



Movement, Learning and Well-Being at Educare

By Sue Merry

THE READY LIST Skills For Life

‘Thinking and learning are not all in our head. On the contrary, the body plays an integral part in all our intellectual processes from our earliest moments right through to old age. It is our body’s senses that feed the brain environmental information with which to form an understanding of the world and from which to draw when creating new possibilities. And it is our movements that express knowledge and facilitate greater cognitive function as they increase in complexity. This is the conclusion which neuroscientific research supports in ever richer detail.’ⁱ

Background

One of the foundational principles at Educare Small School is that movement is crucially important to learning and well-being.

When we first discussed how the school day would be structured, we knew from the very beginning that we wanted each day to start with a movement session. We also knew that we wanted to encourage movement during the school day. But why?

Our observations and experiences in the state school system taught us that the school day can be very static. All humans need to move in order to learn and to flourish. This is especially true of young children who are often still developing neural areas that need movement in order to mature fully.

There are two senses crucial for balance and learning that are still maturing during childhood:

- The vestibular system - controls the sense of movement and balance.
- Proprioception – senses the body’s muscular movements and position in space.

These systems are in place at birth but their functioning matures throughout childhood. In sequence a child acquires head control, sitting, standing and walking. Balance continues to mature through experiential learning and adaptation until the age of approximately 15 years. Of course, the key word here is ‘experiential’ - experiences through the senses, emotions and movement.

At Educare we have developed a series of movements that help these senses to mature. We use them at Movement Circle and also during the course of the school day.

Movement Anchors Learning

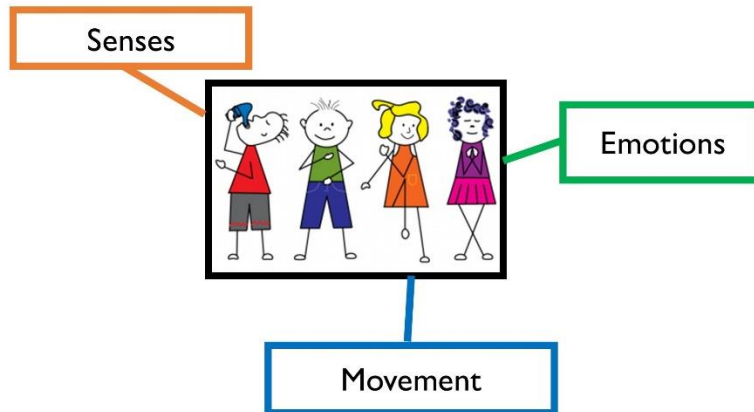
‘Learning is experience. Everything else is just information’ⁱⁱ

‘Learning comes in first through our senses.’ⁱⁱⁱ

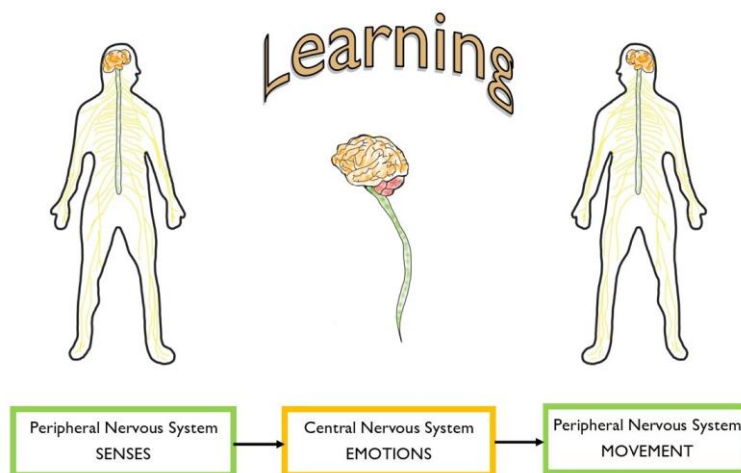
‘We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit.’^{iv}

For learning to occur three areas of the nervous system need to be engaged:

- Senses – Stimulation is detected via our sense organs.
- Emotions – How do we feel about the input?
- Movement – What action do we need to take?



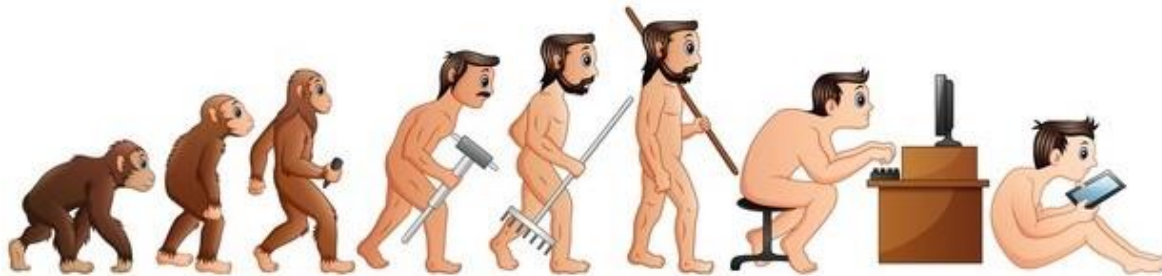
Sensory information is perceived via sensory neurons in the Peripheral Nervous System. This information is interpreted by the Central Nervous System, and we feel it as an emotional response. If action needs to be taken, then this is the job of the Peripheral Nervous System to give the appropriate signals via motor neurons to relevant muscles.



A memory of this response is created and usually – although not always – if repeated a few times, will become a habit. It is essential that the conditions experienced by the child while they are developing a new habit/skill are positive, nurturing and sympathetic to natural human functioning. If not, then the new habit becomes one that manifests with extra-added muscle tension and emotional stress.

This is why we use The Ready List at Educare and why we use appropriately sized furniture, including Tripp Trapp chairs and stools. The principles of the Alexander Technique – adapted as The Ready List - are sympathetic to natural human functioning and thus the formation of efficient and kind habits.

Movement is Essential for Well-Being



‘Over the last ten thousand years, most humans transitioned from a migratory, hunter-gathering population to living in sedentary farming communities, then industrialized nations, and then our current technology-based culture. You and I dwell in a time when movement has been almost entirely outsourced. A moment on our phone can secure food, delivered right to the door. We can seek shelter on Craigslist from the comfort of our chairs. Heck, we can even find a mate online these days, securing a partner without flexing anything but our fingers on a keyboard. While the abundance of food and money varies around the globe, for almost all populations, the current global environment has changed in at least one way across the board: Moving is not required.’^v

A relatively short time ago our human bodies evolved on the grasslands of the savannas in Africa. Our lifestyles were those of hunter-gatherers. Especially since the industrial revolution we have become increasingly static in a very short space of time. This is very much against how we are designed to function.

Asking a child to focus and to learn but not move, is more or less asking for the impossible. Some children can adapt to this better than others. The ones who really cannot adapt are sometimes considered to have behavioral issues.

In his marvelous book ‘Primate Change: How The World We Made is Remaking Us’, Vybarr Cregan-Reid suggests that human groups would originally have valued individuals who were risk-takers. These individuals would have been innovators and explorers and probably not wired for ‘sitting still’ for long and/or conforming to societal norms. Such individuals still exist of course, but often meet with resistance – especially when children - and can be labelled as problems and even medicated.

‘It is as if schools were invented not to educate us, but to teach us to sit still. By the age of 16 the Anthropocene body has not only been taught to sit still for extended periods, but having done so for so long, the child who went into the education factory limber, supple, energetic and agile comes out the other end with a body possessing a more limited range of motion in many of its joints and limbs. The movement has been lost because of the severe restriction of movement involved in sitting down for such long periods, and has a good dose of obedience inculcated into it too.’^{vi}

Although our furniture is probably as good as it can be for our school environment, the natural human environment would be without chairs and tables. We want to see if a lack of chairs

will create a more human-friendly environment that encourages free movement. Will this further support healthy and effective learning and well-being?



www.thereadyl.com
www.thedevelopingself.net

ⁱ *Carla Hannaford, Ph.D. 'Smart Moves: Why Learning Is Not All In Your Head.'* pp 11– 12 Great Ocean Publishers 1995 ISBN 0-915556-27-8

ⁱⁱ *Albert Einstein*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Carla Hannaford pp48 – 49 Ibid*

^{iv} *Aristotle*

^v *Katy Bowman 'Move Your DNA: Restore Your Health Through Natural Movement' Propriometrics Press 2019 ISBN: 978-1-943370-10-8*

^{vi} *Vybarr Cregan-Reid. "Primate Change: How The World We Made is Remaking Us" pp147 – 148. Octopus Publishing Group 2018. eISBN 978-1-78840-108-1*