

# Skill Themes, Movement Concepts, and the *National Standards*

A physical education program for children which begins with an organized sport is analogous to a language arts program beginning with a Shakespearean sonnet.

—IRIS WELSH [STUDENT]



## Key Concepts

- Children need to become sufficiently competent in basic motor skills if they are going to eventually enjoy playing sports or games as teens and adults.
- In the elementary school, the emphasis is placed on practicing motor skills rather than learning rules or the structures of sports.
- Skill themes are analogous to verbs (i.e., they are action words). They are subdivided into three categories: locomotor, nonmanipulative, and manipulative skills.
- Movement concepts are analogous to adverbs (i.e., they describe how an action is performed). They are also subdivided into three categories: space awareness, effort, and relationships.
- In the primary grades, movement concepts are taught before the skill themes.
- The movement analysis framework “wheel” is based on an analysis of human movement and describes how the skill themes and movement concepts interact with one another.
- The “spirals” outline a developmentally appropriate progression for each of the skill themes.
- *Children Moving* directly addresses national and many state physical education standards.

Our primary goal is to provide children with a degree of competence leading to the confidence that encourages them to become, and remain, physically active for a lifetime. Our intent is to help children gain enough skills and confidence for them to participate enjoyably in many activities, not just a few traditional team sports, and to avoid the abysmal failure and embarrassment that often result from a total lack of skill. By focusing on learning and practicing skills rather than on the rules or structure of a game or sport, we can dramatically increase the amount of practice the children actually receive, thereby heightening their opportunities to learn the fundamental motor skills that form the foundation for becoming a lifetime mover. We are also able to do this in ways that children find enjoyable.

*Essentially, the notion is that these elements (fundamental motor skills) are learned in early life through the various activities performed (such as jumping, throwing, striking, and the like), and then when a new act is to be learned in later life, the student can piece together these elements in a more efficient way to achieve the new motor goal. The assumption is that by jumping over*

*objects of various sizes, shapes, heights, et cetera, the student will have more effective “elements” for the performance of the next jumping tasks (e.g., the running long jump in high school).*

—RICHARD SCHMIDT, “Schema Theory: Implications for Movement Education”

Typically, children who are learning to read are taught first to recognize letters, then parts of words, then complete words, and finally sentences. Children who are studying mathematics learn to solve problems after they’ve grasped the basic functions of numbers and signs. Children learning to play a musical instrument typically study the scale before attempting a song. In physical education, however, all too often children are taught games, dances, or complex gymnastic stunts before they’re able to adequately perform fundamental motor skills. Too often, children know the rules for a game or the formation of a dance but don’t have the motor skills needed for successful and enjoyable participation. Our way of teaching children how to participate effectively in various activities is to focus on the development of the necessary motor skills. We call this approach teaching by skill themes.

One of the easiest ways to understand skill themes is to think of a popular sport. Let’s pick softball. What skills do people use when they play softball? The major ones include throwing, catching, batting, and running. Let’s pick another popular sport—basketball. Throwing, catching, running, dribbling with hands, jumping and landing, and chasing and fleeing skills are used frequently in basketball (Figure 2.2). Obviously we could list a number of other sports. The point is that some of the same skills—for example, throwing, catching, and running—are used in both sports, and in many more sports that you know of. Thus if children learn to throw and catch, for example, their odds of playing and enjoying a sport such as softball or basketball increase, because they have a reasonable chance to succeed at that sport. We have termed these skill themes because they apply to many different sports, although the way they are used (the context) differs from one sport to another. Table 3.1 lists various skill themes and indicates which sports emphasize them.

## Characteristics of Themes

In music, a theme recurs in different parts of a song, sometimes in exactly the same way, at other times in a slightly different form. The *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* defines theme as “a short melodic subject from

**Table 3.1** Skill Themes Used in Sports\*

Skill Themes	Sports														
	Aerobics	Basketball	Football	Dance	Golf	Hockey	Martial Arts	Rock Climbing	Soccer	Softball	Tennis	Track and Field	Tumbling	Ultimate Frisbee	Volleyball
Traveling	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Chasing, fleeing, dodging		×	×			×	×		×	×				×	
Jumping, landing	×	×	×	×			×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Balancing	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Transferring weight	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Rolling			×	×			×						×		×
Kicking	×		×	×			×		×						
Punting			×						×						
Throwing		×	×						×	×	×	×		×	×
Catching		×	×						×	×				×	
Volleying									×						×
Dribbling		×				×			×						
Striking with rackets											×				
Striking with golf clubs					×										
Striking with bats										×					
Striking with hockey sticks						×									

\*This table is intended only to suggest how various skill themes are applied in sports contexts.

which variations are developed.” In physical education, various movements can be thought of as a theme.

By revisiting a movement—sometimes in the same context as previously and sometimes in a radically different context—we provide children with variations of a skill theme. These variations lead to proficiency as well as diversity. Jumping can be presented as jumping from an object—a box or a table—and landing softly. This movement can be revisited with a slight variation: jumping from an object and landing facing in a different direction from the takeoff position. Jumping for distance or leaping in synchronization with the leap of a partner would be radically different, yet the theme would still be jumping (Gallagher 1984). So, too, would the high jump and the long jump for track and field athletes as would jumping to catch a ball in football, softball, or basketball.

Some movements, such as jumping, traveling, and balancing, can be focused on in games, gymnastics, and dance contexts. Other movements, such as throwing and dribbling, are primarily used in games. Whenever possible, we point out to students the similarities in movements used in different contexts to enhance students’ cognitive understanding of the principles that underlie successful performance of a movement. We’re not certain that this influences skill performance (transfer of learning), but it doesn’t seem to have any adverse effects.

The instructor who teaches by themes can focus on helping children become skillful movers. Youngsters will have plenty of opportunities as they grow older to learn games, sports, dance, and gymnastics activities, but first they must learn the basic motor skills needed for successful participation.

*Fundamental activities such as running, jumping, skipping, sliding, catching, kicking, and striking are the basic components of the games, sports, and dances of our society. Children who possess inadequate motor skills are often relegated to a life of exclusion from the organized and free play experiences of their peers, and subsequently, to a lifetime of inactivity because of their frustrations in early movement behavior.*

—VERN SEEFELDT, JOHN HAUBENSTRICKER,  
AND SAM REUSCHLEIN

Many adults choose not to play tennis or swim or dance. They don’t enjoy these activities because they don’t possess the skills needed to participate successfully. An unskilled adult attempting to learn a complex set of dance steps may be embarrassed and frustrated. So will the adult who is trying to learn to play tennis



Try to bat the ball without hitting the cone.

but cannot even hit the ball into the opponent’s court. Our goal in the skill theme approach is to lead youngsters to become skillful adults who enjoy a variety of physical activities and sports.

As children become ready, they begin to combine skill themes and movement concepts into the movement

forms that we typically identify as games, sports, gymnastics, and dance. The key word, however, is *ready*. We try to lead children to these experiences gradually rather than forcing them into adult settings prematurely. Let’s use the batting skill theme as an example. In Chapter 28 we explain a variety of enjoyable ways children can practice the skill of batting without placing them in an adult-rules nine-against-nine softball game. Constantly striking out in a softball game in front of your classmates is hardly conducive to wanting to play softball as an adult. Therefore we have developed a sequence of batting tasks and activities that gradually progress into fun batting-type games that also provide for plenty of practice opportunities. We do the same for each of the other skill themes (Part 4).

### Skill Themes and Movement Concepts

We hope by now you understand why we have chosen to develop our curriculum using skill themes. In this section you will find two tables and two figures that are especially important to a thorough understanding of the skill theme approach. The movement concepts are listed in Table 3.2 and the skill themes in Table 3.3. These tables organize the content to be taught in physical education, not by sports, but by an analysis of movements that are used in most sports and physical activities. These tables also serve as a guide to be certain that we teach all the important movements and do not leave any out. The skill themes and movement concepts are defined and thoroughly explained in Parts 3 and 4.

**Table 3.2** Movement Concepts\*

Space Awareness (where the body moves)		Effort (how the body moves)		Relationships
Location:	Self-space and general space	Time:	Fast/slow Sudden/sustained	Of body parts: Round (curved), narrow, wide, twisted, symmetrical/nonsymmetrical
Directions:	Up/down Forward/backward Right/left Clockwise/counterclockwise	Force:	Strong/light	With objects and/or people: Over/under, on/off, near/far, in front/behind, along/through, meeting/parting, surrounding, around, alongside
Levels:	Low/middle/high	Flow:	Bound/free	With people: Leading/following, mirroring/matching, unison/contrast, alone in a mass, solo, partners, groups, between groups
Pathways:	Straight/curved Zigzag			
Extensions:	Large/small Far/near			

\*This table represents many of the movement concepts taught in elementary school physical education. It is not meant to be all-inclusive, but to provide examples of movement concepts.

**Table 3.3 Skill Themes\***

<b>Locomotor Skills</b>
Walking
Running
Hopping
Skipping
Galloping
Sliding
Chasing, fleeing, and dodging
<b>Nonmanipulative Skills</b>
Turning
Twisting
Rolling
Balancing
Transferring weight
Jumping and landing
Stretching
Curling
<b>Manipulative Skills</b>
Throwing
Catching and collecting
Kicking
Punting

\*This table represents many of the skill themes taught in physical education. It is not meant to be all-inclusive, but to provide examples of skill themes.

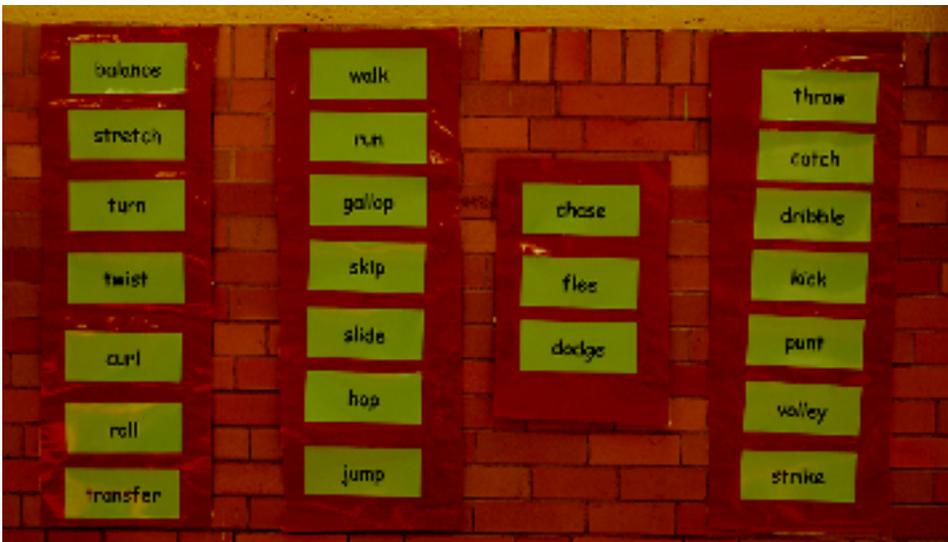
The **movement analysis framework**, which has been termed “the wheel” (Figure 3.1), is intended to show how the skill themes and movement concepts interact with each other. The **spiral** (Figure 3.2) is an example of one of the developmentally appropriate progressions that we have developed for each of the skill themes in Part 4. Both the movement analysis framework and the spiral are explained later in this chapter. Obviously the movement content of our

program consists of more than just skill themes. In fact, it’s difficult to focus on a skill theme for long without introducing one or more movement concepts. The two terms, *skill themes* and *movement concepts*, differentiate the movements (skill themes) from the ideas (movement concepts) used to modify or enrich the range and effectiveness of skill employment. Chapters 16–18 are devoted specifically to ideas and examples for teaching the movement concepts, while Chapters 19–28 do the same for skill themes. At this point, however, it is important to understand the differences between them.

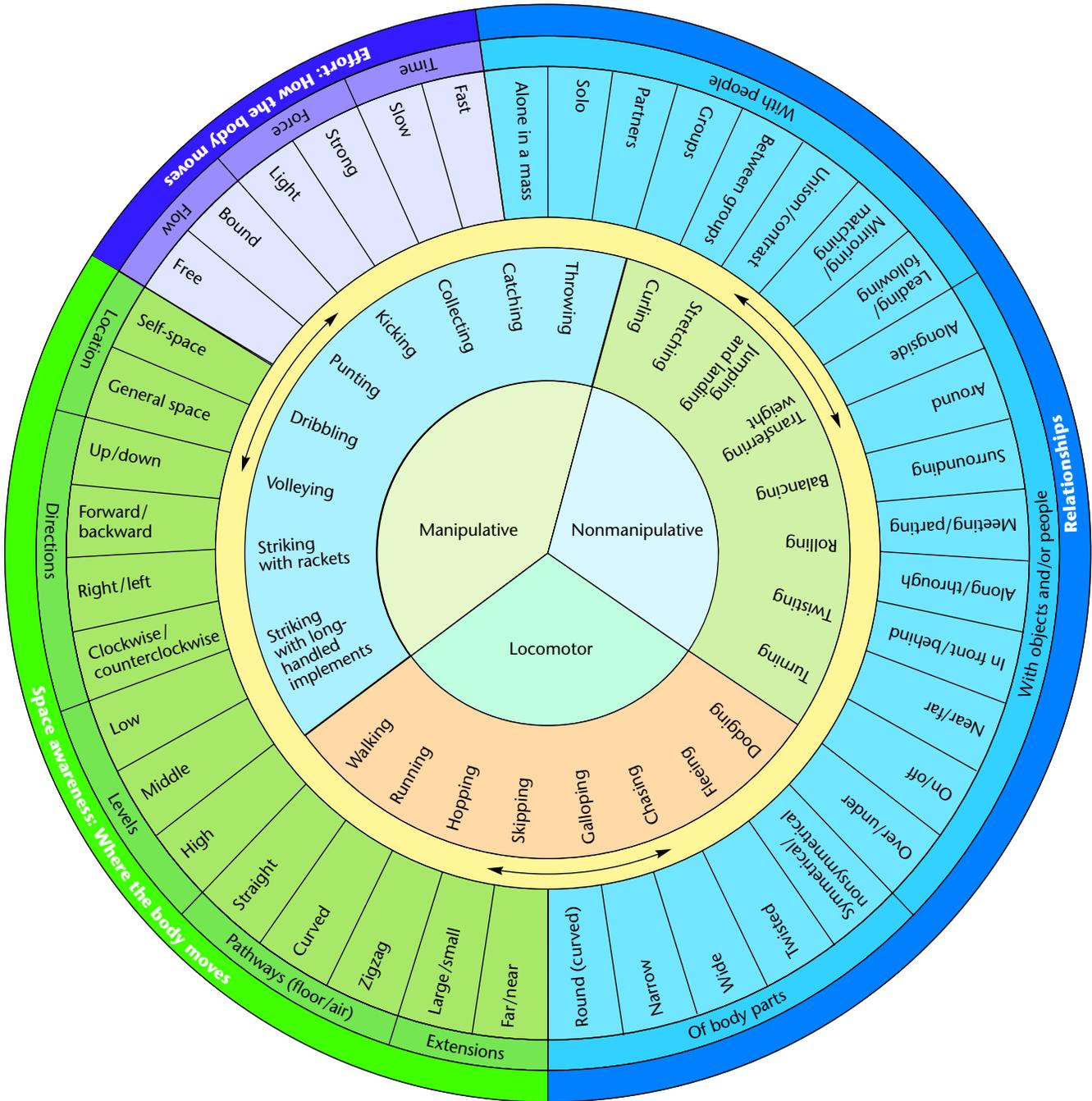
The distinction between movement concepts (Table 3.2) and skill themes (Table 3.3\*) can be clarified by a comparison to grammar. Skill themes are always verbs—they’re movements that can be performed. Movement concepts are always modifiers (adverbs)—they describe how a skill is to be performed. This distinction also clarifies how movement concepts are employed to embellish, enhance, or expand the quality of a movement. A verb by itself—strike, travel, roll—is typically less interesting than one that is modified by an adverb—strike hard, travel jerkily, roll smoothly. Skills can stand by themselves. You can roll or gallop or jump, but you can’t low or high or under. Concepts modify skills.

Our initial focus with the primary-grade children is on learning and understanding the movement concept vocabulary (see Table 3.2) and Chapters 16–19; for this reason, the movement concepts are listed

\*The major source for this explanation of skill themes and movement concepts is Sheila Stanley, *Physical education: A movement orientation*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977).



Children enjoy learning the vocabulary of the skill theme approach. This teacher has posted her skill themes on the gym wall.



**Figure 3.1** Movement analysis framework (wheel) depicting the interaction of movement concepts and skill themes. An “interactive” wheel is located inside the back cover of this book.

before the skill themes (see Table 3.3). We focus on movement concepts before skill themes because children in preschool and the primary grades spend a great deal of time studying vocabulary (learning new words), and many of the movement concepts are part of this vocabulary. This is also the time when children truly enjoy the challenge of learning and moving as they demonstrate their understanding of such words as *symmetrical*, *zigzag*, and *twisted*.

It’s important to remember, however, that although the children are focusing on learning the movement concepts, they are also practicing the skill themes in Chapters 19–28. As soon as the children begin to move, they are practicing one or more skill themes, even though they may not be thinking about it at the time. For example, if we ask children to skip in a curved pathway, they may be thinking about the curve, but they are also practicing skipping. If we ask them to land in a low level (from a jump), they are also getting



**PUNTING**

**Proficiency Level**  
 Playing Punt-Over  
 Punting while traveling  
 Receiving and punting against opponents

**Utilization Level**  
 Playing rush the circle  
 Punting within a limited time  
 Receiving a pass, then punting  
 Punting to a partner  
 Punting at angles

**Control Level**  
 Punting for height  
 Punting for accuracy  
 Using punting zones  
 Punting for distance  
 Punting different types of balls  
 Punting with an approach  
 Punting over low ropes  
 Punting for consistency

**Precontrol Level**  
 Dropping and punting  
 Dropping, bouncing, and kicking lightweight balls

**Figure 3.2** Progression spiral illustrating the contextual variations in which skill themes can be studied.

jumping and landing practice. In later grades, the teacher’s focus will shift from the low level (movement concept) to providing cues for soft, safe landings—from the concept to the skill. In fact, however, this is an artificial separation, because the skill themes and movement concepts are constantly interacting.

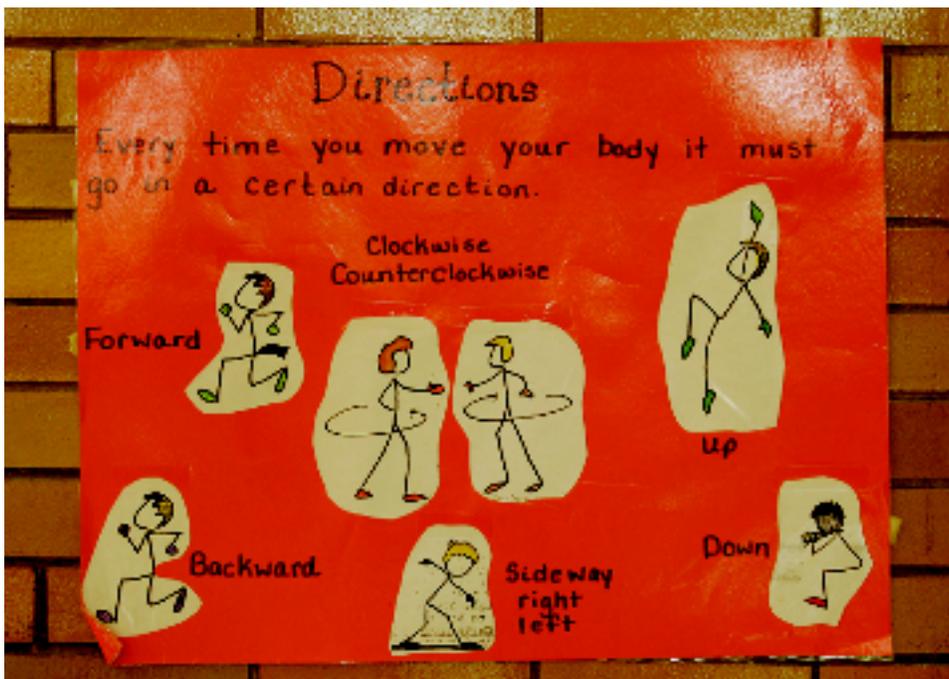
**The Wheel (Movement Analysis Framework)**

The interaction between the movement concepts and the skill themes listed in Tables 3.2 and 3.3 is represented schematically by five concentric circles (Figure 3.1). (For easy reference, we call the movement analysis framework “the wheel,” a term our students coined.) The two inner circles represent the skill themes; the three outer circles represent the movement concepts.

The first inner circle contains the general categories of the skill themes from Table 3.3: manipulative, non-manipulative, and locomotor skills. The next inner circle contains the breakdown of the skills in each category, such as walking and running for locomotor skills, balancing and rolling for nonmanipulative skills, and throwing and kicking for manipulative skills.

The outer circle contains the three categories of the movement concepts from Table 3.2: space awareness (where the body moves), effort (how the body moves), and relationships.\* The second circle subdivides each of

\*Some movement analysis frameworks include the concept of space (direct and flexible) as a quality of movement. In our teaching, however, we use this concept so infrequently that we don’t include it in our discussion of the qualities of movement.



The movement concept of “directions” is illustrated on the gym wall.

the three movement concept categories. For example, the subdivisions of space awareness (Chapter 16) include location and directions; the subdivisions of effort (Chapter 17) include time and force; and among the relationship subdivisions (Chapter 18) are body parts and people. Finally, in the third circle, the movement concepts are subdivided even further.

In the wheel that is provided with your copy of *Children Moving*, you will see that the two inner circles representing the skill themes are stationary. The three outer circles are connected to each other but are able to rotate around the two inner circles. This rotation illustrates the idea that the same movement concept can be used to enhance the development of different skills. The concept of levels in space, for example, is useful for refining such skills as catching, striking, volleying, and balancing (e.g., catching at high level). The concept of fast and slow can be applied to the study of such skills as traveling, rolling, dribbling, transferring weight, and dodging (e.g., rolling at a slow speed). At times, some concepts blend with other concepts. For example, fast or slow may modify pathways, and forward and backward may modify over and under (e.g., galloping slowly forward in a zigzag pathway).

### Progression Spiral

Just learning the terminology for the movement concepts (Table 3.2) and the skill themes (Table 3.3) is not enough to begin actually teaching them. We have developed thorough explanations for each of the movement concepts and skill themes, along with a plethora of activities, in subsequent chapters. Part 3 (Chapters 16–18) contains the definitions and suggested activities for teaching the movement concepts. Part 4 (Chapters 19–28) does the same for the skill themes.

In each of these chapters we provide tasks and activities in a progression from the easiest to the hardest, and from less to more complex. The content in each of the skill theme chapters is outlined in a figure that we call a progression spiral (Figure 3.2). The spiral is intended to be read from the bottom to the top—that is, the easiest tasks are at the bottom, the hardest at the top. It also suggests that tasks may need to be retaught when, for example, it has been several months since the children have practiced that skill or it is the beginning of a school year.

The movement concepts that are emphasized depend on the skill theme being studied. The concepts of fast and slow, for example, can be used to make a task more interesting or challenging. The skill theme of rolling or transferring weight can be made more difficult by challenging the children to move more slowly. But with a skill such as dribbling, which is easier to

perform at a slower rate, the challenge “dribble faster” increases the complexity of the task. In short, there’s no standard formula that can be used as a guide for varying the contexts in which all skill themes are studied. Each skill theme is different as are the children.

The spirals do not suggest the length of time, or the number of lessons, to be spent studying a particular theme. In reflective teaching, as explained in Chapter 8, these decisions are based on the time allocated for physical education classes (e.g., two days a week versus daily) and the children and their home backgrounds and the opportunities available in the community.

Finally, the spiral represents a progression from the precontrol (beginner or novice) level up to the proficiency level (varsity athlete) (see Chapter 7). The movement concept and skill theme progressions in Parts 3 and 4 are based on our knowledge of the pertinent literature and on years of teaching experience. But you may find that a different ordering of the tasks (activities) is more appropriate for a particular teaching situation. Each child, each class, each teaching environment differs from all others, and the reflective teacher adapts to these differences. See Box 3-1 for an example of one school’s use of skill themes in its physical education curriculum.

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### The National Standards and the Skill Theme Approach

In this eighth edition of *Children Moving*, we attempt to show how our program fits with the content of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education’s *Moving into the Future: National Standards for Physical Education* (NASPE 2004). We think this will be especially useful for those teachers who are interested in revising their programs to reflect the content suggested in the *National Standards*. Before describing how *Children Moving* might be used as a guide to developing a program designed on the *National Standards*, it seems important to provide a brief background of the process that led to the development of those standards.

### Background of National Standards Development

In the late 1980s, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education formed a blue-ribbon task force and asked its members to:

- Define a person who is “physically educated”
- Define “outcomes” and “benchmarks” that could serve as guidelines for constructing physical education program curriculums

The Outcomes Task Force worked on the project for more than five years, and each year, at NASPE’s national

## Box 3-1



## Adapting the Skill Theme Approach

Since the first edition of *Children Moving* was published in 1980, a number of school districts throughout the United States have based their curriculums on skill themes. In Gwinnett County (near Atlanta, Georgia), an overview of each area of the curriculum is described on a poster that many

elementary schools in the county display on their walls. The poster is prominently displayed alongside math, reading, and science posters, an arrangement conveying the message that the teachers of Gwinnett County are dedicated to educating the total child.

### Physical Education K–5 Curriculum

**The fundamental objective of the physical education program is to provide opportunities for the development of motor skills and physical fitness.**

#### Skill Themes and Fitness Concepts

Students in grades K–5 will experience a developmentally designed program of skill and fitness development, including educational games, educational dance, and educational gymnastics. The following motor skills and fitness concepts are included:

- body awareness
- balancing
- chasing, fleeing, dodging
- kicking and punting
- striking with implements (short and long handled)
- rolling
- throwing and catching
- traveling
- volleying and dribbling
- transferring weight
- jumping and landing
- cardiorespiratory endurance
- flexibility
- muscular strength and endurance
- fitness testing



Becoming physically educated is a developmental process that begins in early childhood and continues throughout life. The physical education program involves the total child and includes physical, mental, social, and emotional growth experiences. The physical education program provides instruction that will enable the pursuit of physical fitness and a lifetime of physical activity.

**Gwinnett County Public Schools**

conference, physical educators from throughout the United States were invited to review and critique the work. The task force then revised its work based on these recommendations and presented it again the following year. Over several years, the work of the task force was reviewed by hundreds of physical educators and as a result reflects the collective wisdom of much of the profession. The result of this work, published in 1992, was a document entitled *The Physically Educated Person* (NASPE 1992, p. v), which defined a physically educated person as an individual who:

- HAS learned skills necessary to perform a variety of physical activities
- IS physically fit
- DOES participate regularly in physical activity
- KNOWS the implications of and the benefits from involvement in physical activity
- VALUES physical activity and its contributions to a healthful lifestyle

Outcome statements were also developed for each of the five parts of the definition, along with benchmarks for kindergarten, second, fourth, sixth, eighth, tenth, and twelfth grades.

Using the same process, NASPE built upon the foundation of the “Outcomes Project” to develop national content standards for physical education, including examples for assessment. The standards were initially published in 1995 (NASPE 1995) and were revised in 2004 (NASPE 2004). They were especially important because they paralleled work that was also being done in other disciplines, such as mathematics, science, and geography. The skill theme approach, as defined in *Children Moving*, is aligned with the *National Standards for Physical Education*.

### Skill Themes and the Content Standards

Box 1-3 (in Chapter 1) lists the six content standards for physical education from the *National Standards. Children Moving* addresses all the standards throughout the text, but many readers will find Parts 3 and 4 of the book especially helpful for designing, delivering, and assessing the first two content standards. The first two content standards, and part of the general description for each one, follow:

1. A physically educated person demonstrates competency in motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform a variety of physical activities.

*The intent of this standard is development of the physical skills needed to enjoy participation in physical activities. Mastering movement fundamentals establishes a foundation to facilitate continued motor skill*

*acquisition and gives students the capacity for successful and advanced levels of performance to further the likelihood of participation on a daily basis. In the primary years, students develop maturity and versatility in the use of fundamental motor skills (e.g., running, skipping, throwing, striking) that are further refined, combined, and varied during the middle school years. These motor skills, now having evolved into specialized skills (e.g., a specific dance step, chest pass, catching with a glove, or the use of a specific tactic), are used in increasingly complex movements . . . through the middle school years (NASPE 2004, p. 12).*

2. A physically educated person demonstrates understanding of movement concepts, principles, strategies, and tactics as they apply to the learning and performance of physical activities.

*The intent of this standard is facilitation of learners' ability to use cognitive information to understand and enhance motor skill acquisition and performance. . . . In the lower elementary grades, emphasis is placed on establishing a movement vocabulary and applying introductory concepts. Through the upper elementary and middle school years, an emphasis is placed on applying and generalizing these concepts to real-life physical activity situations (NASPE 2004, p. 12).*

In subsequent chapters you will find many examples of how you can teach children the skills and concepts suggested in the *National Standards*. It will also help to refer to Boxes 3-2 and 3-3, which contain sample performance outcomes from the *National Standards*, and Box 3-4, which contains guidelines for promoting lifelong physical activity from the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. After each sample benchmark you will see one or more chapter references that indicate where you can learn more about that specific benchmark and the activities that teachers use to help children achieve the suggested goal.

In many chapters we have also quoted sample performance outcomes from the *National Standards* to assist you in understanding how the content of the *Children Moving* chapters can be developed to meet these benchmarks. When appropriate, we have also included assessment examples in those chapters to assist you in determining how well your students are progressing in regard to the benchmarks.

As we conclude this section on skill themes and movement concepts and how they are described in the *National Standards*, it is important to remember that the standards are not intended as a prescribed set of goals or outcomes to be achieved by all physical education programs. The *National Standards* document

**Box 3-2****Sample Performance Indicators for National Standard 1: Movement Forms**

A more detailed description of each performance indicator, along with activities to teach it, is included in the *Children Moving* chapter(s) listed below at the end of each benchmark. The critical elements (cues) of a mature form are also described in these chapters.

**Grades K–2**

- Skips (or hops, gallops, slides, etc.) using mature form (Chapter 19)
- Performs a simple dance step in keeping with a specific tempo (Chapter 29)
- Demonstrates clear contrasts between slow and fast movements when skipping (hopping, galloping, sliding, etc.) (Chapters 17, 19)
- Travels forward and sideways, changing directions quickly in response to a signal or obstacle using a variety of motor skills (Chapters 16, 17, 19)
- Demonstrates a smooth transition between locomotor skills in time to music (Chapters 17, 19)
- Drops a ball and catches it at the peak of the bounce (Chapter 25)
- Throws a ball underhand using mature form (Chapter 25)
- Discovers how to balance on different body parts, at different levels, becoming “like” a statue while making symmetrical and nonsymmetrical shapes (Chapters 16, 22)

**Grades 3–5**

- Balances with control on a variety of objects (e.g., balance board, large apparatus, skates) (Chapter 22)
- Catches a fly ball using a mature form (Chapter 25)
- Jumps vertically and lands using mature form (Chapter 21)
- Throws a ball overhand and hits a target on the wall (Chapter 25)
- Develops and refines a gymnastics sequence (or creative dance sequence) demonstrating smooth transitions. (Chapters 29, 30)
- Dribbles, then passes a ball to a moving receiver (Chapter 26)
- Throws a ball to a partner 15 yards away using mature form (Chapter 25)

**Grades 6–8**

- Serves a volleyball underhand using a mature form (Chapter 26)
- Dribbles a ball while preventing an opponent from stealing the ball (Chapter 26)
- Places the ball away from an opponent during a tennis rally (Chapter 27)
- Designs and performs gymnastics (or dance) sequences that combine traveling, rolling, balancing, and weight transfer into smooth, flowing sequences with intentional changes in direction, speed, and flow (Chapters 16–19, 23)

**Box 3-3****Sample Performance Indicators for National Standard 2: Movement Concepts**

A more detailed description of each performance indicator, along with activities to teach it, is included in the *Children Moving* chapter(s) listed below at the end of each performance indicator.

**Grades K–2**

- Identifies correctly various body parts (e.g., knee, foot, arm, palm) (Chapter 16)

**Grades 3–5**

- Identifies four characteristics of a mature throw (Chapter 25)
- Uses concepts of space awareness and movement control to run, hop, and skip in different ways in a large group without bumping or falling (Chapters 16, 19)

- Identifies and demonstrates the major characteristics of mature walking, running, hopping, and skipping (Chapter 19)

**Grades 6–8**

- Transfers weight from feet to hands at fast and slow speeds using large extensions (e.g., mule kick, handstand, cartwheel) (Chapter 23)
- Accurately recognizes the critical elements of a throw made by a fellow student and provides feedback to that student (Chapter 25)
- Consistently strikes a softly thrown ball with a bat or paddle, demonstrating an appropriate grip (Chapters 27, 28)

## Box 3-4



### Guidelines for Promoting Lifelong Physical Activity

Almost 30 years ago the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (NCCDPHP) made the following recommendations for “developing students’ mastery of and confidence in motor and behavioral skills for participating in physical activity.” They still apply today:

- Students should become competent in many motor skills and proficient in a few to use in lifelong physical activities.
- Elementary school students should develop basic motor skills that allow participation in a variety of physical activities.
- Older students should become competent in a select number of physical activities they enjoy and succeed in.
- Students’ mastery of and confidence in motor skills occur when these skills are broken down into components and the tasks are ordered from easy to hard.
- Students need opportunities to observe others performing the skills and receive encouragement, feedback, and repeated opportunities for practice during physical education class.
- Active student involvement . . . that focuses on building confidence may increase the likelihood that children and adolescents will enjoy and succeed in physical education and physical activity.

Source: NCCDPHP 1977, p. 209.

is not a national curriculum! As detailed in Chapter 5, “Reflective Teaching,” teachers must determine the goals of their program based on the specific characteristics of the schedule, the children, and the community. The suggested grade levels, for example, are only that—suggestions. The *National Standards* can be immensely helpful, however, as they represent the professional judgment of hundreds of physical education teachers and professors about the content of a quality physical education curriculum that provides the movement foundation for a lifetime of physical activity.

It must be emphasized, however, that the *National Standards* are designed for programs that have daily physical education for grades K–12. Even then, however, the standards may represent optimistic goals. The challenge for many schools and districts that have

physical education only one or two days a week is to carefully select the standards that they can truly accomplish in the amount of time they have allocated for their physical education programs. The standards can also provide the foundation for a strong argument for more time for physical education in the school day. It always difficult to decide which of the standards a school or district will ignore because of the lack of time allocated for physical education.

Since the *National Standards* were first published in 1995, a number of states have revised or developed state standards, many of them based on the *National Standards*. If you are interested in seeing if your state has developed standards, go to PE Central ([www.pecentral.org/professional/statestandards.html](http://www.pecentral.org/professional/statestandards.html)). It might be interesting also to see how your state standards compare to the ones developed at the national level.

## Summary

Teaching by skill themes focuses on developing children’s competence in a variety of motor skills and movement concepts that, if practiced frequently outside of the school setting, will eventually enable the children to acquire confidence and enjoy physical activity throughout their lifetimes. Games, sports, gymnastics, and dance typically require children to use combinations of motor skills and movement concepts that are developed only after a substantial amount of practice. Therefore the teacher places emphasis on teaching children how to acquire the skills and confidence necessary to participate in games, gymnastics, and dance with enjoyment and confidence.

Teaching by themes also involves revisiting the same skills or concepts continually throughout the program at different times and in different contexts. In preschool and the primary grades, the focus is on learning the vocabulary associated with the movement concepts. Once the vocabulary has been learned, the emphasis shifts to the skill themes. In fact, however, the skill themes and movement concepts constantly interact, as depicted in the movement analysis framework (the wheel). The progression and activities for each of the skill themes are illustrated by the spiral. The spiral is a visual reminder that the child revisits each task to enhance skill acquisition and retention

and that skills are best learned when they are presented in a progression from basic to advanced.

Support for the skill theme approach can be found in three national statements, the *National Standards for Physical Education* (NASPE 1995, 2004); *Developmentally Appropriate Physical Education Practices for Children* (COPEC 1992); and *Appropriate Practices for Elementary School Physical Education* (COPEC 2000; NASPE 2009).

Essentially, these sources recommend that physical education programs at the preschool and elementary school levels focus on helping children improve their fundamental motor skills. Physical fitness, rather than being a separate unit, is interwoven throughout the program as we help children understand and value its importance while they also learn to develop their own programs of physical fitness.

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## Reading Comprehension Questions

1. What do children need to learn in physical education before they're ready to play a game? Why?
2. What are movement concepts? How do they modify skill themes?
3. How can you distinguish skill themes from movement concepts?
4. What does "revisiting themes" mean?
5. What does the spiral indicate about skill development? (Use Figure 3.1, the wheel, to explain your answer.)
6. What three skill themes relate most directly to dance? To games? To gymnastics? You may not use the same skill theme twice.
7. Explain how two skill themes might be combined in a task and write three samples for a third-grade class. Use Chapters 19–28 if you need assistance.
8. Select a team sport. List five examples of how space awareness concepts are important for that team to succeed. You may want to refer to Chapter 16 for the more expanded explanation of skill themes.
9. Explain what the authors mean when they write that the skill themes may be used to develop a program that reflects the content suggestions in the *National Standards*.
10. Attempt to locate your state physical education standards at PE Central ([www.pecentral.org/professional/statestandards.html](http://www.pecentral.org/professional/statestandards.html)). (If your state has not posted them, you can refer to the national standards.) Find three examples of state (national) standards for the elementary school grades that directly address the teaching of movement concepts or skill themes. Copy the standard (include the grade level and standard number) and indicate which skill theme or movement concept the standard addresses.

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## References/Suggested Readings

[COPEC] Council on Physical Education for Children. 1992. *Developmentally appropriate physical education practices for children: A position statement of the Council on Physical Education for Children*. Reston, VA: National Association for Sport and Physical Education.

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