

**Appropriate Practices
in Movement Programs
for
Young Children Ages 3 – 5**

A Position Statement of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education
Developed by the Council on Physical Education for Children (COPEC)

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Appropriate Practices In Movement Programs For Young Children Ages 3-5

Preface

Young children's education has become a major focus of public attention. The growth of preschools, child development centers, and other childcare programs has resulted in an increased interest in the education of this age group, including physical education. In addition, research on the physiology of brain development (Jensen, 1998) has focused public and scientific attention on the importance of early experiences on the potential motor, cognitive, emotional, and social development of young children (2 – 5 years of age). These early years have been identified as the critical period in which building blocks for all future development are formed.

Introduction

The importance and value of movement is being recognized as never before. Early childhood educators have become increasingly aware that movement plays an important role in the future development of a young child. During movement activities children use multiple sensory modalities, thereby creating neural connections across numerous pathways in the brain. The branching of these connections is the first step in wiring the brain for all future learning. The focus on multiple intelligences also lends support to the importance of movement, with kinesthetic intelligence being one of eight intelligences

(Gardner, 2000). A learning environment enriched with movement experiences can lead to long-term motor, cognitive, emotional, and social development.

Childhood is the time to begin the development of active, healthy lifestyles. The development of skills, knowledge, and attitudes leading to active, healthy lifestyles must be taught. Placing the child on the road to a lifetime of movement should begin early to ensure a lifetime of good health.

The purpose of this document is to focus on developmentally appropriate practices in movement programs for 3- to 5 year-old children. This includes children enrolled in childcare centers, private and public preschools, and kindergartens. This document can assist those who educate these children to (1) make developmentally appropriate decisions about curriculum and content; (2) make informed decisions about how content is presented; (3) evaluate existing curriculum and teaching methods; (4) advocate the improvement of existing programs; and (5) more fully integrate movement activities into existing curricula.

Quality Movement Programs For Young Children

Early childhood (3 to 5 years of age) is associated with the fundamental movement phase of motor development (Gabbard, 2000; Gallahue, 1998). This is a unique period in the life span primarily due to the emergence of fundamental motor skills that establish the foundation upon which daily learning experiences can have a significant influence on the establishment of a positive attitude and appreciation for a lifetime of participation in regular health-related physical activity.

The Council on Physical Education for Children (COPEC) of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), the largest national professional organization for children's physical education teachers, recommends that quality, daily physical education be available to teach all children. It is COPEC's strong belief that the appropriate approach for this age group is to focus on fundamental motor skills, movement concepts, and the joy of moving to assist the child's motor, cognitive, emotional, and social development.

A developmentally appropriate movement program accommodates a variety of individual characteristics such as developmental status, previous movement experiences, fitness and skill levels, body size, and age. Quality movement programs are both developmentally and instructionally suitable for all children. Developmentally appropriate practices in movement programs are those that recognize children's differing movement capabilities and promote learning experiences that challenge each child to move to the next stage of development. Instructionally appropriate movement programs incorporate the best-known practices, derived from both research and teaching experiences, into a program that maximizes opportunities for learning and success for all children.

Effective teachers utilize the National Standards for Physical Education in conjunction with their existing curriculum to design appropriate programs for children. They evaluate student progress and are accountable for student learning. The outcome of a developmentally and instructionally appropriate program of physical education is a physically educated person... one who knows and values physical activity, is physically fit, has the necessary skills for participation, and engages regularly in health-enhancing physical activity. Appropriate movement programs for young children provide an important first step toward becoming a physically educated person.

Premises of Quality Movement Programs for Children

Within the discussion and implementation of movement programs for young children five premises need to be understood and developed.

1. Teachers of young children are guides and facilitators.

Young children learn through involvement, observation, and modeling, which requires teachers to facilitate children's active involvement in learning. Teachers construct the environment with specific outcomes in mind and then guide the children toward these goals. By carefully observing the children's responses and interests, teachers are able to adapt the learning experiences to best meet each individual child's needs. Children are allowed to make choices and seek creative solutions. They are provided the time and opportunity to explore appropriate responses. Teachers show interest and participate in movement activities, engaging the children in the activity, thereby extending the children's learning.

2. Children should engage in movement programs designed for their developmental levels.

Young children need a variety of experiences that will lead to mature fundamental motor skills. The development of fundamental motor abilities is age related, not age determined. Teachers of 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children need to fully understand the continuum of motor development from infancy through age 5 as it differs from that of elementary school-aged children.

3. Young children learn through interaction with their environment.

This well-established concept has been stated in many ways – children learn by doing; children learn through active involvement with people and objects. Developmentally appropriate movement programs for young children are designed so all children are active participants.

4. Young children learn and develop in an integrated fashion.

Motor, cognitive, emotional, and social development are interrelated. Learning experiences in movement should encompass and interface with other areas of development. Regularly scheduled movement experiences should focus on the

development of fundamental motor skills while incorporating these experiences in the child's total development. Movement is a primary medium for young children's learning.

5. Planned movement experiences enhance play experiences.

A combination of play along with planned movement experiences, specifically designed to help children develop fundamental motor skills, is beneficial in assisting young children in their development. Regularly scheduled and appropriately designed movement experiences are enhanced with regular indoor and outdoor play experiences giving children an opportunity to freely practice and develop skills.

Intended Audience

This document is written for teachers, parents, school administrators, policy makers, and other individuals who are responsible for educational programs for 3 – to 5- year-olds. It is intended to provide specific guidelines to assist in recognizing practices in movement programs that are best for children (appropriate) and those that are counterproductive or harmful (inappropriate). The practices described herein are interrelated. They are separated here for purposes of clarity and ease of reading. Although these practices are not all-inclusive, they do represent many of the characteristics of appropriate practice in movement programs for young children.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Practices in Movement Programs for Children Ages 3 –5

Making Curricula Decisions

Appropriate Practice

Teachers plan a movement curriculum with a scope and sequence based on appropriate objectives and outcomes for the children's developmental level (NASPE National Standards, 1995). The curriculum includes a balance of skills and concepts designed to enhance the motor, cognitive, emotional, and social development of every child.

Inappropriate Practice

Teachers plan the movement curriculum around personal interests, preferences, and background, ignoring the continuum of motor development that focuses on outcomes and objectives that are developmentally appropriate. For example, the curriculum consists primarily of large group games that are activity based, not child centered.

Facilitating Total Development

Appropriate Practice

Teachers design movement activities for the total development of children. The unique role of movement programs, which allow children to learn to move while also moving to learn, is recognized and explored. Teachers provide many opportunities within a developmentally appropriate movement program for children to enhance motor, cognitive, emotional, and social development. For example, opportunities to teach such developmentally appropriate social skills as cooperating, taking turns, and sharing exist within the context of a lesson. Within the same lesson, fundamental locomotor skills are practiced while children develop spatial awareness by moving along a variety of pathways. The cognitive concepts associated with the activity and its relationship to a healthy lifestyle are reinforced. Lessons are centered on the development of the total child within a nurturing and accepting environment.

Inappropriate Practice

Teachers view movement programs as separate from other areas of instruction. They are felt to be a means of “Burning excess energy.” For example, teachers address only the physical realm without including cognitive, emotional, and social contexts.

Designing Learning Experiences

Appropriate Practice

Teachers employ both direct and indirect teaching methods. Direct methods provide instructional models for children to replicate. Indirect teaching methods encourage children to explore and discover a range of movement possibilities. Teachers provide opportunities for children to make choices within and between tasks, while actively exploring their environment. Teachers serve as facilitators, preparing a stimulating environment with challenging activities.

Inappropriate Practice

Teachers implement highly structured, teacher-directed lessons most of the time. Large group instruction is often used in which all children are expected to perform the same activities in the same manner. For example, teachers provide recorded music with verbal cues that children are expected to follow.

Developing Movement Skills and Concepts

Appropriate Practice

Teachers provide frequent and meaningful instruction, including adequate practice opportunities, to develop a functional understanding of movement concepts (space awareness, effort, and relationships) as well as fundamental motor skills. These opportunities are developmentally appropriate for the child and are within the context of the child’s total educational experience.

Inappropriate Practice

Teachers incorporate a limited number of activities designed to meet predetermined standards or use activities that require just one correct response. Opportunities to practice and develop movement concepts and motor skills are restricted.

Implementing Assessment

Appropriate Practice

Teachers use authentic assessment based on the scientific knowledge of children's developmental characteristics and ongoing observations of students in activities. This information is used to individualize instruction, plan objective-oriented lessons, identify children with special needs, communicate with parents, and evaluate the program's effectiveness. Teachers encourage children to do self-assessments as it relates to improving skill performance. For example, teaching children "cue words" for fundamental movement skills will allow them to self-evaluate their performance relative to the cues.

Inappropriate Practice

Teachers assess children solely on the basis of test scores, such as motor skills tests, norm referenced tests, and standardized fitness tests. Teachers use tests to merely audit performance rather than improve it. Assessment indicators are not shared with the parents or the child.

Facilitating Maximum Participation

Appropriate Practice

Teachers use activities that do not eliminate children and frequently modify activities to enhance maximum participation. However, they recognize that young children might need brief rest periods when participating in particularly strenuous activities. Teachers provide sufficient equipment so each child can maximally participate. The equipment includes a variety of shapes, sizes, textures, and weights to allow for experimentation and active participation, increasing the confidence and skill level of the children. Modified, nontraditional equipment is used where appropriate, such as scarves for catching and balloons for volleying.

Inappropriate Practice

Teachers fail to maximize opportunities to learn or practice motor skills by requiring children to wait for a turn. For example, teachers encourage playing sedentary games such as "Duck, Duck, Goose" or other activities that eliminate children and provide no chance to re-enter the activity. Teachers provide insufficient equipment or only offer regulation or "adult size" equipment, which may inhibit skill development or injure or intimidate the children. Continuous, extended aerobic activity is expected.

Allowing for Repetition and Variation

Appropriate Practice

Teachers provide a variety of novel learning experiences that emphasize the same motor skill, across different environmental contexts, allowing for the gradual development of desired movement patterns. Teachers provide opportunities for the extension and refinement of these skills within instructional sessions.

Inappropriate Practice

Activities are repeated without variation or are introduced and practiced only once a year, providing little opportunity for children to develop a foundation of motor skills.

Promoting Success for All Children

Appropriate Practice

Teachers provide children with opportunities to practice skills at high rates of success, adjusted for their individual skill levels, and within a “try again” and “effort” equals improvement” environment. When needed, teachers provide an environment in which children can practice skills independently of other children to avoid the frustration and anxiety of low skill proficiency. For example, children can practice catching a ball that rolls consistently down a chute. Teachers do not use-competition between children as a motivator.

Inappropriate Practice

Teachers direct children to perform activities that are too easy or too hard, causing boredom, frustration, and/or misbehavior. Teachers place children in large group or partner situations in which their success is dependent on other children, resulting in a lack of skill development. For example, when children throw and catch with a partner, more time is spent chasing the ball than practicing the skills of throwing and catching.

Developing Health-Related Fitness

Appropriate Practice

Teachers demonstrate positive attitudes towards fitness and recognize the importance of children valuing physical activity as a lifelong habit. Children experience the joy and learn the value of exploring their movement abilities as a lifetime pursuit. Teachers convey the concept that fitness is a byproduct of participation in appropriately designed movement programs. For example, after an appropriate period of continuous locomotor movement, children are asked to discuss what happens to their bodies during vigorous movement participation.

Inappropriate Practice

Teachers disregard explanations of why activity is important and plan non-motivating activities where children regularly wait to participate, wait for equipment, run laps, perform calisthenics, or participate in follow-the-leader video programs.

Incorporating Fine and Gross Motor Activities

Appropriate Practice

Teachers provide learning experiences with both fine (e.g., finger-play activities) and gross (e.g., running, throwing) motor activities within the movement curricula.

Inappropriate Practice

Teachers emphasize either gross or fine motor learning experiences to the exclusion of the other.

Encouraging Individual and Free Expression

Appropriate Practice

Teachers encourage the use of movement as a form of individual expression. They plan opportunities for children to ask questions and then facilitate finding a myriad of solutions to problems via movement. Teachers encourage the children to express themselves freely.

Inappropriate Practice

Teachers require children to move in prescribed ways and meet set standards of performance. Only relatively quiet, controlled activity is allowed.

Teaching Rhythmical Experiences and Dance

Appropriate Practice

The movement program includes a variety of rhythmical, expressive, creative, and culturally appropriate dance experiences designed with the motor, cognitive, emotional, and social abilities of the children in mind. Teachers encourage children to use their imaginations and move to the sound of their individual rhythms.

Inappropriate Practice

The movement program excludes all rhythmical, expressive, and creative dance experiences and does not value exposing children to a variety of cultural backgrounds. Dances designed for adults (such as folk, square, or line dances) are not modified to meet the developmental abilities of the children.

Teaching Educational Gymnastics

Appropriate Practice

Teachers present broad skill areas such as balancing, rolling, jumping and landing, climbing, and weight transfer. They plan numerous opportunities for exploration of these skills in a variety of situations appropriate to children's ability and confidence levels.

Inappropriate Practice

Teachers expect all children to perform the same pre-determined stunts, such as forward rolls or cartwheels, regardless of their skill level, body composition, and level of confidence.

Teaching Games

Appropriate Practice

When teachers use games, the game reinforces a planned objective. Teachers select, design, sequence, and modify games to maximize children's learning and enjoyment. For example, a game of follow-the-leader can reinforce spatial awareness and relationships, direction, speed, pathways, shadowing, and visual cueing.

Inappropriate Practice

Teachers incorporate games with no obvious purpose or goal other than to keep children "busy, happy, and good." Emphasis is placed on the structure, rules, and formations of the game. Teachers use games in which children are eliminated, such as musical chairs.

Integrating Movement Programs and Play

Appropriate Practice

Movement programs are planned and organized by teachers as part of the total educational program. They are included in each day's curriculum. Regularly scheduled indoor and outdoor movement experiences enhance play experiences.

Inappropriate Practice

Teachers use outdoor and free play only as a way to get children to use up excess energy; it is characterized by a lack of goals, organization, planning, and instruction.

Scheduling Activity

Appropriate Practice

Teachers schedule movement activities as integral parts of the total educational program. The accumulation of 30 to 60 minutes of daily, developmentally appropriate physical

activity of a moderate to vigorous nature will include both structured learning experiences and free play.

Inappropriate Practice

The teacher's daily schedule does not include instructional movement activities.

Providing an Adequate and Safe Environment

Appropriate Practice

Teachers prepare a physically and psychologically safe environment in which there is adequate space for children to move freely and explore their capabilities. Teachers offer a choice of equipment and entry level for the activity compatible with the children's perceived competence. Additional opportunities and equipment are available to encourage child-initiated activities that can lead to positive feelings of self-confidence and self-worth. The teaching environment has adequate acoustics for clear instruction.

Inappropriate Practice

Teachers do not give consideration to each child's readiness to learn. All children are presented the same tasks without allowing for a range of abilities, thereby creating an atmosphere of apprehension and possible failure. Movement activities are restricted due to small, cluttered, unsanitary areas or an inappropriate play surface.

Limiting Class Size

Appropriate Practice

Teachers limit the group size in order to provide young children with developmentally appropriate individualized instruction. No more than 9-10 children ages 4 to 5 are assigned to an adult. Younger children require smaller groups (Bredekamp, 1997).

Inappropriate Practice

Teachers organize the children in groups larger than recommended for physical activity, thereby necessitating the use of more teacher-directed methods and limiting opportunities for exploration and guided discovery.

Facilitating Gender Equity

Appropriate Practice

Teachers fairly and equally encourage, support, and socialize both girls and boys toward successful achievement in all realms of movement activities within an anti-bias curriculum. Motor skill development for this age group does not delineate gender differences.

Inappropriate Practice

Teachers encourage girls to participate in activities that stress traditionally passive roles and encourage boys to participate in more aggressive activities.

Fostering Parent-Teacher Communication

Appropriate Practice

Teachers work in partnership, communicating regularly with parents. Information is provided about the movement curriculum with the intent of promoting parent involvement in children's motor skill development. A variety of movement activities are suggested for use at home to reinforce and enhance the movement concepts developed in the daily curriculum.

Inappropriate Practice

The teacher's communication to parents focuses only on the cognitive and social development of the child.

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Resources

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