

Physical Literacy in Elementary School

Developing physical literacy in the early stages of education lays the foundation for later success and lifelong engagement in physical activity.

To read you need to know your letters and recognize words, and we call this literacy. Knowing numbers and basic arithmetic is called numeracy. For students to be physically active they need physical literacy – the building block of lifetime engagement in physical activity.

For elementary school students, competence in learning physical skills is a major contributor to building self-confidence, and increased self-confidence leads to better academic and social outcomes.

1 Physical Competence

Create opportunities: Providing opportunities for children to explore fundamental movement skills through a variety of physical activities helps develop the physical component of physical literacy. Ensure the space is safe with access to small equipment (equipment that is size appropriate for age group) that students may choose to play with. Encourage them, play with them, and set small challenges for them.

2 Confidence

Enable success: Remember: "not too easy, not too hard". For example, when you set a challenge such as, "can you throw the ball and hit the target?", try changing how close the student stands to the target. If they hit the target easily, move them farther away; if they miss, move them closer. Student confidence comes from successfully doing something they have never done before.

3 Motivation

Lasts a lifetime: Physical literacy is a lifelong journey that is constantly changing. In elementary school, students develop physical competence and confidence, leading to the motivation to be physically active, which ultimately leads to being active for life.



A Formal Definition

"Physical literacy is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life."*

*Canada's Physical Literacy Consensus Statement definition: physicalliteracy.ca/physical-literacy/consensus-statement.

Theory into Practice

Who?

Everyone, including students with disabilities, who should be encouraged to participate to the full extent of their ability (within medical guidelines).

What?

A wide range of activities in a variety of different environments.



Locomotor		Manipulative		Non-Locomotor	
Walk Skip		Pass Catch		Balance	
Run		Throw		Tuck Twist	
Hop Jump		Kick Trap		Curl-up	
Swim		Strike		Bend Turn	
Slide Skate		Bunt Roll		Straighten	
Roll		Scoop		Lower Raise	
Skip Leap		Shoot		Stretch	
Gallop				Extend	
In Nature		In the Gym and on the Playing Field		In Water and in the Air	
				On Ice and Snow	

When?

Every day! Students need to develop the habit of daily physical activity, and should be moderate to vigorously active for a minimum of 60 minutes, plus a few hours of light physical activity per day.

How?

Child-led play during recess and free play. Educator oversees play area and ensures safety.

Educator-led activity in designated area (e.g., gym, outside, classroom, etc.).

Educator organizes equipment, ensures safety, and sets physical challenges for children. Educator provides instructional assistance to students having difficulty meeting a challenge.