

## “How About Some Muscle?” McCloy Is Right!

by

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Over the past 2,500 years, philosophers, educators, and religious, and political leaders have consistently reaffirmed the ancient Greek and Roman maxim of *Mens Sana in Corpore Sano*, i.e., a strong mind in a healthy body. The ancient Greeks believed that strong and fit children were healthier and turned into brave, wise, and productive members of society (Mechikoff & Estes, 2002). Current medical knowledge clearly supports ancient Greece’s wisdom and intuition about the link between exercise and physical and mental well being (Grant, 2000; Morgan, 1997; Penedo and Dahn, 2005).

Following an extensive analysis of hundreds of studies about the relationships between a variety of risk factors and disease, the Surgeon General (1988) concluded that while smoking, high blood pressure, or elevated blood cholesterol increase risk for heart attacks, inactivity poses a more serious threat to adults’ cardiovascular health. Large scale long-term epidemiologic studies conducted over the past two decades have reaffirmed the explicit and consistent link between physical activity, exercise, and fitness and reduced mortality overall, reduced mortality from cardiovascular causes, and reduced cardiovascular risk (Balady, 2002; Lee, & Skerrett, 2001).

Advances in research on aging keep unraveling the effects of regular exercise on muscle mass (Marcell, 2003), bone mass (Frost, 1997), and oxygen consumption at younger ages (Rogers, et al., 1990) and the available reserve during the golden years. Early build up of muscles and bones serves, later in life, as a buffer zone to the inevitable gradual reduction in functional capacity that is congruent with a normal aging process (Brooks, Fahey, & White, 2000; Frontera, et al., 2000; Hawkins, Wiswell and Marcell, 2003).

In addition to a long list of health risks that are associated with inadequate exercise and obesity are the staggering costs of inactivity and its deleterious side effects on local, regional and national economies (Wang, & Brown, 2004; Wang, et al., 2004). According to one report, (Finkelstein, et al., 2004), in 2003, \$75 billion were spent on obesity-related medical expenses in America costing the public \$39 billion a year or \$175 per person.

The complications associated with the pathophysiology of inadequate exercise have prompted the American College of Sports Medicine to reevaluate its “Activity

Guidelines for Children” statement. A recent ACSM (2001) exercise recommendation states that “Elementary school-aged children should engage in age appropriate daily activities for at least 30-60 minutes,” and that “engaging in more than 60 minutes and up to several hours a day of developmentally appropriate physical activities is encouraged...Some of the daily activities should last 10-15 minutes or longer and should include moderate to vigorous exercise with brief periods of rest and recovery (ACSM’S Resource Manual, 4th ed., 2001, p. 524).”

Over the past 25 years, amid continuous warnings about the health risks that are associated with inactivity and childhood obesity (Bar-Or, 2000; Berkowitz, et al., 2005; Braet, et al., 2004; Field, et al., 2005; Hedley, et al., 2004; Pate, et al., 1995; Skidmore & Yarnell, 2004), the number of overweight children in America has doubled and the rate of overweight in adolescents has tripled. Among 6-11 year-olds obesity has risen 54% in the past 15 years. Nearly half of 12-21 year-olds do not engage in regular exercise and as many as 78% of American parents consider TV watching with their children to be a family activity (Calderon, 2005). Wide spread inactivity and poor dietary habits in children are the main culprits of a gradual rise in childhood obesity rates. Overweight in youth in the USA and in the rest of the industrialized world is closely associated with a disturbing trend of increasing cases of type II, or “adult onset” diabetes in children (Arslanian, 2002).

Despite reports of growing numbers of sedentary kids, indisputable evidence of children’s need for movement and exercise, and clear planned exercise recommendations set forth by leading health and fitness authorities, the very programs that are best fit to implement the needed remedies are facing the threat of extinction. A recent extensive report on the status of physical education based on data collected from over 110 countries reveals a very grim picture. Global, as well as continental regional trends indicate an overall reduction in time allocation in the curriculum and funding of physical education programs, along with a growing deficiency in both the numbers and the quality of preparation of future physical education professionals (Hardman and Marshall, 2000; 2004).

How did the field of physical education reverse its fortune and lose its status as a valued discipline in the curriculum? How, for example, did the state of California, the first state to mandate in 1866 physical education in the schools, and a state that houses one of the largest school districts in America, also become the state that many of its districts have no requirement for certified physical education teachers in elementary schools (e.g., Los Angeles US District)? Who is responsible for the diminution of the physical education requirement in California high schools from a four year to a one year program? On what basis did middle and high school students taking part in JV Varsity, Band, Cheerleading, ROTC, and/or Dance Teams get to be excused from any participation in physical education? How are physical educators expected to deliver a quality physical education curriculum with class sizes that often include as many as 60 to 100

students? What were WE thinking when a majority of us silently stood by and let outrageously inadequate working conditions become the norm in physical education settings? Lastly, since it is clear that no one else seems to be willing to hold the torch for us, what are WE going to do to reverse the current tide?

As one ponders over the needed actions to successfully tackle the mammoth task of resurrecting physical education in the curriculum, an old debate between two historically divergent philosophical views of the nature and place of physical education in the curriculum comes to mind. The school of thought that rejected Plato's notion of dualism was championed by Jesse Feiring Williams (1886-1966). Williams (1930, cited in Mechikoff & Estes, 2002, p. 45), embraced an "education through the physical" philosophical position that emphasized Clark Hetherington's organic, psychomotor, character, and intellectual outcomes for physical education. Charles Harold McCloy (1886-1959), a contemporary of Williams, was the main advocate of a competing view that emphasized an "education of the physical" approach. McCloy articulated his position in a book titled: "*Philosophical Basis for Physical Education.*" The following passage highlights McCloy's classic counter point: "*The psychological literature of late has spoken much of the fact of body-mind unity, but this same literature has usually gone on thinking and writing as though the child were all mind. We in physical education, with our growing overemphasis upon the educational aspects of physical education [education through the physical], are apt to fall in the same error. Our organism is more body than mind, and it is only through the adequate functioning of all of it that the most desirable functioning of even the brain occurs*" (McCloy, 1940, pp. 77-78, cited in Mechikoff & Estes, 2002, p. 45)."

Based on 25 years of communications, discussions and debates with physical education teachers, college professors and physical education majors, it is my observation that, with few exceptions (e.g., McKenzie, 2001, 2003), the overwhelming majority of physical educators embrace the "through the physical" philosophy of teaching. A case study in progress in Columbia that focuses on "the role of Physical Education as an instrument to develop positive attitudes in the violent and poor communities of the Bogotá commune" (SpinEd Interim Report, 2004) provides an archetypal illustration of the "through the physical" view. When asked in an "Introduction to Kinesiology" college course about the mission of physical education, students suggest the following traits and goals: leadership, self-esteem, sportsmanship, team spirit, sport skills, knowledge of rules and strategies, loyalty, physical fitness, etc... (almost in that order...). When pressed to select one goal from the list, physical fitness rarely makes the top choice.

Our resolve to address personal, emotional, and intellectual outcomes in addition to health and skill-related fitness outcomes in the physical education curriculum is a noble stance. Reality, however, as represented by inadequate teacher preparation programs, declining funds, growing class sizes, low professional self-esteem, and lack of commitment from communities and its leaders, makes the

effective implementation of a complex “through the physical” curriculum a very difficult task. The time may have come for us to reconsider our mission and goals. Outcomes that strictly focus on movement and the physical are unique to our profession. No other discipline in the curriculum has the responsibility or is expected to educate the physical child. Why not first and foremost address the most pressing and most fundamental needs of our children—the need for movement? Why are we so eager to solve some of the most difficult social problems we face by means of a poorly supported program? How much longer are we going to exist in denial before we realize that too many of us make promises to administer a curriculum that only few may be able to deliver?

At first glance, educating the physical child and preparing her/him to independently maintain an active life style throughout his/her lifespan may seem too simple a goal for the physical education curriculum. It represents, nevertheless, the discipline’s most unique outcome and the most effective weapon in the fight against inactivity—the X generation’s most formidable foe. To regain their deserved respect in the curriculum, physical educators would have to be held accountable. The keeping of student participation records is the physical educator’s first act of accountability. In that respect, physical education classes are no different from other classes in the curriculum. As it now stands, the bona fide differences between the way physical education and other disciplines are valued become apparent as one considers the importance of records taken soon after roll call. Many middle-upper class parents I have talked to do not take seriously their child’s physical education test scores or grade. Not nearly as seriously, for example, as they take their child’s performance in English, math, science, or varsity athletics. Rather than suggesting that we need to figure out ways to take some of the “spot lights” away from math and English, or swivel it toward physical education, I posit that we install our very own spot lights.

The “fitness renaissance and wellness movement” (Siedentop, 1998, p. 82) provides our discipline with one such important spot light. Instead of furnishing parents with standard fitness and skills scores (data that many parents find meaningless) may I suggest that, for example, we present parents with their child’s Body Mass Index (BMI) score, predicted VO<sub>2</sub>max value, etc... along with charts that outline the associated level of health risk. We must proactively familiarize parents with the new “wellness” facts and the interactions between their child’s energy output (miles covered per week, number of completed sit-ups or push ups, weekly activity to inactivity ratio, etc...) in and outside of class, and the child’s health risk factors. Parents should be informed of the role of family history (which they may know but do not have to reveal) in the assessment of health risks. As both child and parent are introduced to emerging new popular concepts of life-span fitness and wellness, the more likely it is that they will share responsibility in managing their personal health. If the above sounds a lot like a “fitness model,” it does so because it is essentially a “fitness for the life-span” model. To those who find the above statements as “naïve, wishful thinking” on

my part, I would argue that given the current state of our profession now is the time to “do the things we think we cannot do (Eleanor Roosevelt).”

To be valued by others we first need to have self-respect. If, as I strongly believe, physical education programs are critical to a child’s all-around education, then, for example, students who fail to fulfill their energy output quotas will be evaluated accordingly and their poor compliance record should be reflected in a reduced overall GPA. A choice to focus on the physical should not make our discipline inferior to disciplines that have an intellectual focus. An emphasis on movement, instead, projects the bright spot on our unique place and role in the curriculum. Our thoughtful and diligent application of the latest research and technology to our fitness and wellness for the life-span curriculum, on the other hand, will serve as a reminder to us, to our colleagues in the teacher’s lounge, and to the rest of the world that we are proud to consider ourselves as “intellectual jocks.”

*“How About Some Muscle?”* (Charles Harold McCloy)

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