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Supporting, extending and enriching movement

We speak of starting with a child 'where he is', which in one sense is not to assert an educational desideratum but an inescapable fact; there is no other place the child can start from. There are only other places the educator can start from. (Bissex 1980: 111)

Selecting appropriate learning phases

In the previous chapter the phases of *free and guided exploration, consolidation and extension* were selected because they relate comfortably to movement education as a specific area of learning and they can be used flexibly in a variety of movement contexts from the earliest years at home through to lessons at Key Stages 1 and 2. Knowing what each phase represents, parents, family, friends, and early childhood professionals can decide which ones are best suited to their children's current learning interests. At home, where one-to-one relationships often prevail, the sequence of phases will relate in the main to activities initiated by the children themselves. As children widen their experience outside the home a variety of increasingly organised contexts, suggestions and challenges are likely to become more small-group and class oriented.

The following guidelines, governing the selection of learning phases, are thought to be appropriate for a variety of situations in which 'assisted movement learning' takes place. They can be used by adults who engage in the early movement play of their children, by early childhood educators and childminders who cater for individuals and small groups, and by class teachers in the preparation and translation into more structured lessons. In all these settings it is important to keep the following guidelines in mind.

- All phases are important in the movement development of children up to eight years.

- There is no hierarchical ordering of phases.
- Not every movement session/lesson has to start with free exploration.
- There is not a special phase.
- Phases may be taken out of order and occur more than once.
- Phases may take up different lengths of time.
- Not all phases have to happen in one movement session/lesson.
- Phases may be combined.

The object now is to look at how phases may be used within several different learning/teaching situations and to consider ways in which some of the theoretical ideas introduced earlier tie up with the movement classification looked at in Chapter 1.

A flexible approach

The general format for informal activity sessions at one end of the birth to eight-year age range and more structured lessons at the other has common threads, although the nature of the challenges set, the use of teaching devices and the child expectations are very different. There is nothing sacrosanct about every detail of content; some ideas are interchangeable although the treatment of them may differ. For example, the dance theme of fireworks as set out in Chapter 8 may be used in a different way with younger or older age groups. Similarly, the 'dance play' session, pitched at the level of three- and four-year-olds, which also appears in Chapter 8, may be reshaped and extended in a variety of ways for children in infant and junior schools. It is the relationship of the various elements, along with the measure for potential development, which defines suitability in each case.

All spontaneous and structured activity sessions along the lines of those which follow contain free exploration and also what might be termed guided contributions. These include the roles which parents, early years practitioners and teachers play, teaching styles and ways which enable maximum learning to take place. They are used here as structuring agents; they identify ways in which the most can be made of periods of children's activity whenever and wherever that activity takes place. It might be argued that common guidelines bring about inflexibility and closed opportunities, but the opposite is true. Because the flexible use of phases of learning implies knowledge of child development and movement principles, both input and outcomes can be varied and relevant. Important elements in the examples given are:

- setting the scene
- observing the outcome
- giving feedback
- engaging in dialogue.

Making suggestions and setting challenges

Sometimes adults need to find ways to set children off; to stimulate, to lead, to interest, to involve them. This can be through the kinds of material provision talked about earlier. It may also come about through talking with the children about what they are in the process of doing or through sharing suggestions as to what they might do next. As cognitive, emotional and physical development advance the 'take it or leave it' type of suggestion, frequently used with young children who are working individually, is extended by teacher-guided challenges which can be appropriately answered by all the children in a small group or class. Relevant, open-ended challenges encourage appropriate movement responses and, therefore, hold no danger of children being unable to respond. They are used to encourage exploration and improvisation, to allow time for children to engage in and consolidate previous learning, and to open up areas of potential achievement. In the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* one of the principles refers to opportunities for children to engage in activities planned by adults and also those that they plan themselves (QCA 2000: 11).

In writing about open-ended versus closed structures, Bruce (1991: 89) draws attention to Jack, aged four years, who was asked to make a fish using a template and prescribed materials – milk bottle tops for scales and tissue paper for the tail. Personal decisions in Jack's fish activity were minimal and, in comparison, adult expectations of what the end product should look like were high. The movement equivalent of such an experience could be found in precisely fashioned skill sequences which simply do not enter into the early years of learning. As Wetton (1988: Introduction) reminds us, 'The younger the child, the more the teacher, nursery nurse or auxiliary will need to concentrate on personalising and individualising the child's experiences'.

At other times, rather than responding to wide-view suggestions introduced by adults, interest is triggered by seeing other people, either children or adults, engaged in a particular form of movement. 'Children are affected by the context in which learning takes place, the people involved in it, and the values and beliefs which are embedded in it' (DES, 1990: 67–8).

Observation

A central characteristic which comes to the fore, when considering children's learning in movement, is the adult's ability to observe quickly and accurately. Swift and informed observation means that assessment can be immediate, and feedback equally so. Without the help that arises from good observation techniques children can be 'strangle-held' in an activity for longer than is necessary or fulfilling. Indicating the importance of observation in short-term planning for young children Fisher (1996: 143) writes:

Through observation in action, carrying out open-ended tasks which allow them to explore and investigate, teachers can gain information about children's knowledge and understanding as well as their skills and strategies. All of this information is necessary if teachers are to plan a curriculum which has relevance and purpose for each child.

For example, a girl near to performing a backward somersault over a pole may just need to know that she should let her head go back with the rest of her upper body as she brings her legs up to the pole. To explain that she is nearly there but not quite making it because her head is restricting the circular passage of movement, and to receive instantaneous encouragement and help to put the words into practice, may mean that she meets with success sooner than later. Such advice, support and encouragement, resulting from skilled observation is in tune with the 'potential' level of development, suggested by Vygotsky and referred to earlier.

Observation also provides material for long-term movement assessment and evaluation on which records and profiles are based. An interesting view of the importance of observation in children's play is presented by Hurst (1994: 173) who writes of the challenge for early childhood educators to learn from observation and identifies purposes and procedures in the learning/teaching situation. Everyone involved in education acknowledges the importance of observation. The many tasks and monitoring demands attributed to teachers could not be carried out without observational references. However, its practice within movement, which is transitory in nature, brings with it a particular set of problems that needs to be separately addressed. The examples of record-keeping based on movement observations given throughout this book refer to specific situations, but there is also a general need for both early childhood and movement practitioners and theorists to examine the nature of this important aspect of

assessing, recording and monitoring movement, at greater depth, in more detail and over time.

Knowing *what to assess* in terms of activities, processes or products is as important as knowing *how to assess* in terms of strategies and pedagogy. Linfield and Warwick (1996: 84) explain that:

Having a grasp of the development of conceptual and procedural understanding allows the educator to plan purposefully, and to use observation as a genuine assessment tool.

Nutbrown (1994: 39) ascertains that prolonged time spans play an important part in the observational process and advocates that:

One of the clearest ways to understand progression in children's learning is to look at individuals over a period of time, observing their schematic interests, seeing how these relate to the development of their behaviour, their speech and their thinking.

Clearly, movement can take its place alongside other areas of learning, sharing the common core to which Hurst refers while identifying its own 'peculiarities'.

Looking and talking together

Whatever their age, wherever they may be, whatever they are doing, talking to children about their movement is a major part of the learning situation. It provides the means whereby achievement and understanding can be assessed and it also features prominently in the recording process. The questions adults and children ask, as well as help and guidance given to individuals and like-minded groups as they work, are of the utmost importance. Such inter-conversational interludes are highly valued by children and adults alike, with the time spent on talking together increasing in length and complexity as children's concentration spans extend. Another significant factor influencing the manner in which children and adults look and talk together is in relation to 'whose movement it is'. With very young children their concentration, and their conversation, is predictably on 'me and my movement'. It may be some time before the movement of others is of lasting interest. The dialogue between children also plays an important part in their learning bringing with

it an affinity and reciprocity different in kind from the adult–child relationship. This view supports the research carried out by Mosston and Ashworth whose spectrum of teaching styles although not oriented to early childhood experiences in movement, is nevertheless pertinent here. In setting the scene for new roles and new relationships they maintain that the teacher accepts the socialising process between observer and doer as a desirable goal in education (Mosston and Ashworth 1994: 67). The implementation of the reciprocal teaching style where the teacher ‘is able to shift the power of giving feedback to the learner’ is particularly relevant to the seven- and eight-year-olds participating in more structured situations. However, whether the occasion is spontaneous or structured it follows that encouraging children to talk with each other about what is happening, and to exchange views, is educationally sound.

We can see from the wide range of questions asked of the children in the following two sample activity sessions that the notion of movement-matching operates similarly in terms of language. Questions have to be of the right sort for the children to be able to think about and answer in an appropriate manner. With the youngest children, questions need to be associated in some way to the ‘here and now’ of their activity, to what is within their immediate grasp and of a ‘matter of fact’ variety. Questions of the ‘I wonder if’ and ‘supposing’ type guard against the closed, predictable nature of answers. Advice given in the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* emphasises that using conversations and carefully framed questions is crucial in developing children’s knowledge, and here open-endedness is clearly stated:

Conversations, open-ended questions and thinking out loud are important tools in developing vocabulary and challenging thinking. Encouraging children to reflect on and tell others what they have been doing ... helps them to give voice to what they know and to practise thinking and new vocabulary.

(QCA 2000: 23)

Later on, children are able to surmise a little, to allow those ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’ into their descriptions and conversations and are able to deviate from the immediate situation. Meadows and Cashdan (1988: 59) point out that:

whenever we ask a question we are making a ‘demand’ on that child ... The teacher who is aware of the range of possible levels of demand is in a good

position to vary questions appropriately, striking the best balance between extending the child and consolidating their existing knowledge.

One of the overriding values of language exchange within the movement session is the clarification and articulation of the skills, versatility and artistry the children are achieving: to describe both the process – what is taking place – and the end product, if there is one.

The younger children

In the case of the two- and three-year-olds the major part of movement activity times will be started spontaneously by the children themselves or in response to the sort of provision made for them. At other times, joining in with parents or older brothers' and sisters' activities brings about enhanced understanding as well as a strong sense of camaraderie. Times such as these prove to be great favourites with the children as long as the main emphasis is on the 'doing', or perhaps what might be more appropriately called 'me doing'. As we saw with Lucy's play session in Chapter 2 the adult's main concern at this time is to create the setting, and to 'accompany' the children in their learning journey assisting this in as personal a way as possible.

Examples of sample activity sessions

From sessions to lessons, from noticing to observing, from helping to challenging are important differential perspectives which face educators of young children. What follows now are two movement activity sessions related to two of the four categories of movement set out in Chapter 1.

The first *relates to a stable environment* and describes a situation which might arise spontaneously with, or be specifically planned for, children up to four years of age. Several individuals and groups of people will be involved in, and take responsibility for, movement activity sessions of the kind suggested here. They will all have some direct or indirect teaching component in what they do but the definition and extent of this will vary greatly according to the particular group of children and the context in which the activity occurs. This could be in the home, or in a variety of group settings, ranging from family units and early childhood settings through to infant and junior schools.

The second activity relates to children of about six and seven years, and is

based on children's interest in *handling objects and making them move*. In each of the examples the teaching and learning situation is identified in the following terms:

- type of situation
- resources
- approximate age of children
- duration of activity
- learning phases
- challenges
- adult roles.

The most important resource of all, the adult who takes responsibility for the learning process, is involved in a variety of teaching strategies. These range widely from individually oriented involvement in the early activities of the youngest children right through to the class teacher or the movement specialist in the junior school. The strategies include:

- the making of suggestions and adult and child challenges
- observations and recording of general and specific kinds
- looking and talking with the children
- implementation of learning phases.

Session 1: movement activity related to a stable environment

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Resource | Climbing frame with poles, ladders, planks, slides. |
| Age | Around four years. |
| Time | Fifteen minutes or as long as interest lasts. |
| Learning phase | Free exploration. |
| Challenge | Children encouraged to use the apparatus as they like. |
| Role of adult | To observe and comment generally and with individual children about what they are doing. To draw attention to parts of the body and actions being used as they move. To select two activities to be shown. For example, looking with the children at the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● one child travelling along the plank on the 'tummy' pulling along with hands |

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Looking and talking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • another child climbing the frame using hands and feet. Children, are asked to identify, name and talk about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parts of the body being used • different ways these are used, e.g. to pull along or climb. |
| Challenge | Children asked to go back to where they were working, to move again in their 'special' way. To make it clear what parts of themselves they are using and what sorts of actions they are doing. They may like to name the body parts and actions to themselves as they go along. |
| Learning phase | Consolidation. |
| Role of adult | To observe and talk with the children about what they are doing. To select two further examples and ask children to comment emphasising body parts and actions. |

Session 1 reviewed

Underlying a decision to work with young children in this way is the assumption that, at certain periods during the day, it is important for young children to have the opportunity to spend some time on agility-type apparatus whether at home, at the play group, with the childminder or at nursery school. It is a case of seizing the opportunity, of finding an appropriate period of time to become actively involved in the children's learning. The appropriateness relates both to the children and to the adult who has to fit this in amongst the many other calls upon time, energy and attention.

We have seen from the activity chart above that the first task is to observe what the children are doing and how the information, gleaned from these observations, can best be used. This involves the teacher making a mental assessment as the child travels around. Having decided on the movement ideas most in evidence, two examples can then be selected. Children of this age are not always able to reproduce on request what is wanted, and it is a good idea to ask them to try to remember what they are doing because it may be shown to the other children later on. In this case, the two examples – and they are only examples – of travelling along the plank on the tummy and climbing the frame using hands and feet, were chosen.

The body with all its various connotations is an early and recurring frame of reference for young children. In looking at the two activities the children

are asked to name and talk about body parts involved and the actions performed. This gives them two things to keep in mind, which, because they are closely related, is just about right for children of this age. It is not chance that the two activities selected to be shown were very different from each other both in terms of the parts of the body involved and in the ways of moving. This allows ideas about 'different from' to be used to help the children describe the activities they were watching or doing.

In the second, consolidation, phase, the activity chart shows that the children are given a chance to concentrate once more on 'me and my movement'. This time they will be able to do this with greater understanding and clarity because of the shared looking, naming and describing activity which has just taken place. The ability of the adult to move around the group consolidating what has been, and is being, learned is an important part of the session. The time allocation of 'as long as interest is maintained' reflects the fact that with these young children much of what goes on is an individual affair which may be longer and more concentrated for some individuals than for others.

Session 2: handling objects and making them move: versatility and skill in games

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Resource | Balls, bats, sticks, hoops, ropes, bean bags, rings, cones, etc. |
| Age | Six to seven years. |
| Time | Thirty minutes. |
| Challenge | Children asked to collect the apparatus they were using at the end of the previous lesson and practise the activity they had made up. |
| Learning phase | Consolidation (apparatus being used and activity established). |
| Role of adult | To travel round class and comment to individuals and to make general comments to class. To look at two or three activities and discuss with children in terms of what are the difficult parts, what individual children are doing well and what might help to make it even better. |
| Challenge | Children to return to their activities remembering the inherent 'help-hints' they had talked about. |
| Learning phase | Consolidation. |

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Challenge | Children asked to choose different apparatus this time and to find 'unusual' ways to make it move. |
| Learning phase | Guided exploration. |
| Role of adult | To observe and encourage individuals to experiment with 'out of the ordinary' parts of their bodies to make the apparatus move. To anticipate the selection of two children. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one child moving on front of body using his head to make the ball travel • a second child jumping with bean bag between his feet. |
| Looking and talking | Discussing the skills involved in the two activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • amount of control in keeping ball close to head • giving the body two jobs – to grip the bean bag between the feet and to jump well. |
| Challenge | All children encouraged to make their activities more skilled and be prepared to explain in words and movement how they are doing this. |
| Learning phase | Consolidation. |
| Challenge | Children to go back to the apparatus they were using at the start of the lesson and this time make up an activity where the apparatus goes either upwards or forwards. |
| Learning phase | Guided exploration (incorporating consolidation). |
| Role of adult | Selecting two contrasting examples. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one child with rope skipping forwards • another child throwing and catching a rubber ring upwards. |
| Looking and talking | Talking with the children about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the difference in direction • the same body parts being used • different actions. |

Session 2 reviewed

This session is directly structured and likely to exist as one of a series of lessons planned over a given length of time, perhaps four or five weeks. It takes into consideration the assumption that six- and seven-year-olds will be able to remember what they were doing in the previous lesson, although in some cases they may need some help. Secure in this knowledge the teacher

can start with a phase of consolidation – in this case to ask the children to collect the apparatus they used the time before. In this reiterative process the role of the teacher is to enhance the learning of an already established activity. A second period of consolidation follows the observation and discussion of selected activities. This is more concentrated in nature and also presupposes that the children can transfer some of the ‘help-hints’ to their own activities.

The second challenge is carried out within the learning phase of guided exploration where the teacher encourages exploratory activity through the suggestion to choose different apparatus and to find unusual ways to make it move. Two things for the children to remember here: different apparatus and unusual ways of using it. Again two crucial strategies are used: the selection by the teacher of relevant activities and the use made of these by looking and talking together about them. As in the previous lesson the teacher has picked out two very different activities to show the class and to form the basis of discussion. On this occasion it would have been just as valuable to have selected two activities which had components in common, thus extending thought in a classificatory rather than a discriminatory context.

Following a further phase of consolidation the children are prepared for one last task which is to return to the apparatus they were using at the start of the lesson but this time to make their apparatus go up or forwards thus introducing a spatial, trajectory element to their game. It is vital that sufficient time is allowed for the children’s responses to this challenge. In the time allotted to looking and talking together the children are asked to analyse two games, one going forward while skipping and another showing the upward throwing and catching of a rubber ring. These two distinctly different games activities are quite complex. In addition to highlighting the directional differences the teacher takes the opportunity to identify the skill factors needed in each. The lesson ends with the children reworking their games in the light of comments made.

Starting, supporting, checking and recording

Concentration on ways in which children’s movement education can be supported, extended and enriched culminates here with a list of suggestions which may be given to children from three to eight years; to individuals, small groups or classes in either formal or informal situations.

The list is a 'sample' collection of suggestions from one area of movement only, namely agility. It is suggested for 'short-term loan' only for the advantage of the movement classification is that, once thoroughly digested, many, many more such lists may be collated for any type of movement activity. This particular collection starts with just one, and then two, movement ideas which develop in complexity in what is being asked of the children.

In the first instance, the object is to provide some suggestions from which parents and early childhood educators can select what they think is most relevant. However, the list has other uses. It makes it possible to check for areas of movement not given recent attention perhaps levels, or symmetry, or patterns. To check when these suspected omissions were last considered should simply be a task of looking back through the records. Records might show that certain areas have been overused and that well-established and repeated patterns of movement need enlarging and developing along with the implementation of new ones. Importantly the suggested movement content could reinforce and 'flesh out' the dominant schemas being used elsewhere in the home, the play group, the nursery or the school. A child who seems completely absorbed in 'over and under' behaviour may benefit from an immersion in movement situations which provide opportunities of a similar nature which will 'aid and abet' this particular aspect of learning (Athey 1990).

The listed challenges do not have to be used as they appear here, as predetermined ones, and they can be even more open-ended. Alternatively, they can provide a basis from which to assess what is happening in young children's movement; instead of suggesting that children try out certain tasks, the content of those tasks could be a focus of observation. Which children are finding lots of places to jump? Are there examples of children travelling backwards? Who, for days now, has been showing delight in going up and down everything in sight? Adults have a lot to offer in following up these observations by means of supporting and extending them as well as 'spotting' activities which are just emerging or are beginning to be shared.

Children enjoy responding to movement challenges wherever they happen to be. Sometimes they challenge themselves, sometimes they appreciate adults setting challenges and they frequently enjoy setting challenges for each other. The following activities may be those we can see happening freely all around us, or they can form the basis of adult-led experiences.

| ACTIVITY | MOVEMENT FOCUS | LEARNING IMPLICATIONS |
|---|--|---|
| Jumping being practised in one place | Body: action | Need to do activity over and over again – carrying out jumping schema |
| Stretching the body fully while moving forwards | Body: action and shape Space: direction | Two things to be held in mind |
| Moving on the apparatus using only hands and feet | Body: parts emphasised and parts restricted | Encourages invention |
| Travelling round the room with one part of the body leading the way | Body: part leading | As one body part leads the rest of the body needs to ‘line up’ |
| Movement where both sides of the body are doing the same thing | Body: design | Sense of symmetry and balance |
| Balancing on different parts of the body | Body: action and parts taking weight | Alignment of rest of the body according to points of balance |
| Climbing in lots of different places | Body: action | Finding different situations where climbing schema can be used |
| Moving on floor/apparatus on hands and feet travelling in one direction | Body: part highlighted Space: direction | Keeping two things in mind: (a) the body and (b) the space |
| Going under and over the apparatus with some things happening slowly , others quickly | Space: zone Dynamics: time | Concentration on the ‘how’ and ‘where’ of movement |
| Lots of activities on the floor without putting weight on feet | Body: restriction of parts | Emphasising invention in terms of bodily agility |
| Finding ways of passing each other | Relationship: with partner | Having to adapt to partner, to negotiate, to share a common goal |
| Playing follow my leader | Relationship: duo – leading and following | Adapting to leader’s actions, pathway and timing |

Figure 21 A sample list of agility challenges

Summary

Children learn in situations which are neither undemanding nor overwhelming. We can use what we know about the process of learning to help children to build on what they already know, giving them opportunities to struggle, practise and play.

(Roberts 2002: 82)