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A mixed-method approach for the assessment of fundamental movement skills in physical education.

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Abstract

Introduction: Physical education may help to improve the physical activity level (PAL) and has an important role in the development of fundamental movement skills (FMS). Indeed, several studies showed that the acquisition of FMS correlate with PAL, health-related fitness and self-esteem (Stodden, Langendorfer, & Robertson, 2009; Stodden & Goodway, 2007).

Purpose of study: In education the assessment of children's motor skills represents an interesting research issue. In this work we discuss about the results obtained during the assessment of one movement skill in 11/12-age children of an Italian school. **Methods:** Fundamental motor skill was evaluated using quantitative instruments, kinematic video-based analysis, and qualitative instruments as specific evaluation grid. The test used for the FMS assessment is "Catch" (Fundamental Motor Skills, 1996). **Discussion:** The comparison about the data show two interesting findings: 1) children don't reach the level of motor-gross abilities expected for their age; 2) evaluations of qualitative instruments sometimes don't match the ones obtained by quantitative devices.

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1. Introduction

The role of physical education is important for the development of fundamental motor skills and for the improvement of physical activity levels. Several researches believe that the low level of physical activity is one of the major causes of overweight and obesity in children and youth (Odgen et al., 2006). The dramatic increase in childhood obesity has been deemed one of the most serious public health issues facing nowadays society (Ebbeling, Pawlak & Ludwig, 2002; Odgen et al., 2006). Physical activity helps health and social life during our existence. The childhood represents a critical period when the practice of physical activity can improve our health level and it can help to prevent problems such as hypertension, respiratory problems and orthopaedic complications (Dietz, 1998). In Italy, the report “Osservasalute-2009” proposed by the National Health Observatory outlined that in several Italian regions the overweight phenomenon increased in last years and a third of Italian people are considered overweight.

Several guidelines produced by numerous countries promote physical activity importance in children and youth (Janssen, 2007). In the previously mentioned guidelines, with a few exceptions, authors suggest children and youth to participate at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous intensity of physical activity daily (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). Other researches, regrettably, proved that the indications provided by those guidelines are only partially attended by youth. Ribeiro and his colleagues, studying a sample of 210 youth of the city of Oporto, showed that the level of physical activity is compatible with the same proposed by the guidelines only in the weekends; moreover only the 15% of boys and the 7% of girls respect the guideline indications (2009).

Today school represents the ideal context to promote the physical activities for youth and children, especially in biggest cities where the opportunity to play with other friends is highly restricted. School, moreover, has to promote innovative learning methods for physical education, including the use of the new technologies, as the exergames, to engage students' participation and to improve the assessment method of physical activity levels (Sgrò et al., 2010).

Moving from this consideration, in this work we discuss about the results obtained using a mixed-method approach for the assessment of a motor test, “Catch” proposed as a fundamental motor skill in childhood and youth (Okely, Booth & Patterson, 2004; Cliff et al., 2009).

2. Physical Education

Physical education is an all-encompassing term, including fitness, skills, movement, dance, recreation, health, games and sport plus the appropriate values and knowledge of each.

Physical education (PE) in school curricula must help students to develop motor abilities. A good motor proficiency acquired during childhood is fundamental to a healthy lifestyle and a suitable level of physical activity. Unfortunately, PE is not relevant in the school system of many countries (Casolo, 2012) and it is often associated to a sport-practice time, while it would be managed as other learning subjects of school curricula, as suggested by Gardner in his studies on multiple intelligence (Gardner, 1987). Students often underestimate the importance of the concepts taught in physical education, such as BMI definition or sports rules. If PE had much relevance in the education, probably some health-problems related to the low level of physical activity could be avoided.

2.1. Fundamental Motor Skills in education

The fundamental motor skills (FMS) represent an important part of PE programs in pre-school and primary schools. FMS are common motor and physical activities with specific patterns. Fundamental motor skills are often divided in two domains:

- *Locomotor skills*: run, jump, hop.

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