PHYSICAL LITERACY IN ELEMENTARY PHYSICAL EDUCATION: A SURVEY OF FUNDAMENTAL MOVEMENT SKILL PRACTICE PATTERNS

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Background: Pediatric physical inactivity is a major public health concern. According to the 2017 State of Play report, only 24% of youth meet the recommended physical activity (PA) dosage. Previous studies identified fundamental movement skill (FMS) proficiency as a predictor of physical literacy and PA. Mastery of FMS requires direct instruction and practice; however, it is unknown how well FMS are implemented in physical education (PE).

Hypothesis/Purpose: To describe FMS practice patterns in the elementary PE curriculum. We had two hypotheses: 1) Fewer PE teachers provide comprehensive FMS instruction in later curriculum (grades 4-6) compared to early curriculum (grades 1-3) and 2) Fewer PE teachers teach FMS with direct instruction methods in later curriculum compared to early curriculum.

Methods: A cross sectional survey design was used. PE teachers (grades 1-6) were recruited via electronic mail from various U.S. regions from January 2018 to March 2019. An electronic questionnaire was developed to ask about timing of FMS teaching and method of instruction. Additional questions were asked about methods used to evaluate FMS proficiency, including use of a standardized assessment of gross motor development, referrals and remediation recommended for children who appeared to be falling behind, and perceived barriers to FMS instruction. Chi-square tests (p<0.05) were employed.

Results: We collected 87 responses with approximately 9% from West, 42% from Midwest, and 49% from South regions. Among all responses, 54% of PE teachers taught all FMS and 40% taught all FMS with direct instruction. Approximately, 66% taught all FMS for grades 1-3 compared to 42% for grades 4-6 (p<0.0001). Regarding instruction methods, 47% of teachers for grades 1-3 utilized direct instruction to teach all FMS compared to 27% for grades 4-6 (p=0.0007). Only 3.7% of teachers used a standardized assessment of gross motor development to evaluate FMS proficiency. For children who appeared to be falling behind, 6.7% of teachers reported accepting the child’s “best effort” in participation. Only 7.3% reported referring to an exercise program and no PE teacher sought a healthcare referral. Time was reported as the greatest barrier to improving a child’s FMS competency in 52.4% of responses.
**Conclusion:** Results suggests that fewer PE teachers teach all FMS in late elementary PE curriculum compared to early curriculum. Additionally, fewer teachers utilize direct instruction methods to teach skills in late elementary curriculum. With time reported as the greatest barrier, a more efficient screening tool to evaluate FMS competency may be needed.

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