

Chapter 3

Moving and Dancing to Music

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Importance of Movement

Movement is important. Children love to be active. They need to be active. They are building their bodies. They build muscles by using their muscles. They build strong dense bones by having muscles pull against the bones requiring more strength. They develop their circulatory system by being active and requiring more blood to supply oxygen to muscles and cells. They develop complex neural pathways and circuitry by engaging in more complex movements requiring more complex coordination. Thus, children are designed to move and be active. The body requires movement for good health and for building itself. The body adapts to demands. If muscles are not used, they atrophy. If a person wants to play the piano, or dance as a ballerina, the person has to build these abilities through repetitive practice over time. This is because it takes time to physically build the new physical structures in the body. This development won't take place by sitting and thinking about it. It is only achieved through work.

It has been known that many elderly become frail and lose bone density. The result is that they fracture bones more easily. Therefore, it was thought the solution to the problem was to give the elderly calcium supplements. However, it has been found that a better solution for creating bone density is activity. Calcium supplements deposit calcium in the arteries and heart vessels. As a result, people develop calcified hearts. A better solution has turned out to be engaging the elderly in more activity. Active people live longer and stay healthy longer. This is true for everyone including children. Activity is especially important for young children who are building their systems.

Space for Movement and Dance

As a result of the bodies need for movement, young children feel like being active. They like to run about, climb trees and rocks, turn summersaults and cartwheels, spin around, and roll down hills. They like games that foster development. So, children like to play games such as Hop Scotch and Jump Rope. And, they love to dance and move to music. Through moving to music, children listen and feel the music with their entire body. And so, it is important that adults provide the conditions children need to be able to move to music. Every classroom needs to have an area that can be used for dance and movement. Such an indoor space can be an area that is also used for group time, for singing, for story telling, and group lessons, demonstrations, and performances.

In terms of space, somewhere, the classroom needs enough space for everyone to be able to move about and dance. For the whole group, it may be that there is only enough space outdoors. It may be that indoors there is only have enough space for a few people to dance at one time. In that case, it is helpful to have an indoor space where a few children can choose to move to music, and then also have an outdoor space for whole group activity.

In the space provided for movement indoors, it is ideal to have the space adjacent to a wall that has a large full length mirror like you might see in a ballet studio so children can view themselves as they move. They love to move while they listen to music and see themselves as they move. This helps develop body awareness and an awareness of position in space.

Sound System

The provided space will need a good sound system so that the music is easy to access and has a good sound quality. If we go back in time, every elementary classroom used to have a piano and teachers were required to know how to play it. Pianos were replaced by record players, which were then replaced by tape recorders, which were then replaced by CD players. Now, CD players can be replaced by a mobile device such as a tablet, smart phone, laptop, or computer.

A mobile device does not need to be expensive. In fact, a used device can work perfectly well. An older smart phone or tablet can provide a great solution. Many people are willing to donate older smart phones or tablets when they purchase an updated model. In addition, a number of companies sell refurbished models for prices much lower than the price of new units. You can turn the cellular feature off on an older phone and the other features will still work well. A music system does not need to be large. A phone that fits in the hand is portable and serves as a better sound solution than a record player or even CD player. It provides good sound quality and provides easy random access to selections. Furthermore, it does not require any media to handle that can get scratched or damaged. And, as long as the unit has bluetooth, it can probably be connected to inexpensive bluetooth wireless speakers.

How the system is to be controlled is dependent upon whether it is intended to be used by the teacher or by the children. Ideally, both options should be available. The teacher should be able to draw upon a library of music for group dancing. However, in addition to group dancing organized by the teacher, children should have the ability to select music for dancing by themselves or with friends. It is important that children have an opportunity to participate in music socially and independently. To meet this goal, the teacher needs to provide a

library of music that children can access and operate independently. (See the discussion on creating listening opportunities for children in the previous chapter on Music Listening.) For older children, this can be the same sound system that is available for quiet listening, or it can be a separate system. However, for younger children, it works best to have one sound system set up for quiet listening, and a separate sound system set up for dancing and moving to music.

As previously mentioned, one approach for enabling children to engage in listening to music independently, is for children to be able to pick up a small mobile touch device such as an iTouch, iPhone, mini iPad, full iPad, or Android or Microsoft device which enables the children to choose music by pointing to a piece, and then listen to it through headphones. As a result, a child can be independent and not disturb the rest of the class. Because the mobile device and headphones are portable, the child can choose to take the set to any location in the classroom for listening.

For dancing, an individual can use a mobile device and wireless headphones in space large enough for movement. If a child wishes to dance with friends, or a larger group, the sound unit will need to be connected to a speaker system. Today, a new option is to use a wireless speaker system.

Movement in Rhythm to Music

The first goal of Musical Movement Activities is to help children develop the ability to move in rhythm to music and feel the beat.

Young children first need to develop the ability to coordinate their movements, feel the rhythm of the music, and move in time to the beat. The best approach to achieving this goal is to simply let the children have the freedom to move to music without directions or verbalization from the adult.

In this stage of development, we are not trying to teach children how to dance. We are not teaching steps, movement patterns, or sequences of movements. Instead we are allowing children to spontaneously move to music as they feel it.

To this end, it is important to put on music, or make music available to children to choose, and watch how they respond.

- 1) Are the children stimulated to respond to the music. If the music doesn't stimulate them to start moving to it, try some other music. Find music that they can't resist. Don't say anything negative about the music. Just try something else.
- 2) If the children start moving to the music and get engaged in the music, watch their coordination to see if they are able to move in rhythm to the music. If they are not engaged in the music, or are having trouble moving to the time of the music, notice whether it may be too fast or too slow. It may require movement patterns for which they are not ready. A gallop is more difficult than a walking or trotting step. A waltz, or music in 3 meter, is more difficult than music in 2 meter. Children usually have trouble skipping until around the age of 5.

General Progression of Movement Activities.

First Independent Movement Activity

Begin with music in 2 meter to which children like to bounce. (Remember that you should choose music that has stood the test of time and music that children will be less likely to have a chance to hear today.) To this end, it is helpful draw upon American and International folk dance music. Dixieland music can work well, as can dance music composed by classical composers such as Beethoven, Brahms, Strauss, and others. This will help prepare the children for when they get older and

they start to play music based on different dance forms such as the waltz. They will have a feel for the music.

The purpose of these selections is to stimulate a spontaneous interest in moving freely to the music. The children move independently of each other. Each child enjoys being engaged in his or her own movements. Children can independently choose some music and start moving to it, or the teacher can put on some music for the children.

In 1924 Elise Braun Barnett was working in a kind of daycare center, conducted along the same lines as the Casa dei Bambini, which attracted the interest of Dr. Montessori. On one of Dr. Montessori's visits to the program, she found Elise Braun Barnett playing the piano for the children and began helping Elise develop the teaching of music along the lines of Dr. Montessori's principals of education. Dr. Montessori then invited Elise to conduct sessions on the teaching of music in courses in Rome, Milan, and London. Elise's association with Dr. Montessori lasted until Dr. Montessori's death in 1952. During that time, Elise continued to engage children in music and refine her music selections to those that children particularly enjoyed, as well as to refine an effective sequence of music for children's movement. Her selection of music consisted of a collection of folk tunes and excerpts from pieces by well known composers selected specifically for young children ranging from 3 years to 8 years old. In 1957 Elise published a book with Schocken Books which presents Elise's music program for having children listen to music through movement.

“Montessori & Music, Rhythmic Activities for Young Children,”
by Elise Braun Barnett.

In her book, Elise wrote, “They (children) like to move with music. They express their feeling for the music with their whole body. If they are encouraged in this expression, they gain the inner satisfaction that comes from the union of their movement with music. The music becomes part of them, and this is, after all, the truest measure of appreciation.”

Elise went on to say, “Since the music that children hear forms the basis for their future musical development, it is of the utmost importance that they be exposed to the very best. It is with this idea in mind that the material for this (her) book is chosen. The folk tunes were selected for their rhythmic qualities, spontaneity of expression, and simplicity. These qualities are closely allied with the things children like and feel. The same qualities are also found in the music of our greatest composers. I have selected those compositions that lend themselves most readily to movement.”

In explaining her approach to working with children in music, Elise wrote, “Once the child begins to concentrate on an activity, the teacher does not interfere or interrupt. Montessori knew that the valid impulse to learning is self-motivation.” “She (the teacher) offers the child stimulation, but ultimately, the child learns by himself and is motivated by the work itself.”

Unfortunately, today, Elise’s book is difficult to find and afford. And so, based upon the principles that Elise has expressed in her book, a set of playlists has been organized on Spotify that follow her guidelines. These playlists are listed on the following webpage: www.montessoriworld.org/MusicEducation/Media/Movement/index.html.

Since Elise’s book is out of print, difficult to find, very expensive for a used book, and is basically a book of sheet

music for someone who knows how to play the piano, Elise's basic principles are quoted below. These principles will help a teacher or parent to utilize the movement playlists that are listed on the webpage listed above.

“The pieces...are divided into different rhythms corresponding to various movements that children are able to perform. Experience has shown that there are three groups of movements embracing nine different rhythms. They are presented here in the order in which the child develops the muscular coordination to perform them.

1. Spontaneous movements: walking, running, galloping, and skipping. (The tempo of the music is adjusted to the children's speed).
2. Adjusted spontaneous movements: trotting (slow running), slow walking, and slow marching. (The tempo of the children's movements is adjusted to the tempo of the music.)
3. Step patterns: a waltz step and a polka step.

In the first group (ages three and a half to four years), pieces using rhythms from Group 1 are suitable. Pieces for walking, running, and galloping can be introduced to this age group, but not those for skipping. Though skipping is a spontaneous movement, it cannot usually be performed with ease by children under five years.

In the second group (four to five years), the child is able to adjust the tempo of his spontaneous movement to the tempo of the music he hears. Music for trotting and slow walking, as well as slow marching, can be introduced to him at this time.

When the child has more coordination, he can try simple dance steps. It will now be easy for him to learn the steps of the waltz and the polka.”

When the teacher feels that a change of pace might be welcome in the classroom, the teacher can put on some music. Elise says, “Some children will interrupt whatever they are doing and joyfully move to the music; others more cautious will watch for a while before joining; others may just remain ‘hearers.’ There is no urging by anyone to join.”

Elise goes on to say that she has found the following plan to be very successful.

“Walking and running as contrasting rhythms would be introduced together at the beginning. Only the first piece of a group should be used, until the children are able to move smoothly to that piece. Since most of the selections are short, and since children like repetition, it is advisable to play the pieces over several times without pause.”

“Once the children know their rhythms, they enjoy hearing a succession of pieces in different rhythms and tempi, and they react to them without any direction from the teacher.”

“Even though the children at first are interested mostly in the rhythm of the music, they later become aware of the melody and the musical character of each piece, and they will express the awareness in their movements.”

“The adult should not talk to the children while the music is being played.”

“Encourage singing and all other spontaneous expressions.”

“The music activity session should be planned to include about eight to twelve pieces. The program of each session should have pieces in contrasting moods, tempi, and rhythms. Children often help in programming by asking for their favorite selections.”

Elise then goes on to say,

“A wonderful phenomenon occurred with children who for some time were exposed to the music. They suddenly started to sing the music. While they had been seemingly reacting to the rhythm only, they had absorbed the melodies. It was almost a miracle to see that little children were able to sing more than one hundred ‘pieces’ without having been taught.”

Group Moving Together Activity

As you notice the children being able to move in rhythm to the music by themselves, you can begin to introduce them to moving together as a whole group.

Children are still given music to which they can bounce and step to. It is music that they have successfully moved to in rhythm, and they can feel the beat. Now, however, they are going to be introduced to moving together as a group to the music spontaneously in simple patterns led by the teacher. The teacher

does not tell them the patterns ahead of time. They will pick up what happens as it happens. That provides a fun new challenge.

Simple Movement of a Line

Start by having everyone get in a line and hold hands. The teacher will be in the middle of the line after the teacher puts on the music. The teacher has everyone stand and wait for the end of the introduction to the music. Then, when the “A” part of the music starts, the teacher says, “forward,” and the teacher, holding hands with children on both sides, starts moving forward in rhythm to the music. The whole line follows forward as a unit.

When the line can’t go forward any further, the teachers says, “reverse,” and pulls the line backwards to the starting point. When the starting point is reached, the teacher says, “forward” again and pulls the whole line forward. That will be followed by another “reverse.”

Then, to provide variety, the teacher says, “bend” or “down,” and bends over at the waste as the teacher pulls the group forward. When the line can’t go forward any further, the teacher then says, “up” and stands up straight while pulling the line backwards until they get to the starting position.

This can be repeated several times.

With the next piece, if the children have responded well (some children may have fallen down, and that is taken all in fun, and there may be some giggling and screams of pleasure), the teacher continues and may add some new patterns.

The Line forms a Snake and Circle

To introduce a new pattern, this time the teacher may join the group at the end of the line after putting on a different piece of music. With this new piece, the teacher will start with the same patterns already introduced. However, after having gone up and back several times, the teacher may now say, "snake," and start pulling the line around the room weaving in and out like a snake. Eventually the teacher may catch up to the other end of the line, take the last person's hand, and then say "circle" and lead the group around in a big circle. After going in one direction, the teacher can then say, "reverse," and start pulling the circle in the opposite direction. Some children may stumble, but that is all in fun and everyone catches on to what the group is doing. The teacher has not given directions before starting. Everything is spontaneous.

After going around in one direction, and then reversing directions, and doing that several times, the teacher can let go with one hand and say, "snake," and start leading the weaving movement of a snake.

Next, the teacher can lead the snake into a straight line and then say, "Forward," and pull the line in a forward direction and repeat the forward and back patterns to which the children are already familiar. That makes for a fun group activity. And, it helps establish a sense of community and belonging. Everyone gets to participate.

Those patterns of movement can be repeated on following days. All together then, children are encouraged to dance independently by themselves, and there can also be times for spontaneous group movement activities as described above.

All of this is to music involving simple 2 meter rhythms that are easy for stepping in time.

Swing Your Partner

While at this stage, it is fun to introduce the idea of swing your partner. Children can hold hands and swing each other around, or, they can lock elbows and swing each other around.

They can enjoy this independently as pairs, and this can be added to the group activity by the teacher calling out to “swing your partner,” after having moved into forming a circle, or having formed a snake. They can then go back to a snake or circle and go back and forth as they hear the teacher’s call.

Planned Sequence of Moves

Next, after children have been enjoying the spontaneous group sessions, the teacher might announce that it might be fun to figure out the moves they want to do before they start. Invite the children to suggest what move they want to do first, and then what they want to do second and third.

Accept each suggestion and summarize the ideas as they are made. And then ask if everyone remembers what they have decided. The teacher can then summarize the sequence. Then, the teacher will lead the sequence that was planned together.

When the children have gotten the idea, the teacher can ask if anyone would like to repeat back the sequence. And then, everyone does the sequence together.

Follow the Leader

Now the teacher can introduce the idea of “follow the leader.” After the children are familiar with all the variations of a group activity, the teacher can ask if a child would like to volunteer to be the leader.

As a variation, the teacher starts leading the line of children weaving around the room like a snake, but without holding hands. Instead, he or she asks the children to do what teacher does as he or she leads the group. The teacher may bend over. The teacher may raise his or her hands above his or her head. The teacher may move his or her arms out to the side and back.

After the children get the idea, the teacher can ask if a child would like to volunteer to be the leader.

Other Rhythm Activities

During this stage of musical development, the teacher can introduce other rhythm activities to help children practice enjoying the rhythm of music in different ways.

Clapping Activities and Clapping Games

Children will enjoy a variety of clapping games and activities. There are a number of books and resources for teachers on clapping games and rhythm activities. Children often pass on fun clapping games they have done with friends or their parents. Pat-a-Cake Pat-a-Cake is an example. You can find examples on the web in YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edNIAZFU3g>

Rhythm Instruments

Another type of activity that children enjoy is using rhythm instruments like rhythm sticks, and spoons.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U0Tp8-NjsvM>

Second Level of Independent Movement

Introduce music that requires deliberate timing or more coordination.

Timing - slow walks, slow marches, marches trotting, running.

Coordination - steps like gallop, polka, skipping, and waltz.

Once children are able to move in rhythm to 2 meter music that has a tempo that is fairly close to children's natural movements, children are next introduced to music that requires them to adjust their movement to fit the music. A wider variety of music is introduced to help children develop a feel for different moods, tempos, and types of movements. Music from different classic ballets is very useful for this purpose.

Slow Walks, Marches, and Faster Trotting and Running.

Children are introduced to music with different tempos. The format for activities does not change.

Free Independent Movement

Children are given opportunity to move freely.

It is important for children to have a chance to realize they need to adjust their movements to fit to the music. They need to get a feel for different tempos, moods, emotional expressions, and a wider range of movements.

Group Movement

In a Montessori classroom, children are introduced to an activity called "Walking on the Line." There are a number of variations of this activity. It is a terrific activity for practicing walking to music with a slow walking tempo and slow marches. Children may need to experiment, and it may take them awhile to get the feel of music that requires slow steps. For slow marches, in this activity, don't worry about stepping with the left foot on the first beat. At the beginning, children need to develop a feel for marching a slow march.

The teacher puts on music with different tempos and let's the children get a feel for adjusting their movement to fit the tempo of the music.

Next, the teacher can introduce music that calls for different movements.

Children love to be taught to how to march. They have been stepping freely to march music. Now, they are going to be introduced to stepping on the first beat with the left foot and marching left - right, left - right. Children like to be taught the following commands and how to carry them out:

"ATTENTION": Heels are brought together and on the same line, knees straight, Arms hanging straight at the sides, Chest up, shoulders back and level. Eyes looking straight to the front, heels together smartly and audibly.

"(Stand) At, EASE": Move the left foot to the left so that the feet are shoulder width apart. This command allows you to relax. You may not talk.

"Forward, MARCH": forward marching movement in cadence.

"Right (left), FACE": A turn to the right (on left foot).

"About, FACE": A complete 180° turn to the right

Column Right (left), MARCH": A turn to the right(left) while marching.

"Company, HALT": Take one more step then freeze.

Next comes the gallop. I remember the first time I put a gallop on in my classroom. The children were all outside with an assistant and I was setting up the sound system. To run a test, I put on a gallop and a little girl came into the room and started galloping all around the room. It was spontaneous. I didn't say a word. That is just what she felt like doing. I have found that after children have begun responding to the rhythm of music and feeling the beat, they will spontaneously gallop to a piece that is a gallop. I just like to let them respond naturally to the music. A gallop composed by a member of the Strauss family works well to that end.

Once children have been introduced to the gallop and are comfortable with that movement, they are ready to learn the polka. A simple polka can consists of a gallop starting with one foot, and then a gallop starting with the other foot while turning in the process. It is fun done with a partner.

Singing Games and Dances

For generations children have handed down a number of singing games and dances that they enjoy. Songs like "Ring Around the Rosie" and "A-Tisket, A-Tasket." Children sing these songs unaccompanied and move to the sound of their own voices. These are wonderful, fun, and natural movement activities for young children.

Lois Choksy and David Brummitt have collected and published a number of these singing games in their book, “120 Singing Games and Dances for Elementary Schools.”

http://www.amazon.com/Singing-Games-Dances-Elementary-Schools/dp/0136350380/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1315377334&sr=8-1

In order to provide a sense of the very useful and valuable content covered in this book, below is a brief overview. The content provides a progression of activities for children from 3 years of age up through the upper elementary grades.

Choksy and Brummitt begin with some “Moving in Place” songs for 3 and 4 year olds like,

“Rain, Rain, Go Away,”
“Eency Weency Spider,”

and rhymes like, “Hickory, Dickory Dock.”

Next comes “Free Movement in Space” intended for K-1. This does not mean movement without thought. Instead, it means that children explore the possibilities for movement in 3 different ways:

- “1. direction - forward, backward, sideways,”
- “2. body position - higher or lower in space”
- “3. movement type - step, skip, run, hop, slide, gallop, tiptoe.

These are more structured games and dances like:

Engine Number 9
Down by the Station

Hop Old Squirrel
Hey Betty Martin

Next are Circle Games and Dances

These are of the following types:

“Acting-Out Games and Dances” like:

Ring Around the Rosie
Teddy Bear
Here We go Round the Mulberry Bush
Looby Loo
Did You Ever See a Lassie?

“Partner Choosing Games” like:

The Farmer in the Dell,
The Muffin Man

“Chase Games”

A-Tisket, A-Tasket
I Wrote a Letter to My Love
The Mill Wheel
Mouse, Mouse

“Games with Arch Forming”

Here Comes a Bluebird
Ti-de-o

Further types of games and dances are:

“Winding Games”

“Double Circles”

Circles with Square Dance Steps

Then, for children in the upper elementary grades there are:

Singing Squares

Line Games and Dances

Passing Games

Clapping Games

And, lastly, there is information on Creating Games and Dances.

Dance

Once children have mastered moving to music in rhythm, and can adjust to the tempo of music, and have mastered skipping and simple step patterns such as the polka and waltz, and follow calls such as to move in line forward and backward, form a snake and a circle, and swing a partner, they are ready to learn simple folk dances. Then, as they move through the elementary school grades they can progress onto more complicated folk dances and international folk dances.

An excellent resource from which to develop a folk dance curriculum is provided by the New England Dancing Masters Productions.

<http://www.dancingmasters.com/store/index.html>

I recommend:

- 1) Instructional Video: The Chimes of DunKirk: Teaching Dance to Children (This is the dance DVD). This is really excellent and very helpful.
- 2) The Chimes of DunKirk: Teaching Dance to Children (This is the book with instructions, printed music, and background information). Be sure to also get the CD which contains music to which your students can dance. The Book, DVD, and CD are all very valuable.
- 3) Sashay the Donut: Even more dances for just about anyone. (Get both the book and CD)
- 4) Listen to the Mockingbird: More Great Dances for Children, Schools, and Communities (Get both the book and CD)
- 5) Jump Jim Joe: Great Singing Games for Children (Get both the book and CD)
- 6) Down in the Valley: More Great Singing Games for Children. (Get both the book and CD)

I also like to use;

Traditional Barn Dances Calls & Fiddling. This contains some good simple dances and a very helpful video glossary. http://www.amazon.com/Traditional-Barn-Dances-Calls-Fiddling/dp/0736076123/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1314158127&sr=8-1

This is a book that includes a DVD and two music CDs (one with calls, and one without).

Ballroom Dance

For the upper elementary grades of 4, 5 and 6, it is interesting to view the DVD of "Mad Hot Ballroom." This is an award-winning film that follows New York City 4th, 5th, and 6th graders as they become involved in ballroom dance.

The DVD is available through Amazon at:

https://www.amazon.com/Mad-Hot-Ballroom-Heather-Berman/dp/B000ADS6DA/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1501630708&sr=8-1&keywords=mad+hot+ballroom+dvd

It is also available through Amazon's instant video at:

https://www.amazon.com/Mad-Ballroom-Tara-Devon-Gallagher/dp/B007WBROD6/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1501630832&sr=8-1&keywords=mad+hot+ballroom+instant+video

Upper Elementary students really enjoy learning the various ballroom dances.

According to the Wikipedia, the American Style Ballroom Dances are:

Smooth

Waltz: 28–30 bars per minute 30–32 bars per minute for Bronze

Tango: 30 bars per minute 30–32 bars per minute for Bronze

Foxtrot: 30 bars per minute 32–34 bars per minute for Bronze

Viennese Waltz: 53–54 bars per minute 54 bars per minute for Bronze

Rhythm

Cha Cha: 30 bars per minute

Rumba: 30–32 bars per minute 32–36 bars per minute for Bronze

East Coast Swing: 36 bars per minute 34–36 bars per minute for Bronze

Bolero: 24 bars per minute 24–26 bars per minute for Bronze

Mambo: 47 bars per minute 48–51 bars per minute for Bronze

It is possible to find a number of tutorials on YouTube on teaching or learning each of the above dances. In addition, there are lots of examples of ballroom competitions.

Upper elementary aged students can have fun joining together with friends researching how to dance a particular type of ballroom dance, learn it, and then teach it to others.