

Chapter 10

Authentic Learning in Elementary Classrooms: Promoting Movement in Physical Education

Franco Zengaro

Jacksonville State University, USA

Sally A. Zengaro

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3988-6139>

Jacksonville State University, USA

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the role of movement in authentic learning in the elementary classroom. First, this chapter discusses the role of movement education in fostering a classroom climate of curiosity, learning, and positive development for children. Next, the chapter explores the link between being active as a child and increases in learning. Movement is children's first contact with the world, and since the interaction between children and their environment is primarily via the body, movement can spur the development of conceptual understanding. Therefore, this chapter proposes that young learners benefit from having movement activities embedded into their educational experiences, especially in the elementary physical education classroom.

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INTRODUCTION

Maria Montessori used the analogy of the sponge in the “absorbent mind” to characterize the inner disposition in children to fix their physical energies and make exploratory moves toward an object (Montessori, 1966). Montessori argued that teachers should encourage and support the innate biological rhythm of development in children. Referencing a sponge, Montessori provided a window into the spirit of the child, developing a method of teaching is child centered. Ahead of her time, she introduced constructivist teaching principles to education.

Following Montessori’s lead, early educational activities for young children need to prioritize the senses because the senses of a child are the main method to unlock the individual’s power to navigate perceptual stimuli for learning. The early years are exceptional periods of growth and interest for a child, propelling children to push forward to accomplish new activities. The absorbent mind is a classic example of the role of spontaneous learning in children, with the hope that adults observe these leaps in development in children as bodily movement in learning takes priority over abstract schematic concepts (Montessori, 1966, 1967; Piaget, 1966; Piaget & Inhelder, 1967).

The objectives of this chapter are to discuss movement education in elementary physical education classes as a basis of authentic learning for children. The second objective is to introduce and explain the concept of physical literacy in terms of movement education and learning for elementary school children. The chapter addresses the background of movement education along with current trends in teaching physical literacy. It concludes with solutions and recommendations for instructors to increase authentic learning in elementary physical education classrooms. The chapter posits that teachers have a powerful influence on children’s attitudes and behaviors toward physical activity and lifelong engagement with physical activity.

BACKGROUND

The human body is designed to move. The basic process of locomotion has a myriad of significant factors transcending the basic movement of going from one place to another. Biologically and physiologically, the body confirms the importance of movement since it is finely associated to life. Physical activity involves moving the body. Movement cannot be separated from the body, and the body cannot do without movement.

Physical educators have long recognized the importance of physical activity to development (Young, 2014). However, one area of disagreement is whether physical education teachers should teach physical activities or physical education (Lund,

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