

A stylized graphic of a human head profile in silhouette, facing right. The interior of the head is filled with several vertical, wavy lines of varying heights, creating a sense of movement or sound waves.

THE MOVING CENTER

*EXPLORING
MOVEMENT
ACTIVITIES
FOR THE
CLASSROOM*

***Gay & Kathlyn
Hendricks***

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Gay & Kathlyn Hendricks



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For Chris and Gabriel

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I would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Jack Downing, who gently suggested that I learn to dance. My deep gratitude goes also to Amanda and Kathlyn for dancing with me in ways that made everything worthwhile.

—*Gay Hendricks*

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—*Kathlyn Hendricks*

THE MOVING CENTER

1

Becoming a moving teacher

As teachers, we want our students to be all that they can be. Just as we are grateful to the teachers who put us in touch with powers we did not know we had, so we now hope to assist our students in feeling and expressing the full range of their potential, not only intellectually but also physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We come into teaching with a desire to touch students in ways that have lasting positive consequences.

To do this, we must communicate with the whole of our own being, and that of our students; we teach who we are, not just what we know. In their fullest form, teaching and learning are done with our whole bodies, not just the tiny part of us we call the intellect. For those teachers who wish to speak with the whole person, movement is the voice.

Why Use Movement in Teaching?

Our world, especially as children, is charged with sensory experience. Each person is heir to a many-million-year legacy of refinement in feeling, seeing, touching, tasting, and smelling. Each of us has inherited a capacity for the pure joy of moving through space, of exploring the inner and outer worlds. We live in bodies that want to move. But as we go along in life, many of us encounter conventions and conditioning that tell us to stop moving. Somewhere we learn that our celebration of the joy of movement must be stifled in order to join the “grown-up” world.

Sound education strikes a balance between conscious mental activity and conscious movement. Sadly, movement is often limited to physical education class and the slow shuffle from classroom to classroom. There are many negative consequences of denying the body’s need to move and learn about itself. Ignored, the body stiffens, decreasing its capacity for feeling. Ignored for too long, it falls prey to degenerative diseases. Unless the body is tended and celebrated, it cannot be used for its full potential of joy and learning.

Another reason for using movement in teaching is to bring people more in harmony with themselves and others. Moving together is a superb way of building community. We all know the unpleasant effects of the lack of a sense of community, whether in a classroom or in the world at large. There is something about dancing and moving with one’s fellows that can dissolve the stiffness and alienation that sometimes occur between humans. In a classroom, teacher and students moving together can build the kind of rapport that is at the heart of meaningful education.

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Too, movement is a path to deeper levels of experience. Much schooling tiptoes around the intellectual periphery of life. As the poet William Blake put it, "Energy is the only life, and is from the body; and reason is the bound or outward circumference of energy. Energy is eternal delight." Once we break through the thin crust of intellect, we have access to a richer and more delightful fare than we may ever have dreamed possible . . . feeling, sensation, the myriad hums and buzzes of a world of tumbling energy. Education generally focuses on what and how we think. Kept in perspective, this mental focus is valuable; but if it deludes us into denigrating feeling and the life of the body, then it does us little good.

Movement can prevent many of the common problems that plague the classroom. Disruptive behavior, for example, often is the result of an imbalance between sitting and moving. By integrating movement experiences into the activities of the classroom, the teacher can head off many disruptions before they occur. In the same vein, we now are more knowledgeable about individual learning styles. Some people are visual learners, some are auditory, and some are kinesthetic. Given the same learning task, some children will get it best through pictures, some will get it best through words and sounds, and some will get it best through body experiences. In addition, all of us, no matter how strong our auditory or visual parts are, have a kinesthetic part within us that needs to be served. Kinesthetic learners have typically gotten the short end of the slide rule in schooling. Whereas there is plenty of talk in schools, and more recently plenty of audio-visual aids, there certainly are very few kinesthetic aids to bring out the feeling and moving parts of ourselves.

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Finally, there is a lesson to be learned from exploring the body that can be crucial to our subsequent development. This lesson is that the body doesn't lie. Many people become unhappy and ill each year because they do not learn to listen to what their bodies are telling them. Many others do not make the most of their lives because they have not tuned in to the directions in which their bodies want to take them. Sadly, the process of growing up often involves a split between mind and body so that they do battle with each other. The body is coughing out a "stop smoking" message, while the mind is saying, "I smoke for pleasure." The body says "rest me," the mind drives it on to an accident. The body becomes full of tension, the mind does not inquire into what might be causing it. If we do not begin early in life to prevent this split, much more effort must go into remedying it later on. So, movement exploration can be regarded as being an essential form of preventive medicine that can enhance the quality of life at the moment of doing it and long, long after.

The Objectives of Movement Exploration

There are two major areas of objectives in doing movement work in education: cognitive and affective, that which can be known and that which can be felt. Let's consider each briefly.

COGNITIVE OBJECTIVES All teachers must be on the lookout at all times for innovative strategies to teach the cogni-

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tive material at hand, whether it be math, literature, or woodworking. Movement offers a new way of conceptualizing the cognitive objectives in education. Once we get comfortable with the notion of using the whole body in teaching, new vistas open up. The teacher who has previously taught subtraction to her or his second-graders using a chalkboard can now enhance the lesson with a movement game in which the children form different-sized groups, subtract themselves, and count the remainders.

Movement gives students permission to use all their senses in learning. We do not know enough about the learning process to insist that children only use intellectual processes. Anything we can do to help children expand into learning with the full range of themselves can have a high payoff.

Movement bridges mind and body, enabling us to integrate new information into ourselves. Many of us have had the experience of being exposed to new data in a traditional way—through explanations, examples, and diagrams—only to “get it” later when we’re taking a walk or playing marbles. Movement often has the effect of bringing mental learning down into the body so that we have a whole-body understanding of it.

Movement is universal. As teachers, we are always seeking ways of putting abstract notions into concrete examples so that our students can relate to them. Since nearly all of us can relate to movement, it becomes a new way of making abstractions concrete once we learn to use it.

The recent research on right- and left-brain functions suggests that a better balance could be achieved in

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education between intellectual activities and right-hemisphere functions such as spatial relations, metaphor, dreams, and music. Movement takes us out of the logic-dominated left hemisphere and puts us more in touch with the body and its energy.

AFFECTIVE OBJECTIVES Most teachers would agree that there are certain key affective objectives that should be part of every classroom, no matter whether in elementary school or college. Movement exploration can present affective lessons in ways that are interesting and fun.

Many adults complain of being out of touch with their feelings and needs. Much time and energy are spent later in life trying to become aware of who we are, how we really feel, what we really want. One of the biggest services a teacher can provide is to give students experiences that connect them with their inner sensations, feelings, and needs. These types of learning will often be remembered and used long after the niceties of the past perfect subjunctive and the quadratic equation have been forgotten. In one way or another, every movement activity in this book can help us to be more aware of inner experience.

Another major affective objective is creativity. One problem that many people feel is a lack of contact with the spontaneous creative energy within them. Over time, many of us shut off the channel that connects us with our creativity. One of the major advantages of doing movement work is that it can reopen that channel. The activities in this book give people the opportunity to find the place in themselves from which spontaneous creative activity

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emerges. Once we have learned to find and nurture that place, we are more likely to keep an open and friendly relationship with it.

One of the main affective goals in life is the integration of the many polarities within us: good/bad, should/shouldn't, right/wrong, one/many, love/hate. For example, many of us struggle to come into harmony with the strong/weak polarity; we want to be strong so that we can carry out purposeful, successful action, and we want to be open and vulnerable so that we have access to the tender parts of ourselves and others. Movement is the means by which polarities are most readily manifested to our awareness and explored. By learning how polarities make themselves known through the body and its movement, we can be aware of many of the disturbing splits in ourselves.

Self-concept is a fundamental affective objective. How we feel about ourselves is grounded in our body image. There are many components to a successful self-concept; one essential is flexibility, another is confidence, still another, the ability to have direct and immediate access to the truth of one's experience. All of these components are enhanced through the exploration of movement. There are mental and emotional factors that play a role in self-concept also; these too can be developed through the use of movement. For example, one's ability to solve problems, which on the surface seems a purely mental ability, can actually be improved through learning more about body movement. (Chapter 6 provides excellent problem-solving activities.)

One of the greatest affective objectives, one that can lead to lifelong enrichment, is the development of an inner life. Teachers can make lasting contributions by putting

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their students in touch with the deep and nourishing flow of experience within them. There are magnificent vistas of interior life that are available to us: dreams, feelings, needs, songs, dance. Also within is a symphony of body experience, the streaming wisdom of millions of years of evolution. Movement is a way of gaining access to the inner treasure trove we all share.

In a complex and rapidly changing world, we can greatly benefit from having a growing relationship with the part of us that is always with us—our innermost sense of being. Whether we call it spirit or essence or soul, it is that part of us that is deeply and directly connected to the timeless. This spirit lives through the body; movement nurtures it, keeping it alive and growing.

For thousands of years, people have been moving and dancing together as a way of finding a rapport and a sense of community with each other. In many societies, dance is a high form of celebration, used in weddings, births, and other rites of passage. In western society, movement has been deemphasized as a celebration. We do not dance our Thanksgiving; we eat together or watch football. A new father does not organize a birth dance for the others in the community; cigars are dispensed instead. Movement is catching on again, however. At first, it is segregated into specialized places such as rock clubs and the jogging path. One of the enduring affective objectives we can offer our students is to let them know how to build movement rituals into their daily lives. That way, movement will again be woven into the fabric of life, and we will become as fluent in speaking the language of the body as we are in vocal speech.