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Title of paper: The Effects of Motor Skill Competence and Physical Activity Participation in Childhood and Adolescence

Physical activity is a part of life. However if someone does not enjoy an activity, or doesn’t perform well at it, why would they pursue it? It is more likely that if discouraged, someone will abandon whatever caused that discouragement. This is crucial when children become involved. A child’s experiences of an activity can influence future desire to participate. This creates a linear decrease in adolescent physical activity participation. There are numerous studies that research the differences between children and adolescents, especially regarding their physical activity participation. As such, various theories and observations have been made about motor skill competence and its effects on participating in activities. This paper will discuss the effects motor skill competence and physical activity participation has on children and adolescents.

According to Payne and Isaacs (2012), “perception of successful competence motivates the individual to continue participation” (p. 422). Based on this, if an individual is unsuccessful, they will not be as motivated to participate. This is the core of this topic. If a child does not have a positive experience with activity at a young age, they will be less likely to participate in adolescence. The articles and studies cited provide evidence for such statements.

A study by Simpkins, Vest, and Becnel (2009) used music and physical activity performance and participation in children, and compared it to their participation in adolescence. They found that most children who stick with music, or an activity for several years are more likely to continue participating in adolescence. However, those who did not participate in sports or music tended to avoid such activities in later years. The study also suggests that participation in elementary school can be used to predict adolescent behavior, and therefore instructors can intervene before it becomes an issue. This evidence supports the notion that positive experience with motor skills in children can influence their participation and activity levels in adolescence.

Donaldson and Ronan (2006) investigated the emotional and behavioral side to children and adolescents in relation to physical activity in a different study. They came to the following conclusion:

children with increased perceptions of sport-related competencies reported significantly fewer emotional and behavioral problems than did children who were, by external standards (e.g., teacher rating, number of sporting achievements), actually competent at sport. (p. 369)

Their study consisted of 203 adolescents between the ages of 11 years, 1 month to 13 years, 10 months. The study involved 93 males, and 109 females, whom were subjected to three self-repots. These included the Youth Self-Report, the Self Perception Profile for Children, and a sports questionnaire. These reports revealed the adolescents’ self awareness, while additional questionnaires followed to gage their actual participation and ability. As stated above, they discovered that if a child’s perception of their ability were high, they would show less emotional and behavioral problems than those who don’t. Donaldson and Ronan (2006) insist that competition in childhood should be decreased, focusing instead on cooperation.

These findings complement Payne and Isaacs study, as positive perception increased interest and pleasure in activity, while negative perception led to more behavioral and emotional problems. Clearly it is important for children to not only enjoy activity in childhood, but also to perceive themselves succeeding, as it can influence their participation levels, and emotional and behavioral issues in adolescence.

A similar study was done which researched the influences on perception and enjoyment in early adolescents. Scarpa and Nart (2012) discovered that there were:

positive associations between physical self-concept scales and PA enjoyment, and our hypothesis that perceived sport competence can be considered a good predictor of PA enjoyment was confirmed. (p. 204)

Such findings support other conclusions that self-concept in children and their abilities are related to their enjoyment and participation.

Another study regarding self-perception in children and their physical competence was performed by Sollerhed, Apitzsch, Rastam, and Ejlertsson (2008). They came to similar conclusions as other studies mentioned, but also discovered that children were relatively accurate in judging their physical status. More so, it was the children who performed well that could judge their status. This can also help instructors intervene, as they can identify the children at risk, and provide assistance before any permanent discouragement occurs.

Looking at specific details also helps understand this concept. Kantomaa et al. (2011) linked low participation in children to physical activity and low cardiorespiratory fitness in adolescence. Kantomaa et al. (2011) discovered:

Boys were physically more active (p,0.001), and they had higher cardiorespiratory fitness (p,0.001) than girls at the age of 16 years. The mean MET hours per week were 33.3 (SD 17.8) among boys and 28.8 (SD 15.4) among girls. The mean peak oxygen consumption was 48.7 (SD 8.9) ml kg21 min21 among boys and 34.2 (SD 5.8) ml kg21 min21 among girls. (p. 4)

Such findings conclude that boys are more active than girls, and are less at risk for low activity levels in adolescence. It further demonstrates that activity and fitness levels in children will decrease with time if they become less active, or do not enjoy it. Low activity results in males, and more specifically females could be signs of discouragement or disinterest in physical activity from a young age, and that behavior in childhood can predict future ones, as previous studies have discussed.

Another aspect to this topic is children who have low motor competence versus those with high motor competence. Rudisill, Mahar, and Meaney (1993) used the Motor skill Perceived Competence Scale with 218 children to discover that boys had a higher perceived competence than girls, but neither could accurately understand their motor competence. Another study was done to compare children with HMC to those with LMC. Hands’ (2007) research revealed that:

Changes over time were significantly different between groups for cardiovascular endurance, 50- m run and static balance, but not for body composition, overhand throw or standing broad jump. Between the two groups, performances were significantly different for all measures except body composition. (p. 159)

This study showed that over the years children with LMC did not reach the ability of those with HMC. Another study came to similar conclusions. According to Haga (2009, p. 1096), “Children with LMC performed less well on all fitness measures than children with HMC.” Evidently, children who have LMC are more at risk in adolescence for poor physical activity participation and motor competence.

 Using the articles previously discussed, it is easy to conclude that what happens in childhood will affect adolescence. Children who perform poorly during childhood, or those with LMC, will be less inclined to participate in physical activity during adolescence. Another conclusion is that a child’s perception of their ability, as well as their experience, can also influence later years. By providing a positive environment, and observing behaviors, one can predict a child’s path and intervene before it becomes an issue. In doing so, the numbers of adolescence not participating in physical activity can be decreased, establishing healthier and more active adults. Clearly there is a link between motor competence and physical activity in children and adolescence, and it can have dramatic effects.

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