

5-2017

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Recommended Citation

Reed, S. (2017). *Gross motor in the preschool classroom* (Master's thesis, Northwestern College, Orange City, IA). Retrieved from http://nwcommons.nwciowa.edu/education_masters/34/

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Gross Motor in the Preschool Classroom

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Abstract

This literature review discusses the history of Early Childhood and how far it has come since it started. It will discuss the increase of obesity in young children and the importance of teaching children young the value of healthy living. This literature review will describe ways to use gross motor in the classroom to help with improving physical movement in the classroom. The literature review will give ideas on ways to encourage gross motor in the classroom as well as outdoors. It provides research that explains why it is important to include physical breaks in the classroom activities throughout the day.

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Gross Motor in the Preschool Classroom

Gross motor is very important for all ages, it is especially important for children in preschool. Gross motor or large motor skills is part of the Early Learning Standards that are state guided for Early Childhood Classrooms. This review will discuss what gross motor will look like in the classrooms, whether gross motor affects behavior in the classroom and what research says about gross motor in preschool classrooms. It will discuss how gross motor affects behavior and academic development for students in the classroom.

Literature Review

An important part of Early Childhood is information. There are many factors that affect how much gross motor and physical activity a child participates in. These are all important for an educator to understand the best way to help their students excel not only in the classroom but also in life. This is done by researching, collaborating with other educators, participating in Professional Development, and creating relationships with family.

By knowing the child's environment and how active they are during normal situations, as well as their families and cultures, gives the educator an inside to how to encourage gross motor activities to students. Educators must also understand the importance of using different gross motor movements to help the child strengthen their movements and balance. Educators need to be able to not only explain the purpose of their activities to their supervisors and fellow educators but also with parents as well. Educators need to be able to help parents understand the importance of gross motor activities.

Knowing the history of childcare and early childhood education is important for educators to understand when providing a curriculum plan for students. Childcare has been around for centuries starting with Native Americans who carried their newborns in woven

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carriers to African American mothers who took care of white babies. From Colonial women who had specific spots for their children to stand so they did not get hurt to fisherman who taught their children where to play safe without getting hurt. Families also used slightly older siblings, parents, grandparents, and neighbors to help with childcare.

During the Progressive Era, childcare became a target for modernizing. Many groups worked towards reforming childcare into what we know it as today. New York philanthropists led by Josephine Jewell Dodge set up a Model Day Nursery in 1893 and then founded the National Federation of Day Nurseries in 1898. Jane Addams and Julia Lathrop worked in a different path to better childcare. They pushed for a policy to help mothers stay at home to take care of their children. This policy would give mothers' pensions to be able to stay at home. Almost every union state passed some form of mothers or widows' pension law by 1930.

Teaching children outside of schools called early childhood education started with an European mother in the early 1800s. In America, this looked like "infant schools" in churches, factories and private homes. Per History of Early Childhood Education, (Lipoff, n.d.) in 1848, Wisconsin created constitutional amendments for free education to children aged four to twenty. In 1873, they started the first four-year-old kindergarten program. NAEYC or National Association for the Education of Young children was founded in 1926. This program works to improve the quality of education and developmental services for children birth to eight. The United States Department of Health and Human Services founded Headstart, a program for low-income children prior to Kindergarten, in 1965.

"Early Childhood is a term used to describe the developmental period generally from birth to age eight" (Frabutt, 2013). Early Childhood Education, which generally describes children from ages three to five year olds is the most common in the United States. Early

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childhood education teaches students school readiness and developmental activities that target academic skills such as early literacy, language development, early foundational skills in math and science and social-emotional skills. There were many theorists who helped shape our Early Childhood Educations today some of them were Maria Montessori, Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky.

Maria Montessori, created the method that was based on human tendencies such as to explore, move, share with a group, to be independent and make decisions, create order, develop self-control, abstract ideas from experience, use the creative imagination, work hard, repeat, concentrate, and perfect one's efforts (Gottesman, n.d.). She felt there were three stages to learning, Stage 1: introduction to concept, Stage 2: processing the information, and Stage 3: "knowing" (Gottesman, n.d). Erik Erikson believed that humans developed throughout life. He developed eight psychosocial stages that humans encounter. These stages are Trust vs Mistrust, Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt, Initiative vs Guilt, Industry vs Inferiority, Identity vs Role Confusion, Intimacy vs Isolation, Generativity vs Stagnation, and Integrity vs Despair. Jean Piaget focused on the cognitive development of children. He felt there were four Stages to Development, Sensorimotor from birth to age 2, Preoperational from start of talking to age 7, Concrete from first grade to early adolescence, and Formal Operations during adolescence. Lev Vygotsky focused on social interaction being a key role in cognitive development. He felt that community was a big part of a child's understanding. Vygotsky believed that the Zone of Proximal Development is where the most guidance should be given.

Another theory that is becoming hugely popular in the United States in play-based learning. This concept gives focus on students learning through organized play where they interact with people and objects that represent the world around them. During play-based

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curriculum students, teach themselves through problem solving and discovery with little intervention from teachers. Direct Instruction is another theory that is known in the education world. This theory was for children to be directed through their development with teachers directing the activities towards specific learning.

Per the Iowa Department of Education, there are 39 Early Childhood Areas statewide, which represent the 99 Counties. ("Early childhood Iowa | Iowa department of education," n.d.) There are many programs provided in Iowa to help keep the Early Childhood Centers working and provide resources for our families in Early Childhood. Such programs as Early Access, Early Childhood Iowa, Early Childhood Special Education, Early Head Start, Every Child Reads 3-5, Shared Visions, and Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for 4 year olds. From a survey done in 2014 by the Child Trends Data Bank, the percentage of children from ages 3 to 6 have increased from 2007 to 2012. This includes children who are non-Hispanic White, Non-Hispanic Black, Asian and Hispanic. They also indicated that the mother's level of education, mother's employment status affected the numbers but the region in which the child lived did not (Child Trends Databank, 2014). Center-based Early Childhood Education is becoming more popular. The demand is becoming greater with both parents needing to work as well as because research is proving that children's most critical learning is during the Early Childhood years.

Another crucial factor in considering when deciding the importance of gross motor in the classroom is weight gain and obesity in the early childhood population. Obesity rates in childhood have tripled from the ages of 2 to 19 since 1980, according to Obesity Rates & Trends Overview (Obesity rates & trends overview: The state of obesity, n.d.). It is also known that obesity rates are becoming more common in younger years and higher at younger ages. 8.9 percent of 2-4 year olds are now obese and around 2 percent are extremely obese (Obesity rates

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& trends overview: The state of obesity, n.d.). Obesity in children can cause many health issues including but not limited to Type II diabetes, cardiovascular disease, orthopedic problems, behavioral disorders, asthma and high blood pressure.

It is more likely for Latinos and Blacks to be obese than whites and Asians. It is higher for Latino males, Black females, White females, and Asian males than Latina females, Black males, White males, and Asian females. For preschoolers, it is three times more likely for Latinos to be overweight and twice as likely for Blacks to be obese than Whites or Asians (Obesity rates & trends overview: The state of obesity, n.d.). There are many factors that influence obesity in children. Such factors as genetics, culture, and poverty. There is also an increase for technology that children use. According to research children from 2-11 watch approximately 23 hours of television a week. This is greatly over the amount that is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics, which recommends 1-2 hours a day (Drohan, 2002, p.603).

A child's environment plays a key factor as well. Children learn from their environment, they eat what is in their environment and learn to move by how their parents, siblings, peers and other close community members. A child who watches people around them eat healthy, exercise and continue to be active are more likely to do the same, just as children whose family goes out to eat at fast food restaurants regularly, isn't very active and prefers to watch television or play video games is more likely to follow. It is important as educators and parents to provide positive influence to children by support and nurturing or through modeling.

Poverty is an issue since families who live in poverty have a harder time being able to get the resources needed to live in a healthy life style. A pregnant mother who lives in poverty may not be able to get the nutritious foods needed to keep herself and her baby healthy through

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pregnancy. It is also less likely that she is exercising and keeping fit. Poverty families have a harder time seeking medical attention that is needed to keep families healthy. Many families work long hours therefore do not have time to prepare a well-balanced homemade meal and tend to use fast food as their diet.

Many parents lack the information they need to create a healthy home and to encourage their children's healthy habits. It is important as educators to provide this information to parents and families. Educators may need to participate in professional development activities to help them be able to better support parents and families in guiding young children.

As stated previously, a child's surroundings are key in how efficient a child is in being healthy and active. A home, center or home-based center who understands the importance of movement in young children is critical in helping children gain a positive relationship with healthy living. By educators and families becoming knowledgeable of ways to create, a physically active lifestyle balanced with healthy eating through modeling and support. Having space is a big issue for many situations, space and money can sometimes be scarce but it is important to help provide information to families and centers with ways to improvise using materials and space that are available to get the children moving.

Gross motor is the movements that utilize the large muscles of the body. Gross motor activities consist of many different things; for a one year old, it could be crawling, pushing themselves up on their elbows, and walking or waving. For a four-year-old, gross motor could look like running, jumping on two feet, hopping, or galloping across the room. By providing time for students to participate in gross motor activities, students can move their bodies more and it encourages them to concentrate more as well as be able to focus on math, language and have a stronger memory.

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Children are required to participate in a minimum of one hour of gross motor activity during an eight-hour day of preschool. Unity Point Health stated that only 25% of preschoolers participate in free-time physical activity (Blank Children's Hospital, 2014). Students are encouraged to participate in gross motor activities but it is unknown whether the students are benefiting from the activities and using their large muscles efficiently. To an Early Childhood educator, gross motor is important part of the classroom curriculum. By educators, using research and professional development trainings to update themselves on gross motor activities that encourage whole body movement and use in the classroom helps create a curriculum that reaches all areas of the students' development.

There are many reasons to teach children young how to properly be physically active. The main reason is that obesity is becoming more and more common in younger children especially in the preschool ages of two to five years. It is also becoming more common for children to be seen doing more sedentary activities. Part of this could be the high popularity of electronic devices. Per the article by Wadsworth (2011), "the obesity prevalence among preschool-age children has increased from 5 to 12.4% in recent years" (p. 391). Another reason could be that preschool teachers are not trained on ways to create a planned daily physical activity curriculum.

One way to provide more gross motor activity in the classroom throughout the day is to provide more breaks throughout the day. The article *Break for Physical Activity: Incorporating Classroom-Based Physical Activity Breaks into Preschool* (2012), stated that their research was done by providing two separate 10-minute activity breaks, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The break consisted of a 2-minute warm up, 6-minute physical activity, and 2-minute cool-down time. The article's results proved that by providing these breaks throughout the day,

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there was an increase in the students' moderate to vigorous physical activity. By providing motor skills, students can be more competent in advanced movement. It allows them to be more competent in their environment; therefore, they are more physically active.

There are many reasons to include motor skills in the classroom; research has connected these motor skills with increasing a child's ability of learning advanced sport skills, positive self-concept, and positive social-skill development. It also influences a child's self-esteem and peer interaction (Ignico, 1994). By students participating in physical activity in preschool, whether through a break time, physical education class, or during outdoor exploration time, students learn many valuable skills such as the ones listed before as well as leadership skills, independence and confidence to help them in later school years as well as in life.

One of the main reasons that preschool teachers are not incorporating more physical activity into their curriculum is because the Iowa-Core Early Learning Standards focus on cognition, language, social, physical and motor, and approaches to learning. The physical and motor is limited to the basic motor skills such as low gross motor like jumping, hopping, skipping, and fine motor skills like holding a pencil correctly and picking up small objects. Another reason is that the schooling that preschool teacher's take does not include physical education courses beyond a basic course curriculum for all teachers. For preschool educators to be able to provide a better physical education curriculum, they need to be participating in trainings and courses that teach them how to create developmentally appropriate curriculum for physical education while also providing a curriculum that meets all the guidelines for Early Childhood curriculum.

If moderate to vigorous gross motor is not implemented in the classroom, an effective way to start is by implementing physical activity breaks. Below is a table provided from article

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Break for Physical Activity: Incorporating Classroom-Based Physical Activity Breaks into Preschools (Wadsworth, 2011).

Table 1: Physical Activity Breaks Implemented

Physical Activity Breaks			
Component	Minutes	Activities	Repetitions
Warm-up	2:00	Touch the sky/touch your toes, arm circles, jumping jacks/straddle jumps	Completed 3-5 times; 10 jumping jacks
Physical Activity	6:00	Cycling, bunny hops, scissor jumps, balancing act	30 s. each exercise repeat 3 times
Cool-down	2:00	Yoga poses, stretching activities, deep-breathing exercises	Completed 3-5

Table 2: Activity Ideas to implement in Preschool Classroom

Activity Ideas			
	Warm-up	Physical Activity	Cool-down
Activities	Arm Circles Hand Slaps Arms Overhead Hands on Shoulders Trunk Side Bends Trunk Rotations Trunk Bends Knee Bends Single Leg Lunges Forward Bend Jog in Place Walk in place Color Game Balancing Act Red Light, Green Light Simon Says	Cycling Bunny Hop Bear Crawl Ups and Downs Knee taps Heel raises Scissor jumps Bear reach Animal walk Balancing act Jumping jacks Dance Activity – roll a die move only part shown on die Balloon Ball Parachute Follow the Leader Bubble Wrap Attack	Balancing Act Arm circles Touch the sky/touch your knees Yoga Poses Walk moving arms in a sway motion Touch shoulders- reach over head Skip slowly side to side Jump on the spot Run, gallop, skip, walk, tip toe across gym

Table 2 provides activity ideas that can be implemented in the classroom during the physical activity breaks. The best thing about the physical activity breaks is that you do not have to stay with specific activities; it can be changed around using different activities each time as

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long as you follow the 2-6-2 method. This break is a great way to encourage students to stop focusing on what they are doing, destress, move their body and get physical even if they are not able to get outside.

Per Active Star guidelines children are to participate in sixty minutes of planned physical activity and sixty minutes of unplanned physical activity daily (Robinson, 2011). A way to help encourage physical activity for the unplanned time could be to provide a gross motor area that holds a basket with supplies, direction cards, and timers for students to be able to lead their own gross motor time. Individual baskets, one for inside and one for outside could be provided with varied materials to encourage gross motor activities. An outside basket could look like balls, jump ropes, Frisbees, items for a scavenger hunt, etc., and direction cards for different activities.

Conclusion

Childhood obesity is increasing every year, it is our duty as educators to ensure that students are getting the recommended amount of time to move and be physical. It is also important that we model the importance of healthy eating and moving especially where children spend more time in preschool and childcare settings during the day. To make sure that students are getting the recommended amount of physical activity needed to live a healthy life, educators need to incorporate physical activity into the classroom. By participating in physical activities during the day students can become more self-confident, have higher self-esteem, higher gained independence and a greater peer social interaction. There are many reasons that Preschoolers should be taught to properly be active. It takes more than just running around, or being able to jump to keep a child healthy. Students need to be able to move their bodies in ways to help them strengthen their large muscles as well as strengthen their body to help them prevent childhood

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illnesses affected by unhealthy living. Educators need to be knowledgeable on ways to encourage movement and be able to provide resources, support and encouragement to families to do the same.

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