

Music and Movement for Young Children's Healthy Development

What music and movement activities are appropriate for toddlers and preschool children? This article offers practical curriculum ideas and useful Websites for teachers and families.

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and Claire Hicks**

Upon entering his preschool classroom and hearing music, Elijah began bouncing up and down in place and said, "This is how we dance at home!" Nathan joined in with his break dancing. Soon, everyone in the classroom started to dance to the music, including the teachers.

Young children enjoy moving around when they hear music. Children take pleasure in physical activities that contribute to their healthy development. Physical activities are vital to retain healthy bodies, and inactivity is one cause of obesity in young children (Dow, 2010; Izumi-Taylor & Morris, 2007).

**Physical activities
are vital to stay
healthy.**

This article describes how teachers and families can support young children's healthy development by engaging together in joyful and fun activities related to music and movement, which in turn, can help fight children's obesity.

Importance of Physical Activity

In today's mechanized society, children's lives are much more sedentary than those of their parents and grandparents (Pica, 2010; Stewart & Phillips, 1992). Several factors contribute to the decrease in children's physical activities, such as hurried adult schedules, societal changes including consumption of fatty foods and larger portion sizes, development of technology that makes daily living less physical (Anderson & Butcher, 2006), increases in

academic pressures, and a decrease in safe outdoor play spaces (Rogers & Taylor, 1999). Children rarely experience enough outdoor play and spend a great deal of time playing indoors with computer games or watching television (Anderson & Butcher, 2006; Caprio, 2006). All of these factors contribute to their risk for obesity.

What Does It Mean?

Childhood obesity—based on body mass index (BMI), which is determined by dividing weight in kg by height in meters squared (Anderson & Butcher, 2006, p. 20). A percentile is then calculated using standard formulas. Children at or above the 95th percentile for their age are considered to be obese.

Authentic learning environment—a setting where children can play and explore freely and be safe.

Childhood obesity is now recognized not only as a major health problem in the United States, but also as a national epidemic (Caprio, 2006; Sorte & Daeschel, 2006). The rate of obesity is rapidly increasing even among babies and toddlers. Factors that may predispose children to obesity sometimes begin to affect children within their first 3 years of life (Lumeng, 2009).

Children who are obese are at risk for some of the same health conditions as obese adolescents and adults:

- diabetes 2,
- liver disease,
- high cholesterol, and
- high blood pressure,

all of which are risk factors that contribute to heart disease and stroke (NIHCM, 2004). Because of growing concern for these risk factors, medical care providers have begun checking children at age 3 for high blood pressure during routine office visits. Addressing this issue at a young age has become a high priority (NIHCM, 2004).



Subjects & Predicates

Movement and physical activities need to be a daily component of learning in all early childhood programs and elementary schools. Children learn by doing, so find ways for children to experience all content areas in the curriculum in a physical way.

Overweight children are affected academically, behaviorally, and physically (Datar, Sturm, & Magnabosco, 2004). Children who are overweight have significantly lower test scores in math and reading than do their non-overweight peers. The researchers further report that childhood obesity has been associated with several immediate health risk factors, including orthopedic, pulmonary, gastroenterological, and endocrine conditions. Obesity also has psychological effects. Low self-esteem and depression tend to result when children are overweight (Marotz, Cross, & Rush, 2005; NIHCM, 2004).

To fight obesity, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that all children 2 years of age and older get at least 60 minutes of active physical exercise on most days (2005). However, the U.S. Department of Education reports that many elementary school children receive only 15 minutes of recess or fewer (Santa, 2009). For many children, school is the main environment for being active (Bailey, 2006). School is the primary place for children to participate in physical activities and learn about physical development.

For these reasons, movement and physical activities need to be a daily component of learning in all early childhood programs and elementary schools. Children learn by doing, so teachers are encouraged to find ways for children to experience all content areas in the curriculum in a physical way. Not only does this integration aid children's learning, but it also promotes physical fitness and active living (Pica, 2009).

What Can Schools Do?

Increase Children's Physical Activity

Childhood obesity has been linked to inactivity at home and school, unwholesome food, and school vending machines (Cline, Spradlin, & Plucker, 2005). Young children need to engage in daily physical activities in order to use calories, to maintain muscle tissue, to develop coordination skills, and to learn to express themselves as well as to develop social skills (Aronson, 2002).

Many items found in school vending machines are of minimal nutritional value and may be high in calories as well. Items that may contribute to childhood obesity include "soft drinks and fruit drinks containing large amounts of sugar; foods of high energy and low nutrient density, such as chocolate; chewing gum and candy; and chips or other salty snacks" (Cline, Spradlin, & Plucker, 2005, p. 3).

A change in school policies with regard to physical education (PE) may be part of the solution. Scheduling "one additional hour of physical education in first grade compared with the time allowed for physical education in kindergarten" (p. 1501) reduced BMI (body mass index) for girls who were overweight,

or were at risk for becoming overweight, in kindergarten (Datar & Sturm, 2004).

Therefore, increasing PE time to allow kindergartners to have at least 5 hours of activity per week could potentially decrease the occurrence of overweight girls in first grade by about 4% (Datar & Sturm, 2004). On the other hand, the effect of increasing PE for overweight boys by the same level was much smaller than for girls (Datar & Sturm, 2004).

Movement also provides children with opportunities to learn about themselves, the environment, and other people around them (Curtis, 1982; Parlakian & Lerner, 2010). Early childhood educators can create an authentic learning environment that encourages children's imagination and fantasy through the use of music and movement activities (Edwards, Bayless, & Ramsey, 2009).

An *authentic* environment refers to a setting where children can play and explore freely and be safe. In such an environment, teachers and families implement play activities that encourage young children to jump, tiptoe, march, throw and kick balls, pedal, and engage in many other types of movement. Movement skills that are learned in the early childhood years build the foundation for almost all physical activities later in life (Bailey, 2006).

Much early learning is transmitted through the large muscles, so Wood recommends that preschoolers spend about a quarter of their school day in physical activity (as cited in Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Children at this age are very active beings. They cherish opportunities for creativity and movement, especially physical activities without constraints (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Incorporate Music

Teachers who work with young children educate the whole child, which includes not only the thinking and feeling aspects of the child, but also the moving child (Pica, 2009). To help children become active, moving to music can play a big part in children's everyday school activities. Music and movement are fundamental aspects of children's play, so as they hear music, children have opportunities to enjoy moving, listening, and singing. Children not only hear music, but also experience emotional reactions to it, and this motivates movement.

Move to music!

The curriculum guidelines set by the National Association for Music Education (1994) for young children delineate that children should have ample opportunities to experience music as they

- sing,
- move,
- listen, and
- play musical instruments.

Additionally, teachers are urged to provide children with opportunities to verbalize and to visualize musical and play-related activities, such as

- chanting,
- imitating sounds,
- rocking,
- patting,
- touching, and
- moving.

Young children benefit by experiencing music through their senses of

hearing and feeling, as well as by experimenting with their vocalizations (Edwards, Bayless, & Ramsey, 2009).

Early childhood educators also help children learn about the importance of healthy lifestyles (Sorte & Daeschel, 2006). Teaching children healthy habits is vital to maintain healthy weights and build strong muscles. Encouraging children to engage in movement activities with music can help them appreciate the importance of vigorous physical activity and eating healthy foods.

Because music naturally enhances a curriculum and environment by providing energy, life, joy, and playfulness (Kieff & Casbergue, 2000), here are some ideas on how to implement music and movement activities for preschoolers.

Integrate Music and Movement Activities

Teachers and family members teach toddlers and preschoolers about healthy habits when they set a good example and

- provide children with abundant opportunities to eat healthy food,
- include children in healthy cooking activities,
- talk with children about how their bodies are growing and the importance of physical activity, and
- encourage them to build their physical motor skills (Sorte & Daeschel, 2006).

Young children are likely to participate at different levels in music and movement activities. Some preschoolers may just listen to music, some may just observe others' movements, and others may join in the activity (Humpal & Wolf, 2003).

The most compelling music and movement activities are enjoyable and voluntary so that all children can appreciate the joy and beauty of the experience for its own sake. When teachers offer intriguing activities to children daily, reluctant children are likely to join in over time.

Children's early experiences with movement activities influence their later knowledge, concept development, skills, and attitudes (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2001), so selecting appropriate teaching strategies is critical. See the sidebar for tips on how one preschool teacher with a small playground manages to incorporate children's daily physical activities.

Music is joyful and predictable, as well as nonjudgmental and noncompetitive (Humpal & Wolf, 2003). Some teachers may say, "I don't sing to the children in my classroom because I can't sing." Rest assured that it is not musical talent that teachers need to worry about, but rather the importance of embedding children's

music experiences in the classroom (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2001).

In one preschool, teachers believed that music and movement were very important components of early childhood education, so they arranged their classrooms with a music center that included

- an MP3 player
- rhythm instruments
- illustrated music books
- song charts with pictures to help with the words
- keyboard
- scarves

Sometimes the children and teachers record their singing and music making. They listen to themselves with rapt attention and excitement. About twice a year, the teacher and children invite family members to come to their "concert and dance presentations."

Here are a few more suggestions for teachers and families to enjoy moving and music together.

Sing using adults' own voices (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2001). Live music is so much more compelling! Teachers and families can practice songs to get more comfortable with the tunes and words (Kieff & Casbergue, 2000). Then ask children to join in the singing.

Choose developmentally appropriate songs (Ringgenberg, 2003). Observe children's reactions to music. In a Head Start classroom, children were watching a slide show of photos of themselves. Two children began crying. When asked why they were crying, they independently both said, "Because it's sad." So a volunteer asked, "Why are the pictures so sad?" The children explained that it was not the photos but the background music ("Memory" from the musical "Cats") that was so sad. The music was changed immediately!

Teachers are urged to talk with children's family members to find out what kind of music and movement they share at home. Ask families to teach the group favorite songs, play traditional instruments, or dance steps from their heritage.

Active songs and games that are usually popular include: Hokey Pokey, Pop Goes the Weasel, If You're Happy and You Know It Clap Your Hands..., Ring Around the Roses, Mulberry Bush, Lost My Handkerchief, Musical Chairs, Duck Duck Goose, Happy School Song, I Caught a Fish, Mama Kangaroo, Mr. Turkey, Ten Little Frogs, Six Little Ducks, and Two Little Blackbirds.

Use simple instruments to promote young children's participation in music and movement (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2001; Pica, 2010). Involve children in making their own shakers (see sidebar on p. 38). Children can march down the hall and around the playground playing instruments

Delores Makes the Most of a Small Playground

Delores is a lead teacher in an urban preschool. She wants to make certain that the children in her classroom experience the amount of physical activity required for healthy development.

Her center has a small fenced playground that can only accommodate 13 children at a time. Many of the children live in neighborhoods with unsafe playgrounds, so outside play in fresh air during the day is very important.

Consequently, Delores provides outside playtime for her class even during cold or hot weather. When it is rainy, children play on tumbling mats and dance vigorously in a large former dining room. Music and singing are regular components of both indoor and outdoor activities.

Because the center has a bus, the group makes weekly excursions to well-equipped playgrounds in the city's park system. They take along sidewalk chalk, balls, hoops, and sunscreen.

During the week of one July 4th, children made musical instruments and hats. They sang and drummed patriotic songs as they marched around a city block.

All summer long, children participate in outdoor activities in their swimsuits. They play games in small swimming pools. They splash water and blow bubbles in water tables. They carry buckets of sand, mud, and water from one area to another. They "paint" sidewalks and fences with water and large paintbrushes. They sweep the sidewalk with brooms and climb through recycled tires that have holes drilled in them to let water escape. The children also play active outdoor games while listening to music.

such as triangles, bells, maracas, and tambourines. Kitchen gadgets, such as wooden spoons, make good drum or rhythm sticks. Recycled pan lids are perfect cymbals. Teachers and families alike can be creative when it comes to making music!

Provide enough room for toddlers and preschoolers to move. Carefully arrange space for children to explore and move around so that their music and movement experiences are positive and creative. For toddlers, creatively structure the environment so that they can move around freely and safely (Curtis, 1982). Suggest spaces for physical activities by laying out large mats, for example, to help them find a suitable spot (Edwards, Bayless, & Ramsey, 2009).

Invite families to play musical instruments, sing songs, or teach traditional dance steps with children. Record the music and make enough copies for children to take home. Use this recorded music for dancing, too.

Read books related to music, dance, and play. One preschool teacher read *The Big Bug Ball* (1999). Children asked if they could act out the story while dancing to music. They made their own costumes in the colors of different bugs, selected their favorite music and instruments, and started dancing. The teacher took pictures and showed them to the children and their families. Later, children drew pictures of their experiences and created a book about their work.

Be an advocate. Talk to school administrators and families about how vigorous physical activities can prevent children's obesity and support healthy development (Edwards, Bayless, & Ramsey, 2009). Focus on the importance of eating healthy food, engaging in outdoor and indoor active play, and modeling



Subjects & Predicates

Teaching children healthy habits is vital to maintain healthy weights and build strong muscles. Engage in movement activities with music to help children appreciate the importance of vigorous physical activity.

active, healthy habits for children.

Use technology to get families involved in children's activities at home and in school. At one preschool, a video camera setup enables families

to observe the children's daily activities. Families can talk to their children about their daily activities at home. Children are usually delighted that their families are familiar with songs and movements from school.

Websites for Teachers

Music and early childhood development

<http://www.amc-music.com/maecf.htm>

Vigorous movement

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org>

www.movingandlearning.com

www.naeyc.org/tyc/missjackie

www.aahperd.org/nda

Healthy eating habits

www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/defining.htm

www.choosemyplate.gov

http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan_mats/toolkit.pdf

<http://www.nature.com/oby/journal/v12/n1/pdf/oby20049a.pdf>



Subjects & Predicates

The most compelling music and movement activities are enjoyable and voluntary so that all children can appreciate the joy and beauty of the experience for its own sake. When teachers offer intriguing activities to children daily, reluctant children are likely to join in over time.

Keep activities short. Toddlers usually stay engaged for about 10 minutes (Miller, 2005). Scarves, instruments, and other props are likely to maintain their interest longer.

When preschool children are active, they sometimes can be engaged for long periods of time. In a Head Start program, a visiting teacher from Africa played drums, wrapped scarves around their heads and shoulders, balanced baskets on

their heads, and danced with children for most of the morning. Encourage children to participate but respect their choice of level and length of involvement. Some may wander in and out several times.

Use the direct approach, which includes modeling, demonstrating, and imitating, when implementing music and movement activities for preschoolers (Edwards, Bayless, & Ramsey, 2009). Nursery rhymes

and fingerplays are enjoyable and fun. Some examples are Simon Says, Follow the Leader, Where is Thumbkin?, Rain Rain Go Away, One Potato, Pussy Cat Pussy Cat, Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed, Head and Shoulders 1 2 3, Mother May I?, Teddy Bear Teddy Bear Turn Around, and Funky Penguin.

Integrated music and movement activities are components of a high-quality early childhood education curriculum. When teachers and family members understand how to provide appropriate physical activities, children experience the joy of music and movement. These activities offer daily opportunities for children to develop and learn in authentic environments with careful attention by adults.

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Make Music Shakers With Preschoolers

1. Ask families to save appropriate sizes of recycled, safe, clean, empty containers such as plastic coffee cans, water bottles, paper towel rolls, and oatmeal boxes.
2. Ask children and families to help collect small recycled materials such as pebbles, shells, sand, outdated seeds, and buttons.
3. Children put items in the containers, leaving plenty of room for the materials to shake and make noise. Help children securely glue on the tops of containers. Dry.
4. Children decorate the outside of their shakers with construction paper, markers, feathers, and other art supplies.
5. Have fun making music and moving together!

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Claire Hicks, M.S., is a Prekindergarten Teacher at Presbyterian Day School, Memphis, Tennessee. Hicks continually uses music and movement activities in her preschool classroom. She has found these activities to be helpful in keeping her students engaged and happy about their learning.

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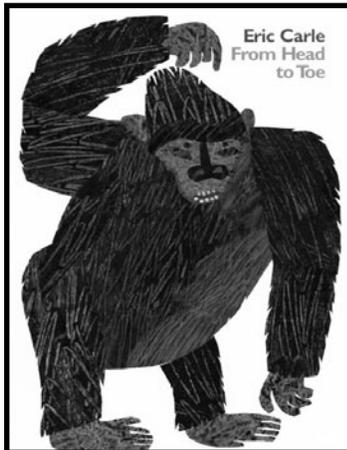
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Extend

These Ideas With Books

Connect Music and Movement With a Children's Book

by Jorja Davis



From Head to Toe

Written and illustrated by Eric Carle.
2000. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Alligators wiggle, giraffes bend, gorillas thump, and monkeys wave their arms. The interactive dialogue asks, “Can you do it?” The fun-filled, confidence-building response is “I can do it!” A variety of colorful cut-paper collages of familiar animals and diverse children invite infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and early school-aged children to move and play individually or as a group. There is no story, but the repetition of a simple vocabulary and movement covering body parts and familiar animal names makes the book accessible to early readers as well.

Tambien, este libro divertido interactivo está disponible en español. En De la cabeza a los pies, como este libro en ingles, los movimientos sugeridos han sido cuidadosamente escogidos de manera que sirvan como ejercicios para cada una de las partes del cuerpo. Un pingüino puede girar la cabeza, o un loro puede mover los dedos de pies. Siguiete es una invitación “¿Puede hacerlo?” “¿Yo puedo hacerlo!” Es como si Eric Carle dijera a su manera, “Ven a jugar conmigo”.

Books about animals are delightful ways to explore various ways of moving, indoors and outdoors. Make the most of the space and resources available with these ideas!



LITERACY: Go to Mister Rogers' Neighborhood at PBSKids.org to see Eric Carle read *From Head to Toe* to Mister Rogers. Recommend this to families. Ask children to recreate or expand the story. Take photographs of children as they write and draw to put in the literacy center. Ask families to read the story in their home languages and record it for children at school.



HEALTH AND SAFETY: At home or school, refer to books and Websites that show how bones and muscles work together to move. Talk about foods that help muscles and bones grow strong.



MOVEMENT & MUSIC: Read the book with a mirror. Encourage children to mimic the actions. Video the action to watch and imitate again and again. Think of other animals and how they might move. Find music that is reminiscent of each animal's movements.



PRETEND PLAY: Provide materials to create a veterinarian's office in the pretend play area or construct a wildlife conservation workers' truck in a huge recycled cardboard box.



MATH: With older children, estimate distances or speeds that animals move. Graph them. Run outdoors, pretending to go at the speeds of the animals.



ART: Children use recycled materials to construct animals. Children can create dioramas in recycled boxes to show animals' natural habitats. To make end sheets for their original storybooks, children tear colored tissue paper and glue it to large sheets.

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