

Keynote Presentation

***Physical Activity Education for Human Resource Development:
Expanding Roles and Increased Relevance***

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Abstract

People cannot perform at their best unless they are healthy and well. A key behavior in attaining and maintaining a high state of health and wellness is physical activity. Regular physical activity participation is widely known to provide numerous physical, psychological, and social benefits. In spite of this, very few people achieve the recommended amount of physical activity. Improving upon this situation is an international priority. Fogg's behavior model along with Cardinal's progressive principles for physical activity educators will be introduced in attempt to address this need. Four domains will be featured in which concepts from the model and principles will then be applied in an effort to improve human resource development. The presentation concludes by suggesting that physical activity education can and should occur across the lifespan where people live, learn, work, and play, and where the pursuit of a healthy, active lifestyle should not simply be an individual effort, but rather a societal obligation where making the healthy choice is the easy choice.

Introduction

People cannot perform optimally unless they are healthy and well. A key behavior in attaining and maintaining a high state of health and wellness is physical activity. Regular physical activity participation is widely known to provide numerous physical, psychological, and social benefits (Garber et al., 2011; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). In recognition of this, the United States federal government has issued physical activity guidelines for all Americans (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). These guidelines emphasize the value of physical activity in human resource development, particularly in the prevention of chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, noninfectious pulmonary diseases,

and stroke, which, taken together, account for 61% of all deaths in the United States (Miniño, Murphy, Xu, & Kochenek, 2011).¹

Unfortunately, for an array of genetic (e.g., biological, hereditary), life-course (i.e., changing people in changing contexts), social cognitive (e.g., disinterest, negative past experiences, personal priorities), and social ecological (e.g., access, competence, inconvenience), reasons, very few people achieve the levels of physical activity recommended by the federal government and various scientific organizations (Dumith, Hallal, Reis, & Kohl, 2011). The results of this are disastrous for people, who experience a diminished quality (e.g., inability to fully engage in life, morbidity, unnecessary suffering) and quantity (i.e., premature mortality) of life; and for societies, which must bear the burden of higher health care costs due to increased disease and disability among the populace, lost days of work, and lower quality of life. Improving upon this situation is an international priority (Kohl et al., 2012; Pate, 2009).

In an increasingly modernized world with rapidly developing and advancing economies that are reliant upon and profit from technological innovation, affecting change among the masses has proven to be especially challenging. As communities develop and new technologies are introduced, it is paramount to make decisions with an understanding of what their effects on human health and wellbeing will be. Physical activity educators can play a critical role in assuring that this occurs by engaging in collaborative work aimed at healthy and safe community environments, clinical and community preventive services, empowering people, and eliminating health disparities (Cardinal, 2011). Such involvement can be rationalized and guided by Cardinal's (in press) progressive principles for physical activity educators, which include:

- Physical activity is a basic need of the human organism, and participating in physical activity is a fundamental human right;
- Effective, positive, and safe physical activity opportunities must be available for *all* people, regardless of life stage or social circumstance;
- People live in dynamic environments and the health benefits of physical activity cannot be stored, therefore physical activity education must occur across the lifespan;
- In taking a life-course perspective (Li, Cardinal, & Settersten, 2009) to the promotion of physical activity, physical activity educators need to develop an understanding of changing people (e.g., affective, cognitive, and physical growth and development) and their changing contexts (e.g., socioeconomic, sociopolitical), which will help them anticipate distinct challenges and opportunities for helping people engage in physical activity and, therefore, receive optimal human resource development.

Fogg's (2015) behavior model offers theoretical structure to Cardinal's (In press) progressive principles. Specifically, Fogg's (2015) model hypothesizes that for a behavior to happen, three key elements must be present: motivation, ability, and trigger. The first two of these, motivation and ability, center on the person and are most closely aligned with the work of physical activity education (at least historically). That is, physical activity educators teach people how to be active and why they need to be physically active. The third one, trigger, pertains to the environment, which represents a relatively new and expanding area of opportunity for physical activity education, particularly beyond childhood and youth, and outside of the school environment (Cardinal, 2011). This is especially true since knowing that if one of the three elements proposed by Fogg (2015) is missing, the probability of a behavior

happening diminishes. So, for example, a person may choose to ride up an elevator rather than walk up the stairs because the elevator offers an environmental trigger, it is easier, and it is more convenient. However, if the person were to have to pay to ride up the elevator instead of taking the freely available stairs, the person may choose the stairs instead in an effort to save money. Of course, the stairwell would need to be in an accessible and convenient location for this to occur, too. Creating and sustaining a culture of health and physical activity, particularly in a world in which multiple forces resist this ideal, provides new opportunities for expanding the roles and relevance of lifespan physical activity education.

In this presentation, four key domains will be featured in which these concepts will be applied. They include the design and construction of healthy and safe community environments, the provision of clinical and community preventive services, empowering people, and eliminating health disparities.

Conclusion

Physical activity education can and should occur across the lifespan where people live, learn, work, and play. There are multiple opportunities for inter-sectoral collaboration and cooperation among both traditional (e.g., education, medicine, public health, recreation) and non-traditional fields of study (e.g., architecture, business, computer science, ecology, engineering, geography, public policy, sociology, transportation, urban planning). The pursuit of a healthy, active lifestyle should not simply be an individual effort. Rather, it should be a societal obligation where making the healthy choice is the easy choice.

Note

¹ While the focus of this paper and accompanying presentation will be primarily on the situation in the United States, it is believed that the situation being described may be affecting (or ultimately will be affecting) other countries that are trying to emulate the lifestyle of those living in the United States.

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