



# Introduction

During the thirty-five years that I have taught movement classes in public and private schools, teachers have often approached me and expressed interest in bringing creative movement into their own classrooms. But they have always quickly added that they didn't know where to start, or that they didn't know how to present movement concepts in an organized way. From the outset, the enthusiasm and interest of these teachers have been a primary inspiration for me. This book has been written for all those teachers of preschool children and child care providers who have wanted to bring movement into their classrooms but weren't sure where to begin.

For teachers with no formal dance training, the idea of bringing structured movement into a classroom may be daunting. Movement traditionally has not been as widely used in classrooms as other art forms, such as music, visual art, and drama, and many teachers may not know where to begin. In fact, movement is very accessible, and requires almost no materials. With a small drum or tambourine, a few recorded musical selections, a classroom space, and a guided lesson plan, you can present a playful, imaginative, and enriching class to your students.

I have found that the most difficult part of teaching a preschool movement class is not teaching the movement skills themselves, but learning how to work with young children. Because teachers are already familiar with handling a classroom full of young children, incorporating structured movement into the lesson plan can be a very straightforward process. In fact, it is a natural addition to the curriculum because young

children love to move, and movement then becomes another helpful instructional tool for the teacher.

*Dance, Turn, Hop, Learn!* is designed to bridge the gap for teachers who recognize that movement can be a valuable tool in the classroom but who are not familiar with teaching structured movement classes. The thirty-eight lessons in this book will take you through a year of movement exploration and imagination and will give you the confidence to make creative movement a basic part of your classroom.

## Movement Is Learning

Movement is one of the most basic and natural ways that children explore their surroundings. Every time a child moves, she is learning about her world. When a child drops a block and sees it fall to the floor, he is learning about gravity. When she plays with a doll, she is learning about social roles and about caring and nurturing. In the simple act of doing, the child is learning. All learning is first experiential and then conceptual. And much experiential learning for young children is done with their own bodies through their everyday physical interactions with their environment.

In the creative dance class, children explore different ways of moving and try on many different roles. In doing so, the child is learning how different parts of her body work, refining her large and fine motor skills, and beginning to understand concepts in the physical world such as speed, energy, and spatial orientation. The child is also practicing social skills such as listening, following directions, learning body control,

and participating in a group activity. Movement can also serve as a springboard for learning about other subjects such as nature, communities, reading, and counting.

In addition, with the increasing emphasis placed on physical fitness as rates of childhood obesity rise, structured movement classes can be a wonderful way to teach children that movement and exercise can be fun and exciting. In many early child care environments, the large motor skills practice is limited to outside play or other open spaces for running and jumping. Bringing organized movement into the classroom can help children appreciate all the ways their bodies can move and make movement throughout the day a natural part of their lives.

So how can creative movement help a child in his journey of learning about the world? Because movement and learning are interwoven concepts in a young child's life, it follows that the use of structured movement in the classroom can be a positive, nurturing influence in a child's development. This exploration of the principles of movement, guided by the teacher, stimulates the children to engage in active, imaginative play, which leads to physical, intellectual, emotional, and creative growth.

## **PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT**

Within structured movement classes, the teacher can help to promote the development of young children's physical skills. This can be accomplished by channeling the child's love of movement into a specific activity. Creative movement classes are a time for children to do the things they already love to do, such as run, jump, turn, and move to music. A teacher might introduce a new skill by tapping into the child's love of one of these movements that he has already mastered. For example, a teacher can use the child's love of running, and guide the child to master a more complex and refined type of run, such as a gallop. The classes in this book help to lay a foundation for teaching and refining children's motor skills, while at the same time making the learning process enjoyable.

A very important component of children's physical development is learning how to control their own bodies. There is no better way for children to learn this self-control than in a structured movement class. This body control is not only important for children, it is a social skill that, when mastered by the students,

ultimately contributes to a more positive classroom environment for the students and teacher. When children are in a structured movement class, they learn the range of movement of the parts of their bodies, and they learn that they have a personal space of their own, within which they are moving. They learn that other children also have a personal space, and that those boundaries should be respected. They become accustomed to listening, processing the instructions, and, finally, incorporating the movement instructions into their own bodies. They learn to slow down and stop, control the speed at which they move, change directions in space, and respect the other children who are also moving at the same time in close proximity.

When children master these basic concepts in the creative movement class, the teacher then has a set of classroom management tools that can be incorporated into all aspects of the educational environment. The teacher will be guided in the book's first seven lesson plans as to how to introduce the classroom management techniques and basic movement skills, and these important body control concepts will be repeated and reinforced throughout the remaining lesson plans.

## **INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT**

The teacher can use movement as a means of fostering intellectual growth. Movement can be used to address almost any subject. Children can often understand abstract concepts more easily if they experience the concept in their own bodies. For example, the mathematical concept of subtraction can be demonstrated by placing children in a circle, counting aloud together how many children there are, and then having one child at a time sit down or come into the center of the circle. Early literacy concepts can also readily be addressed through movement. Poems, rhymes, books, and stories serve as lively accompaniments and stimuli for movement.

Creative movement classes can help children to make choices and search for solutions to problems through hands-on participation. The simple question "How can we change the way we walk?" can be solved in many different ways: change of direction, level, speed, rhythm, size of strides, or adding other body part movements to the walk (to name only some of the myriad possibilities). A child learns that there may

not be just one way to answer a question or solve a problem, which then leads to the discovery of several solutions to a task or activity presented during the movement class. Through movement activities, children learn the concept that in many situations, there are no mistakes; there are only opportunities for many solutions. This attitude, when communicated to children, frees them to look for many answers as they approach a problem or task. They learn that often there isn't just one right and one wrong answer, but countless right answers.

Because movement is a concrete way for children to begin to grasp abstract or more complex ideas, movement classes are an excellent medium for addressing the early childhood learning standards. These goals may be broad concepts, such as mastering mathematic skills, or more specific ones, such as helping a child recognize and learn to move to rhythms. Each lesson in this book addresses one or more of the recognized national standards for early childhood learning. In this book, the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework is used as the guide for learning standards.

## **EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Throughout a creative dance lesson, the teacher presents ideas to the children for exploration. These tasks can have many different approaches and solutions. The children will experiment and solve them in individual ways, boosting their confidence, and thus their self-esteem. The children are given another means of expressing themselves; simply by moving, they can come up with creative solutions.

The teacher can further nurture the confidence-building benefits the children gain through solving the movement problems. A child who does not excel in verbal skills may shine in the arena of movement. If a teacher singles out this child, for example, when she comes up with a particularly imaginative answer to a movement task, she has a moment in the limelight and a boost of self-esteem, and her solution can serve as an inspiration to the other students. For example, a teacher might assign a task, such as "Can you find a way to move from one spot to another without touching the bottoms of your feet to the ground?" Then, if one of the children found a particularly creative solution, the teacher could bring the other students' attention to her and say something like "Look at Kia! She is crawling, and now she is scooting on her seat!

Kia, you came up with a great answer to my question!" In addition to helping to boost confidence, this kind of positive reinforcement also increases a child's interest in the subject. Singling a child out for praise in a movement class can be especially rewarding for one who is not progressing as quickly in other areas.

In addition, movement can give children another tool with which to express themselves. Children can learn that movement can be used to express emotions, focus their energy, and understand ideas. Children who have difficulty expressing themselves in words may thrive in a movement class. The ability to use many avenues to express feelings is a valuable tool in a child's emotional development.

## **CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT**

Movement can be used as a springboard to stimulate a child's imagination. Simple questions, such as "What if you could fly? What would it feel like to be a bird? What do you think you could see if you were flying?" are easy and effective imagination-starters. The creative movement teacher can use movement prompts as teaching tools to encourage the children to move their bodies in a new way, as a lead-in to a game or story, or simply to allow the child to imagine himself in a new place or having a new experience. *Dance, Turn, Hop, Learn!* offers many suggestions for using movement to stimulate imagination, and draws on a variety of subjects that are interesting and enjoyable to preschoolers, using themes that loosely follow the school year.

It should also be noted that throughout the book the words *movement*, *creative movement*, and *dance* are interchangeable. Movement becomes art when it is used for something other than everyday tasks. Walking from one side of a room to the other is an everyday task. When a dancer walks dramatically from one side of the stage to the other, carefully controlling and directing his well-trained body, the movement has become art. The art form of dance uses the body and body movements as the medium of communication, just as music uses sound. In teaching a creative movement class, you are encouraging the children to think creatively about the ways in which they typically use their bodies. The components of dance provide a wealth of material for structuring classes and teaching children to use movement as a way to learn about their world.

## How to Use This Book

This book consists of thirty-eight lessons that can be used each week throughout the school year. The lessons will take you through all the months of the year as you explore the different seasons and the themes that go along with them. However, it is not necessary to use the lessons in order. For example, you may want to pull out a lesson here or there that explores a theme you are studying with the class. These thirty-eight lessons can be used and adapted in any way that suits your setting, program, and/or curriculum.

The classes are designed for a maximum of ten children; larger groups can be accommodated as long as the child/teacher ratio is at least one teacher for every ten children. They are designed for children ages three to six. The children should dress for movement class in loose play clothes and soft-soled shoes or bare feet, but just as they play during recess in whatever they wore to school that day, they should be permitted to participate in the movement class even if they don't have the above-mentioned clothing.

### **CLASSROOM: NO TWO SPACES ARE ALIKE**

The thirty-eight lessons can be adapted to any kind of classroom space. It is important to allow children some time during the school day for large, expansive movement. The classroom or child care setting may be limited in available space, but most of the activities in this book can be adapted to a small area. If there are objects in the middle of the room, such as bookshelves or tables, they can be incorporated right into the activity with the use of a little imagination and flexibility. For example, a table can be a central object to circle around while performing traveling movements; a bookshelf might be the boundary that signals a change of direction. Suggestions are given throughout the lessons in Part One for these types of spatial adaptations.

Of course, if a large, open space is available, with no objects or constraints, the lesson plans can be followed as written. The teacher and children will become accustomed to moving in whatever space is available to them and will find activities that work particularly well in their own classroom.

## **THE PROGRESSION OF THE LESSON PLANS: TEACHING THE TEACHER**

The book is divided into two main parts. The first part introduces classroom management tools that will be helpful for leading movement classes. This part also presents the basic movement concepts that the children will be exploring throughout all the lessons in the book. Part Two then reinforces and expands the concepts introduced in Part One.

### **Part One, Lessons 1–7**

Part One of the book includes the first seven lessons. Teaching the first seven lessons in order is the recommended approach to the book as the principal concepts for teaching movement are presented in a logical order; however, if the teacher is already comfortable using the lesson plans, the classes may be taught in the order that best suits his needs. Each of the seven lessons in Part One emphasizes specific classroom management tools and basic movement skills that will lay the groundwork for more smoothly functioning and structured movement classes in the future.

The classroom management tools are techniques that will enable the teacher to deal with the group of children, and help the children control their own bodies, so that learning can take place. The basic movement skills are principles of movement based on the tenets of the art of dance. These principles, such as body awareness, motor skills, and control of direction, speed, and energy, empower the children with the ability to control their bodies. The learning of these skills is one of the most important reasons that structured movement classes are beneficial in the early childhood classroom; the children learn body control, which is a win-win situation for both the students and the teacher. The classroom management tools and the basic movement skills are listed at the beginning of this part of the book.

### **Part Two, Lessons 8–38**

Part Two encompasses the remaining thirty-one lesson plans. These are complete sessions built around the general theme of the lesson title. These thirty-one lessons are to be used once the first seven lessons have been completed, thus the classroom management tools and basic movement skills have all been systematically introduced, or if the teacher is already

comfortable teaching movement. The more complex motor skills, such as gallops, are introduced in Part Two.

## **THE STRUCTURE OF THE LESSON PLANS**

The principal objective of this book is to help the teacher introduce movement, as a teaching tool, to the classroom. The book is designed so that the teacher can easily access the material, know the goal of a specific activity, and then have directions and a script to guide the children through the activity to accomplish the goal.

### **Music and Materials:**

Music and movement are natural companions and essential partners in a movement class for children. The lesson plan provides general musical style suggestions so that a teacher can draw from readily available resources. A few recommended CDs that will carry you through most of the activities in this book are highlighted in the index of music titles. Most of the lessons also have suggestions for specific selections that will complement and enhance the theme. All of the music titles are current and should be available at the local library. However, it is not necessary to have the exact selections listed in order for the class to be successful; it is more important that the children frequently have the opportunity to dance to musical accompaniment.

Many of the lessons also employ the use of simple materials for props such as scarves, clothespins, and stuffed animals. In addition, a number of the lessons are based on storybooks that can be found in your local library, or involve crafts that can easily be made with materials found in most early childhood classrooms. The materials needed for each lesson are listed and described for the teacher at the beginning of each lesson plan. As with the musical selections, though, it is not always necessary to have the exact materials. If you do not have the recommended books or stories, you may bring in pictures instead that highlight the theme of the day. Variations are suggested throughout the lessons. In addition, if you do not have the exact materials that the lesson requires, you can come up with your own adaptations using a little creativity and imagination!

### **Early Childhood Learning Standards:**

The lessons in this book are all correlated with one or more of the Head Start early childhood learning stan-

dards. As noted above, movement classes in the early childhood classroom not only are a great way to develop the children's large motor skills, but can provide the foundation for learning in a number of different domains. In each lesson, you will find listed the early childhood learning standards that will be addressed in the activities in the lesson. These are then indexed at the back of the book.

### **The Lesson Description:**

The Lesson Description is the actual text that guides the teacher through the different parts of the class. In order for a teacher to feel comfortable following the lesson plans in this book, it is important to understand the flow and structure of a movement/dance class. A movement class usually consists of four major components, which are the warm-up, the large motor skills practice, the body of the class, and the conclusion. The classes in this book are based on this structure, but the sections have been tailored to the preschool-aged child, and are described below.

Each of the four sections is clearly delineated and includes the preparation and script for presentation of the activities. Throughout the lesson plan, italics are used when there are suggested words, explanations, or stories that the teacher can use while presenting the lesson.

#### **1. Opening Activity**

The introductory activity in each lesson is an opportunity to immediately focus the children's attention on movement. It also serves the purpose of allowing them to be active right away, instead of having to sit quietly and await the beginning of class. Usually children come into the open space of a classroom and begin moving right away anyway, so a loosely structured improvisation is a way of warming up their bodies and easing them into the more structured sections of the class.

#### **2. Greeting Circle**

The purpose of the Greeting Circle is to provide a transition between the Opening Activity and the Movement Exploration. The teacher can use this time to greet the children and briefly discuss the lesson theme.



### 3. Movement Exploration

In this section of the lesson, movement games, improvisations, stories, and prop explorations are introduced that are based on the theme for the day. This is an opportunity for the teacher to cultivate the children's imaginations, while at the same time address the lesson goals. Musical accompaniment is often a very important enhancement to the activities of this section of the class.

The teacher can also use this part of the class to introduce and practice seated warm-up exercises and large motor skills with the children. The majority of the classes in this book begin the Movement Exploration with a seated warm-up. These are short exercises, designed specifically for young children, to guide them in warming up different parts of their bodies. The seated warm-ups are then followed by the large motor skills practice. For this part of the class, the children line up on one side of the classroom and practice different large motor skills such as walking, running, and galloping as they travel together to the other side of the room. The motor skills are introduced individually in the earlier lessons and reinforced throughout the remaining lessons. Both the seated warm-ups and the motor skills practices are presented in a playful way, using the lesson theme, so that the repetition of the skills is both fun and challenging for the children.

### 4. Good-Bye Circle

There is almost always a quiet finish to a dance class, no matter how strenuous and exciting it has been up to this point. In a creative movement lesson for young children, it is especially important to bring the children back to a calm state of mind after the stimulation of movement. Suggestions are given for ending each class, which will help to reinforce an idea or concept from the lesson theme.

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The lessons are laid out in sections, and each one, if taught as a whole, will take about thirty minutes. Most of the sections in the four-part lesson plan will last about five to seven minutes each. Thus, you may want to choose only one section, or several sections of a lesson, and plug them into your own class plan for the day. After reading a book about a particular subject, pull out one or two sections from a lesson in this book with a related theme to the one you are teaching, and

reinforce the learning of that theme with a movement activity. Or use part of one class and part of another, if that works better for your particular classroom goals. Used in this way, the book can increase the instructional tools you have at your disposal throughout the entire school year.

This book is a manual; it will be a work in progress to guide you through your journey of teaching movement. There is a space at the end of every lesson for you to write down what worked and what didn't work in each lesson. The students will probably generate as many ideas about the lesson theme as the book itself offers; take the opportunity to write the ideas down immediately, so they will be available to you the next time you teach that lesson or explore a related theme.

Once you have become comfortable with the flow of teaching a movement class, and see how adaptable the classes are to the learning environment, you may want to develop your own lesson plans. There may be ideas and themes you would like to present that are not covered in these thirty-eight lessons. A blank Lesson Plan Template is printed at the back of the book to be copied and used for new lesson ideas.

### A NOTE ON CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Children with special needs can actively participate in any of the movement activities with some simple adaptations. All children should have the opportunity to participate in whatever capacity they can.

For children with physical disabilities, the teacher may need to increase the amount of space needed for the activities and remove barriers such as bookshelves and tables. The use of props, particularly if they are heavy, may need to be modified for the child to use them. The teacher should be particularly watchful for signs of fatigue or other signs of exertion. If a child is physically unable to perform an exercise, she may also be given a toy or doll with moveable body parts to manipulate according to the instructions.

For children with visual impairments, you may need to delineate the boundaries of the movement area with bright colors, and remove other impediments such as bookshelves or tables. Clear verbal instructions are particularly important for children with visual impairments, and you can also use sound in the form of drumbeats or musical changes to help the child recognize transitions. Having the child partner

with another child can also be useful for a child with visual impairments.

Just as children with visual impairments respond to auditory cues, children with hearing impairments will respond well to visual cues. Demonstrating a movement first for the child can be particularly useful, as can having the child partner with another child during the exercise. The use of cue cards, props, and other signals such as turning the lights on and off to signal a transition may also be helpful.

Children with learning and emotional disabilities often do particularly well in movement classes because movement provides another tool for learning and self-expression. Clear, consistent instructions are important for a child with learning or emotional disabilities in this environment, as well as having minimal outside distractions. In addition, you may want to “shine the spotlight” on these children for solving problems creatively and provide plenty of positive reinforcement.

Children with special needs not only can participate, but they often thrive in a movement class. These

lessons can easily be tailored and adapted to your own classroom environment to include all children in the movement activities.

## **Have Fun with This Book!**

The driving force behind this book is my belief that creative dance, as well as the other arts, should be a part of every young child’s life. Movement classes should be seen not only as a way to promote large motor skill development but also as the basis for all types of learning, from artistic expression to creative problem solving to social development. Once familiar with the use of this book, you can look forward to an exciting year, as you and your young students discover and explore the sheer joy of moving. The wonder that comes with exploring how their bodies move and the world around them is as valuable as anything else the children will learn in this book.

Have fun!