



“What parents teach is themselves, as models of what is human – by their moods, their reactions, their facial expressions and actions. These are the real things parents need to be aware of, and of how they affect their children. Allow them to know you, and it might become easier for them to learn about themselves.”
– Magda Gerber

Movement & Literacy

By Trisha Martinez

Recently, the Kowhai children have shown great interest in writing their names. They have been enjoying looking for their names and examining them at the beginning of meal times (to facilitate a smooth flow from washing hands to morning tea, the children are encouraged to find their names on the table and sit at the table where their name is). The Kowhai children are demonstrating amazing literacy-related skills and dispositions including listening, focus, concepts of print, reading books on their own, and participating in music and movement experiences.

As an early childhood teacher, I've always appreciated and believed that movement and literacy are interrelated. Physical activities support children in developing ways of communicating and making meaning. Movement contributes greatly in establishing a foundation for literacy skills including listening, speaking, writing, and reading. When I ask myself exactly how this happens, somehow I cannot articulate it...so I did a little bit of research to support my belief, refresh and improve my knowledge, and, in turn, further support children's learning.

Literature on literacy and movement has reminded me of how the body and the mind are intertwined and inseparable. Physical activity enhances physical well-being. It helps people to be mentally alert and thus, ready for further learning. Studies have shown that oxygen intake during physical exercise strengthens neural connections. Research has shown how young children's mental focus and concentration levels are enhanced after participating in physical activity. Research also indicates a positive correlation between physical activity and academic achievement.

Reading about movement and literacy prompts me to refer to movement as the child's "first" language. I was reminded about how thought/thinking can only be expressed through activity. Indeed, movement, no matter how small or big, is a form of self-expression. An infant who wants to get an object crawls towards it. A toddler who is hungry picks up a piece of banana from the plate. A young child who gets hurt cries. All of these require the use of different parts of the body, of muscles. As children move and make

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use of their muscles, they express themselves. Apart from movement being a form of language itself, physical activity that requires the use of small muscles such as the eyes, fingers, lips, tongue provides the building blocks for speaking, writing, and reading.

Movement that is accompanied by verbal language, for instance, when someone describes how a child moves as she uses a playground equipment or when the child performs movements to a song, helps the child grasp meanings of words. The child understands what "over" means as he jumps over the rope. He appreciates what "steep" means as he goes up a steep hill. He learns what "squishy" means as he manipulates squishy play dough. Concepts become rich and meaningful as children physically experience them.

It is interesting to read about how certain components of movement such as balance, coordination, spatial awareness, spinning, crossing the midline, swinging, and rolling stimulate the brain. For instance, research has shown that children who have not had a lot of experience in orienting one's body in space by moving in different directions (up, on, under, inside, over, etc.) have difficulty with letter identification and orientation of symbols on a page. Crossing the midline (the imaginary line down the middle of one's body) as when one paints the left and right side of the paper using one hand (instead of using the right hand for the right side of the paper and then the left hand for the left side of the paper) or when one reaches for an object on the left with the right hand (and

vice versa) supports the child in literacy tasks such as writing across the page using one hand. It also enhances bilateral coordination wherein both left and right brain have to work together such as in reading tasks. I can never fully grasp how certain movements enhance different areas of the brain but having a strong belief that the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional domains of development are interrelated makes it easy to subscribe to.

One idea that is quite new to me but makes a lot of sense is on rhythm and movement. Rhythm is said to be an important component of movement. There is rhythm in walking, running, galloping, skipping, and going up and down the stairs. Although rhythm is more commonly associated with music, words and sentences consist of rhythm as well. Sounds, silences, pauses, intonation, and stresses are all components of rhythm in language. Thus, the rhythm that children develop when they move supports them in language development.

There are indeed many links between movement and literacy. I think it is amazing that something so innate in the child provides the foundation for learning about symbols that human beings created. At TLC, we strive to provide an environment that encourages movement, whether it is through a non-structured or a structured learning experience, not only to promote literacy development but to enhance the child's well-being.

The core elements of the bodily-kinesthetic intelligence are control of one's bodily motions and the capacity to handle objects skillfully (206). Gardner elaborates to say that this intelligence also includes a sense of timing, a clear sense of the goal of a physical action, along with the ability to train responses so they become like reflexes.

In theory, people who have bodily-kinesthetic intelligence should learn better by involving muscular movement (e.g. getting up and moving around into the learning experience), and are generally good at physical activities such as sports or dance. They may enjoy acting or performing, and in general they are good at building and making things. They often learn best by doing something physically, rather than by reading or hearing about it. Those with strong bodily-kinesthetic intelligence seem to use what might be termed "muscle memory," drawing on it to supplement or in extreme cases even substitute for other skills such as verbal memory.

Careers that suit those with this intelligence include: athletes, pilots, dancers, musicians, actors, surgeons, builders, police officers, and soldiers. Although these careers can be duplicated through virtual simulation, they will not produce the actual physical learning that is needed in this intelligence. (Wikipedia)

