



Chesapeake Bay  
Alexander Studies

# Learning to Move, Moving to Learn

Developmental Movement and Dance for Music and Early Childhood Educators

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This paper was written in conjunction with a keynote address and workshops presented at the Northeast Regional Conference of the Early Childhood Music and Movement Association. The theme of the 2007 ECMMA conference, held in Hopewell, NJ, was “No Teacher Left Behind: Educating the Whole Child Through Music and Movement.”

**We move** throughout our lifetime in ways small and large, simple and complex. Any given movement or gesture might appear mundane but may in fact represent an important piece of learning. Movement is essential not only for physical coordination but for cognitive and perceptual development as well. This workshop will draw from developmental movement, Contact Improvisation and “modern folk” dances that I have choreographed for young children. The material can be adapted for all abilities and age groups. Active participation by teachers encourages students to grow and maintain a broad palette of movement and rhythmic options which are the building blocks of higher learning.

## **Goals** for students:

Body awareness in relation to self, others and the environment

Mobility in spine; strong connection from head to sit-bones to heels

Crossing body midline with arms and legs--*important in language development*

Acceptance of touch and a range of tactile sensations

Vocalization

Making eye contact and interacting with peers and adults

Cooperating as a group; following instructions

As technology and life in general gather speed, our visual and auditory senses are bombarded with rapidly changing images and sounds. Attention spans are getting shorter, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and learning delays are on the rise, and the prevalence of childhood obesity poses a major health crisis. A generation of children will be “wired” without appropriate psychophysical development. The lack of tactile and kinesthetic stimulation can lead to cognitive problems that, left unchecked, may result in lifelong learning woes.

It is common knowledge that babies who are not touched and repositioned do not develop properly. Young children need movement and touch in order to thrive, and this basic human need underlies adult behavior as well. From the learning standpoint, early reflex patterns and locomotor movement stimulate all areas of the brain in preparation for speaking, reading and understanding spatial and numeric concepts. Developmental movement can be revisited at any age in a multitude of ways.

Music classes that incorporate movement support other types of classroom learning. Preschool teachers can include movement components across the curriculum to support integrated, psychophysical development.

## **Developmental Movement Components**

Spinal movement: wriggling, bending, twisting, rolling

Sensory awareness:

Visual (V)- tracking with eyes, depth perception, eye contact;

Auditory (A)- responding to sound through movement, imitation, call and response, rhythm;

Tactile (T)-self touch including tapping, patting, stroking, rubbing, pushing; interactive touch including pat-a-cake, tapping, shaking hands, passing objects with different textures such as musical instruments

Crossing midline: cross patterning through crawling, reaching across body, crossing arms and legs.

Essential in linking up the two hemispheres of the brain and necessary for language development

Level changes: building strength and coordination, shifting from self-referential to engaging with environment

Locomotion: creeping on forearms and knees, crawling on hands and knees, bear walk, walking, running, sliding, hopping, skipping, leaping

## **Elements of a music and movement class that support physical and cognitive learning**

Breathing and relaxation

Movement exploration of the spine

Crossing midline in a variety of ways

Range of rhythmic activity

Partner activities: mirroring, weight sharing, changing spatial relationships

Group activities: include level changes, spatial changes (near and far, in a line, in a circle), clapping and stamping, vocalizing, unison movement, “spotlight” solos, passing/transforming a gesture; problem solving

## **Themed activities linked to curriculum**

Again,

movement supports *all* learning;

Quite simply,

children *must* be in motion.

Music and movement can enhance curricular subjects both general and specific. Music teachers can incorporate particular themes into their music choices based on what the students are studying in other classes. The classroom teacher needn't be a trained choreographer, just a creative thinker, in

order to inject movement into the subject at hand. Children are wonderful imitators, but they can also generate their own movement and share their kinesthetic ideas with others. Some tried and true examples follow.

#### Weather Report:

Enact rain, wind, etc. through movement, breath and sound. Good for spinal movement and tactile stimulation of own body parts with varying qualities.

#### Alphabet:

Trace letters in the air with different body parts (finger, elbow, nose, foot, belly button). Vary size and speed of “writing” and include words and own name if age appropriate.

#### Dinosaurs:

Create a giant dinosaur with each child being a different body part. How does this creature move through space with all the parts coordinated?

#### Transportation:

Good for problem solving and following instructions to change speed, direction, etc. Students can move as a solo car, train, plane, etc. or work in teams to build larger machines.

#### Math:

Rhythm--identify body rhythms such as breath and heartbeat, then move in unison with those rhythms; clap, stamp and jump to various rhythms, then add double time, half time, etc.; \_ time is great for level changes.

Spatial groupings--cluster children in groups to represent either specific numbers or less than/more than. Call out different ways of locomotion to move from one group to another. (*Cross-patterning promotes math skills.*)

Geometry/shapes--use different body parts to create line, curve, angle, triangle, circle, etc.; try it in pairs or trios using two or more whole bodies to create one shape.

## **Teaching children with special needs**

Any of the above material can be adapted to students of different abilities. ALL children need to experience a full range of movement in order to thrive. When needed, hands on support and guidance can provide this experience. Stimulating the central nervous system and reinforcing developmental movement benefits everyone regardless of age or ability.

Repetition is important for all children, and those with learning differences require a great deal of repetition and introduction of new material in increments. Establishing a routine of “getting ready to dance” (which may entail removing shoes) helps with transitioning from one activity to the next. Depending on the population, design movement activities to stimulate underused pathways of coordination and/or to redirect inappropriate behaviors. As with any group of students, the teacher’s physical presence and tone of voice greatly influence how students respond to instruction. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then your students are a reliable mirror. If the teacher is not at ease, students will pick up on that and respond in kind. Teachers who make eye contact, vocalize well and are willing to move fully and creatively will get back from students what they demonstrate.

## Music choices

Music abounds in our society and affects us both consciously and unconsciously. The growing genre of children's music offers much to choose from. **World Music** expands the range beyond what is heard every day, and hearing different languages engages the brain in a less linear way than listening to lyrics for content. *Invaluable for any CD collection: Putamayo World Music* label has a division for children called Putamayo Kids ([www.putamayokids.com](http://www.putamayokids.com)). Anything in this series is great, and the "must have" CD is called *World Playground*. In two volumes, it's a sampler of music from around the world that is highly dance oriented. When learning about other cultures, music and movement give students auditory and kinesthetic input from those cultures. Create "modern folk" dances to represent different countries.

Whether using classical music or hip hop (yes, there is "G" rated hip hop for kids), encouraging students to vocalize supports learning movement. When demonstrating movement, teachers can "say and do" while students "see, say and do." Adding the music brings in "hear" to integrate all the channels of learning. Incorporating a wide variety of music promotes flexible thinking, curiosity, tolerance and appreciation of differences.

## National Standards

Just as there are National Standards for Music Education, there are National Standards for Dance and Movement Education. Because few schools have an actual dance teacher for lower grade levels, that task often falls to the physical education teacher and/or the classroom teacher. Because good music teachers already incorporate movement into their lessons, they are well placed to integrate the National Standards into the curriculum.

*"Children in grades K-4 love to move and learn through engagement of the whole self. They need to become literate in the language of dance in order to use this natural facility as a means of communication and self-expression, and as a way of responding to the expression of others. Dancing and creating dances provide them with skills and knowledge necessary for all future learning in dance and give them a way to celebrate their humanity."*

- Opening paragraph of National Standards for Dance and Movement Education from the National Standards for Arts Education.

The entire text of National Standards for Arts Education including dance, music, theater and visual arts may be viewed online at:

**<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/standards>**

## Resources

[www.artsedge.kennedy-center.org](http://www.artsedge.kennedy-center.org) Invaluable website for all educators!

[www.aapherd.org/nda](http://www.aapherd.org/nda) National Dance Association site

[www.menc.org](http://www.menc.org)

National Association For Music Education site

[www.putamayo.com/playground](http://www.putamayo.com/playground)

Putamayo World Music site for children's music

[www.vsarts.org](http://www.vsarts.org)

VSA Arts promotes creative power for people with disabilities

[www.bodymindcentering.com](http://www.bodymindcentering.com)

Look under "programs" for training in developmental movement

Google "developmental movement" for a fascinating array of resources including links to early childhood learning, dyslexia, learning delays, etc.

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