

# Physical education in early childhood education: Guest editorial

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In this special issue focusing on Physical education in early childhood education, the editorial board of JECER publish the selected work of leading early childhood education as well as leading physical education researchers from: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK, and USA to further extend out understandings through findings based on their recent research and policy analysis. The special issue was organised by AIESEP (International Association for Physical Education in Higher Education) Early Years Special Interest Group (SIG). The aim of this SIG is to add knowledge and understanding to the field about the importance of physically active play and motor development as important part of children's overall wellbeing, health, physical education (PE), physical activity (PA) and physical development.

In this special issue, PE is seen as curriculum based content of early childhood education and care (ECEC) and articles within this special issue share research on perceptions and attitudes of ECEC staff, as well as focusing on pedagogical approaches. PA includes different intensity levels, motor skills and play from the movement point of view. Therefore, the articles within this special issue share research focusing on PE programmes and PA interventions that targeted supporting young children's holistic development (physical, motor, cognitive, social, emotional, psychology and moral). Physically active play is children's natural way to implement their physical curiosity toward environment and way of learning about themselves and about the world around them. ECEC teachers' who have a better understanding about developmental aspects can

use this knowledge to help them to plan interesting, child centred learning environment to children.

We celebrate that our articles are incredibly varied in nature and include those that are: theoretical in nature; large scale quantitative empirical research; case study in depth qualitative analysis; PA intervention study, as well as motor skill intervention study. We also wish to celebrate the final article within the special issue that is a large international comparative scientific writing that focuses in on a critical commentary of 12 country policy and practice analysis of how can we inspire, motivate young children to be physically active through play.

The special issue is categorised and structured into 3 key thematic areas, to enable the reader to focus on the new knowledge and understanding that our expert researchers are sharing:

- Early Childhood Teacher Education (ECTE)
- Child Development and Early Childhood Pedagogy
- Intervention and PA specific studies

Within the ECTE section:

**Soini, Takalo, Kalari** and **Iivonen** reviewed and compared preservice teacher's perceptions of their PE studies in early childhood teacher education in Finland. The amount of PE varied between all seven Finnish universities, although content analysis revealed both knowledge- and skill-based learning outcomes. Teaching skills were most emphasized. Preservice teachers were mostly satisfied about their PE studies, but they perceived training with children insufficient. Authors suggest harmonizing learning outcomes of PE courses between different universities.

Then **Vidoni, Soini** and **Ferraz** analysed the perceptions of PE in early childhood in teacher education courses across Brazil, Finland and US. They found similarities across the countries in terms of perceptions of teacher education and similar difficulties including not always having practicum activities, physical education not being valued and the time allocated was inconsistent. Yet PE in early childhood teacher education helps support the understanding the PE is part of the whole child's education.

**Murray** and **Howells** examined a novel and innovative way of using non-traditional activities through spiral progression pedagogy to help develop creative moves. They focused on the unusual medium of 'wheels', and examine how their student trainees experienced a series of connecting experiences using balance bikes, bicycles, tricycles,

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scooters, mountain bikes and BMX bikes to develop agility, balance, and coordination. They encourage others to consider other creative experiential application of their method into other non-traditional activities.

**Vinci, Howells, Hall, Wirth** and **Gregg** investigated ECE training, and the value of educating educators on movement, play and physical literacy development, across Canada, England and USA. They proposed that children may be missing out on movement and play opportunities due to lack of knowledge and understanding on the importance of physical literacy development. They found great variance across the 3 settings of minimum number of preparation hours for ECE and that physical literacy was a missing focus within training or specifically guidance in curricula. They recommend that policy makers need to value educating the educators more globally.

The second section focuses on children's development and early childhood pedagogy which includes:

**Svanbäck-Laaksonen** who interviewed 16 ECE teachers aiming to find out how they support children in their development and learning of fundamental motor skills. Her qualitative and inductive study showed that teachers make conscious pedagogical considerations during PE lessons, but also during the whole ECEC day. Study made visible teachers' important pedagogical work with children's fundamental motor skills in early childhood education centers. This information has a message to ECEC teacher education: teacher's pedagogical actions really matter!

**Smith, Carter, Fletcher** and **Ní Chróinín** focused on how one early childhood teacher prioritised meaningful experiences for children in PE. They are able to examine these meaningful experiences in particular through the analysis of lessons plans; teacher reflections; teacher narrative, and teacher artefacts including: tweets; Power Point slides; timelines; photographs and children's interviews. They offer ways in their article of what a pedagogy of meaningfulness might include and in particular highlight the value of story-telling to frame young children's experience of movement stories.

**Arvola, Liljeroth** and **Reunamo** reminded us that children's active participation belongs to ECEC legislation and policy. They asked if PA is a pathway to culturally and linguistically diverse children's participation in ECEC. Systematic observation revealed that culturally and linguistically diverse children are physically active, but their physical play was disturbed in different ways. Increasing all children's involvement and supporting their social processes is important for guaranteed inclusion for physical activities.

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The third section of the special issue focuses on a range of intervention studies:

**Mehtälä, Sääkslahti, Soini, Poskiparta and Kokko** examined the effect of the teacher-implemented one year long home-and childcare based intervention (HIPPA) to promote children's PA in ECEC settings. Their study showed that it is possible to increase both boys' and girls' PA by tailored, multicomponent intervention. Effective intervention were planned based on each center's own needs in cooperation between researchers and ECEC personnel. Guardians' and children's ideas were also included into intervention. Results confirmed that ECEC personnel can promote active play.

**Hall and Gregg** investigated the effectiveness of the delivery of an evidence based physical literacy education program (Movement for Life!) for adult caregivers of infants, toddlers and preschool children. They also assessed the program's ability to increase ECE's knowledge and understanding of fostering physical literacy development in young children. They found significant increases in confidence levels of their ECEs and also significant decreases in difficulty in providing effective physical literacy development activities illuminating the success of the Movement for Life! They recommend such programs to all ECEs.

**Jones, Innerd, Giles and Azevedo's** study was large scale, within the North-East of England that analysed the PA levels of children aged 4–5years of age. They focused their analysis on temporal, anthropometric and demographical variables. They found that on average 97.4% of the children within the study were able to meet the UK PA guidelines for 5–18 year olds. However there were temporal, sex and socioeconomic differences in PA. They recommended targeted interventions to help promote the need for PA both within school educational settings as well as in the community and home settings to prevent inequalities in PA widening.

Finally, the special issue concludes with **Howells, Jerebine, Cools, D'Hondt, De Martelaer, Coppens, Sienaert, Hall, Dong, Soini, O'Keeffe, Coulter, McNally, McCaffrey, Tortella, Costa, Hernández-Martinez, Sollerhed, Urtel, Vinci, Wirth, Vidoni, and Sääkslahti** and their 12 country report which examines how lifelong movement and PA patterns are developed during early childhood globally. The international policy and practice analysis was completed by analysing the ECEC curricular and their implementation in different cultural contexts. The aim of this scientific writing was to share cross cultural working, as well as recognising and valuing each other's practice and policy. The authors highlighted the global need for better ECEC staff support in acknowledging and implementing physical play to aid children's overall development, physical activity and wellbeing. The paper summarised ways for the future for ECEC staff and policy makers to implement physical play into pedagogical frameworks, active learning methods and motor development.

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We wish to thank all our peer reviewers who supported the development of the articles. In conclusion we note that the majority of the papers included were from members of the Early Years SIG, we also welcomed those from beyond the SIG. For those who may be interested our next international network opportunity of the Early Years SIG will be part of AIESEP 2023 4th – 7th July 2023, and we look forward to welcoming old friends and new friends into the SIG. For further information please contact either Arja or Kristy for more details.

With best wishes Arja Sääkslahti and Kristy Howells, Guest Editors for this special issue of JECER.