

Creative movement – An opportunity for affective education

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Abstract

This paper considers the possibility of cross-curricular integration and the integration of creative movement/dance activities that appear in all areas of teaching and learning in primary schools. It highlights the importance of creative movement in child development and presents creative teaching methods as a part of holistic learning in primary schools. In this paper, an overview of some theories, approaches, and practices that emphasize the use of the body in learning processes (e.g. creative movement approach, holistic learning, and Gardner's multiple intelligences) is presented. This paper is a review of recent research that deals with the usage and effects of the creative movement as a holistic teaching method in primary school programmes in Slovenia.

It highlights the importance of including creative movement methods into primary school lessons from psychological, pedagogical, and didactic points of view.

A qualitative analysis of over 200 reports made by Slovenian teachers, 20 diploma theses, and over 200 evaluations of students from Faculties of Education of two Slovenian universities was made. The methodological approach was action research. The result showed positive effects in the process of education in all areas of child development: the social-emotional, cognitive, and psychomotor. The most important was the connection between a creative movement approach and affective goals: well-being, communication, cooperation, empathy, group problem solving, and the reduction of aggressive behavior. Pupils were also more motivated for their school work, and they understood subjects better. We believe that better knowledge of a creative movement approach as a holistic method in primary schools is one of the most important elements of affective education for reaching a higher level of teaching in Slovenian primary schools.

Keywords: creative movement approach, holistic learning/teaching, affective education, embodiment, primary school

Kinesthetic learning

For children, movement is a fundamental form of expression. Koff (2000; Sansom, 2011, p. 31) believes that children learn to use this non-verbal expression to communicate how they feel and think. Children constantly learn on multiple levels. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence is recognized as one of our multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983), but is one of the most undervalued in our schools. We seem not to understand that physically learning, including kinesthetic activities, creative movement, and dance, is natural to most children. Learning to see a student's moving body in our classroom requires making a significant shift in our conception of knowledge, academic traditions, and vocabularies. Blumenfeld-Jones (2004) pointed out that the purpose of education is to focus "upon a holistic understanding of human flourishing of the many capacities

which cultures, the world over and throughout history, have shown to be part of the human condition” (Sansom, 2011, p. 32). It would be imperative, therefore, that everyone have the capacity or potential to learn in different or multiple ways, and for that reason, have access to multivariate approaches. Shapiro (2008, p. 254) outlines: “Dance ... offers a unique and powerful form of human expression. It allows us to speak in a language that is visceral and far less mediated by our thought and abstract conceptualizations. It provides, at times, a raw, embodied way of capturing human experience.” New researches on the brain highlight the use of kinesthetic lessons in the classroom: “The embodiment view emphasizes that pro-activity in exploring the environment is a core aspect of cognitive development ... the child ... selects the experience from which to learn” (Goswami, 2008, p. 400). Embodiment refers to the fact that the brain is in a body, which is embedded in a physical and social environment. Dewey (Davidson, 2004, p. 198) identifies the deeply connected paths of knowing, where the body and mind intersect and become entangled.

Most of the preschool and school population excels through kinesthetic means: touching, feeling, and experiencing the material at hand. Children enter kindergarten as kinesthetic and tactual learners, moving and touching everything as they learn. They use their bodies to explore the world, express feelings, and act out their ideas. By second or third grade, some pupils have become visual learners. During the late elementary years, some pupils, primarily females, become auditory learners. Carbo, et al. (1986) stress that “approximately 20 to 30 percent of the school-aged population remembers what is heard; 40 percent recalls well visually the things that are seen or read; many must write or use their fingers in some manipulative way to help them remember basic facts; other people can not internalize information or skills unless they use them in real-life activities” (p. 13).

Creative movement method in primary school

The use of creative movement as a teaching method in school settings is an example of holistic teaching that integrates kinetic and verbal activities. The method of creative movement is an approach where children use movement to express, form, and create various educational contents, and movement creativity is expressed through playing. This method encourages the child to communicate, create, relax, and learn with the help of various didactic movement-dancing games, social games, and different types of relaxation, and to learn about all subject fields through creative movement.



Image 1. Learning math with creative movement: How many triangles could you find?
Students from Trnovo Primary School, Ljubljana, first class.
Photographer: Vesna Geršak

When using holistic methods of teaching and learning, one of them being the creative movement method, children develop in the physical, motor, intellectual, emotional, and social fields. Holistic learning means understanding with both the body and mind.

The benefits of inviting students to work in movement and dance are numerous and far-reaching. Movement and dance help students:

- focus and engage in learning;
- apply their kinesthetic intelligence;
- understand concepts and themes;
- develop and refine their higher-level thinking skills;
- communicate in unique ways and appreciate the artistic expression of others;
- develop spatial awareness;
- cooperate and collaborate with each other. (Zakkai, 1997, p. 10)

Alternative educational approaches, like the Waldorf School with eurhythmy and the Wambach convergent pedagogy with body expression to music, have been present for a longer time. However, the kinesthetic learning in Slovene regular primary school classes is only gaining value. More and more often, preschool and primary school teachers use the method of creative movement when working with children. They use it for motivation, explanation, and strengthening of mathematical concepts; for easier understanding of science; and for literacy instruction. Creative movement is already recognized as a method for teaching a language (mother tongue or foreign language). Creative movement as a teaching/learning approach can make the curriculum more tangible, accessible, memorable, and effective for children. Trust, communication, cooperation, empathy, discipline, persistence, introspection, creative thinking,

problem solving, observation, analysis, criticism – all are part of the process of creative movement approach.

It would be sensible to implement more of the creative movement methods into traditional lectures, as that would enable more students with special needs to be included, and would ensure the progress of children, mainly in socio-emotional fields, but also in cognitive and psychomotor fields.

However, we cannot ignore the fact that at a certain developmental stage of a child, dancing is one of the most popular forms of fun, recreation, and humor, with the goal of relaxation. Preschool and primary school teachers who use dance in order to make learning a fun activity hold a key that opens many doors.

Nowadays, relaxation education is an important and even a necessary alternative to that part of a child's world that is full of passive and superficial experiences. From an early stage, children must be given a chance to learn how to clearly express their feelings and how to recognize and respect the feelings of others. They must have opportunities to explore, improvise, and use their imagination, as they will need all of these later to creatively solve problems. Therefore, children should get to know their body and their state of mind.

Creative movement and affective education. Kinesthetic lessons can provide opportunities for a child to learn on many levels besides the intellectual. In a successful kinesthetic lesson, children are learning to make use of their own experiences and observations as a foundation for knowledge. This nurtures self-affirmation and self-esteem because the children's natural resources, their own bodies, are taking them to a place of understanding. Giving children the physical and emotional space to explore inner parts of themselves without being told they are right or wrong allows them to integrate their sense of self with the material that they are learning in school (Griss, 1998, pp. 5-6).

Dance games; cooperative games, which include group work; physical and psychical activity; movement; communication; relaxation; focusing; body contact; spiritual and mental contact; interpersonal tolerance; and cooperation are acknowledged worldwide. They are also some of the basic methods for educating children about non-violent conflict solving and an element of affective education (emotions, feelings, self-esteem, etc.).

Review of some research and findings in the field of creative movement in Slovenia

Breda Kroflič (1992, 1999) made two studies on a representative sample of children, where the influence of creative movement on children's creative thinking was investigated. The first one examined the influence of guided creative movement activities on the creative thinking of preschool children. The second study investigated how creative movement, as a way of teaching and learning (including every school subject, such as language, mathematics, science), influenced pupils' creative thinking through four grades of primary school.

The analysis of teachers' experiences showed the positive influence of this holistic teaching approach on children's motivation, understanding, memory, creativity, self-esteem, inter-personal

relationships, co-operation, and tolerance between pupils and between pupils and their teacher. The Torrance TCAM and Jellen-Urban TCT-DP creativity tests used in the follow-up research showed a significant effect of creative movement on children's creative thinking.

The most important findings of this study were that the creative movement as a holistic approach in teaching and learning: a) could stimulate the development of creative thinking, b) could be a method for teaching and learning creative thinking, and c) enabled the transfer of creative thinking from one non-verbal modality (movement) to another non-verbal modality (drawing). Furthermore, creative movement as a holistic approach to teaching and learning was generally well accepted by both children and teachers.

As can be seen from the results of the study, the use of creative movement led to an improved sense of well-being and can therefore have preventive and therapeutic effects. The results of this research thus provide empirical support for theories of holistic learning.

Geršak, Tancig, and Novak (2005) compiled research that dealt with the usage and effects of the creative movement and relaxing techniques of teaching and learning in the lower grades of the Slovene primary school programme. Statistics were based on reports made by 164 teachers and preschool teachers in the years 1998 through 2005. The analysis showed that the above-mentioned method is mostly used in the first grade of the primary school in all subjects, especially in Slovene language class, music class, and mathematics.

The second aim of the research was to outline the general effects of the creative movement teaching method. Above all, teachers pointed out that with the improvements in pupil well-being, relaxation, motion, imagination, and creativity, as well as pupil-pupil and teacher-pupil communication, pupils were more easily motivated to work (Table 1).

| Groups of positive effects | Frequency of noticing the effects | Percentage of the effect (%) |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Well-being | 236 | 11,4 |
| Relaxation | 206 | 9,9 |
| Positive relations | 200 | 9,7 |
| Physical activity | 195 | 9,4 |
| Creativity | 149 | 7,2 |
| Communication | 136 | 6,6 |
| Mental activity | 136 | 6,6 |
| Expression of feelings and emotions | 123 | 5,9 |
| Better concentration | 117 | 5,6 |
| Imagination | 109 | 5,3 |
| Experiencing the world around them | 94 | 4,5 |
| Positive self-image | 84 | 4,1 |
| Interest | 84 | 4,1 |

| | | |
|------------------|------|-----|
| Motivation | 73 | 3,5 |
| Empathy | 56 | 2,7 |
| Independence | 40 | 1,9 |
| Working activity | 34 | 1,6 |
| All effects | 2072 | 100 |

Table 1. Positive Effects of the Creative Movement teaching Method (n=2072).

Motivation, creativeness, well-being, reduction of aggressive behavior, self-esteem, and better communication was also pointed out by the evaluation of questionnaires on creative movement classes taken by over 200 students of The University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education, and of The University of Primorska, Faculty of Education in the years 2003-2011.

Even more importantly, teachers who are at present using the method of creative movement in their everyday work with children, support our statement. For example, Viktorija U., a primary school teacher, says, "Several years ago, I discovered that words will not help me convince lively children to calm down and listen. I started moving with them." Dragica P., a primary school teacher, adds:

We are playing games that include movement and dancing, role playing, nursery rhymes, moving while listening to music, creating ... After approximately one month of this kind of work, children became more open and tolerant towards one another, happier with themselves and their classmates, boys became friendlier to girls. Children are calmer, less impulsive and less aggressive; their feelings of belonging and empathy have grown.

Žagar, Geršak, and Cotič (2006) used the creative-kinesthetic activities in elementary school (third grade). For this purpose, they designed creative-kinesthetic activities for teaching all mathematical contents in the third grade. The methodological approach was action research. One intellectual area they were observing was the development of knowledge and skills. One social area their observation focused on was the development of interpersonal relationships and co-operation among children. The results highlight the importance of including creative movement methods in math lessons, from psychological, pedagogical, and didactic points of view. They conclude that the creative-kinesthetic activities are welcomed into math lessons because of their pedagogical and educational roles, which approach children in an unobtrusive way. Creative-kinesthetic activities helped in developing the interpersonal relationships and children's motoric and cognitive development in a positive way. They concluded that it was useful to include the method of creative movement in math lessons, as it stimulates the child's understanding, activity, creativity, loosening of inner tensions, and emotional experience.

Hribar, Geršak, and Vute (2006) analysed 20 diploma theses on creative movement linked to pupils with special needs. The results helped us understand the influence of creative movement on pupils with special needs for socio-emotional, intellectual, and psychomotor development (Figure 1).

The research has shown numerous positive effects: Creative movement mainly influences the communication between pupils and between pupils and a teacher, pupils' relaxation, better mutual relations, tolerance, self-image, motivation, creativity of pupils, working habits, motor skills, concentration, self-confidence, and the reduction of aggressive behavior and behavioral problems.

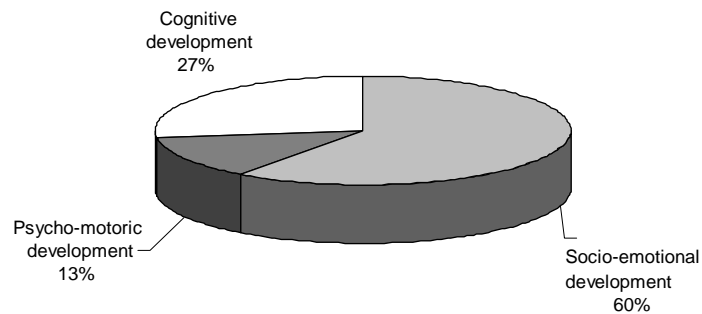


Figure 1. Influence of creative movement on pupils with special needs.

To conclude, the method of creative movement enables easier and successful integration of pupils with special needs into elementary school.

Zupančič, Geršak, and Vute (2007) researched the influence of creative movement on restless children. Statistics were based on reports made by 36 teachers in the years 1996-2006.

The results show that the influence of creative movement on restless children is present in all developmental fields (Figure 2).

The majority of the positive effects (good interpersonal relations, a positive attitude to work, relaxation, positive self-image, self-esteem, good will) belong in the socio-emotional field of a child's development, followed by the psycho-motor field (calmness), and the cognitive developmental field (motivation, concentration, creativity).

Creative movement mainly influences the calmness of children, creates better interpersonal relations and tolerance, reduces aggressive behavior, and influences a better work attitude, motivation, concentration, creativity, relaxation, self-image, good will, and self-esteem.

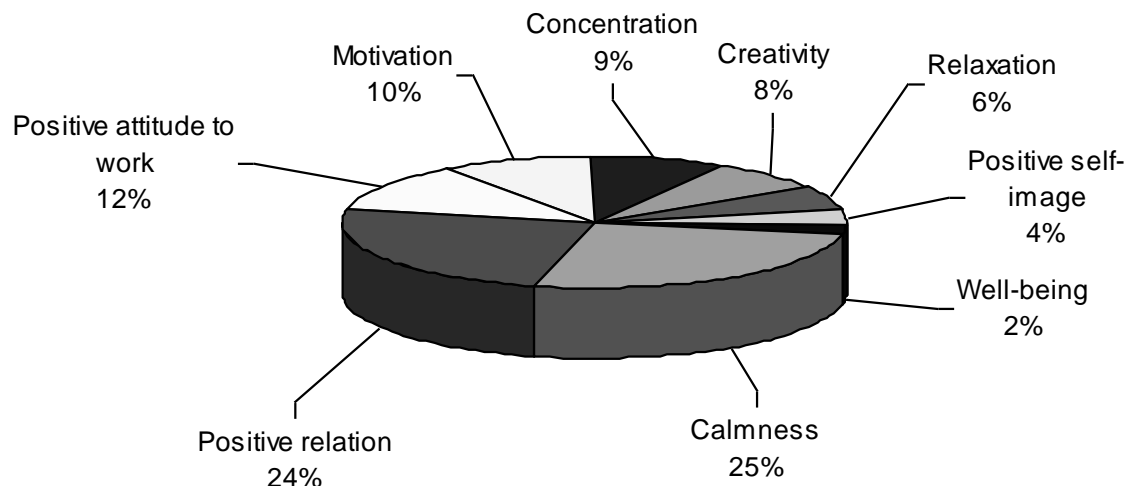


Figure 2. Influence of creative movement on restless children.

Discussion and Conclusion

After the analysis of the presented research and studies in Slovenia, and after a deep study of the creative movement and dancing method's positive effects on children, similar conclusions were reached. Primary school teachers, who are aware of the importance of kinesthetic learning and are using the method of playing, creative movement, and dancing when working with children, have discovered many positive effects of this method. These studies also exemplify current ideas in the cognitive sciences. Moreover, the results of this research have shown that creative movement improves cooperation and tolerance and is thus related to Goldberg's (1990) model of "Big Five" personality factors, such as Energy, Friendliness, Conscientiousness, Emotional stability, and Openness. Connections can also be made to Lowden's (1995) views of dance as the body language of space, time and energy, body and movement as a way of being, and Goleman's (1996) emotional intelligence, with abilities such as self-awareness, flow, and empathy.

By using the movement-dancing activity, the children are more easily motivated for different learning contents. This approach also brings the more complicated and less understandable concepts and ideas closer to children. A noticeable progress is made when establishing interpersonal relations among children; the relation between the preschool/primary school teacher and the child is more genuine after using such methods. The playing and moving makes children feel pleasant; they are connected with positive emotions. Such a climate contributes to better academic results and to a longer lasting knowledge. Preschool and primary school teachers who are implementing creative movement and relaxation activities among others in preschool and primary school, claim that children are shouting less and are less aggressive during this kind of work. A pro-social ability, such as empathy, was stimulated through creative movement. When moving creatively in a group, children were relaxed, felt pleasant, were cooperating, and understood subjects better.

We can conclude that expression through dancing and creative movement is important for a child's social, emotional, physical, motor, and intellectual development. Researches also show benefits of the creative movement as a dance-movement therapy when working with pupils with

special needs. Dancing and creative movement stimulates the development of general motor skills, mostly coordination of movement, orientation in time and space, balance and speed, stamina and precision. It is important to emphasise that dancing has a positive effect on a child's self-esteem, on social and emotional relations in a group, and an easier understanding of the world. Creative movement methods, dance, and relaxation education can contribute to the development of a child's creative capacity, which is why it is necessary to make it an element of today's education.

The aim of this article is to point out the importance of implementing holistic teaching approaches in elementary school. The creative movement and dancing method, as one of such approaches, enables children kinesthetic expression and expression through arts. The use of this method had important positive effects in all fields of child development: the socio-emotional, cognitive, and psycho-motor fields, as well as on children with special needs (especially with restless and hyperactive children). Therefore, these findings are especially important for the structuring of programmes and teaching methods for children in preschool and in early elementary school. The method of teaching through playing and creative movement allows for a lot of freshness, activity, and tolerance, all preliminary conditions for a successful education, as well as learning and teaching.

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