

## The complexity of young children's physical education.

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This paper is based on the belief that young children's physical education is a much more complex phenomenon than is often portrayed in the literature. Using key principles from complexity thinking, the paper discusses how, as children grow older, they iteratively engage in a self-organising process that involves regular negotiation of the personal and environmental boundaries that are part of their daily lives (Jess, 2019). From a physical education experiences, this recursive process involves engagement in a range of structured and unstructured learning activities that, to varying degrees, help children develop physical activity habits and movement competence. This complex mix of physical activity and movement learning is central to children developing the physical education foundation that will act as the catalyst for successful engagement in sport, dance and other physical activities as they get older (Howells, 2017). This complex learning process however is not a one-size-fits-all experience but a dynamic, emergent and non-linear process for each child and requires to be appropriately differentiated over time. Young children's physical education is subsequently not something that should simply be left to chance but should be a focus of primary/elementary school and preschool/kindergarten programmes. Teachers and early years' practitioners need to be supported to develop the knowledge and skills to ensure that young children are offered regular opportunities that help them develop physically active habits and movement control and coordination. Critically, these learning experiences should not be isolated to the gymnasium but should act as the basis of a meaning-making experience that connects physical education across children's lives in school, the community and at home. The presentation concludes by offering suggestions as to how children's physical activity habits and movement competence can be developed through a long term capacity building process.

Howell, K., (2017) Developing Curiosity and Physical Development in Howells K., with Carney, A., Castle, N. and Little R., *Mastering Primary Physical Education*. Bloomsbury, London, UK.

Jess, M (2019) The Complex Nature of Early Childhood Movement Skill Development, in Duncombe, R., (Ed), *Young Children's Physical Development Needs: (Re)Defining Physical Education in the Early Years*, Taylor & Francis, London, UK