

ARTICLE REVIEWED

Physical Literacy at the Start Line: Young Children's Motor Competence, Fitness, Physical Activity, and Fitness Knowledge

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THE PROBLEM:

Physical literacy has become a popular topic as it relates to physical education. Being a physically literate individual means that you are confident and competent in participating in physical activity. If the goal of physical education is to promote lifelong physical activity and produce physically literate individuals, the curriculum must adhere to student physical competence, physical activity knowledge, and motivation for physical activity. Developmentally, third graders are at the prime age where they begin to understand and play around with critical knowledge related to physical literacy. Thus, examining physical literacy among third grade students is warranted as this developmental level can make or break a student's future participation in physical activity.



Research Summary:

A total of 342 third graders, from four elementary schools, participated in this study (44.5% Hispanic). Fundamental motor skills were assessed (throwing, dribbling, hopping, and sliding). Additionally, students completed the FitnessGram® battery. The third graders also wore accelerometers throughout the school day (6-7 hours, Monday-Friday) to measure their school-based moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) levels. Lastly, the third graders participated in a written health-related fitness knowledge test.

Conclusion:

For fundamental motor skills, the third grade students demonstrated low levels of sliding and hopping, similar levels in dribbling, and high levels of throwing when compared to kindergarten students. Approximately 95% of students in this study also met the 60 minutes of MVPA per day. Results also indicated that students' physical literacy achievement was attained based on three separate variables (gender, weight and ethnicity). For example, cardiorespiratory levels were higher in girls compared to boys, and muscular fitness was greater among the Hispanic population, when compared to other ethnicities. Lastly, 60% of the third graders in this study failed their grade-level competence in locomotor and object control skills.

Key Takeaway:

For students to experience success in physical education and become physically literate individuals, it is critical for the physical education teacher to teach their students the importance of fitness concepts and strategies, starting at an early age. The earlier students are exposed to fitness concepts, the more likely they will confidently participate in physical activity in the future.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- PE Metrics: <https://www.shapeamerica.org/publications/products/pemetrics.aspx>