

# MOVEMENT in the Primary Grades

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## 5

## The Role of the Educator to Develop Physical Literacy in Students

Although students learn skills through play, and often learn skills naturally, educators have a critical role in helping students learn fundamental movement skills to develop physical competence, build confidence in executing these skills, and increase motivation to participate in and try new physical activities, as part of developing students physical literacy.

**Be an active role model:** Brain science shows that active role models are important.<sup>2</sup> When students watch active educators, their own brain cells start to copy what the educator is doing, and helps them learn to do what is being demonstrated. When educators enjoy physical activity this attitude is picked up and copied. This mimicry can lead to the student feeling confident and motivated enough to try new skills, and build up existing physical competence.

### How to Help

**Setting the stage:** Ensure that the physical activity space is safe, free of obstacles, and that any equipment used is in good condition. Allow students to offer their physical activity ideas and incorporate those where appropriate.

**Space:** Students need enough space to safely run around, and even in the classroom, pushing back the furniture to make room is often enough for stationary and movement activities. Utilize different spaces to allow students the opportunity to explore different movements and skills on their own. Students may be more confident and/or motivated to use a skill in an unstructured game of tag with their friends on the playground than a structured game of tag as part of a class activity.

**Markings:** A simple and cheap way to increase students' physical activity is to put markings on the floor such as chalk markings in the playground or tape on indoor floors. Straight lines, squiggles or squares all work well. Students see the markings and spend time walking along them, jumping over

them and using them as part of their games.

**Equipment:** Simple, basic equipment is best. Balls, beanbags, lightweight plastic bats or hockey sticks, and wheeled equipment, such as sitting scooters, are more than enough. Equipment needs to be the right size and weight for the students' to use safely. Students can build confidence by picking the type of equipment they want to use, so they can practice and explore different skills on their own.

**Promote activities:** Promote and profile a variety of activities and sports on classroom bulletin boards and in school work. This encourages students to see the diverse possibilities offered in sport and recreation.

**Organize retrievers:** Students learn when they have chances to practice – for example, if students are kicking a ball, have another student roll it or bring it back to them so that they can try again. Encourage students to encourage each other when performing skills to help build confidence and foster motivation to try again.

**Repetition without boredom:** Students learn by repetition, but can get bored with repeating the same activity over and over again. Use variations of an activity to create a fun and challenging environment where students experience successes and constructive failure.

**Follow-the-leader:** Let students take turns as leader in follow-the-leader. Leading encourages creativity and builds confidence while following helps students automate their skills as they focus on the leader.

**Leave them alone:** When students are engaged in physical activity on their own, let them be! Learning does not have to be adult directed all the time.

**Actively supervise:** Pay close attention, anticipate risks, and keep students safe from collisions or being strike. Be sure to encourage students on an ongoing basis to build their confidence while also motivating them to try different skills and activities.

<sup>2</sup> Lacoboni, M. (2009). *Imitation, Empathy, and Mirror Neurons. Annual Review of Psychology*, 60, 653-70.