

Movement and Dance in the Early Years

Mollie Davies



Movement and Dance in Early Childhood

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Movement and Dance in Early Childhood

Second Edition

Mollie Davies



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*To Mary Wilkinson, dear friend and colleague, whose
wisdom, patience and care guided me through the first
edition and whose memory has sustained me through
the second.*

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Preface

Dr Mollie Davies holds an international reputation for her outstanding and scholarly work in the field of Movement and Dance Education. She has influenced many adults and young people with whom she has worked and her contribution has been honoured with an MBE for services to dance education and by a fellowship from the Royal Academy of Dance.

The examples in this unique and ground-breaking book on movement and dance development from birth to eight years show her love of children and a depth of knowledge and practical experience in helping them to become skilled, creative and imaginative in a wide range of movement-oriented activities. She helps early childhood educators and parents in very practical ways and yet her guidance is always rooted in a sound theoretical understanding which she shares in a clear and accessible style.

In this second edition of her book she has updated and expanded the text in the light of recent research and extended her investigation of how young children learn in and through movement. There are now two chapters devoted to dance. The first of these suggests strategies for working with young children while the second suggests ways in which the expressive and artistic aspects of children's movement can be appropriately located within the 'Effective Framework for Adults Working with Children from Birth to Three', the 'Foundation Stage' and at Key Stages 1 and 2. Both these chapters, as all others throughout the book, highlight the interrelationship of theory and practice.

TINA BRUCE
Series Editor
September 2002

Acknowledgements

To all my colleagues, at various stages of my teaching career, I am grateful for the years of sharing which took place and for the wide range of opportunities given to me, many of which have provided material for my writing. And, of course, to the children whose movement continues to interest and delight me.

My involvement with two institutions has played an important part in all the teaching and research which I have undertaken. The first is the Laban Art of Movement Studio (now known as Laban) where my fascination with the field of human movement began. To Rudolf Laban, Lisa Ullman and my many teachers there I am grateful, and especially to Dr Marion North, OBE, who taught me so much about the theory and practice of movement observation and its importance in personality assessment. My experience at the Laban Studio was followed immediately with my time at the Froebel Institute College and here my appreciation is to Molly Brearley, CBE, Principal of the College at the time and to Chris Athey, MEd, author and formerly Principal Lecturer in Education and Leverhulme Research Fellow. Each in her own way has helped me towards an understanding of the rich variety of ways in which young children learn.

My thanks go to the parents, teachers and friends who allowed me to photograph their children and to record their activities and conversations. And to the parents who took photographs of their children for me. Their interest, curiosity and generosity have been an important source of encouragement. I hope that when they read what has been written and see the photographic images of their children they will understand what a significant contribution they have made. I am especially grateful to Terry Kane for his photographic contribution to the first edition and to the front cover of the second edition, to Niki Sianni for her photograph of 'Mothers and Toddlers' and to Catherine Ashmore for allowing the inclusion of her photographs of Hannah. I am

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Finally, I wish to convey appreciation to Professor Tina Bruce, my series editor, who has given me continuous support during the writing of this second edition. She has shared my interests and curiosity, and extended my thinking. I am most grateful to her for her encouragement, gentle guidance – and once again for keeping faith.

Preface for the 0–8 Series

The 0–8 Series has stood the test of time, maintaining a central place among early childhood texts. Practitioners have appreciated the books because, while very practical, the series presents a holistic approach to work with young children, which values close partnership with families and their communities. It is evidence based, drawing on theory and research in an accessible way.

The 0–8 Series, now being revised and updated, continues to deal with the themes of early childhood which have always been of concern and interest to parents, practitioners and the children themselves. The voice of the child has, since 1989, been under threat in education. Each author has made an important contribution in their field of expertise, using this within a sound background of child development and practical experience with children, families, communities, schools and other early childhood settings. The series consistently gives a central place to the interests and needs of children, emphasising the relationship between child development and the socio-cultural learning with which biological and brain development is inextricably linked. The voice of the child is once again being understood as being important if children are to develop and learn effectively, and if adults helping them to learn (teaching them) are to be effective in their work.

The basic processes of communication, movement, play, self-esteem and understanding of self and others, as well as the symbolic layerings in development (leading to dances, reading, writing, mathematical and musical notations, drawing, model-making) never cease to fascinate those who love and spend time with children. Some of the books in this series focus on these processes of development and learning, by looking at children and their contexts in a general way, giving examples as they go. Other books take a look at particular aspects of individual children and the community. Some emphasise the importance of rich physical and cultural provision and careful

consideration of the environment indoors and outdoors and the way that adults work with children.

As Series Editor I am delighted to reintroduce the 0–8 Series to a new readership. The re-launched series enters a more favourable climate than the original series, which survived (and flourished) in a hostile climate of literacy hours for four-year-olds, adult-led learning, and a lack of valuing diversity, multi-lingualism, imagination and creativity. This revised and updated 0–8 Series will inform, support and inspire the next generation of early childhood practitioners in the important work they do, in a climate which will encourage rather than undermine.

I look forward to seeing the impact of the 0–8 Series on the next decade.

PROFESSOR TINA BRUCE
London Metropolitan University
October 2001

Introduction

In the seven years since this book was first published many changes have taken place. There have been significant publications in early childhood literature and a consequent increase in the understanding of young children and the variety of contexts in which they live and learn. The National Curriculum for pupils aged from five to eleven is fully operative and for the first time the Foundation Stage has been enshrined in law.

Personally, a second edition has meant a 'second chance'. A chance to revisit concepts and children, to read extensively, to make new observations and attempt to translate generalities into specifics and problems into opportunities. I have also been able to extend the trans-global perspective by references to children beyond the UK – in Finland, France, Germany, Puerto Rica, and Taiwan.

Essentially, this book is about the multi-faceted role that movement plays in the lives of young children. It explores the nature and function of movement as a central part of their doing, thinking and feeling and highlights the pleasure and sense of well-being which is experienced as they are helped to come to maximise their bodily potential. It argues that attention given by adults to the development of their children's movement, and its significance in the learning process, is crucial right from the start of life. This is not only because it helps towards producing a well-tuned and articulate body, which in itself is a matter of considerable importance, but also because of the significant role movement plays in the development of feeling and thought.

At the hub of the book is a framework of movement which, presented in Chapter 1, permeates the text. Each of the chapters considers one particular set of ideas which gives it a specific emphasis. However, rather like movement itself, these ideas also find their place in other chapters. In this reappraisal I have at times considered movement as a 'virtual' jigsaw puzzle

where pieces fit, change and interlock, resulting in the uniqueness of each and every child.

Having observed ways in which they can be helped to develop thinking, expressing and socialising skills through movement, children are then seen in their roles as early performers, creators and spectators. The physical, intellectual and expressive implications of these roles are developed further in relation to dance in statutory education where ideas are suggested, debated and reflected upon at the Foundation Stage and at Key Stages 1 and 2.

Throughout, photographic illustrations inform the text. Because of the transient and momentary nature of human movement, at places they 'become' the text. The purpose of these, along with the classification, contextual examples, and general guidelines in which they are embedded, is to spark off procedures and practices – or ways and means – which seem most appropriate to a particular setting. Any specific use must be decided upon by the adults concerned, for not only are children unique but so also are the people who care for, nurture and educate them.

What is movement?

Everything that we discover about life, we discover through movement. Light waves reach the eye, sound waves contact the ear. Both smell and taste involve movement. Above all, our capacity to touch and move to gain further experience, confirms our awareness. (Hodgson 2001: 172)

This chapter provides a theoretical framework which serves as a reference point, or identity kit, for the many examples of children's activities which illustrate subsequent chapters of this book. It also provides a way of thinking about, supporting, enriching and recording children's movement for all those concerned with early childhood education.

The indivisibility of movement from human functioning may be one of the reasons why its importance in terms of child development is not always given the serious recognition it deserves. It is so inbuilt that it is not until movement is seen to be dysfunctional or ineffective in some way, such as in autism, depression, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, cerebral palsy or mood swings, that it emerges as a significant educational phenomenon. Post-graduate Dance Movement Therapy programmes on offer in the UK and elsewhere include diagnostic and treatment tools in their training and, increasingly, dance and movement join art, drama and music therapies in their bid to modify and enhance living. In the therapeutic context non-verbal communication of the body is 'incorporated with other research to refine coping distinctions and measure changes' and, as such, is universally acknowledged. (Bartenieff 1980: viii)

While welcoming such advancements in the therapeutic field, I believe that movement plays an equally important role in the growth, development and education of all children. However, because movement of young children is seen to be a part and parcel of their everyday lives the danger is that it can be taken for granted and overlooked in terms of its importance in the educational spectrum. Those concerned with child care and education may

see no reason to classify and analyse something which seems so obvious. In contrast, however, as soon as children show the first signs of emergent reading skills, help is at hand; resources, methods and procedures are actively sought and discussion within and between family units abounds. Similarly, as children's interests in numeracy become apparent, parents are the first to join in the bigger/smaller, taller/shorter phase of discrimination. Even if parents and early childhood practitioners do not have detailed knowledge in these areas, realising its importance they seek it out and provide materials and experiences which assist learning at this stage.

In movement, too, important achievements are noted, valued and discussed with pride. Photograph albums and family CD libraries are filled with illustrations documenting such events as early, unsteady steps, digging in the sand, kicking a ball and swimming without support. But there the similarity ends. Although there is often movement-oriented provision in parks, playgrounds and gardens, detailed guidance for promoting, observing and recognising activities stimulating growth, development and creativity is far behind that in other areas of learning. Sometimes adults 'sense' what is needed to help children initiate, consolidate or progress in their movement activities but, however valuable and successful this sensing may sometimes seem to be, it needs to be related to a much larger canvas of knowledge. If parents and early years practitioners are to function knowingly it is necessary to extend beyond sensing. If they are to take responsibility for movement as an important area of children's experience then they need to know what 'constitutes' movement just as they need to know about all the other areas of learning for which they make provision.

The challenge was to find a model which was sufficiently proven and sufficiently flexible to relate to young children in a variety of situations: a model or framework which would establish general principles and cater not simply for provision but also for extended learning in objective and creative contexts. In choosing the framework used throughout this book acknowledgement is made to the theories of Rudolf Laban (1948, 1966, 1980) and those concerned with the development of his ideas including Bartenieff (1980), Lamb (1965), North (1972), Preston (1963), Preston-Dunlop (1998), Redfern (1973), Russell (1965) and Ullmann who continued his work after his death. After a remarkable life spent in researching movement in a variety of theoretical and practical contexts Laban's findings remain the most pertinent and relevant available today. As Hodgson (2001: 55) writes:

A good deal of Laban's work and theory forms the foundation of so much of our understanding of movement, that quite often people come to regard it now as common belief.

This allegiance may be partly due to his guiding principles which echo those of leading educational theorists of today, and which permeate my own thinking. Laban did not create a 'one and only' model but instead inspired others to take up and develop his principles in the variety of fields in which he worked. Preston-Dunlop (1998: cover), Laban scholar and researcher, writes:

His ideas have innovations not just in dance, but also in acting and performance, in the study of non verbal communication, in ergonomics, in educational theory and child development, in personality assessment and psychotherapy.

In her conclusion she comments (ibid.: 269):

Today his [Laban's] concepts are alive and well, adapted, pruned and developed to accommodate the needs and demands of the twenty-first century.

Theoretical framework of movement

Human movement is not only unique to the species but is also unique to each individual within it. To understand and recognise the complexity of individual uniqueness it is necessary first to establish the common denominators from which personal movement springs. **The body, the instrument of action**, is central to the classification of movement. Giving colour and form to the 'playing' of that instrument are three important and interrelated categories:

- *dynamics* which relates to how the instrument moves
- *space* which refers to ways in which the body inhabits and uses space
- *relationships* which identifies ways in which the body acts and interacts with people and objects.