

# Gymnastics

## Classification and Teaching

**Sandor Poloskei**  
Gymnastic Instructor  
University of Regina  
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The previous chapter focused on the history of gymnastics. However, in view of the varied development of the activity, one may pose the question: What is gymnastics after all? Since the word gymnastics used to refer to a number of physical activities that, in spite of their common developmental history, appear very different to the casual observer, I would answer the question by stating that the phrase gymnastics is an umbrella term used to refer to a collection of physical activities that are historically and developmentally inter-related in nature. Presently, gymnastics includes disciplines that are either competitive or non competitive activities. The competitive disciplines of gymnastics include such sports as artistic gymnastics, RSG or rhythmic sportive gymnastics, trampolining, acrosport and aerobics. The non-competitive disciplines of gymnastics include such activities as recreational, educational, demonstrational and applied gymnastics.

### Classification and Brief Description

#### A) *Competitive events*

##### 1) Artistic gymnastics

Artistic gymnastics is probably the most well known form of gymnastics. It is practiced by both men and women and it has been part of the Olympic Games since the modern games were re-introduced in Athens, more than a hundred years ago. Men have to perform various exercises in six events (floor, pommel horse, rings, vault, parallel bars and high bar) while women perform in four (vault, uneven bars, balance beam, floor).

##### 2) Rhythmic Sportive Gymnastics (RSG)

RSG is women's only event and it is also part of the Olympic Games. The events of RSG include exercises performed by skipping rope, ball, hula hoop, clubs and ribbon.

##### 3) Trampolining

Trampolining is practiced by both men and women and it is also part of the Olympic Games since Sydney (2000). 80th genders perform the same events, although in separate categories. The exercises are performed either on trampolines or the so called double-mini trampolines. Medals are awarded in the categories of singles, doubles or mixed doubles.

##### 4) Acrosport

The sport of acrobatics includes the events of power tumbling and hand balancing. It is practiced by both genders, in separate categories. Power tumbling is performed on an 80 foot spring loaded surface, with a run up area and a dismounting area at the end of the run way. The hand balancing events are performed by teams of doubles, trios or quads on a square gymnastics mat.

##### 5) Aerobics

The sport is the latest new comer on the gymnastics scene. It is practiced by both genders in singles and doubles categories.

#### B) *Non- competitive events*

##### 1) Recreational gymnastics

Recreational gymnastics, the mainstay of many successful leisure programs, enjoys a great deal of popularity all across Canada and the popularity reaches way beyond our borders. The most popular programs were designed by Gymnastics Canada and delivered through thousands of clubs, YMCA's and YWCA from coast to coast.

However, the content of the programs are not necessarily restricted to the one developed by Gymnastics Canada. Indeed, the content of various programs may even be designed to utilize the apparatus and skills of any of the competitive disciplines of gymnastics. However, the success of the program developed by Gymnastics Canada is probably due to its focus on skill concepts, such as the six dominant movement patterns (DMP), as opposed to focusing on specific skills. This focus allows even the non athletic segment of population to participate and creates an enjoyable, safe environment for the participants.

## 2) Educational Gymnastics

Gymnastics becomes educational gymnastics when educational institutions include it in their curriculum in order to fulfill specific educational aims. Such is the case in Saskatchewan, where the K-12 Physical Education Curriculum Guide states that 25 to 40% of all physical education classes should be focusing on teaching/learning gymnastics.

## 3) Demonstrational Gymnastics

Although demonstrational gymnastics is not well known in North America, it enjoys a great deal of popularity in Europe, especially in Germany and the Czech Republic. It is not uncommon to see hundreds, sometimes even thousands of people performing together, in a coordinated fashion of course, during mass demonstrations. The equipment used for these performances can be an array of almost any, very imaginative props, such as medicine balls, sticks, umbrellas, hand held ladders, dim bing poles or team mates. The most famous of these gymnastics festivals are the Gymnastrada (originated in Germany) and the Spartakiade (Czech Republic). These two events run for days at a time and involve tens of thousands of participants.

## 4) Applied Gymnastics

This form of gymnastics is often used as part of the training regiment in other sports in order to:

1. Facilitate general physical development,
2. To develop motor skills and abilities,
3. To enhance injury prevention, and to
4. Assist in the rehabilitation from injuries.

Some examples of sports that rely on gymnastics for preparation include wrestling (physical development, injury prevention), diving and pole vaulting (motor skill development. Please note that I only included the most obvious examples.

Although it is not a very common practice in North America, gymnastics is also used for medicinal purposes, especially in Europe. Specific exercises are used to treat back aches resulting from postural problems, foot pain as a consequence of fallen arches. There are also programs that help disabled people to regain their independence in the performance of their regular daily activities.

## **Justification for the inclusion of Gymnastics in school curriculums**

The Saskatchewan K-12 Curriculum Guide justifies the inclusion of physical education in school curriculum by recognising that "physical activity can provide enjoyment. Challenge, self-expression, social interaction, work and leisure". It also acknowledges that gymnastics activities can offer some very unique opportunities to participants that are seldom offered by other forms of physical activities. The list of these unique opportunities includes:

1. Upper body development
2. Development of physical fitness, especially muscular endurance.
3. Bilateral development

Participants may also gain skills, landings for instance, that can potentially reduce injuries in everyday situations, such as falling off playground equipment, bikes, roller blades, stairs, etc.

## **Teaching Gymnastics**

The aim of physical education is to develop physically educated persons through

1. The development of positive attitudes towards physical activity.
2. Promoting a lifestyle oriented to overall well being.
3. Development of concept based skills

Note that the above mentioned aims resemble very closely to the teaching philosophy advocated by Gymnastics Canada. This philosophy is geared towards promoting life long participation. Gymnastics Canada states that in order to achieve this goal, gymnastics programs should be focusing on the three principles of fun, fitness and fundamentals. The explanation to how the use of these three philosophical principles relate to the aims of physical education is listed in the points below.

### **Fun**

The development of positive attitudes towards physical activity relies greatly on intrinsic motivation. People are known to engage in activities in which they have fun while participating. If they really enjoy the activity, then participation itself can become a motivating reward. In order to make the activity enjoyable, the instructor should ensure that activity is continuous (elimination of line ups and waiting for turns also tend to eliminate boredom), the participants experience success (we tend to stay away from activities that consistently make us fail, because it does not make us feel really good about ourselves) and the participants are consistently challenged and allowed to discover new ways of doing things. Instructors should also use a variety of teaching styles, which means that sometimes they just have to relinquish control to the students.

Note that teaching styles vary between the extremes of teacher directed learning (lecture would be the most extreme example) and student directed learning (a free for all would be the

most extreme case). Challenge and discovery methods lie between these two extremes. The exact location on the teaching/learning continuum depends on the amount of control the teacher retains and the amount of restrictions he/she implements.

### **Fitness**

It is also reasoned, that in order to promote a lifestyle oriented to overall well being. A successful program should allow participants to develop and retain a good level of fitness. The components of fitness are listed below.

- Physical fitness
- Flexibility Strength and Power Endurance
- Motor Fitness
- Spatial Orientation
- Kinesthetic Awareness
- Balance
- Fundamentals

The development of concept based skills should be achieved by teaching, exploring and repeating the six dominant movement patterns of gymnastics. These dominant movement patterns are listed as:

- Landings
- Static positions
- Locomotions
- Swings
- Rotations
- Springs



