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MOTOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT AS A COMPONENT OF SCHOOL READINESS – IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING PRACTICE

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The article examines motor development as an essential component of school readiness and emphasizes its direct relevance to preschool and early school teaching practice. School readiness is presented as a multidimensional construct that includes cognitive, emotional, social, and physical domains, while motor competence is treated not merely as a sign of physical maturity but as a functional condition for effective learning. The authors underline the close relationship between motor, cognitive, emotional, and social development, showing that difficulties in posture, muscle tone, gross and fine motor skills, sensory integration, and body schema may influence attention, graphomotor abilities, classroom behavior, self-esteem, and the child's adaptation to school requirements. Particular attention is paid to observable motor behaviors that may indicate reduced readiness for school, including rapid fatigue, fidgeting, clumsiness, reluctance to draw or write, excessive movement, withdrawal, and the need for intense sensory stimulation. The article stresses the important role of teachers as everyday observers of children's functioning in natural educational settings. Their awareness of motor indicators may support early recognition of developmental risks and timely referral for specialist consultation, especially physiotherapeutic assessment. The paper also presents practical strategies that teachers can use without specialized training, such as movement breaks, manipulative exercises, body-schema activities, classroom tasks involving movement, and ergonomic adaptation of the child's workstation. The authors conclude that motor development should be regarded as an integral element of school readiness and that cooperation between teachers, parents, physiotherapists, pediatricians, and psychologists is necessary to support the harmonious development of the child and prevent future learning difficulties.

Keywords: motor skill development, school readiness, preschool education, gross motor skills, fine motor skills, postural control, sensory integration, teaching practice.

Introduction. School readiness is a holistic and multidimensional concept encompassing physical well-being, motor development, cognitive processes, and the

emotional-social domain of the child [8]. Within this framework, physical maturity is understood as an adequate level of motor development and a properly developed organism [9]. Contemporary neuropsychology indicates that school readiness is the result of cumulative experiences acquired by the child from the moment of conception [8].

Despite the recognition of school readiness as a multidimensional construct, the motor component is often treated as secondary in comparison with cognitive, emotional, and social domains. In everyday preschool and early school practice, insufficient attention to motor development may lead to delayed recognition of difficulties affecting attention, graphomotor skills, posture, classroom behavior, and adaptation to school requirements. Therefore, the scientific problem addressed in this article concerns the pedagogical significance of motor development as an integral component of school readiness and the need to identify observable motor indicators that may guide teachers in supporting children's educational adaptation.

The purpose of the study is to theoretically substantiate motor development as an integral component of school readiness and to identify pedagogically relevant indicators and strategies that may support teachers in observing and strengthening children's readiness for school. *The object of the study* is school readiness in preschool and early school-age children. *The subject of the study* is motor development as a functional component of school readiness and its pedagogical interpretation in everyday teaching practice.

In accordance with the purpose, the following ***research tasks*** were formulated:

1. To analyze theoretical approaches to school readiness with particular attention to the physical and motor domain.
2. To characterize the relationship between motor development, postural control, sensory integration, attention, and graphomotor skills.
3. To identify observable motor behaviors that may indicate reduced school readiness.
4. To determine the role of the teacher in observing and supporting children's motor development.
5. To systematize simple pedagogical strategies that may support school readiness through movement.

Motor development constitutes the foundation for other domains of personality, and motor competence is a prerequisite for successful adaptation to school conditions [7; 8]. Teachers should pay particular attention to children's motor functioning, as movement forms the basis of learning from the earliest days of life, and early identification of deficits enables effective support of the pupil [1; 7]. In traditional approaches, school maturity is most often analyzed across several domains, namely:

- **Cognitive processes**, focusing on the ability to concentrate attention, visual and auditory perception, communicative speech, and conceptual understanding.

- **The emotional-motivational domain**, concerning the ability to regulate emotions, a sense of responsibility, and cognitive curiosity.
- **Social development**, characterized by a sense of belonging to a group and an understanding of the social norms governing that group.
- **Physical development**, encompassing general health status, growth, and motor competence.

Assessment of school readiness conducted by teachers or educators tends to focus primarily on the first three domains, largely due to the nature of their pedagogical competencies. As an example, a fragment of the final school readiness assessment form used at the Jan Brzechwa Public Kindergarten in Jarosław, made available by its director, Dr. Agata Kolasa-Skiba, is cited [10]. It is worth noting that preschool teachers use similar assessment forms when observing the behavior of three-, four-, and five-year-old children. Although the ordinal rating scales employed in these tools may be subject to certain forms of subjective bias, they function effectively in practice and are widely utilized.

In the present article, it is assumed that the level of a child's motor development constitutes not only an indicator of physical maturity but also a significant element of functional readiness to learn, which may be accurately observed and interpreted by the teacher in everyday educational practice. An analysis of available research findings indicates beneficial associations between physical activity and selected aspects of children's cognitive functioning, particularly working memory and cognitive control [2]. To illustrate how selected elements of the physical domain may be included in school readiness assessment, Table 1 presents an example of observational indicators used in preschool practice. The table is not the result of the authors' own empirical research; it is cited as an example of an existing pedagogical assessment tool.

Materials and methods. The article is theoretical and practice-oriented in character. It is based on the analysis, synthesis, and systematization of pedagogical, neuropsychological, physiotherapeutic, and developmental literature concerning school readiness and children's motor development. The following methods were used: theoretical analysis of scientific sources, comparative analysis of selected domains of school readiness, conceptual generalization, and pedagogical interpretation of motor indicators observable in preschool and early school settings.

The article does not present the results of an original pedagogical experiment. The table included in the manuscript is used as an illustrative example of an assessment tool related to the physical domain of child development and is cited from an external source. Therefore, the conclusions of the article should be understood as theoretically grounded practical recommendations rather than empirical findings obtained through the authors' own experimental research.

Lp.	**Zadanie**	0	1	2	3
	Physical domain of child development	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**
1.	Reports physiological needs; independently uses the bathroom, remembering to wash hands; uses tissues when necessary				
2.	Independently puts on all items of clothing (buttoning buttons, fastening zippers, and tying shoes are not subject to assessment)				
3.	Fastens buttons and zippers				
4.	Ties shoes				
5.	Eats meals using cutlery				
6.	Sets the table and cleans up after a meal				
7.	Participates in movement activities: musical, rhythmic, imitative, etc.				
8.	Performs various forms of movement: crawls on all fours, throws at a target, runs without collisions, jumps with both feet and on one foot				
9.	Communicates his/her needs; asks for help when needed				
10.	Independently builds structures with blocks and other available materials during free time and guided activities				
11.	Engages in simple manual/technical activities during free time and guided activities, using basic tools				
12.	Cleans up toys after finishing play				
13.	Efficiently grasps and manipulates objects; is able to grasp objects with one hand and with both hands				
14.	Correctly holds a writing instrument while drawing and during initial attempts at writing				
15.	Catches a ball thrown in his/her direction				
16.	Traces along a line (Worksheet No. 1, Task 1)				
17.	Draws according to a model (Worksheet No. 1, Task 2)				

Source: Rejman K., Błażejewski G. *Problemy medycznej i środowiskowej rehabilitacji dzieci oraz młodzieży z niepełnosprawnością ruchową*. Rzeszów 2022, s. 23.

Motor Development in Preschool and Early School-Age Children. A child's personality development is comprehensive in nature and possesses a psychomotor character, which should be understood as the existence of a significant relationship between psychological, cognitive, and intellectual development and motor (physical) development. Disturbances in cognitive development may affect motor development,

and conversely, disturbances in motor development may influence cognitive development.

Contemporary perspectives widely recognize motor development as the foundation of functioning across all domains of the child's development. Within an interdisciplinary approach to school readiness, physical fitness is regarded as a key indicator of health and maturity of the central nervous system (CNS). Motor development is not an isolated process; rather, it constitutes the foundation upon which the child's cognitive, emotional, and social functions are built. Adequate motor competence is a prerequisite for the harmonious maturation of the central nervous system (CNS) and the achievement of full readiness for learning.

A child's motor functioning is not limited to the mere execution of movement; it reflects the organization of the entire system of postural regulation and muscle tone control. The quality of this organization manifests itself both in movement dynamics and in the ability to maintain a stable body position during activities requiring concentration and control. In practice, this means that a child's body posture may either facilitate or hinder attention, depending on the efficiency of stabilizing mechanisms.

Motor activity also performs an integrative function with respect to sensory experiences, which constitute the basis for environmental orientation and action planning. In this context, motor development should be considered a process encompassing overall bodily coordination, the precision of manual activities, and the capacity for postural control. Disturbances within any of these areas may lead to functional difficulties manifested not only in the motor domain but also in the course of learning and in the child's social interactions.

For practical purposes, motor activity is divided into gross motor skills and fine motor skills (grasping and manipulation) [13]. The development of gross motor skills leads to whole-body coordination, free and efficient gait, and constitutes a prerequisite for the later development of precise movements [6; 13]. Fine motor skills involve the small muscles of the hand and require good visuomotor coordination and sustained attention [13]. Postural control forms the basis for these activities. High-quality postural control underlies both the quality of movement and the appropriate body position for its execution.

The learning process occurs through multiple senses: vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Sensory input from the vestibular system (inner ear), proprioceptive input (from muscles and joints), and tactile input (from the skin) are utilized by the child to generate an appropriate motor and postural response. When the position of individual body parts and segments is correct, optimal feedback from the nervous system can be expected. Any disturbance in this process may affect the body schema and sensorimotor integration in the child, potentially resulting in negative consequences for learning.

In preschool and school practice, this means that the manner in which a child–a pupil–perceives and organizes information originating from his or her own body may either facilitate learning or constitute a genuine barrier to it.

The Relationship Between Motor Development and Functioning in Preschool and School. Proper body posture ensures stability with minimal muscular effort, allowing the child to focus attention on cognitive tasks without experiencing fatigue associated with maintaining position [6; 14]. Muscle tone directly affects concentration; children with postural defects fatigue more quickly, which leads to distractibility and frustration. Disturbances in muscle tone translate into impairments in postural control as well as in fine and gross motor skills [1; 6]. They limit the capacity for antigravity activity.

Fine motor skills constitute the foundation for learning to write and draw, and their efficiency depends on the maturity of the musculoskeletal system [7]. They also depend on the ability to maintain the position of the hand as well as the entire body. Muscle strength and its modulation according to the trained function of the hand represent important aspects related to school readiness.

Research confirms strong associations between the domain of motor activity and cognitive processes, academic achievement, and IQ levels [3]. Findings from international studies indicate, among other things, that effective sensory information processing and the integration of these signals with motor activity are associated with executive functions such as attention, planning, and working memory, which play a key role in school success.

Motor Behaviors as Indicators of Reduced School Readiness in Children. Reduced school readiness often manifests through specific behaviors that serve as inferential indicators, namely:

- Rapid fatigue: Difficulties in maintaining a seated position, supporting the head with the hand, or slouching frequently result from insufficient endurance of the postural muscles and weak postural control [1]. The child may have difficulty maintaining an intermediate position described as correct and more frequently adopts asymmetric, excessively flexed, or excessively extended postural patterns.
- Fidgeting: This is usually a physiological signal – a pupil with low postural stability fidgets in order to provide the brain with information about body position [1].
- Motor clumsiness: Frequent stumbling and avoidance of physical play due to fear of failure may negatively affect the child's psychological well-being [7]. Graphomotor difficulties: Reluctance to draw, an improper grip of the writing instrument, and the presence of synkinesis (involuntary associated movements), such as unnecessary tongue movements during writing or inappropriate muscle co-contractions [1]. An excessively weak or excessively strong grip on the writing instrument may also be observed.
- Excessive motor activity or withdrawal: These behaviors may constitute a response to difficulties in sensory processing [7].

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- The need to seek intense sensory input: Bumping into objects or people, hitting, tightly squeezing other children, toys, or a writing instrument.
- Difficulties in speech development, articulation of phonemes, or voice modulation: These may result from faulty body posture and problems related to the respiratory system.

The above-mentioned behaviors are subjective and observational in nature and do not constitute independent or definitive diagnostic criteria. However, they may indicate insufficient school readiness and inspire further, more in-depth observation of the child.

The Role of the Teacher in Observing and Supporting the Motor Development of Pupils. The pace of development is individual for each child. Teachers have the opportunity to observe their pupils in natural school and preschool settings, which enables them to assess the health and maturity of the central nervous system in terms of functions related to education [1; 7]. When various difficulties in preschool or early school functioning are observed, teachers should consider whether the above-mentioned motor problems are present, as these may exert either a direct or indirect impact.

A child's motor functioning constitutes one of the significant factors associated with adaptation to school demands, the organization of activity within the classroom environment, and the course of the learning process, particularly with regard to maintaining attention and effectively performing educational tasks [15]. Teachers' awareness of these relationships, together with prolonged observation of the child in school or preschool educational settings, may be crucial for the child's harmonious development over time.

Every teacher has the opportunity to inform parents about the results of their observations and to suggest the need for specialist consultation, for example with a physiotherapist. Work focused on the motor system may yield visible effects not only in the child's physical functioning but also in the development of school-related competencies, including intellectual and emotional domains.

The period between 4 and 6 years of age is referred to as the "golden age" of motor development, characterized by dynamic progress in speed, agility, and strength [6; 14]. It is also a time when developmental deficits may become more pronounced and potentially more detrimental to further comprehensive development.

Simple Strategies to Support the Development of School Readiness Through Movement. The scientific literature describes numerous educational forms and methods aimed at fostering school readiness in preschool children. With regard to supporting its development through movement, teachers may, in order to maintain children's motivation and attention, introduce short movement breaks or initiate changes in body position during activities [1]. Examples of other activities that may be implemented for this purpose in everyday teaching, educational, and caregiving practice, and that do not require specialized training, are presented below:

- **Short movement exercises:** Activities developing coordination, balance, and agility [3; 6]. Games involving alternating movements of the limbs.
- **Preparation of the hand for writing:** Manipulative exercises, modeling with clay or other materials, cutting, and drawing pre-writing patterns [9; 13]. The systematic use of simple movement-based strategies may support the process of school adaptation and reduce the risk of graphomotor and attention difficulties.
- **Physical activity as prevention:** Providing children with access to forms of movement that create opportunities to acquire essential motor competencies [3]. Regular physical activity may constitute an element of early prevention of school difficulties, supporting the child's harmonious psychomotor development.
- **Auxiliary tasks during lessons:** For children who require increased movement, teachers may introduce activities such as wiping the board or distributing materials from the back of the classroom – this allows the child's movement needs to be met and may enhance task-related attention.
- **Body schema exercises:** Asking the child to maintain a specific position and describe the position of their hand or leg.
- **Attention to ergonomics:** Adjusting desks and chairs to the pupil's height [1]. Ergonomic adaptation of the pupil's workstation, considering height and body proportions, supports trunk stabilization and effective postural control during desk-based tasks.

Indications for Specialist Physiotherapeutic Consultation. Specialist consultation is indicated when the teacher observes so-called warning signs such as persistent scapular asymmetry – colloquially described as a child consistently sitting "crooked" in the same manner – disturbances in gait pattern that are visibly noticeable and limit the child's activity compared to peers and restrict freedom of movement, valgus positioning of the feet, tripping over one's own feet, or difficulty extending the trunk accompanied by a persistently flexed posture [6; 11]. Such information should be communicated to the parent or legal guardian, enabling further diagnostic evaluation and, if necessary, the implementation of appropriate corrective intervention. The teacher may also receive information useful for planning school activities, including adjustments to the environment, as well as clarification regarding the nature of the child's difficulties.

Early physiotherapeutic intervention has the greatest likelihood of success prior to the completion of central nervous system (CNS) maturation [11]. The physiotherapist supports the child through the regulation of muscle tone, postural re-education, and sensorimotor integration, while also providing the teacher with guidance on how to adapt educational demands to the pupil's physical capabilities [6; 11].

In educational practice, observation of a child's motor functioning acquires particular significance when such difficulties are not acute but develop gradually and remain unnoticed in everyday functioning. Careful and long-term observation allows

for the identification of subtle signs of reduced motor competence that may affect the child's comfort in the school environment and readiness to undertake educational tasks. Early referral to a specialist creates the opportunity to address these areas before motor difficulties begin to exert secondary effects on motivation, self-esteem, and the child's functioning in preschool or school settings.

Theoretical and practical significance of the study. The theoretical significance of the article lies in the clarification of motor development as an integral component of school readiness rather than as a merely auxiliary aspect of physical maturation. The article contributes to the interdisciplinary understanding of school readiness by linking motor competence, postural control, sensory integration, attention, graphomotor skills, and classroom adaptation. The practical significance of the article consists in the systematization of observable motor indicators and simple pedagogical strategies that may be used by teachers in preschool and early school settings. These strategies do not replace specialist diagnosis but may support early identification of developmental risks and facilitate cooperation between teachers, parents, physiotherapists, pediatricians, and psychologists.

Limitations. The study has a theoretical and analytical character and does not include original empirical testing of the proposed pedagogical strategies. The recommendations presented in the article are based on the analysis and synthesis of existing literature and require further empirical verification in preschool and early school settings. Future research should include observational studies, teacher surveys, and intervention-based designs aimed at assessing the effectiveness of movement-based strategies in supporting school readiness.

Conclusion. The analysis confirms that motor development should be considered an integral component of school readiness, alongside cognitive, emotional, and social domains. Gross motor skills, fine motor skills, postural control, muscle tone regulation, sensory integration, and body schema influence the child's ability to maintain attention, perform graphomotor tasks, participate in classroom activities, and adapt to school requirements. Movement constitutes the foundation of learning and an inseparable element of the comprehensive development of every child's personality [7]. Conscious observation of motor development in the context of school readiness enables not only the detection of postural defects but also an understanding of the underlying causes of learning difficulties [1].

The harmonious development of a pupil is a shared responsibility of the teacher, the parent, and specialists, whose collaboration allows for an optimal start within the educational system [8]. The teacher is an important–often the first–professional, conscious, and responsible observer of the quality of a child's overall development; therefore, knowledge concerning, among other aspects, motor development is significant in planning educational demands for pupils.

Considering the presented argumentation, it is justified to treat motor development as an integral component of school readiness rather than merely a

background for cognitive development. Taking into account the need for continuous observation of a child's motor functioning in everyday preschool educational and caregiving practice enables earlier identification of developmental risks and the appropriate planning of preventive and therapeutic interventions.

Teachers, as daily observers of children's functioning in natural educational settings, play an important role in identifying motor behaviors that may indicate reduced readiness for school. Such behaviors do not constitute diagnostic criteria in themselves, but they may justify further observation, communication with parents, and referral for specialist consultation. Ongoing enhancement of teachers' competencies in this area, together with the development of interdisciplinary collaboration skills involving physiotherapists, pediatricians, and psychologists, may constitute an important direction for actions supporting the child's harmonious development.

The practical strategies described in the article, including movement breaks, manipulative exercises, body-schema activities, classroom movement tasks, and ergonomic adaptation of the workstation, may support children's school adaptation. However, their effectiveness should be further verified through empirical research. Interdisciplinary cooperation between teachers, parents, physiotherapists, pediatricians, and psychologists remains essential for supporting the harmonious development of the child.

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РОЗВИТОК МОТОРИКИ У ДІТЕЙ В ПРОЦЕСІ ЇХНЬОЇ ПІДГОТОВКИ ДО ШКОЛИ

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Розглянуто моторний розвиток як важливий складник готовності дитини до школи та підкреслено його безпосереднє значення для практики дошкільної та початкової освіти. Готовність до школи трактується як багатовимірне явище, що охоплює когнітивну, емоційну, соціальну й фізичну сфери, тоді як моторну компетентність розглянуто не лише як показник фізичної зрілості, а й як функціональну умову успішного навчання. Автори наголошують на тісному взаємозв'язку рухового, пізнавального, емоційного та соціального розвитку дитини, доводячи, що порушення постави, м'язового тонусу, великої та дрібної моторики, сенсорної інтеграції й схеми тіла можуть впливати на увагу, графомоторні навички, поведінку в класі, самооцінку та адаптацію до шкільних вимог. Особливу увагу приділено моторним проявам, які можуть свідчити про знижену готовність до навчання: швидкій втомлюваності, постійному

руховому неспокою, незграбності, небажанню малювати чи писати, надмірній руховій активності, замкненості, потребі в інтенсивній сенсорній стимуляції. Зазначено роль педагога як щоденного спостерігача за функціонуванням дитини в природному освітньому середовищі. Усвідомлення моторних індикаторів дає змогу своєчасно виявляти ризики розвитку та рекомендувати консультацію фахівців, зокрема фізіотерапевта. Також подано практичні стратегії підтримки, доступні педагогам без спеціальної підготовки: рухові паузи, маніпулятивні вправи, вправи на схему тіла, доручення з руховою активністю та ергономічне облаштування робочого місця. Зроблено висновок, що моторний розвиток варто розглядати як невід'ємну частину шкільної готовності, а ефективна підтримка дитини потребує співпраці педагогів, батьків, фізіотерапевтів, педіатрів і психологів.

Ключові слова: моторний розвиток, готовність до школи, дошкільна освіта, велика моторика, дрібна моторика, постуральний контроль, сенсорна інтеграція, педагогічна практика.