

The 'Fun, Move, Play' Project: Qualitative and Quantitative Findings from Irish Primary School Children (6-8 Years), Parents and Teachers

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Abstract : Fundamental Movement Skills (FMS) mastery is considered essential for children's ongoing, meaningful engagement in Physical Activity (PA). There has been a dearth of Irish research on baseline FMS and their development by means of intervention in young primary school children. In addition, as children's participation in PA is heavily influenced by both parents and teachers, it is imperative to understand their attitudes and perceptions towards PA participation and its' promotion in children. The 'Fun, Move, Play' Project investigated the effect of a 6-week play based PA intervention on primary school children's (aged 6-8 years) FMS while also exploring the attitudes and perceptions of their parents and teachers towards PA participation. The FMS intervention utilised a pre-post quasi-experimental design to determine the effect of a 6-week play based PA intervention (devised from the iCoach Kids Programme) on 176 primary school children's FMS (N = 176: 90 girls and 86 boys; M = 7.2 years; SD = 0.48). Objective measures of 7 FMS (run, skip, vertical jump, static balance, stationary dribble, catch, kick) were made using a combination of the TGMD2 and Get Skilled, Get Active resources. One hundred parents (87 mothers; 13 fathers; M=36 years; SD=5.45) and 90 teachers (67 females; 23 males) completed surveys investigating their attitudes and perceptions towards PA participation. In addition, 19 of these parents and 9 of these teachers participated in semi-structured qualitative interviews to explore, in more depth, their views and perceptions of PA participation. Both the FMS data set and survey responses were analysed using SPSS version 23, using appropriate statistical analysis. A thematic analysis framework was used to analyse the qualitative findings. A significant improvement was observed in the children's overall FMS score pre-post intervention ($t = 16.67$; $df = 175$; $p < 0.001$), while there were also significant improvements in each of the seven individual FMS measured in the children, pre-post intervention. Findings from the parent surveys and interviews indicated that parents had positive attitudes towards PA, viewed it as important and supported their child's PA participation. However, a lack of knowledge regarding the amount and intensity of PA that children should participate in emerged as a recurrent finding. Also, there was a significant positive correlation between the PA levels of parents' and their children ($r = .41$; $n = 100$; $p < .001$). Arising from the teachers' surveys and interviews was a positive attitude towards PA and the impact that it has on a child's health and well-being. They also reported feeling more confident teaching certain aspects of the PE curriculum (games and sports) compared to others (gymnastics, dance), where they appreciate working with specialist practitioners. Conclusion: A short-term PA intervention has a positive effect on children's FMS. While parents are supportive of their child's PA participation, there is a knowledge gap regarding National PA guidelines for children. Teachers appreciate the importance of PA in children, but face a number of challenges in its implementation and promotion.

Keywords : fundamental movement skills, parents attitudes to physical activity, short-term intervention, teachers attitudes to physical activity

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