Towards the fitness of the new millennium: the social contribution of the Bones For Life Programme

The strategies of the programme which traces its origins to the Feldenkrais Method, from the Weber-Fechner law through the original principles of the use of pressure and the use of weight loads in the Bones For Life programme towards a new approach to fitness which contributes to the development of the civilized human being.

by Daniela Agazzi

The origins of the Bones For Life programme from the principles of the Feldenkrais Method

'The more advanced Technology gets, the poorer civilized man's fitness seems to become. The quality of personal movement coordination in the culture is lagging behind the inventive capacity of human's mind faculty to provide solutions for life needs. Growing in age, people tend to lose the ease of moving, as well as the primal intelligence which could lead them to a more gratifying use of their body. With walking done with difficulty, distortion of posture, faces expressing suffering, the civilized human tend to reach a condition which would not have allowed him to survive in pre- cultural natural reality.

If Pre-historic man would not have been able to walk well, let alone to run, he would not have survived, and we would not be here today. In the language of evolution a skillful movement is equal survival. Fortunately civilization is allowing us to exist with lower standards, but with the acceptance of less than satisfactory mobility, we also lose the joy of existence which is inherent in moving freely.

Those people who intentionally take responsibility for their personal ecology, and are willing to invest in restoring their quality of moving, may find many available methods for building up fitness, but most of these methods might be irrelevantly exaggerated or do not answer the basic need for natural movement which serves life.'[1]

How does the Bones For Life programme claim to be different and innovative? What are the strategies which accompany the aim of updating human beings' fitness?

The Bones For Life programme, created by Ruthy Alon, has its origins in the principles of the Feldenkrais Method. Ruthy Alon is in fact a Senior Trainer of the Feldenkrais Method; she had direct contact with the genius Moshe Feldenkrais for some 40 years and has taught and still teaches this Method in many countries throughout the world. Her contribution could not fail to be influenced by this long experience in her own life.

[1] *Cit. Ruthy Alon, Movement Intelligence - Abstract, page 1.*

The Weber-Fechner law

Moshe Feldenkrais, the founder of the method which bears his name, based this innovative approach on the Weber-Fechner law. This is a general psychological law splendidly described and placed in its historical and cultural context in a 1997 article by Feldenkrais Method Trainer Dennis Leri. This law relates

'the degree of response or sensation of a sense organ and the intensity of the stimulus.'[2]

In practice, what happens in our everyday life? If you are on a sunlit beach at midday and light a candle, can you notice the difference in the quantity of light? If you are in an extremely silent place, such as in the countryside, far from the city, you can hear a car arriving from the approach of its noise, but if you are in a chaotic city centre in the middle of a traffic jam does anything change if one more car arrives? The Weber-Fechner law tells us that we often cannot notice the auditory stimulus of the arrival of a car but that this ability of the nervous system depends on the context of the background stimulus.

With his Method Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais showed us that to improve the learning of the nervous system it is necessary to reduce the effort (and obviously the basic muscle tone) and that this allows the development of our own motor sensitiveness which will be at the service of the learning. The Weber-Fechner law allowed him to state what he intuitively knew through experience. In other words, the greater the background noise the less we are able to hear small and subtle stimuli. It is a physiological phenomenon which is held to be valid for almost all our senses. And thus it is reasonable to suppose that the more the muscle effort or background noise in an action is reduced, the greater will be our ability to feel and perceive what we are doing. It may be deduced from this that the intentional reduction of effort will be significant for the ability to learn better ways of acting.

Ernst Heinrich Weber (1795-1878), a German anatomist and physiologist, first introduced the concept of 'just noticeable difference' that is the smallest perceptible difference between two similar stimuli. Weber's empirical observations were then expressed in a mathematical formula by Gustav Theodor Fechner, who called his formula Weber's Law. [3]

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[2] *Cit. Dennis Leri, The Weber-Fechner Principles, 1997, which may be seen on Dennis Leri's website at www.semiophysics.com/SemioPhysics_Articles_mental_10*
Dennis Leri also specifies that 'The law asserts that equal increments of sensation are associated with equal increments of the logarithm of the stimulus, or that the just noticeable difference in any sensation results from a change in the stimulus which bears a constant ratio to the value of the stimulus.'

[3] *The historical and cultural context from where Weber and Fechner's ideas have emerged that led to the development of their law can be seen in the same article written by D. Leri.*
'The Fechner Weber principle marked the beginning of the science of psychophysiology and yet all its implications have not been played out in that field. (…) Weber was a professor at the University of Leipzig from 1818 until 1871. He is known chiefly for his work on sensory response to weight, temperature, and pressure; he described a number of his experiments in this area in 'De Tactu' (1834; "Concerning Touch"). Weber determined that there was a threshold of sensation that must be passed before an increase in the intensity of any stimulus could be detected; the amount of increase necessary to create sensation was the just-noticeable difference. He further observed that the difference was a ratio of the total intensity of sensation, rather than an absolute figure; thus, a greater weight must be added to a 100-pound load than to a 10-pound load for a man carrying the load to notice the change. Similar observations were made on other senses, including sight and hearing. Weber also described a terminal threshold for all senses, the maximum stimulus beyond which no further sensation could be registered. Weber's findings were elaborated in 'Der Tastsinn und das Gemeingefühl' (1851; "The Sense of Touch and the Common Sensibility"), which was considered to be "the foundation stone of experimental psychology." (…) Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801-1887) was a German physicist and philosopher and a key figure in the founding of psychophysics, the science concerned with quantitative relations between sensations and the stimuli producing them. (…) Between 1851 and 1860, Fechner worked out the rationale for measuring sensation indirectly in terms of the unit of just noticeable difference between two sensations, developed his three basic psychophysical methods (just noticeable differences, right and wrong cases, and average error) and carried out the classical experiments on tactual and visual distance, visual brightness, and lifted weights that formed a large part of the first of the two volumes of the Elemente der Psychophysik. Fechner's aim in the Elemente was to establish an exact science of the functional relationship between physical and mental phenomena. Distinguishing between inner (the relation between sensation and nerve excitation) and outer (the relation between sensation and physical stimulation) psychophysics, Fechner formulated his famous principle that the intensity of a sensation increases as the log of the stimulus (S = k log R) to characterize outer psychophysical relations. In doing so, he believed that he had arrived at a way of demonstrating a fundamental

The Weber-Fechner principle allows us to relate quantity and quality in movement. The Feldenkrais Method teaches us to reduce the basic stimulus and allows us to learn to perceive the just noticeable differences at lower thresholds than normal. Learning with minimum effort is already a satisfaction in itself, given that movement becomes particularly easy and pleasant, but it turns out to be only a strategy which allows the true and deepest learning that renews our whole neuromotor organisation of everyday actions. The Feldenkrais Method places us once more at the moment in which our dynamic habits are built on the base of life experience. And in the light of recent discoveries, which came about thanks to studies in neuroscience, we now know how much our experience, based on sensorimotor perception, is plastic and susceptible to great development.[4]

The sensorimotor activities of the human species were built over millions of years of evolution. The evolutionary processes are the basis of the habits of our species. At the phylogenetic level they carry a inherited knowledge which has been perfected and refined and which has allowed the species to survive over time, while at the ontogenetic level they embody in our personal history the events of our life as single individuals and of the cultural group to which we belong.

What allows learning is the ability to perceive differences; the sensitiveness that allows us to recognise what we are doing and to give it significance in relation to a basic context. If there are no differences there is no meaning and there will be no learning. In fact our nervous system is more able to perceive the margin between two stimuli in comparison - relative perception - than one stimulus taken alone - absolute perception.

By means of its particular structure a Feldenkrais lesson evokes the ancient phylogenetic dynamics of organic learning, and adding to it an intelligent re-elaboration of ontogenetic skills allows us to do more, and better, with less effort.

An idea which is certainly not often found in the world of movement education. The specific skills of the species are being ever more often forgotten and left behind in our repertoire of human movement, lost as we are in chasing after the idea of power even at the expense of harmony. And we do not realise that this way of behaving distances us from the protective organic ability to perceive the body and the quality of our actions.

The Feldenkrais lesson makes us perceive again these ancient skills, and happens like a sort of re-discovery of a way of act, of thinking and of being ourselves which permits us to learn throughout our lives increasingly delicate, refined and healthy aspects of experience ourselves in the world. We cultivate the perception of small differences. We are going to move the threshold above which we can pick out the barely perceptible differences. Regarding the perception of weight in fact - which at the proprioceptive level constitutes a particularly determining element - according to the Weber-Fechner law we can perceive the difference of around 1/20 of what we are already carrying. Naturally this varies from person to person. It also varies according to several other factors, but the simplest approximation of the human ability to

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philosophical truth: mind and matter are simply different ways of conceiving of one and the same reality. While the philosophical message of the Elemente was largely ignored, its methodological and empirical contributions were not. Fechner may have set out to counter materialist metaphysics; but he was a well-trained, systematic experimentalist and a competent mathematician and the impact of his work on scientists was scientific rather than metaphysical. He combined methodological innovation in measurement with careful experimentation. (…) Later research has shown, however, that Fechner's equation is applicable within the mid range of stimulus intensity and then holds only approximately true. (…) So, now we are able to place the Fechner Weber Principle in its proper historical context.'
Dennis Leri, op.cit.

[4] *Michael Merzenich, Soft-wired – How the New Science of Brain Plasticity Can Change Your Life, Parnassus Publishing, LLC, San Francisco, 2013*

perceive the difference in weight is that we can feel a difference of from 1/20 to 1/40, if we are particularly sensitive.

New distinctions and acquisitions may be made thanks to sensorimotor operations of more recent and refined differentiation. Our attention is aroused by unusual differences. And the boundaries under which we do not perceive anything and over which we perceive something will finally be changed. And new habits may thus be formed. The Weber-Fechner law shows the perceptive habits that our species uses to live in the world. The various boundary points between the basic stimulus and the stimulus of emerging perception are established by us as learned habits. Consequently, using the specific skills of our species, we can reorganise these habits and facilitate learning which is, indeed, a creation of habits.

The operating implications of the Weber-Fechner law show us that there exists a feedback loop between effort and sensitiveness. If the muscle is working under a heavy load there will be less perceptive discernment therefore small differences related to the quality of movement will not be perceived. And this will condition the individual's organisation of movement. Every human being has in their organisation a certain basic level of muscle tone and in any action, movement or functional activity that we carry out there will be a certain amount of effort involved. And the person can normally perceive the difference in quality between one course of action or another. But if the basic context is a muscle tone which is weary or overloaded by effort or tension then it will have much lower sensitiveness to discerning between one way of behaving and another. The less efficient the base movement, the less chance I will have of discerning its quality. Thus the effect will be that the skill of discernment diminishes even more and the effort goes up, making things worse in a vicious circle. By the organism's natural homeostasis process it will tend to create a new basic equilibrium of progressively worse quality.

But the Feldenkrais Method allows us to initiate a virtuous circle. If we can find the way to reduce the effort so as to be able to perceive the smallest differences it will be possible to create the space for the freedom of choice between different ways of behaving. The muscles will become freer to function in a better way if freed from the overload, and by a very happy coincidence, the nervous system is freer to learn.

The innovation of the Bones For Life programme

This is the basic theoretical context on which the Bones For Life programme has been taking life and shape, thanks to Ruthy Alon, from 1998. She herself clearly describes its purpose.

'I had to find a way to use the autonomous learning principles of the organism from the Feldenkrais method, and apply them in a totally different context. The challenge was how to guide rhythmic movement with powerful stomping that will resonate in every bone, without missing the inner exploration leading to quality? How to be faithful to harmony, which can yield the inner transformation, and correct itself, when performing a dynamic, challenging task? How to activate pace-specific intense movement, without falling into the trap of ambition and excessive effort, sacrificing one's self and denying the subtleties which can correct?'[5]

So it was a question of finding a way of developing a balance between effort and sensitiveness using the language which nature has given us to the end of improving the execution of dynamic activities.

Sensitiveness has to do with malleability, self-awareness, adaptability, mobility and fluidity. Sensitivity is about being ready to receive and to perceive. When we are physically or emotionally tense and on the

[5] *Cit. Ruthy Alon, Movement Intelligence - Abstract, page 9.*

defensive it becomes more difficult to perceive oneself, move freely to carry out any action, or to communicate easily with others. So sensitiveness is the foundation for an appropriate and effective action.

Force is related to solidity, weight, taking decisions, determination and stability, as well as those qualities of physical and mental organisation like rootedness, resolution and tenacity. It involves the elements of power and control. Without force we are not able to act efficiently.

Force and sensitivity are intimately connected. Force which is not balanced by sensitivity will be hard, tense and uncontrolled, and sensitivity not balanced by force will be weak and inefficient. The balance and the integration between force and sensitivity allows a harmonious, comfortable and efficient action. Using this form of physical organisation also produces an emotional state with interior stability and force of will, and this sensation of internal force is crucial for the development of the ability to tackle any personal challenge.

In fact a really 'fit' person is someone who can respond creatively to life's continuously changing demands. As the important research into stress by Hans Selye[6] has shown us, people who experience too many changes in too short a time often fall ill. In this frenetic world living effectively generally requires the ability to make rapid decisions, interact effectively with different types of people, assimilate vast quantities of information and adapt to all kinds of unexpected changes. This high quality fitness demands a flexible integration of mind and body.

In this rediscovered spirit of balance between force and sensitivity it is possible to tackle those dynamic tasks which take place in a context as similar as possible to that of everyday life, and above all if they take place in minimal doses and in a protected environment, they will trigger a positive process of reorganization at the neuromotor level which will create a strengthening of the whole structure of the organism and the person will develop a powerful, balanced and efficient self-image.

'I recalled that Feldenkrais started his quest of exploring movement efficiency when he practiced Judo, which is a superb test for movement skill, with precision of technique, interwoven in improvisation and resourcefulness while coping with a partner that is unpredictable, acting in the reality of vertical plain and real time. This gave me encouragement to dare to guide a process of inner discovery oriented toward auto improvement, without the greenhouse condition of lying on the floor, but in upright posture, authentic to life, and in a position where the person is committed to be responsible for their balance and posture. I had to create a substitute for the utterly comfortable Feldenkrais atmosphere of learning, that will be more dynamic and demanding, but still, will reduce the level of noise to minimum, in order to hear the subtleties which compose the harmony of self-mobilization.'[7]

And with the Bones For Life programme we can do precisely that. Bones For Life transmits the language of force to our nervous system. Walking, running, jumping and all the energetic movements of life are reconstructed from within and can be carried out with ever greater ease and success by anyone. The strategies applied are, however, derived from the Feldenkrais Method. With Bones For Life the laboratory of coordination and learning of the nervous system is completed with the introduction to the use of force in the dynamic movement patterns. And this is its novelty.

Lifting weights: wise strenghtening

Process number 47 of the Bones For Life programme, called *Lifting Weights,* defined also as 'wise strenghtening', is a striking example of how one single principle behind a specific strategy – chosen in this

[6] *Hans Selye, The stress of life. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956.*

[7] *Cit. Ruthy Alon, Movement Intelligence - Abstract, page 9.*

case to obtain the strenghtening of the body – can be applied in many different other ways to develop the infinite possible uses of the programme.

The Bones For Life programme, whose development was stimulated by the research into good movement for the strengthening of bone tissue, has proved to be of much broader application. And in fact the strategies for good movement can actually lead to strengthening and development of the whole body structure, certainly not just of the bone tissue which however is still a 'bonus' effect of the work.

In the words of Ruthy Alon

'The significant factor most evident as influencing bone strength is the lifting of weights. The BFL program copes with this activity in a way that is very different from the conventional model, in which weights are being lifted in a gym. With the commitment to safety first, the weights are lifted in the program only when the back is supported by the wall, with extra padding in the lumbar area, in order to limit the upsetting of the lower back vertebrae and preventing them from overreaction to the effort of lifting weight. The trajectory of the arm raising the weight is outlining a spiral configuration, within rotation around its own axis. This way it is gradually engaging one vertebra after another, within proportional cooperation of the total back, without threatening any specific point. Raising the weights in this safe way is gaining a progressive strengthening of the bone within good feeling of self-empowerment.'[8]

In this process *Lifting weights*, it is actually normal to use light gym weights of around 500 grams. The main work is above all the learning done by the nervous system. The position in which the movement is carried out is standing and leaning on the wall with a particular protection strategy which prevents the lumbar zone - typically at risk in weightlifting - from acting with unsuitable coordination.

The weights are lifted with the hands. Loads of less than 500 grams can also be used, for example using small objects easily manageable with one hand until reaching the point of symbolic weights such as balls made of paper or rolled-up tights. Depending on the student's physical state we can use any weight which does not interfere with the protected safe environment in which they are going to work. In this way we permit the nervous system to learn the correct coordination and to create from the beginning a neurological association of this type of movement with a weight, albeit very light, which is not part of their own body.

But after that we might want also to use the opposite strategy. We could progress with small increases in weight, so light that the student does not perceive them as an increase in the weight to be borne. We use the Weber-Fechner law in reverse, remaining below the threshold of the just noticeable difference in weight. With this system we can gradually and safely bring a student to lifting even heavy weights, maintaining and making always easier the acquisition of good coordination with the neurological connections to the chosen movement.

Given that according to the Weber-Fechner law human beings who hold a 10 kg weight in their hands are able to recognise a difference in weight of from one twentieth to one fortieth, that is 500 or 250 grams, in this case we will be able to increase the weight by approximately 150 grams without the student recognising any perceived difference. Thus the student's internal emotional spirit would not be disturbed by thoughts of possible failure or by demands of excessive effort which might evoke counterproductive habitual motor patterns. The motor coordination learned would be reinforced and at the neurological level it would be possible to have a marked engraving on the person's nervous tissue. And besides this all the other components of movement - the muscles - would have a minimal increase in the working weight which would be registered and developed. A win-win system in every respect. And we must not imagine

[8] *Ruthy Alon, Movement Intelligence - Abstract, pages 41-42.*

that unknown quantities of time would be needed to achieve a strengthening - hours and months of repeated activities which require little muscular effort. Neuroscience reassures us that the nervous system can learn even in relatively rapid way, especially if the stress responses are not activated, and will thus be able to give the necessary signals to the organism for it to reinforce the musculature and all the structures connected to the movement.

There are also other processes in the programme in which this strategy of minimal and progressive load is used. Perhaps the most obvious is the 'crown' on the head which offers the possibility of gradually adding weights to carry. This is actually process number 20 *The water carriers' walk* which uses the typical Bones For Life rolled cloth as a donut-shaped crown to wear on the head. The very presence of the cloth constitutes a load of extra-corporeal weight which will stimulate a reflex action of upwards elongation of the whole spinal column in order to sustain it. The process itself was sparked off by the tradition of African and Asian women of carrying significant weights on their heads, guaranteeing themselves a flexible and effective posture and walking style over long distances. We can gradually insert small objects into the crown and gradually increase the weight accustoming the organism to an elastic and elegant movement.

Starting from these examples and from the theory that we have seen above we notice that we hold in our hands the simple and powerful tools to be able to redesign the very nature of a fitness programme and that this ability can turn out to be a preparation for any type of sporting activity at amateur or professional level. In a first phase the Weber-Fechner law can be used to develop the sensitivity which will be the environment in which coordination can be improved and then, using the same criteria in the opposite way, we can work towards the strengthening of the whole structure of the body.

For a hypothesis of diffusion: a possible social contribution

With my experience of movement and of somatic education[9] I have often reflected on what could be the ways to introduce the important educative innovations which derive from the field of somatic education and particular from the Bones For Life programme into lessons of all types of movement.

The integration of the methods of somatic education into movement lessons would broaden the concept of physical education well beyond the current boundaries of sporting and fitness activities. Teaching movement would embrace the theme of the body and of movement as it is applied in every human field and the teachers of movement would become consultant experts involved in a vast array of activities.

Physical education, broadly speaking, is the study of that which is living being in the human body. It is an intensely practical study of what it means to live well and all the important human themes can be tackled through their somatic component. Moreover, I would go so far as to say that they cannot be tackled with maximum effectiveness without paying some attention to their somatic component.

It is the essential insight into the neurological connection between sensitiveness, awareness, action and development of the skill which makes Bones For Life successful. The body's need to sustain its own weight, the same need to strengthen itself to carry out everyday activities and activities with a slightly higher motor demand elicit the organism's spontaneous response.

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[9] *Somatic education is a field of education concerned with the human being in its entirety, studying in a practical way the interaction between posture, emotion, thinking, self-image and cultural values. This term was first introduced by Thomas Hanna who was a student of Moshe Feldenkrais. See Thomas Hanna, Somatics, Da Capo Press, Perseus Books Group, Cambridge, 1988.*

Sensitivity must be considered first but then it becomes crucial for a re-education and for a high level of fitness. People often exercise whilst watching TV, talking on the telephone or listening to music. These practices actually do not encourage sensitivity. Besides, there is the common and sad conviction that we cannot be fit and healthy unless we exercise with great effort. Give priority to quality over quantity, organization over effort and awareness over force is an innovative idea. It is a revolution and is destined to succeed in the long term. This will help us to achieve better results, more stable and in a shorter time.

It has sometimes happened that my students have improved in a single lesson or two. But then they went back to the gym, repeated the movements as they had done in the past, and went back to having their troubles. Some realised that the very way in which they were exercising was creating difficulties for them but still wanted to be 'fit' and to tackle the hard fitness routine.

The solution which I found to help my students was that of giving them some simple indications of how to tackle their habitual fitness practices. Basing my ideas on what they told me I helped them to modify a few small aspects of their work in such a way that the exercises became an opportunity to be more sensitive and to learn. Each piece of advice addressed a particular issue for the individual student. When I teach I am busy with objective questions of posture and movement seen in their entirety as manifestations and causes of subjective states of sensitivity, perception, emotion and thinking. It is an educational process which can be undertaken as a preventative practice, before any problems have the chance to develop, or as a way of regaining one's own well-being if necessary but also as a tool for developing high performances of all types. Somatic innovations are a key element in helping people to be healthy and productive.

But this contribution of mine is confined to my own professional activity. Is it possible to create the space for these ideas and principles to have a broader impact? Is a fitness practice taking account of the innovations of the Bones For Life programme possible?

In this part of the article I put forward a hypothesis - perhaps a rather visionary one - of what lessons of movement of all kinds might become if they absorbed the new acquisitions into their centres.

It is recognised that all movement activities deal with the whole human being and can also create changes in the psychomotor, cognitive and emotional spheres. The somatic processes of Bones For Life offer powerful specific tools which directly link the psychomotor work to cognitive/emotional aspects. Such a complete movement activity could be useful in many areas and principally in the development of high performance, in education in well-being and taking care of oneself, not to mention preventive health care, and as additional services in the areas of medical therapy and mental health.

Also motor activity in schools of all types and levels would have a different impact, not just on the regular sporting activities, but by improving students' capacity for mental and motor control it would help them to learn better in other disciplines too.

Notable opportunities could develop in the world of business and industry, not to mention that of the general public, both in terms of education for health and well-being, and also of support for high performance.

Bones For Life could bring about a fundamental innovation in the fitness of the 21st century, and its wide applications could have a very important role in contributing to the creation of a more healthy, peaceful, productive and essentially happy world.

Conclusion

My personal experience as well as my work with people of different ages, levels of health and ways of life makes me think that we all possess a 'deep internal guidance-system'. Such a system can be described as a meta-skill which is at the base of all other skills and fundamental for the ability to improve and tackle every area of life. It is about the organism's innate intelligence and the nervous system which is behind the movement itself. The intelligence to find solutions, to coordinate, to adapt and to know how to adapt oneself to find the best. The intelligence which guides a child's development and growth in learning the most complex things for a human being for themselves: walking and talking.

Through its dynamic strategies and its awareness work Bones For Life emerges with elegance and effectiveness and sometimes with surprising speed to improve the quality of movement contacting this level of organic intelligence, entering directly into the nervous system's innate capacity for self-renewal, for freeing itself of outdated unproductive ways and updating its habits. During the lessons we easily enter a mind-body state of internal organization which allows an individual to assimilate information and to express their own actions with maximum effectiveness.

Having myself tried out a wide variety of approaches both in the realms of movement and of awareness, I believe that the Feldenkrais Method, and the Bones For Life programme which represents a fascinating development of it, are among the most effective systems of facilitating rapid improvements both in fitness and in the development of an internal organisation capable of sustaining high performances. Inevitably, sensitivity and innate intelligence always win. The nervous system, by its very nature, will know how to choose the best way of carrying out an action when all the various options are clear. The individual understands how the intention leads to the action with a spontaneous precision which was not there before.

The Bones For Life programme, in my teaching experience, has helped people of various kinds to tackle motor problems and pains and to improve mental skills as well as tackling life with renewed and more positive ways of thinking. All this has spontaneously come out of the very process of learning. While the work, carried out following the principles of the Weber-Fechner law, can seem aimed at 'fixing' a painful neck or some kind of back problem, in reality it leads directly to the heart of life: the secret of effective action. In practising it we live the experience of a human version of that type of fitness which we have seen in a lion or a panther - in shape, to live life to the full - whatever may be the challenges of their daily life. And that, in fact, is fitness.