

## Precarity, fitness testing and critical pedagogy: a response-able approach

### ABSTRACT

In this paper, I argue the field of physical education is in a constant state of precarity brought on by external societal forces. These powerful forces have the ability to produce conditions that leave the field (and the people that comprise it) in conditions of instability, vulnerability, and insecurity. As a way to illustrate this, I first map some of the different ties that fitness testing has with cultural, social, political, and economic entities in society. I then show how the articulations between these relationships can produce negative affects for the field of physical education, its teachers, and the (diverse) young people that comprise it. I argue the use of critical pedagogy is a better way to go about teaching fitness and fitness testing with young people. Using a Response-able Pedagogy approach, I argue that young people may develop the skills to be 'Able to Respond' to the precarities they face due to fitness testing.

**Keywords:** Physical education; Health; Wellbeing; Equity

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## **Precariedade, testes de aptidão física e pedagogia crítica: uma abordagem responsiva**

### **Resumo**

Neste artigo, argumento que o campo da Educação Física está em constante estado de precariedade causado por forças sociais externas. Essas forças poderosas têm a capacidade de produzir condições que deixam o campo (e as pessoas que o compõem) em condições de instabilidade, vulnerabilidade e insegurança. Como forma de ilustrar isso, primeiro mapeio alguns dos diferentes laços que o teste de aptidão tem com entidades culturais, sociais, políticas e econômicas da sociedade. Mostro então como as articulações entre essas relações podem produzir efeitos negativos para o campo da Educação Física, seus professores e os (diversos) jovens que o compõem. Argumento que o uso da pedagogia crítica é a melhor maneira de ensinar fitness e testes de condicionamento físico com jovens. Usando uma pedagogia responsiva, defendo que os jovens podem desenvolver as habilidades para serem “capazes de responder” às precariedades que enfrentam devido aos testes de aptidão.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação física; Saúde; Bem-estar; Equidade

## **Precariedad, prueba de aptitud física y pedagogía crítica: un abordaje responsivo**

### **Resumen**

En este artículo, argumento que el campo de la Educación Física está en constante estado de precariedad provocado por fuerzas sociales externas. Estas fuerzas poderosas tienen la capacidad de producir condiciones que dejan el campo (y las personas que lo componen) en condiciones de inestabilidad, vulnerabilidad e inseguridad. Como forma de ilustrar esto, primero demuestro algunos de los distintos lazos que el test de aptitud física tiene con entidades culturales, sociales, políticas y económicas de la sociedad. Demuestro, entonces, como las articulaciones entre estas relaciones pueden producir efectos negativos para el campo de la Educación Física, sus profesores y los (diferentes) jóvenes que lo componen. Argumento que el uso de la pedagogía crítica es la mejor manera de enseñar fitness y test de condicionamiento entre los jóvenes. Usando una pedagogía responsiva, defiendo que los jóvenes pueden desarrollar las habilidades para responder a las precariedades que enfrentan debido a las pruebas de aptitud física.

**Palabras-clave:** Educación física; Salud; Bienestar; Equidad

## Introduction

Physical education once again finds itself at a point of crisis. Philosophical dispositions and societal trends are conspiring to rob our profession of its soul. The nature and meaning of kinesiology is in danger of being lost. It is the contention of this author that a philosophical pragmatism and cultural materialism, coupled with an overriding concern for health and wellness, have engendered this crisis (HAWKINS, 2008, p. 345).

In 2008, Hawkins stated that United States physical education has repeatedly been in different ‘points of crises’ driven by external social, political and economic forces. In so doing, he argued the field’s ‘soul’ is vulnerable – or outside of its own control – because different social circumstances have constrained the work of physical educators. He went on to contend that part of the problem is that some have been willing to compromise the educational aims of the field in order to gain financial and cultural capital aligned to health promotion agendas. Indeed, Kirk (2020) traced this historic entanglement between physical education and health promotion across multiple Anglophone countries through eras such as scientific functionalism, the ‘new health consciousness’, exercise as medicine, amongst others. To extend on these points, I argue the field of physical education is in a constant state of precarity because its existence is always contingent on economic and social conditions that are outside of our field’s control.

Precarity is a concept in social science research that is used to understand the vulnerability produced due to economic conditions (STANDING, 2016). In this way, precarity is often described as a change in the relationship between a person’s labour and their economic capital (ALBERTI, 2018). Put differently, precarity is produced when there is a change in the relationship between the work people do (labour) and how they get compensated (e.g., money, benefits) for that work. When there is a change in this relationship, what follows are moments of instability and insecurity within people’s lives. Precarity then, has been framed as the heightened vulnerability produced as a result of unstable employment.

Precarity, however, is not just related to employment. It is related to health, security, wellbeing and even professionalisation. Further, precarity is not a new term! Kirk (2020) illustrated that Bourdieu’s research highlighted the precarious relationship between unstable employment and individual health outcomes. Kirk (2020) also outlined research from Sweden that illustrated the ways precarity negatively affects identity development, human relationships, happiness, and spirituality in people (NÄSSTRÖM; KALM, 2015). When we consider Hawkins’s comments in relation to precarity, it is unsurprising that physical education’s ‘soul’ is always vulnerable because the broader social, political, and economic landscape influences what happens in the name of physical education. Therefore, precarity is not *just* an economic or labour condition. Rather, it is a social process that produces unstable conditions in our world (BUTLER, 2004).

In this paper, I argue that precarity (as a social process) has had negative effects on the field of physical education and diverse young people. I begin by explaining why ‘precarity’ is a social process and not just an economic condition. I then turn to fitness testing as an example to show how this social process makes physical education precarious. I do this by illustrating the negative social, political, economic, and cultural affects that fitness testing has had on physical education as well as diverse young people. Despite causing many of these issues, I argue that fitness testing (as a social process) is then ironically presented as *the* solution to the precarious environment it helped create. Rather than *compromising* the educational aims of physical education by adopting and aligning to

traditional fitness testing practices, I argue that critical pedagogy offers a different approach to fitness testing that can help teach about precarity, health and wellbeing, as well as equity.

## **Precarity as a Social Process**

To be precaritized is to be subject to pressures and experiences that lead to a precariat existence, of living in the present, without a secure identity or sense of development achieved through work or lifestyle (STANDING, 2016, p. 19).

The concept ‘precarity’ (STANDING, 2016) is being picked up and used across multiple fields in the social sciences including economics, sociology, education – and lately – physical education (KIRK, 2020). In the simplest sense, precarity is a term used to describe life situations that are vulnerable, unstable and insecure, leading to detrimental effects on health and wellbeing. The most well-known example of precarity is when employers use ‘gig’ employment to replace permanent jobs (ALBERTI et al., 2018). That is, when employers hire someone to complete a project (or a gig) and pay them a flat rate for the completion of the task regardless of the time a person works (think of an Uber driver). Further, there is little (if any) guarantee of future employment once that ‘gig’ has been completed. Therefore, ‘gig’ work is insecure (no guarantee of work), vulnerable (often underpaid), and unstable (lacks long-term benefits).

Like many fields, physical education has not been shielded from the ‘gig’ economy. Kirk (2020) outlined how the field has already been ‘precaritized’ through ‘gig’ jobs like substitute teaching, using external providers (POWELL, 2015; SPERKA; ENRIGHT, 2018), and using ‘ready-made’ curriculum kits to replace teacher developed instruction (LANDI, FITZPATRICK; MCGLASHAN, 2016). Kirk (2020) also argued that we are likely already working with children (and indeed some teachers) that are wrestling with the effects of precarity. Social institutions, like government housing, national healthcare services and government unemployment benefits are meant to ease the effects of precarity on society (BUTLER, 2009). Schools are one of these social institutions meant to minimise the effects of precarity. Yet, schools remain under-staffed, under-resourced and under-prepared to address these highly complex issues. Additionally, there is ample evidence to suggest that schools may be causing even greater harm to diverse young people (e.g., Black, LGBTQ+, immigrants). Put differently, not only are schools likely not minimising the effects of precarity but they also may be exacerbating them.

As I shift the focus toward understanding ‘precarity’, I wish to refer the reader to the language Standing (2016) used in the passage that started this section. Standing (2016) stated people are subjected to ‘pressures’, ‘experiences’ and ‘existence’ in a process of becoming ‘precaritized’. There are (at least) three significant reasons why this passage is important. To start, Standing (2016) skilfully transitioned precarity from being an adjective (a description of conditions) to a verb, or a series of active processes (pressures, experiences, existence) that constantly produce vulnerable conditions. Thus, precarity is not static condition (being in precarity) but rather is a ‘continuous state’ where people are actively precaritized by social processes. Shifting precarity from an adjective (description/ condition) to a verb (active processes) allows us to consider *which* social processes produce vulnerability and instability. Thus, the second important point in using precarity as an analytical tool is that we must focus on the *relationships* between multiple things in our world (e.g., humans, economy, objects) rather than describing conditions. From this perspective, precarity is not just a labour condition but rather is a *social process* (BUTLER, 2004) that is embodied and unstable.

The last insight of using precarity as a conceptual tool is to consider the ‘affects’ of these precarious social processes on the world. Given the diversity of our world (e.g., race, gender, social class), different people experience these active social processes in unique and individualised ways. In other words, the precarity that a young transgender boy faces in a changing room is different than the precarity that a young Black American boy encounters in a changing room. Therefore, relationships do not produce a single and stable condition of ‘precarity’ (one way to be vulnerable), but rather they produce multiple *precarities* (diverse forms of vulnerability). In this way, ‘precarity’ as an analytical tool is an investigation into understanding how socio-political *processes* by mapping the different *relationships* it enters into that produce a range of *affects*, or ‘pressures’ and ‘experiences’ (STANDING, 2016) that cause harm, violence and injury (economically, socially, physically) in our world.

### **Fitness Testing as a Social Process: mapping the relationships**

Fitness testing has proven to be a polemic topic in physical education (ALFREY; GARD 2014). There are some in the field that support fitness testing linked to educational aims (KEATING, 2003; SILVERMAN; KEATING; PHILLIPS, 2008) because they have *hypothesised* fitness testing *might* lead to a reduction in negative health outcomes (KEATING ET AL., 2020). On the other hand, there are those who have argued that young people do not enjoy fitness testing (WRENCH; GARRETT, 2008), the tests are usually implemented poorly and for non-educational purposes (ALFREY; LANDI, 2022), there are ethical questions around data collection and consent (Pluim and Gard 2018), and tests have measurement limitations (CALE; HARRIS, 2009). Thus, a large question looms over the fitness testing debate: does the implementation of fitness tests in physical education place the *potential* benefits of the assessment above the *empirically documented* negative affects it has on (diverse) young people?

From a precarity (STANDING, 2016) perspective, it is useful to conceptualise fitness testing as a *social process* rather than a ‘neutral’ assessment tool. To do so, it is helpful to map the social, political, economic, and cultural relationships of fitness testing. Socially, fitness testing organisations (e.g., FitnessGRAM®, Cooper Institute) are powerful entities that have historical ties with corporations (e.g., NFL, Campbell’s Soup) and professional/ charitable organisations (e.g., SHAPE America, National Fitness Foundation, National Dairy Council) (BUTLER-WALL, 2015; GARD; PLUIM 2017). The fitness testing process wields significant social capital using these relationships to expand and promote its outreach.

From a political perspective, fitness testing has been legislatively mandated in several countries, states or regions, as well as large cities across the world (SAFRON; LANDI, 2022). Many policies are a result of lobbying efforts by companies, professional organisations, and researchers that have vested financial and professional interests in fitness testing (e.g., SHAPE AMERICA, 2016). Further, government funded research projects and guidance documents (CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL, 2019) that are developed by these same groups of people explicitly recommend fitness testing as part of their requirements in grant applications. Additionally, governmental programmes, like the Presidential Youth Fitness Program, have outright adopted specific fitness testing schemes (e.g., FitnessGRAM) (US DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, 2023). In other words, fitness testing (as a social process) has entanglements in multiple political entities that influence the laws, grants, and policies that affect physical education.

There are also economic (financial) ties to fitness testing social. Schools and school systems pay substantial sums of money to implement testing in their classes (JETTE et al., 2020).



Professional organisations actively profit by selling resources and workshops that help educators implement fitness testing in schools (CONKLE, 2019). Many fitness testing companies donate and/or pay advertising fees to professional organisations to expand their marketing outreach (SHAPE AMERICA, 2023). As schools adopt fitness testing programmes, the companies gain greater access to – and can profit from – student health data (DAY et al., 2023). Researchers using these data sets can gain financial benefits from public health grant funding schemes (PLUIM; GARD, 2018). The researchers further publish their results in journals run by publishing companies (e.g., Taylor & Francis, Elsevier) that charge customers massive fees to read the articles. Notably, these are just *some* of the financial ties produced as part of the fitness testing social process in physical education.

Culturally, fitness tests are often aligned to medical and public health fields where advocates *theorise* the tests can *potentially* lead to better long-term health outcomes (DAY et al., 2023; KEATING et al., 2020). The relationship with medicine and public health ostensibly links fitness testing to ‘hard sciences’ (WELK, 2017) and works to legitimise the field (JETTE ET AL., 2020). Despite issues with the methods, measurement, and scientific rigour (CALE; HARRIS, 2009), many physical educators that use fitness testing argue the connection to ‘science’ and ‘public health’ legitimises the field (ALFREY; GARD, 2014). Therefore, fitness testing leverages its cultural relationship with public health and ‘science’ to quell challenges raised about its use in schools and physical education more broadly.

When using precarity (STANDING, 2016) as an analytical tool, fitness testing is understood as a vast social process that has produced relationships between social, political, economic, and cultural networks. These relationships are not isolated from one another, but rather come to matter in relation to each other. For example, professional organisations (social relationship) may partner with fitness testing companies to apply for grants (economic relationship) from the government (political relationship) within the field of public health (cultural relationship) to conduct research in physical education. The point here is that these relationships produced by the fitness testing social process affect what happens in the field of physical education and influences the experiences of (diverse) young people in schools.

### **Fitness Testing: producing precarities**

When reflecting on Hawkins (2008, p. 345) statement that opened this paper, he was very clear about what is affecting physical education: “societal trends are conspiring to rob our profession of its soul”. The societal trends that Hawkins is referring to are the social processes that *precaritise* (STANDING, 2016) the field of physical education and the people that comprise it (students and teachers). Through this precaritisation process, the field is left vulnerable for outside forces to ‘rob our soul’ or dictate the practices that happen in physical education.

One particular societal trend fitness testing actively produces in physical education is the medicalisation (CRAWFORD, 1980) of young people and their behaviours. For example, the most widely used fitness assessment in the world sends report cards to parents that classify students using the following terms: ‘healthy fitness zone’, ‘needs improvement’, and ‘health risk’ (PLOWMAN; MEREDITH, 2013). These labels are medicalised categories that seek to warn students that they are ‘at-risk’ and need to change their health behaviours (BUTLER-WALL, 2015). Fitness testing here is not a ‘neutral’ assessment tool but instead is a sociopolitical network that draws on cultural relationships with public health in order to medicalise young people’s bodies in the name of public health promotion. Clearly, this is a massive shift where the educative aims of physical education are

replaced by the behavioural goals in public health promotion. Or as Hawkins puts it, outside forces robs the field of its soul.

Another form of precarisation is illustrated in how fitness testing affects the economic and professional landscape of physical education. For example, some places not only mandate fitness testing for all students but also use those results to evaluate teachers (NYC DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, 2022). Despite numerous flaws with the test (CALE; HARRIS, 2009), lack of resources to conduct fitness testing properly (SILVERMAN; KEATING; PHILLIPS, 2008), and a lack of evidence that fitness testing leads to positive health outcomes (LANDI; WALTON-FISETTE; SUTHERLAND, 2021) – teachers’ professional and financial livelihoods are being held hostage by a system that aims to produce instability amongst the profession. Therefore, fitness testing has the potential to affect teachers employment status, salaries, and upward social mobility.

Another way fitness tests precarise the profession is by minimising the resources teachers have. Most departments have to pay for the fitness testing products they implement (PHYSEDNHEALTH, 2020). These departments, however, are already under-funded, under-resourced, and lack sufficient facilities and personnel. Many fitness tests, however, require departments to purchase additional resources, training, and equipment in order to implement the procedures ‘correctly’ (CONKLE, 2019). In this case, departments have to use their minimal funding from schools to purchase fitness tests and any associated costs. Further, through the actual implementation of fitness testing, teachers often lose valuable instructional time with their students. Therefore, not only can fitness testing be a financial drain on budgets, but it also limits the most precious resource teachers have: time with their students.

Fitness testing also places a diverse range of precarities on the (diverse) students that comprise physical education. Indeed, there are documented positive effects of fitness testing on *some* students. For example, there is evidence that ‘highly fit’ and ‘self-competent’ students may have increased motivation as a result of participating in fitness testing (JAAKKOLA ET AL., 2016; SIMONTON; MERCIER; GARN, 2019). In addition, many boys have very positive experiences of fitness testing and believe it is integral to the physical education curriculum (O’KEEFFE; MACDONNCHA; DONNELLY, 2021). Notably, these positive results were limited to boys that were already physically fit and/or had high self-competence going into the test.

Juxtaposed with the positive indicators above, there is increasing evidence to suggest that diverse young people’s experiences of fitness testing are less than ideal. For example, studies have illustrated that young women and girls have labelled fitness testing as painful (WRENCH; GARRETT, 2008) and has negative influences on body-image and dissatisfaction (LODEWYK; SULLIVAN, 2016). Safron and Landi (2023) recently documented the negative experiences that young Black, Latina/o, and LGBTQ+ young people have during fitness testing – making them want to drop out of physical education. Further, questions have been raised about how testing practices medicalise the body in ways that disenfranchises young people from diverse cultural, psychological, athletic, educational, and social backgrounds (ALFREY; LANDI, 2022). In other words, the fitness testing social process produces multiple precarities amongst students regarding their health and wellbeing, educational attainment, culture and heritage, as well as their identities.

Fitness testing imposes multiple forms of precarities on physical education departments, teachers, and (diverse) students. In so doing, these pressures work to produce instability in the field leaving it vulnerable to outside forces. Fitness testing is not a ‘neutral’ practice that evaluates young people. Rather, it is a network of political, social, cultural, and economic processes that actively undermine the educational foundations of the profession. Hawkins (2008, p. 345) was specific about *which* processes were most harmful: “a philosophical pragmatism and cultural materialism, coupled with an overriding concern for health and wellness, have engendered this crisis”. In other words, the

field of physical education have often responded to these manufactured crises by compromising with the precaritising forces that produced the instability in the first place.

When it comes to fitness testing, these compromises can be found across the physical education profession. For example, professional organisations have re-orientated their mission statements to include and promote health outcomes as well as practices that measure (and medicalise) young bodies (AZZARITO, 2007). Some scholars aligned their research agendas toward the improvement of public health outcomes through physical education (MCKENZIE; LOUNSBERY, 2009; METZLER et al., 2013). In fact, many physical education guidelines explicitly recommended or mandated fitness testing in physical education in different evaluation tools (CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL, 2019; SHAPE AMERICA, 2016). Indeed, those people and organisations that did make compromises by aligning their work to external forces have benefitted in some ways. Some may have received limited and short-lived benefits (e.g., grants, resources, donations) as well as cultural capital that may have eased the ill-effects of the precarities brought on by fitness testing. Yet, by aligning their agendas to fitness testing, and compromising the holistic educational foundations of the field, these groups also reinforced the same social process that manufactured the crisis to begin with. Rather than allowing fitness testing and its' social network to define physical education, I argue we need to keep these practices in their place. One way to do so is by teaching about fitness and fitness testing using critical pedagogy (FITZPATRICK, 2019).

### **Critical pedagogy: a response-able approach to fitness education**

Like Kirk (2020) suggested, I believe critical pedagogy can be a powerful way to address precarity in physical education. Critical pedagogy is a teaching approach that aims to deconstruct and transform inequities and oppressive power structures in education (FREIRE, 2009). Lather (1998) claimed that the numerous forms of critical pedagogy (there are many) fall under a big tent. As such, there are some overarching principles that are often shared across these pedagogies within that tent: (1) a raised critical consciousness (FREIRE, 2009); (2) dialectical and reflective learning (GIROUX, 1988); (3) combining theory and practice – praxis (FREIRE, 2009); and (4) empowering (diverse) students (HOOKS, 1994). These principles are also used across multiple forms of critical pedagogy in physical education.

Within physical education, Fitzpatrick (2019) outlined four dominant threads of critical pedagogy in the field: (a) girls activist approach (OLIVER; KIRK, 2015), (b) modest pedagogy (TINNING, 2002), (c) feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial pedagogy (AZZARITO, 2019), and (d) multicultural and intersectional pedagogy (FITZPATRICK, 2013; FITZPATRICK; RUSSELL, 2015). Each of these pedagogies were developed and refined in different parts of the world (e.g., USA, Australia, UK, Aotearoa New Zealand) and therefore address diverse power relations in relation to equity and diversity. I have no doubt that each of these approaches would do well to engage with and teach about the precarities produced through fitness testing in physical education. For me, however, I draw on a different strand of critical pedagogy inspired by posthuman and new materialist theories: response-able pedagogy.

Response-able pedagogy is a teaching approach informed by new materialist and posthuman theories. Barad (2012, p. 81) argued “[...] responsibility is not about right response, but rather a matter of inviting, welcoming, and enabling the response of the Other. That is, what is at issue is response-ability — the ability to respond”. In other words, response-able pedagogy is not meant to teach students there is a ‘right response’ to something. Rather, it develops the students’ abilities to engage with diverse perspectives and empower them to develop the ‘ability to respond’ in



meaningful and ethical ways to these perspectives. Haraway (2016, p. 105) adds that response-ability is a “praxis of care and response” so we are able to respond to troubles within a complex world in order to learn to live and die together well. Thus, wellbeing is at the heart of response-able practices. Below, I outline the five principles of response-able pedagogy and what they may look like in teaching about fitness testing as a response to precarity.

A response-able pedagogy in physical education would include: (a) an attentiveness to and affirmation of difference (TAYLOR, 2018). Whilst teaching fitness, this could mean leading an activity where students examine the cultural differences around fitness and how diverse ethnicities and cultures address fitness. It could also include exploring the differences between body types and how this influences different health-related factors. Perhaps students may explore different factors that affect people’s engagement with fitness based on geographic regions, gender, race, sexuality, and abilities. In fact, it could even lead to an activity that explores if fitness tests can account for these differences, and if so, how?.

The second principle of response-able pedagogy is to: (b) focus on embedded and embodied relationships (GRAVETT; TAYLOR; FAIRCHILD, 2021). Rather than thinking about human bodies as distinct and isolated, a response-able pedagogy would teach that bodies are relational and always interconnected to others and the environment. Teaching about fitness from this perspective may include discussing how health and wellbeing is influenced by our relationships with friends and families. It could also discuss how our environment shapes which movements our bodies can participate in. From this perspective, fitness is not something that is an individual characteristic. Rather, fitness is a production of multiple relationships between other people, places, and objects.

The third principle of response-able pedagogy is: (c) attuning to affect (RENOLD; ASHTON; MCGEENEY; 2021; STROM; MILLS, 2021). There are two ways to *read* affect here. The first is about listening, responding, and making sense of different emotions. Within fitness testing, this could include reflective discussions with one another about how students feel, how others may feel, and how to support one another. The other form of affect here, however, is reading affect as a force – or how we *affect* one another. What does fitness testing do for our bodies? What can our bodies do to other bodies in fitness? Affect from a response-able perspective is not just the affective domain (emotions, listening, responding), but also thinking about how we produce affects in and are affected by others in this world.

The fourth principle of response-able pedagogy is: (d) cultivating an ethic of care and concern (HARAWAY, 2016). Having an ability to respond also includes being responsible. This includes being responsible for our own decisions and behaviours and thinking how they affect others. It also includes being a citizen of physical education that cares for the wellbeing of others. Lastly, it includes recognising that we – as a culture – are accountable for the successes and failures we have as a group. Teaching fitness testing with an ethic of care and concern means setting up tasks and activities in a way that forces young people to rely on, and care for, one another to be successful. Therefore, fitness is not an individual ‘achievement’ but is a collective goal for everyone to contribute towards.

The fifth and last principle of response-able pedagogy is: (e) engaging in transformational practices (BARAD, 2007). A response-able pedagogy aims to empower young people, and have them develop the skills to empower others, in order to solve problems in our world. From a fitness perspective, perhaps we ask young people what are the current ‘problems’ with the fitness testing practices. We then empower the students to make changes/ adaptations to fitness testing so the activities they engage in are empowering for others. In so doing, not only do students take control of their own learning, but they transform the fitness testing process that aims to precaritize the field of physical education. Instead, fitness testing becomes an empowering activity that regains the educative and holistic aims of the field.

## Summary

I began this paper with Hawkins' (2008) passage that contends the field of physical education is in a constant state of crisis. He argued this crisis is due to external societal trends that use networks and relationships to 'rob the profession of its soul'. I agreed with this perspective and connected it to Kirk's (2020) recent theorising about precarity in physical education. Rather than seeing precarity as *just* a labour condition (STANDING, 2016), however, I argued precarity is a social process that produces vulnerable, unstable and insecure conditions (BUTLER, 2004). To do so, I argued that precarity as a social system is an active process that uses different networks and relationships to produce different forms of precarities within the field of physical education that affect the teachers and (diverse) young people it serves.

To illustrate how precarity operates in physical education, I used fitness testing as an example of a social practice because of its use of interconnected networks of relationships (social, cultural, etc.) to produce vulnerability, instability, and insecurity within the field. Further, I then illustrated that the fitness testing social system actively produces negative affects on (diverse) young people's experiences, health and wellbeing (SAFRON; LANDI, 2022; WRENCH; GARRETT, 2008). Despite being the cause of these multiple precarities, fitness testing is also constructed as a potential solution to ease the effects of these negative outcomes. Therefore, many within the field have aligned their practices to fitness testing, and its interconnected network, in order to get short-term relief from the precarity's ill effects.

Rather than aligning to these external forces (and their short-term benefits), I argued that a critical, and more specifically a Response-Able (BARAD, 2007), pedagogy is a better way to teach about fitness and fitness testing in physical education. I outlined the five principles of response-able pedagogy: (a) an attentiveness to and affirmation of difference; (b) focus on embedded and embodied relationships; (c) attuning to affect (emotions and force); (d) cultivating an ethic of care and concern; (e) engaging in transformational practices. By drawing on these five principles, I argue that a response-able pedagogical approach to fitness and fitness testing may provide students with opportunities to develop new skills that equip them with the 'ability to respond' to (and transform) the precarity brought on by an unjust and inequitable fitness testing social system. Perhaps by empowering young people to be 'response-able', our field can resist the external forces from precaritising and 'robbing the profession of its soul' (HAWKINS, 2008). Further, perhaps these skills will give the students the ability to respond to the multiple precarities they are currently facing in their own lives.

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