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CHAPTER 18

Five Ways to Sneak Movement Into the Curriculum

It's really sad to have to talk about “sneaking” movement into the children's day. Once upon a time, young children in an early childhood setting spent *most* of their days moving. Unless they were listening to a story or creating a work of art, they rarely sat.

Unfortunately, that's not the case today. I hate to tell you how many times teachers in my presentations have said that administrators have reprimanded them for doing an activity with the children that everyone in the early childhood profession should know is developmentally appropriate—and important!

I know it's hard to rebel—especially when your livelihood relies on your being compliant with the rules—no matter how ludicrous those rules might be. But we have to do whatever we can for the children. If that means closing your classroom door, or sneaking movement in wherever you can, then that's what has to be done.

So, here are my suggestions for how you can manage that.

First, group or circle time provides the perfect opportunity for movement. As hinted at in the last chapter, there is no law that says everything you do during group time must involve seated, stationary children. Even if you're reading them a story,

allowing them to move freely while listening will ensure they don't get restless. They'll also have the opportunity to feel the rhythm of the words you're reading. And if they're allowed to act out the story, they'll better remember its characters, plot, and sequence.

Group time is also the perfect opportunity for you to facilitate an actual movement activity or two. An example would be something like Simon Says, which is an excellent listening and body-parts activity. If you play it without the elimination process, the children will get much more practice. To make this happen, divide the group into two circles. When a child moves without Simon's permission, she or he simply leaves her or his original circle and goes to the other one. Then, "Simon" can make requests such as the following:

- Raise your arms.
- Touch your head.
- Stand up tall.
- Touch your toes.
- Touch your shoulders.
- Pucker up your lips.
- Stand on one foot.
- Place your hands on your hips.
- Bend and touch your knees.
- Close (open) your eyes.
- Reach for the sky.
- Give yourself a hug!

Eventually, you can make the game more challenging by incorporating such "difficult" body parts as elbows, wrists, ankles, temples, and shins.

This may seem like just fun and games, but body-part identification falls under the content area of science for young children, and listening skills are components of both music and emergent literacy.

Brain breaks are a must if you want to avoid restlessness and off-task behavior. And as we know by now, they're also necessary for learning, as sitting increases fatigue and reduces concentration. Knowing that the learning brain can only absorb information for a handful of minutes at a time, why would we

want the children to sit for more than a handful of minutes at a time?

For a brain break, you can invite the children to do something as simple as bending and stretching. For instance, have them show you the following:

- Stretch as though you're picking fruit from a tall tree.
- Flop like a rag doll.
- Stretch as though you're waking up and yawning first thing in the morning.
- Bend over as though to tie shoes.
- Stretch to put something on a high shelf.
- Bend to pat a dog; an even smaller dog, or a cat.
- Stretch to shoot a basketball through a hoop.
- Bend to pick up a coin from the floor.
- Stretch as though you're climbing a ladder.
- Bend to pick vegetables or flowers from a garden.

The concepts of up, down, high, and low fall under the headings of both mathematics and art.

Outdoor time, of course, is an obvious time for movement. Outside, children will:

- burn the most calories;
- have the chance to practice and refine emerging physical skills;
- invent games and rules;
- develop their social skills; and
- engage in loud, boisterous behaviors that aren't possible or welcome indoors.

All of this doesn't even take into account the fact that the outside light contributes to our happiness factor, to improved vision, and to productivity. So, the children should get *at least* one outdoor recess per day—rain or shine or temps below freezing!

Using movement across the curriculum is suggestion number four. As we know, young children are experiential learners—and the more senses they use in the learning process, the more information they retain. For these two reasons alone, worksheets are not the way to help children learn.

Finally, there is no better way to sneak in active learning than through transitions. The children are going to be moving anyway, and they'll learn a heck of a lot more by pretending to be astronauts floating in outer space than by walking in a line "holding bubbles" in their mouths.

Here are a couple of transition activities and the content areas they connect to:

- Floating weightlessly like astronauts = social studies (occupations), math (the quantitative concept of *lightly*), and emergent literacy (word comprehension)
- Follow the Leader = emergent literacy and art (physically replicating what the eyes see)
- Moving in different shapes and at different levels = math and art
- Moving like stalking cats = science (animals), math (the concept of *lightly*), and emergent literacy (word comprehension, specifically adjectives)

It is truly sad that we have to justify developmentally appropriate practice. It's also absurd, considering that the research is on our side. But until the policymakers see the light, we can practice "civil disobedience" and sneak movement into the curriculum so the young children in our care can get a *real* education.

What's a Teacher to Do?

- To add extra "credibility" to your movement activities, you can accompany them with children's books. For example, to accompany a body-parts activity like Simon Says, you might choose *Bend and Stretch: Learning About Your Bones and Muscles*, by Pamela Hill Nettleton. Another possibility is *Eyes, Nose, Fingers, and Toes* by Judy Hindley. To help create additional appreciation for the outdoors, you might read *Our Great Big Backyard* by Laura Bush and Jenna Bush Hager.

- Managing behavior challenges is of great importance to educators and can be used to make a case in favor of movement activities. One of the many benefits of movement experiences is that children become acquainted with the concept of personal space. Once familiar and respectful of it, such incidents as sitting too close and kicking one another will be minimized.

- Also as it relates to behavior challenges, you can use the information in Chapter 12 to advocate for movement in the classroom.

- If, heaven forbid, recess has been eliminated in your setting, take some of your learning outside and make sure as much of it as possible is active! For example, if you're studying transportation, the children would have more space outside to demonstrate various modes.

- If an administrator should pop into your room while the children are creating letter shapes with their bodies or measuring things with their hands, you may have some explaining to do. That's why it's critical that you know exactly what content area—and standards—your activities are linked to.

Where to Learn More

- My book *Active Learning Across the Curriculum* offers hundreds of activities under the content areas of art, emergent literacy, math, music, science, and social studies. Another possibility is *The Kinesthetic Classroom* by Traci Lengel and Mike Kuczala.
- My book *Teachable Transitions* offers 190 activities to help children transition creatively from arrival to departure.

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- “Make Transitions Trouble-Free & Teachable” is an online course for early childhood professionals. It offers many activities for the six typical daily transitions and can be found here:

<https://raepica.teachable.com/p/make-transitions-trouble-free-teachable/>

- *Acting Out!: Avoid Behavior Challenges With Active Games & Activities* offers circle games for building community and includes a chapter on brain breaks. Eric Jensen’s *Learning With the Body in Mind* also includes brain breaks (what he calls energizers) as well as rationale for them.

- My YouTube channel offers many videos on brain breaks, active learning, transitions, and more. You can find it here:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-d20r_dzRuJdQ7J0TEZOMQ

- Listen to “Fitting Fitness Into the Curriculum” here:

<https://www.bamradionetwork.com/track/fitting-fitness-into-the-curriculum/>