Correlation between Skipping Ability and Reading Levels of First Grade Students

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At the beginning of the school year several years ago, the Physical Educator noticed some first grade students could not skip. The classroom teacher was asked to come back two minutes before the end of their class time to view the non-skippers. After visiting with the classroom teacher we decided to compare their reading level with their skipping ability. In almost all cases, the classroom teacher was amazed to see the correlation between the low readers and the non-skippers.

So a plan was hatched. The Physical Educator used bulletin board paper to draw large size shoe prints in two different colors. Each shoe has the word STEP (and PASO in Spanish), and Hop (and BRINCO in Spanish). The shoe prints were then cut out, laminated and then ran through a Ziron ® machine that puts a sticky surface to the back of the shoe prints. The shoe prints can then be taken off the paper and applied to the gym floor in the skipping pattern. The first two prints each read STEP and STEP, where the student starts (see Figure 1).

The next two shoe prints are left prints; first the STEP print, followed in front of that with the HOP print. The pattern repeats on the right side, then left side, then right side for a total of 16 pairs of shoe prints. The student begins by standing on the first two prints that read STEP (PASO). They must say the words aloud while doing the step or hop. The pattern is set up close to the closed bleachers so the student can use the bleacher for balance if needed.

Each Physical Education class the non-skippers practice until they have mastered the skipping sequence. When they think they are ready, or when the Instructor asks them to demonstrate, they can try skipping on the black line of the gym floor. If successful they join the other students, and if not they go back to the patterning practice area.

It has been reported by classroom teachers that the non-skipper reading levels do improve by the time they become skippers. Whether this is due in part to learning to skip or whether the regular reading practice in the classroom was the reason could not be determined. However, there has been reading research that shows a similar neural firing pathway similar to skipping.