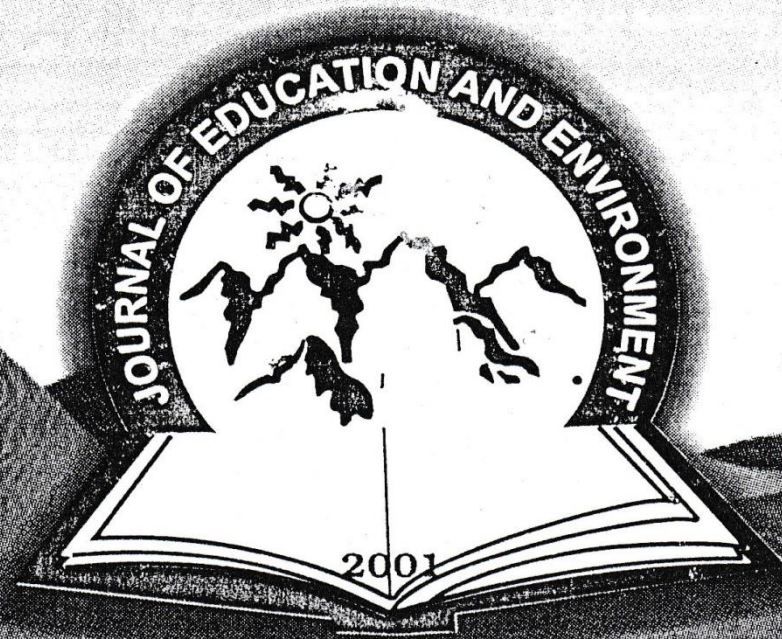


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MOVEMENT TAXONOMY IN CHILDREN: TEMPLATE FOR SKILLFUL PSYCHOMOTOR DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Movement is an inherent instinct in children. Sequel to the hostile political and socio-economic challenges of contemporary society, the deliberate development of this natural characteristics in children is ignored. This article calls on Nursery and Primary schools to take up the professional gauntlet and rescue the nation's children from motor under-development. The plan: to "exploit" children's natural motor talent; fundamental movements, and aid them acquire skillful motor behaviour to avert motor inferiority in adulthood. The presumption is that the most elementary aim of physical education is "learning to move and learning through movement". Consequently, if teachers are to provide quality physical education programme they should focus on helping young children learn how to use their body efficiently and effectively in a wide variety of fundamental movements.

INTRODUCTION

These are very challenging times. The trend cuts across every stratum of the society; the children, youths and adults. Nonetheless, children are the high risk group. The United Nations echoed this thinking when the General Assembly resolved that its relevant bodies should consider specific measures, within their competence to help better the lot of the world's children (Donli, 1991). Since the realities of contemporary society render children vulnerable, it seems reasonable that the schools should perform rescue operations. If the schools accept the challenge, they must design programmes to develop the total capacities of the child, so that in adulthood he may be equipped with knowledge, sound thinking capacities, physical stamina, and emotional maturity to live effectively in this complex society.

Today the Nigerian child faces a challenging future. Germane to this paper is "restrictions" on his movements:

- * His play spaces are converted to "market gardens".
- * His learning is measured merely by intellectual achievement.
- * His privileged peers are motorized to and from school.
- * Most schools do not have adequate play spaces commensurate with the total enrolment.
- * Television mania (viewing) has deprived most children of active play time.
- * Child abuse (child labour) alarmingly deprives children of recreation time.
- * Town planners make no provision for recreational spaces in urban design and development.

These are not encouraging benchmarks that can nurture the Nigerian child to

develop socially, emotionally, mentally and physically. If the child must live well to face and actually overcome the challenging times, the schools have vital roles to play. Fait (1976) gave a vocal support to this thinking when he opined that school teachers bear a major portion of the responsibility in tackling this challenge effectively. The educational achievements of the elementary school years are the girders on which all future learning is built. If the girders are to be functional, the school curriculum must range beyond the basic academic skills of the traditional "3Rs"; writing, reading and arithmetic. The curriculum plan must include and equip the children with natural experiences that will aid their psychomotor development.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the importance of the systematic build-up of the inherently natural movement framework in pre-secondary grade pupils as the recipe for motor excellence. This way, they would be able to use their bodies better in later life, ie. life long movement education.

THE CONCEPTION

Movement is synonymous to life though not all movements indicate life. Galloway (1984), argued that where there is life there is movement and where there are children there is almost perpetual movement. The joy that accompanies a child in his ability to stand up and make his first step of life is inexpressible. We are witnesses to the fact that children normally run, jump, throw, catch, kick, strike, roll, gallop, skip and perform a multitude of basic skills. These are indications that movement is a natural instinct in children. On reaching school age the child has implanted a repertoire of movements. It is the place of the school to develop and transform the fundamental or inherent movement schema into "technical" motor skills. The child's first exposure to "educated" movements is most often than not in the schools. In the schools teachers of human kinetics transform the rich and inherent fundamental movements acquired by children in their developmental process into meaningful patterns to achieve educational values.

MOTOR BEHAVIOUR

The dynamic urge for activity is a natural biological impulse of all healthy children and is manifested by outward responses in movements (Daugherty and Lewis 1979). This biological drive in children gives dominant expressions in movements which are necessary for their normal growth and development.

In the schools, physical educators explore the movement instinct in children for educational goals. The physical education curricula in the nursery and primary schools should be essentially activities oriented, based on movement exploration.

Before reaching school age, children have acquired movement blue prints commonly described as fundamental or basic movements. These preliminary skills are essential prelude for future major skills accomplishment. These fundamental skills are not acquired by all the children of the same age at the same time. If educational values are to be attained, children should not be compelled to master these skills against their normal and natural developmental patterns.

Strom and Torrence (1973), after a comprehensive outline of fundamental movements, classified gross movement skills into three groups: static, locomotor and impacted movements. These are: stretching, locomotion and breaking inertia of external objects respectively.

Table 1. Taxonomy of Gross Motor Skills

STATIC	LOCOMOTOR	IMPACTED
Bending	Walking	Pushing
Stretching	Running	Pulling
Twisting	Leaping	Throwing
Swaying	Jumping	Kicking
Turning	Hopping	Striking
Shaking	Skipping	Batting
Carrying	Galloping	Catching
Standing	Dancing	Lifting
Jerking	Rolling	Blocking
Rocking	Tiptoeing	Dunking

Movement exploration as an operational definition may be considered as a process or method whereby pupils are opportuned to try out challenges, experiment and delve into the unknown, create or invent or manufacture various movements. Another name for movement exploration is creative movement. This simply means movement that is discovered or thought out by oneself. When children are exploring in physical education class they are finding, investigating and examining from the known to the unknown. Creativity is thinking to bring about something new from already known facts. This explains why fundamental movements (skills) are the bedrock of movement exploration. Fait (1976) advised that movement exploration as a unit of work in physical education should be included at every grade level; because the experiences it affords are so basic to all the physical activities that will follow, it should receive special emphasis from nursery and kindergarten through the primary grades.

RHYTHMIC ACTIVITIES

Children find in rhythmic movements a medium for expressing their inner thoughts and deepest feelings. Rhythmic activities have reflected and interpreted the culture of every society in every age. Above all they are activities that involve considerable motor skills, (Fait 1976). Consequently, rhythms have become an integral part of the physical education programme.

Rhythmic activities in physical education are the regular re-occurrence of successive movements. It falls into five categories; viz:-

- (1) **Fundamental Rhythmic Activities:** The activities considered here are the same as in fundamental movements like running, walking and galloping. The difference is that there is the principle of regular re-occurrence of the movements i.e the movements occur rhythmically. The activities covered include locomotor and non-locomotor movements.
- (2) **Creative Rhythmic Activities:** As in movement exploration, focus is on the application of creativity in movement patterns.

Three basic forms are identified:

- (i) **Expressive Movement** This affords the children opportunities to move their body freely especially in dance activities.
 - (ii) **Identification** This is mimicry whereby the children can identify themselves with familiar characters or objects.
 - (iii) **Dramatization** Children are made to make a play of ideas or events by interpreting through movement patterns stories or actions in the form of mime.
- (3) **Rhythmic March** When marching, children are guided to perform organised and synchronized movement patterns with the body placed in a relaxed position. The stepping should be timed, uniform and aided by musical beats.
 - (4) **Singing Games** These are rhythmical games or dances which are developed with songs. The songs help to produce rhythm as the game or dance is in progress. Examples; (a) Mkpok eto (Ibibio) (b) Tim eyen edi (Ibibio). Fire on the mountain (English).
 - (5) **Folk Dance** This takes the form of traditional dances of the various communities. Musical identify and set movement patterns are the key distinguishing factors.
 - (6) **Social Dance** Presently this includes largely of foreign dances characterized by intricate dance or movement patterns. Examples; pop, disco and reggae dances.

It is observed that foreign games syndrome has deprived us the focus to develop our rich indigenous music and dances such as "Uta, Itembe," and "Ekombi". Hopefully the cultural revival sweeping across the country would bring a renaissance.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MOTOR LEARNING

Programmes of movement exploration and rhythmic activities are valuable not only in the teaching of basic movements, but in developing balance, co-ordination, poise, self control and self confidence. Moreover the activities provide opportunities to develop a sense of enjoyment in the participants, projection and mastery of the peoples' culture, enhancement of the development of physical fitness, creativity, social and aesthetic values. The children can inadvertently also act out their thought processes.

Physical education teachers who teach children in the pre-secondary school grades should have more than a passive knowledge of the children. If teachers acquaint themselves with growth, development and psychology of children they would be able to provide for their individual differences. Though the desire to help children to acquire "optimum skill" may be grandiose and lofty, physical education teachers are reminded that a critical factor to gain impressive achievement is to give the children carefully designed opportunities. In this way, McClosky (1971), caution would have been heeded; children who are exposed to circumstances that are appropriately encouraging tend to develop motor skills at a level beyond that which is normally expected.

Total skill development of the child is bonded by natural progression and is dependent upon the possession of correct skill development from one level to the next, (Vannier and Gallahue (1978). Considering the primary relationships, they conclude that preparation for promoting optimum skill development can reasonably begin with teaching children correct fundamental motor patterns at the "educational cradle".

CONCLUSION

The internal and external reactions have much to do with movement. Internally the movement blue-prints in the children are dormant. They are to be activated and sustained. Externally the environmental resources are to be exploited for the advantage of the children. The professional responsibility of the physical education teacher is to fertilize their synergistic effect at the primordial stage for optimal development.

It is reasonable that at the "nursery stage" enough opportunities should be created to enable the children acquire adequate movement capacities. In this way pre-secondary school teachers may be seen to support the concept of developing in the young children skillful motor behaviour for active adulthood.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) School authorities should provide sports friendly school environment.
- (2) Physical education activities should be made an integral part of school curriculum and not merely a cosmetic curriculum frill.
- (3) Parents should encourage their young ones to take active part in school sports programmes.
- (4) Physical education teachers should ensure that there is strict supervision of activities to eliminate available accidents.

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