

Title: *Educating Early Childhood Educators on Creative Movement*

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Conference Name: 63rd World Congress of Dance Research Athens

Creative Movement in Early Education Settings

This paper explores the integration of creative movement into early childhood education and the corresponding training required for educators. Creativity and playfulness should be an integrated part of the teaching and learning processes in early education settings. Through creativity and playfulness, both the learner and educator have the best opportunity to be in the proximal zone of learning (Meyer & Eilifsen, 2015). Creative movement in early education settings is crucial for enhancing children's holistic development, including their motor, mental, sensory, and emotional potential (Biasutti & Habe, 2020).

Creative movement can be defined as movement generated from the child's own inner expressions (Kaufman & Ellis, 2007). Early childhood educators can provide stimuli in order to facilitate and develop further this innate expression of children. In this respect, what set of skills would be sufficient in order for early childhood educators to enhance their pedagogical approach through creative movement? They certainly do not need to be trained dancers. However, it is argued that they should obtain a good degree of skills that include a sense of their own body, movement freedom, an openness toward other bodies (including observation skills), and a good degree of embodiment of the basic elements of movement/dance (body, space, time, and energy). These can be acquired and further developed through creative approaches toward movement that can include forms of improvisation (Biasutti & Habe, 2020), the use of creative movement as a means of problem-solving and expression, and the use of basic forms of composition (Kaufman & Ellis, 2007).

Pedagogy

In the dance world, conventions such as uniformity, discipline, and technical precision often overshadow other approaches that focus on individual expression and creativity development. While contemporary choreographers now value the importance of their dancers' individual input during the choreographic process, within the educational settings of dance, the development of creativity is sometimes seen as complementary (Mourelou, 2018).

In early childhood education settings, a student-centered pedagogy should be particularly valued in order to enhance the individuality of the participants. This approach is non-uniform and non-mimetic. Rather than learning movement sequences taught by the teacher, children

are encouraged to enhance their natural movements following the teacher's guidance through a creative use of the body, time, space, and energy elements (Kaufman & Ellis, 2007). The same approach is recommended for educators' training: the professor/facilitator should create open-ended environments in which early childhood educators feel free to explore, create, and express through movement. Building a comfortable, respectful environment is crucial, as it can help participants gradually overcome risk-taking barriers, increase body awareness, and remain open to others.

It is also important to consider that some learners may have no previous experience with dance practices, leading to unfamiliarity with movement-based activities. For those who do have dance experience, advantages include familiarity with dance elements. However, disadvantages may arise when habitual movement patterns become rigid and limit openness and flexibility.

What Can Creative Movement Training for Early Childhood Educators Be Based On?

A good starting point for creative movement training is the observation of children's play and interaction, with special focus on the creative use of elements of movement (Kaufman & Ellis, 2007). Following observation, exercises may be based on simple and natural forms of movement. Examples include pedestrian movements (walking, running), clapping, variations of simple jumps, skipping, galloping, hopping, and a re-experience of developmental process movements (Kaufman & Ellis, 2007; Zhu, 2019). This kinetic material is natural, organic, and familiar, offering an excellent basis that can be explored and creatively transformed through the use of dance elements, improvisation, and simple composition modes.

Certain exercises may emphasize free movement, further employing improvisation. The advantages of improvisation are numerous: participants explore and discover movement, break habitual patterns, express individuality, and enhance both self-awareness and social awareness. Overall, motor improvisation enhances confidence, motivation, and communication skills (Biasutti & Habe, 2020).

A third set of exercises may involve simple composition for the creation of small choreographies. Examples include movement phrasing, A-B-A form, rondo, and canon. Learners can become familiar with basic structuring tools and further develop creativity by drawing inspiration from a theme or story during the composition process.

Training should also incorporate lesson planning for children. Lesson plans should focus on creativity and flexibility, with clear intentions and learning goals (Biasutti & Habe, 2020). Self-observation and self-reflection methods are also encouraged. Educators can keep journals in which they reflect on their movement experiences and their interactions with children in creative movement activities. Journals are an effective tool for both feedback and professional growth (Miller, 2023).

Summary

Creative movement—defined as spontaneous, expressive movement originating from the child—plays a vital role in fostering children's holistic development, encompassing motor, cognitive, emotional, and sensory domains. Educators, while not needing formal dance training, benefit from developing body awareness, movement freedom, observational skills, and an embodied understanding of the basic elements of dance: body, space, time, and energy. A student-centered, non-mimetic pedagogical approach is emphasized, promoting improvisation, natural movement, and the creation of simple choreographic structures. Training methods include movement observation, improvisational exercises, and composition practices grounded in familiar, organic movements. Reflection through journaling and intentional lesson planning are essential components, supporting the development of flexible, responsive teaching strategies. The study advocates for a creative, open-ended training model that mirrors the exploratory processes encouraged in children, ultimately enhancing both educator efficacy and child engagement.

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