

Obesity Causes Physical Inactivity: A Forrest Plump Parody on Programs and Instruction

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Abstract

As evident by papers in this Special Section, there are diverse people characteristics (some visible, some not) that limit children and adolescents from engaging actively during physical education (PE) and sport sessions. This is prominent when programs and sessions are delivered in a “traditional” manner. A frequently occurring visible condition is overweight/obesity. This short paper summarizes the worldwide importance of physical activity and uses a fictional character (Forrest Plump) to provide a parody about how obesity may inhibit active engagement in school and sport programs. It concludes with suggestions relevant to the IOHSK membership.

Introduction

Physical activity engagement by children and adolescents is associated with increased motor skills as well as numerous positive physical, mental, and cognitive health outcomes (Bull et al., 2020). Recent evidence also suggests that physical activity helps protect against the serious effects of COVID-19 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). Nonetheless, there is substantial worldwide evidence that children and adolescents engage in insufficient amounts of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) (Guthold, et al., 2020).

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently recommended that children and adolescents (aged 5-17 years) accrue an average of 60 minutes of MVPA per day (Bull et al., 2020). Individual countries also often have their own guidelines. For example, in the US (United States) the guidelines currently are for children and adolescents to accrue MVPA 60 min daily and include aerobic, muscle strengthening, and bone-strengthening activities at least 3 days a week (USDHHS, 2018). Persons with disabilities are particularly challenged in reaching these guidelines, even within school settings (Sit & McKenzie, 2020).

Schools, which are attended by most children and youths for about 6 hours per day for up to 14 years, play an important role in helping students reach guidelines (USDHHS, 2018). Schools provide the potential for students to accumulate MVPA via structured opportunities as well as during recess and activity breaks. The CDC (2013) recommends schools provide diverse and multiple physical activity programs and has identified that a full comprehensive school

physical activity program (CSPAP) has five components: quality PE, physical activity before, during and after school, staff involvement, and family and community engagement (CDC, 2013).

Numerous barriers interfere with quality programs being offered, including lack of funding, limited access to facilities, and limited formal specialized training in physical activity for teachers, coaches, and supervisors (e.g., Kahan & McKenzie, 2015; Lounsbury, McKenzie, & Thompson, 2019; McKenzie & Lounsbury, 2009). Even when PE is offered, reviews of numerous direct observation studies in both the US (McKenzie & Smith, 2017) and internationally (Smith, McKenzie, & Hammons, 2019) indicate that students accrue limited MVPA during lessons mainly due to teachers having a subject matter focus other than physical activity and skill and fitness development (e.g., Lund & van der Mars, 2022) and on substantial time being allocated to class management and teacher lecturing.

There is also low awareness of PE and other physical activity programs and offerings by the public. During the past several years David Kahan has led numerous studies which have involved systematic, line-by-line, analyses of the PE and physical activity content posted on the websites of nearly 4,000 public charter, private, and Jewish day schools in the US (e.g., Kahan & McKenzie, 2021). In general, schools mentioned their physical activity programs infrequently, and when mentioned, the information typically lacked detail. PE was mentioned more often than other MVPA opportunities. Nonetheless, schools rarely provided comprehensive information about the objectives and curricular content of their PE programs, lesson frequency and duration, and the specialty qualifications of instructors. Overall, the information provided varied tremendously from school to school although private schools were likely to mention having PE, a PE specialist, and extracurricular activity programs more often than public schools.

While there are numerous disabling conditions that interfere with students accruing ample amounts of MVPA (Sit & McKenzie 2020), the remaining portion of this paper focuses on obesity. It provides a parody based on a fictional character, Forrest Plump. Forrest is based loosely upon the classic 1994 movie starring Tom Hanks as Forrest Gump and the five summers that I spent directing/co-directing residential programs for overweight/obese youths (McKenzie, 1986). One boy, Forrest, agreed to share some of his experiences.

Fictional Forrest was born in the southern United States. He had some cognitive deficits, but his mother looked after him really well. She protected him and constantly told him that things always happened for the best. Forrest loved his mother and believed everything that she said. Subsequently, Forrest thought everything was good. Here is what he told me, and I quote.

Forrest Plump's Story

“I was born fat. Mama used to say “big” because being big is important in the South. I did not want to be skinny because people would have

called me horrible names like “Tiny,” “My Little Friend,” and “Shrimp.” Instead, by being big, I got called great names like “Dumbo,” “Bubba,” and “The Giant Whale.”

Doctors told me that because I was fat, there was a great likelihood that my parents would be fat also. I guess that is true because both my parents were real fat. Unfortunately, when I was four my daddy died of a heart attack during the second time he and Mama had sexual intercourse.

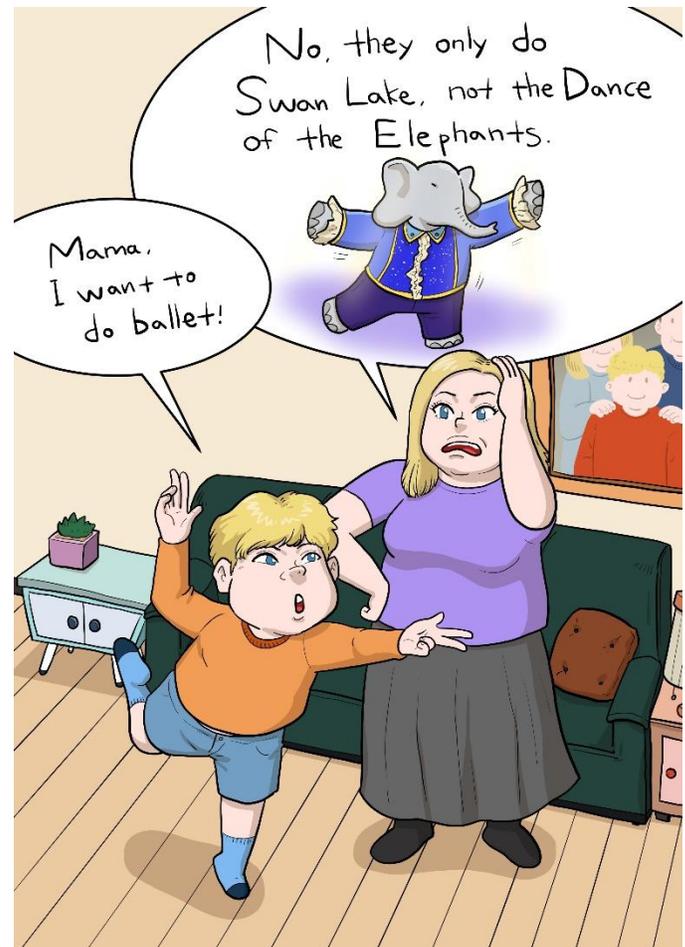
I really like my Mama--she was so soft and so big. She stood above all the other mothers and in the hot southern sun provided the best shade of all.

Mama was really nice to me. She didn't want me to be too active, so she never played vigorous games like tag and hide and seek with me. She was always telling me to slow down. “Stop jumping on the bed, you might break it,” she would say.



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Mama didn't want me to embarrass myself so she would not sign me up for dance or gymnastics. She said I should avoid becoming too strong and graceful so people would not expect too much of me. I did want to do ballet, but Mama said they only did Swan Lake, not the dance of the elephants.



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It was also nice that Mama didn't buy me active toys like rollerblades, skates, or bicycles. She told me that she didn't want me to fall and hurt myself, but I really think she was really trying to protect herself and other kids from being flattened by me.

I once asked Mama to build some climbing apparatus in our backyard. But she said no because I was a big kid and it would require extra materials that would cost way too much.

And that was good because I didn't want to become strong and fit anyway. That way I got to be picked last for sports and games. And when I finally joined a team, the other kids would get really excited, and jump up and down and howl. Also, I never had to be a starter.

Mostly, I got to sit on the bench beside the coach and be the first one to eat the oranges and drink the Gatorade.



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Because I was not very skilled, I learned to be good at what Daryl Siedentop has referred to as being a “competent bystander.” I pretended to be busy, but I was good at hiding out and avoiding activity. I always started at the back of the line so I wouldn't have to take as many turns as the others. And in soccer, I just walked down the field so I wouldn't be in position to have the ball passed to me. Other kids didn't want to pass the ball to me anyway. I like that 'cause I didn't want to make a mistake and have them yell at me.

I like my coaches because they paid a lot of attention to me. They were always yelling things like “Run Forrest run.” They also always put me in positions where I didn't have to be too active. In soccer, I've got to be the goalie and in softball I got to play right field where the ball hardly ever came.

I like chase and dodgeball games a lot. In chase I was slow, so I got tagged out quickly. And in dodgeball, I was a pretty large target. I loved those games. I got to sit down early and watch all the other kids scream and get tired out. Mama also said it was really good to have regular elimination.

Baseball was a lot of fun too. I felt important because I got to bat last. I didn't hit the ball much, but I got on base a lot. From the batter's box my belly hung over the plate, so I often got hit. That way I would walk the first base while all the other kids had to run after hitting the ball. Coach didn't take time to teach me how to slide into base. He said that if that time ever came, I could just roll there faster. And because I was slow, the coach didn't make me steal any bases. That was good, 'cause Mama said that “people shouldn't steal.”

I really liked track and field because I got to sit in the shade while all the other runners were out there in the hot sun, breathing hard and sweating. But swimming was my favorite! All the other kids had to work really hard just to stay up in the water, but all I had to do was just lay there. Additionally, when it came to diving, I was always the one who made the biggest splash. That made everyone groan really loud!

Mama said that because I was big that I would likely have posture problems-mainly flat feet and hyper extended knees. They did hurt a bit sometimes. But my momma said that this was good because whenever I wanted, I could use that as an excuse to get out of PE. She also said it was something that I could tell that Joe Biden fella just in case he wanted me to join the army to invade Alberta or some other place with lots of oil.

Well, it's been nice talking to you. As I said, my name is Forrest Plump and I really like being big - fat is as fat does, and I don't move much at all!

Conclusion

In the simplicity of Forrest, my closing advice is as follows:

1. Examine your curriculum and instructional programs to see if they really meet important goals, such as promoting skill, physical fitness, and physical activity **for all**.
2. Examine your research practices to determine if they focus on variables that are important to society--not just to academia.
3. Rather than focusing all your research efforts on simply being a describer of events, try your hand at being an interventionist.
4. Enjoy what you do.

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Acknowledgement

Special thanks to *Randi McKenzie* for her consultation and final approval for art design.

Notes

Online Journal of JOHSK's design and graphic work was managed by *Hosung So*. Artwork was created by *Seok Hi Kim* and *Hyeonho Yu*. All artwork is protected by Copyright © International Organization for Health, Sports, and Kinesiology and Thomas L. McKenzie and requires proper copyright attribution and permission.

Citation in APA Style

McKenzie, T. L. (2022, April 18). Obesity causes physical inactivity: A Forrest Plump parody on programs and instruction. *Journal of Health, Sports, and Kinesiology*. <https://doi.org/10.47544/johsk.04182022>



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