

# *Active for Life*

developmentally appropriate movement  
programs for young children

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*Credits:*

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# Preface

Daily developmentally appropriate movement experiences have the potential to shape the lives of children in becoming physically active and healthy for a lifetime. This is an important goal.

In 1996 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services published *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*. This was the first report addressing physical activity and health and emphasized that “Americans could substantially improve their health and quality of life by including moderate amounts of physical activity in their daily lives” (DHHS 1996). The report identifies substantial health benefits of regular participation in physical activity, including reducing the risks of dying prematurely from heart disease and of developing diabetes, high blood pressure, or colon cancer. When physical inactivity is combined with poor diet, the impact on health is devastating, accounting for an estimated 300,000 deaths per year; tobacco use is the only behavior that kills more people (DHHS 1996).

## *The importance of movement education for children*

There are many reasons for children to be physically active. For one, physical inactivity has contributed to the unprecedented epidemic of childhood obesity currently plaguing the United States. The percentage of children considered overweight has more than doubled in the past 30 years (DHHS 1996). The importance of early education is crucial since almost half of all young people ages 12 to 21 and more than one-third of all U.S. high school students do not participate in physical activity on a regular basis. In adolescence, obesity also is associated with poor self-esteem and linked with obesity in adulthood.

The lack of daily physical activity by children and adults poses a major health concern in this country. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC 2000) document the realities:

- Among adults today, 25% of women and 20% of men are obese.
- Diseases associated with obesity are estimated to cost almost \$100 billion per year, or approximately 8% of the national health care budget.
- Physical inactivity has contributed to the 100% increase in the prevalence of childhood obesity in the United States since 1980.

In the past, many physical activity programs emphasized intensity, because the underlying philosophy of this earlier approach was that the harder the exercising, the greater the physical benefits. Many adults recall running laps in physical education classes, while a physical education teacher’s bark demanded a faster pace. This emphasis on intensity may actually have been detrimental to many participants and turned off others—children and adults—from physical activity altogether. “Today’s different emphasis on less intense, more moderate amounts of physical activity, and on the flexibility to vary activities according to personal preference, will encourage both children and adults to make physical activity a regular and sustainable part of their lives” (DHHS 1996, 3).

Numerous studies (DHHS 1996; CDC 2000) confirm that regular physical activity helps children to build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints, and to control weight, build lean muscle, and reduce fat; it prevents or delays the development of high blood pressure, reduces feelings of depression and anxiety, and may, through its effect on mental health, increase children’s capacity for learning.

Participation in physical activities promotes social well-being as well as physical and mental health. In addition, from a young child's point of view, participating in daily physical activity is simply a fun way to learn and grow.

### *Benefits of regular physical activity*

Movement is part of everyone's everyday life and has many manifestations. The urge to achieve physical skill mastery and capitalize on the body's capacity for movement is common to all children. They delight in physical accomplishment and enjoy movement for its own sake. Children use movement to express feelings, manipulate objects, and learn about their world.

Movement experiences of all kinds interest early childhood teachers because understanding of movement acquired in one context is likely to have relevance in another. It would take volumes, however, to reflect on all the uses of movement as a means of learning about our physical selves and about the world of movement. For this reason, this book focuses on providing a framework for activating developmentally appropriate practices that help children build a foundation of basic motor skills. With a grounding in the basics, teachers and children can transfer the learning of specific motor skills and movement concepts to a variety of contexts.

### *What concerns do teachers have?*

Comments and questions from preschool teachers about children's physical activity are common and further confirm the need for support and direction.

"Should I assess children? We play games, such as Duck Duck Goose, and we dance and jump to music, and of course the kids run around outdoors. There is plenty of physical activity in our program. Isn't this enough?"

"Is it appropriate to teach a 4-year-old how to throw a ball? How would I do it with 16 children in my class?"

"We do not have the space to have a physical education class!"

"Exactly what is appropriate for young children to learn about physical activity?"

"Should I assess children's learning in physical education the same as I do other skills?"

"We have better things to do with the short period of time we have with the children; is P. E. really that important?"

The purpose of this book is to provide answers to these questions and others, based on what is known from experience and research about movement and physical activity in the lives of young children. To help, the book presents the position of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) as defined and illustrated in *Appropriate Practices in Movement Programs for Young Children Ages 3–5* (COPEC 2000). Central in this statement is the premise that early movement experiences assist children in becoming efficient movers of their bodies and help them develop positive attitudes about the importance of daily physical activity.

### *What to teach young children*

From experience and research we know that children who do not develop a foundation of basic motor skills (throwing, catching, kicking, skipping, galloping, etc.) are less likely to participate in physical activity on a daily basis. Physical education and movement programs for young children should be serious in concentrating on the development of physical skills. These skills are invaluable lifetime tools that children and adults use to successfully participate in regular physical activity and to help maintain health and fitness.

Many adults maintain fitness through skill-based activities such as dance, tennis, badminton, swimming, golf, basketball, aerobics, walking, and bicycling. If children feel competent in many motor skills, they will have a greater propensity toward participating in physical activity later as adults. Movement and sequential skill development are at the center of young children's physical growth, for "no matter what the activity one cannot take part successfully

if the essential fundamental movement skills contained within that activity have not been mastered” (Gallahue 1995).

This book presents a curricular foundation, strategies for teaching, and assessment ideas, and defines and illustrates specific interrelated components of developmentally appropriate practice in providing movement experiences for 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children. Highlighted examples of these components appear in “Key Aspects in Building Quality Physical Education for Young Children” featured in a spread of pages at two junctures in the book, following Part One and Part Two. Based on national standards and professional physical education guidelines, the integrated components of appropriate and inappropriate practice (COPEC 2000), reflect a philosophy of providing early movement experiences. This approach is grounded in the knowledge that daily physical activity is necessary to ensure children’s growth toward building a mature form of essential fundamental movement skills.

### Why a book on national guidelines for physical education?

Emphasis on ensuring that teaching practices are developmentally appropriate is familiar to most early childhood educators. Practitioners widely apply the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs and classrooms. Initially developed in the late 1980s and revised in 1997, the NAEYC guidelines help teachers plan and develop appropriate learning experiences for children. In physical education a set of guidelines for developmentally appropriate programs was developed first in 1994, and it was revised in 2000. Use of these guidelines is growing in physical education settings across the United States.

This book now shares these principles of movement education with professionals outside the physical education field—all those who work with young children in educational settings. Many early childhood centers or schools do not have physical education specialists. The

responsibility for meeting the physical activity needs of young children falls mostly to program administrator/directors and classroom teachers of these young children. This book is a resource and guide.

Part One focuses on understanding developmentally appropriate practice in relation to movement education. It describes the basic premises in the NASPE position statements on movement programs for young children 3 through 5 (COPEC 1994, 2000) as well as guidelines for physical activity for young children (NASPE 2001). Part Two explores the importance of creating movement learning environments, curriculum, and teaching approaches that are in tune with the way children learn and develop. Part Three provides thinking about assessment, evaluation, and planning. A concluding chapter looks at future goals to make movement learning a full partner in education.

Useful diagrams, charts, and resources to support movement education planning appear in the Appendixes. Throughout the book, the reader will note that terms *physical activity programs*, *physical education programs*, and *movement programs* are used interchangeably. For purposes here these have the same meaning. A potpourri of skill learning elements comprise boxes that appear randomly throughout the book, graphically highlighted as useful, quick summaries of teaching points and skill cues.

### Where to go from here?

Developmentally appropriate practice in movement education programs for young children is what we strive for in creating quality for all our children. The intent of this book is to provide teachers with a foundation of knowledge and to offer them direction, support, and encouragement in taking on the challenge of the twenty-first century—providing daily developmentally appropriate movement experiences for preschool children, with the goal of creating a new, healthier generation of Americans.