabilities to engage confidently and competently in a broad range of singular, partnered, group and communal physical activities throughout the lifespan. But this definition needs some elaboration lest we confine fitness, as is the case with much gerontological research on the sustained benefits of physical activity, to the adage of 'use it or lose it.'

From an individual developmental perspective, fitness is encapsulated by a sense of intrinsic purpose, of lived meaning, of knowing intuitively what fitness is for as the basis of coming to know more explicitly what is needed to fit oneself out for a range of activities that will change over a life span. From a social interaction standpoint, fitness is premised on developing the necessary skills, competencies and associated body types to fit in with others engaged in similar activities and, in turn, to fit with a more diverse range of players, opponents and partners, than those to be encountered in just one or only a few activity choices. From an ecological point of view, keeping fit depends upon the encouragement to choose life stage activities and interactivities that progress through the animate worlds of playgrounds, gyms, parks and fields, for the sake of not just surviving but thriving with others in the widest landscapes of activity exploration. Keeping fit is based on the exposure of children and youth to these many and varied life stage-referenced activities and on providing them the knowledge and understanding of, and competence and confidence in, a sufficiently broad array of games, sports, gymnastics, dance forms, meditative and martial arts, alternative environment activities, flow arts and circus arts as the motivational basis of their life-long activity choices.

This life stage perspective suggests an elongated notion of fitness that includes the physiological and morphological aspects of cardio-vascular capacity, muscle strength and endurance, muscle and joint flexibility, and body composition, but situates these fitness indices within an experiential fitness framework. The key criterion of fitness, beyond these physiological and morphological indices, is a playful activity disposition that is evidenced in the physical exuberance of children, the activity discipline and dedication of youth and young adults, and the pastime enjoyments of middle and later adulthood. Indeed, we may find that between the standard fitness indices and the socio-cultural determinants of health we have ignored the malleability of fitness and the adaptability of the very notion of fitness to the life stage choices we each can make for ourselves and for the sake of our relations with others.

[4] Biologist Jaob von Uexküll claims Spencer's statement to be a "basic error" of Darwinism which misinterpreted "the survival of the normal" and the enduring fit of organisms with their environments (van Uexküll, 2010, pp. 11, 188). Such normalcy to fitness is also what is skewed by parameters of physical fitness that elide the life-phase contexts in which these parameters *normally* make sense.

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