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There seems to be what amounts to complete consensus about the need, nay necessity, for physical activity. We must constantly move our bodies on its journey from cradle to grave, because the human body is so constructed. In the last few decades, this understanding has had a marked influence on research in the intersection of health science and sports. The latter is unchallenged as an organized movement whose be-all and end-all is body movement; the former has increasingly favored prophylactic over palliative care. A central theme is how to maintain the childhood fascination with endless variations of human bodily movements throughout the life cycle; thus the motor development of the child has been the in the focus of research. A leading Swedish authority in this area is Dr. Ingegerd Ericsson; her studies within the Bunkeflo Project has been groundbreaking in determining the relationship between motor development on the one hand and cognitive development and learning abilities on the other. We asked Dr Ericsson to read and review a new American book in this field, *Physical Education for Young Children: Movement ABCs for the Little Ones* by Rae Pica (Human Kinetics). The book, concludes our reviewer, works well within its own limitation, partly defined by a preference of words over pictures and a glaring paucity of references.

Physical education in early childhood

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*Rae Pica***Physical Education for Young Children: Movement ABCs for the Little Ones**

129 pages, pb., ill.

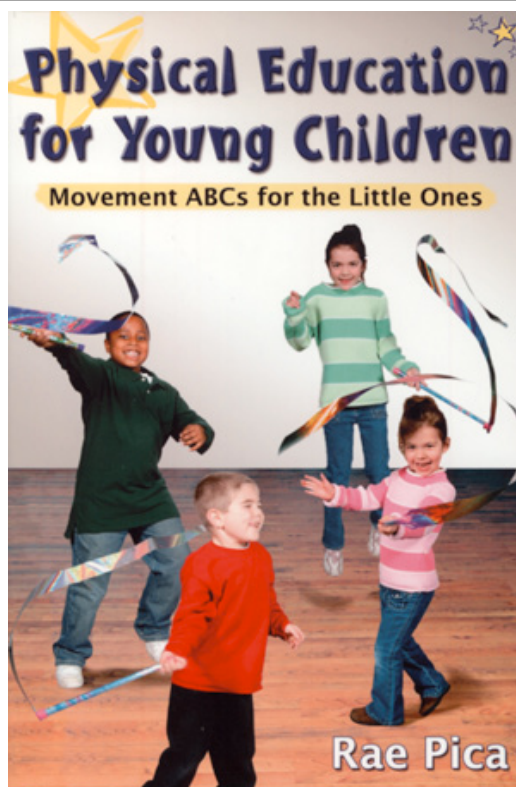
Champaign, IL: [Human Kinetics](#) 2008

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Rae Pica has written a book about early childhood and early elementary PE programs for children at the ages of 4–8 years. The need for such a book stems from the fact that young children are not yet developmentally ready to participate in organized sports, traditional gymnastics or dance. In a study, 49 percent of 1.100 5–8-year-olds were found to “lack the ability to perform even the most fundamental skills required in their sports” (p. 4).

We have to lay the foundation before we can construct the ground floor. We have to complete the ground floor before we can erect the rest of the building. (Pica, 2008, p. viii).

Promoting lifelong fitness should be the goal of every PE program, Pica states. Some similarities can be found with the pedagogy by Holle (1978), also used in the Swedish model for motor skills training. “Motorisk Utveckling som Grund för Inläring”^[1] (MUGI, Ericsson, 2003), for example in statements like: It is important to teach young students in ways that insure success, and children should definitely succeed at single



actions before attempting combinations of them, such as simultaneously running and bouncing a ball. If early physical experiences involve more frustration and failure than fun and success, enjoyment of movement can rapidly disappear. The challenge is to offer young students challenges that are equal to the skills they possess.

Preschoolers are just learning to identify what end where their body parts are and haven't really begun learning how to use them. Using them in a coordinated fashion is simply asking too much. (Pica, 2008, p. 6).

ABCs of movement contains, according to Pica, body-part identification, basic motor skills (nonlocomotor, locomotor, and manipulative), and awareness of the elements of movement (space, shape, time, force, flow, and rhythm).

The book is well structured in seven chapters with titles such as Fundamental Motor Skill Development, Fitness for Young Children and Linking the Gym with the Classroom. In each chapter special items are stressed under the following subtitles: Consider this, Try this or Remember this, which makes the text easy to read. There is also an appendix with three short sample lesson plans: one for ages 4–5, one for ages 5–6, and the third for ages 6–8. There could have been more than one example for each age and the lessons plans might have gained in quality if some pictures were inserted to illustrate the tasks together with advice of how to organize them in the gym. Additionally a teacher/leader might need some guidelines of what is important to observe in the children's movements.

Some milestones in gross motor development are listed briefly, unfortunately without any references. In the chapter Fundamental Motor Skills several categories of motor skills are well described, even though one would have wished for more detailed descriptions of some fundamental locomotor movements, for example of arms, fingers, legs and feet in crawling and creeping. In acquiring motor skills each skill has to progress through stages of development to reach the final phase of full automatization. This development is well described in

1. the precontrol level,
2. the control (advanced beginner) level,
3. the utilization level, and
4. the proficiency level where a movement appears effortless in changing environments.

” *The advantages of the book are that it is well structured, pedagogically written with summaries at the end of each chapter, and that it contains a glossary with explanations of used concepts.*

The advantages of the book are that it is well structured, pedagogically written with summaries at the end of each chapter, and that it contains a glossary with explanations of used concepts. There are several suggestions of how to avoid using “the command style” and how to enhance divergent responses when using an indirect approach, i.e. “a problem-solving” teaching style. Furthermore there are teaching tips on how to establish boundaries, use positive challenges, monitor energy levels, and handle nonparticipants.

The reader may sometimes feel that the text is too pedagogically written with too many sentences repeating the same message. Some descriptions of tasks and games might have gained in being illustrated with drawings or pictures instead of being described in too many words. References to scientific studies should, in my opinion, have been more frequently used and there is also a lack of descriptions of the studies referred to. The lack of references to and descriptions of scientific studies are my most serious criticism of the book. These things may cause the reader to wonder: How can this be true? How do we know that? and How was this examined?

In a book about physical education one might expect plenty of advice on how to observe and stimulate also children who have untrained and/or experienced motor skills. What tasks might be useful to motivate children who have deficits in different milestones of gross motor development? The advice “beginning at the beginning – wherever the children are developmentally – and building from there in a logical progression” (p. 24) will be very hard to follow if you don't know how to decide where the children are developmentally. And what is a logical progression? Is it the same for every child? The book would have benefitted from including a chapter about adapted motor training for children with deficits in motor skills.


Despite the lack of references and the criticism above the book could fulfill the purpose as a guide for understanding the unique needs of 4–8-year-olds in physical education lessons.

References

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[1] Motor Development as a Basis for Learning.

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