

Creative Movement in the Early Years



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Helping children to enjoy the range of opportunities that creative movement offers can be one of the most joyful shared experiences of working with children in the early years. This article explores what creative movement is, and how to create invitations to move creatively in your setting. It will also show how creative movement helps children's development.

Creative movement is more than dance. Whilst dance can be a part of a creative movement menu, creative movement is responding with imagination to a stimulus or invitation to move.



*"From the very first days of our life, we communicate through a series of rhythmic movements. The movements are the first form of communication until the age of two. We use our bodies to express, to learn, to understand, to create."*¹

As humans, we are designed to move every day. Our movement allows us to explore our surroundings and to interact with our environment. Movement helps children to develop the sensory systems that support their learning and development. Creative movement also allows children to explore and express their emotions, it supports the development of spoken language and non-verbal communication; children can use the opportunities to show their feelings and thoughts without the barriers of finding the right words.

It is important to say that creative movement is not the same as a formal dance (such as folk dance) where there is a prescribed pattern of movements. Folk dancing contributes enormously to rhythm, clapping, and following patterns, which are all skills that are highly beneficial to children in the early years. Creative movement allows children to think about how they interpret the movement invitation. What does 'moving like a caterpillar' mean to a child, and how do they show this through their movement?

The thinking, doing, and experiencing from this short example is the essence of the idea behind creative movement. There is no 'right answer', and children will respond with finger movements, arm wriggling, or whole-body movements. Each child will have their own idea, but those that struggle can copy and replicate movements from children or practitioners until they can become more confident at creating ideas.



How might you introduce creative movement?

Within your setting, and in the environment around you, there are so many opportunities to create invitations to move. If you haven't used creative movement regularly, here are some examples to start you off. With your imagination, anything can be used as an invitation to move; a picture, a sound, the weather, an animal, a story, bubbles, ribbons, kites; the list is endless.

Water and weather

Another easily accessible and shared experience is the use of water and weather. Whilst as adults we sometimes forget the awe and excitement of the weather. Watch children's joy on a blustery autumn day when the leaves flurry around them and how they respond to this. There are many ways we can inspire children to move in response to the weather around them. How might children show us a stormy day, or how might they splash and stomp around real or imagined puddles? What different movement potential would be created by swaying in the breeze like trees or grass, or twisting and turning like water running down a slope?

Emotions

As adults, we know that emotions drive behaviours. Creative movement allows the feelings of others (or of the creative movement itself) to be shared. With children, we can use creative movement to make emotional connections. We can move like we are at parties, or like we are caught in the rain. We can encourage movement using music to stimulate emotional responses; slow and melodic, or upbeat and light. We can use bubbles to stimulate light and random movements, mythical giants or dinosaurs to create strong, purposeful and forceful movements.

As we use our imaginations to stimulate children's movement, we are helping them understand and label emotions and consider perspectives outside their own, the essence of empathy.

A process for planning creative movement

Through creative movement we are helping children to use their imagination and communicate their own responses to our invitations to move. As we do this, we are providing experiences that support children's development. The combination of movement, sensory experiences, emotional connections, socially collaborative opportunities, and translating language into movement all fires important neurological responses helping to develop young children's brains.

Animals

From an early age, children are captivated by animals and the animal characters they see in their books, stories, and TV programmes. Animal movements can be seen easily. From the insects, spiders and birds that visit your outdoor spaces, to the books, resources, and visits that children undertake to see larger animals, our shared experiences allow us to invite children to move like animals. Moving on hands and feet, wriggling, changing speed, height, and direction all allow children to use movements that positively contribute to their physical development, sensory integration, and perform actions that build their movement vocabulary.

Stories

Children's picture books and stories provide a rich source of inspiration for movement. Our partners at BookTrust Cymru share some examples of books that can be used to promote physical literacy and get young children moving on page 30.





In addition, a selective choice of music can be added to extend the sensory experiences for the children. An example playlist can be found in the references section below. A wide body of evidence shows how movement, music and the sensory experiences contribute to happy healthy children. For more ideas on movement play with music see Helen Batteley's article on page 26 and page 28 for an exclusive offer from our latest partners Boogie Mites.

- Body parts (heads, arms etc.), shapes (straight, symmetrical etc.) and relationships (body parts to body parts or body parts to objects etc.).
- Space (own space or general space), size (big, medium, little), level (high, middle, low), direction (forward, backward, right, left, up, down etc.).
- Rhythm and speed (slow, medium, fast).
- Force (energy and flow).
- Balance (on or off-balance).
- 2-3 minutes to explore the concept or stimuli or invitation to move.
- Give the children chances and time to explore, develop, and refine their movements (lots of copying and imitation and innovation will take place all of which is great for the child's development of creative thinking and movement). Allow time for children to practise movement and explore possibilities.
- Encourage children to create movement responses. Let children be free to express their creative responses.
- A calming and cooling down activity.

Through creative movement we can help children with schematic development, help develop sensory systems including proprioception and vestibular systems.



'During creative movement exploration there is an abundance of movement all around, and there is always one child doing something that I have never seen another child do before...By offering invitations for children to move creatively together, we are supporting them to form relationships with peers and staff and promoting opportunities for children to develop their sense of belonging, therefore enhancing their wellbeing'.

- Dr Angharad Harrop, Creative Movement in the Early Years, *smalltalk*, (October 2023), pg 22 - 25.



Photo credit: Creative Movement in the Early Years, *smalltalk*, (October 2023), pg 22 - 25

In the scope of this article, we have introduced how creative movement can help and support children's development. If you want further information, or training and support please contact training@earlyyears.wales



References:

¹ Eleni Tsompanaki, 2019. "The Effect of Creative Movement-Dance on the Development of Basic Motor Skills of Pre-School Children," Review of European Studies, Canadian Center of Science and Education, vol. 11(2), pages 1-29, December: <https://ideas.repec.org/a/ibn/resjnl/v11y2019i2p29.html>

² Music for Creative Dance: <https://open.spotify.com/album/3VsKWqAtD4pUlgWBQ4CG24>
Please note, Early Years Wales does not own or monitor the music on this playlist. Practitioners are advised to check any external link for suitability with their children.

³ Creative Movement in the Early Years, *smalltalk*, (October 2023), pg 22 - 25: https://bit.ly/Creativemovementintheearlyyears_smalltalk_October_2023_ENG

You may also be interested in:

Let's have a story! Supporting years students' storytelling skills confidence and skills, *smalltalk*, (May 2023), pg 27-29