

# **Developmental Movement Play**

## **Summary Report Action Research Cycle 1**

### **Cycle One**

#### **1998 – 2000**

A period of investigation by the JABADAO team finding out about current practice in the early years sector. What is happening and how do early years practitioners feel about it?

#### **2000 – 2002**

Reviewing what we found out. Identification of key issues, a research question and development of a new training course.

#### **2002 – 2005**

Establishing a research group of early years practitioners to test the new training course and gather information about a new way of working in movement with babies and young children. Writing up and disseminating emerging themes.

### **Cycle Two**

#### **2006**

Reviewing the state of play and the new research issues thrown up by cycle one. Establishing a new group of research partners.

#### **2007 – 2010**

Gathering further data with research partners. Final report.

### **About JABADAO**

**1** The National Centre for Movement, Learning and Health, is a national charity

founded in 1985 to create more opportunities for people to get involved in movement activities that promote health, learning and wellbeing. The Centre works in partnership with the education, health and social care sectors bringing a new perspective through specialist knowledge from a wide range of movement work, as well as an understanding of the significance of the lived body.

- 2** In 1998, JABADAO began an independent action research project in the early years sector, to address a perceived lack of confidence amongst early years practitioners about the movement activities they were running and the knock-on effects on the opportunities provided for our youngest children.
- 3** Between 1998 and 2000, the Centre consulted with early years practitioners across the country in order to gain an understanding about existing movement activities across the sector, and practitioners' feelings about them. The results of this consultation, plus a review of attitudes to movement within contemporary English culture, (the project took place solely within the English education system), provided the structure for the subsequent project.
- 4** The team identified three areas to address:
  - (i) As the prevailing culture mitigates against free and enthusiastic participation in spontaneous movement, practitioners were influenced by largely negative experiences of 'creative' movement
  - (ii) Practitioners lacked theoretical understanding about specific connections between early movement activities and the development of functioning and learning
  - (iii) Practitioners had little ownership over the methods they were trying to use to develop movement work, which limited their creativity
- 5** In 2002 the JABADAO team developed a new four-day training course aiming to address these issues and give early years practitioners more confidence and flexibility to support children's natural enthusiasm for movement.
- 6** The approach – called Developmental Movement Play – provides a theoretical basis for the biological drives children have to move in particular ways. It draws on theory from perceptual-motor approaches concerned with readiness for learning and movement approaches that provide an in-depth understanding of kinesthetic awareness. It encourages practitioners to prioritise child-led movement (rather than adult-led activities) based on evidence that children are biologically driven to seek the physical experience that will most benefit their particular point of development. Beyond any links it makes between movement and the development of readiness for learning, it also encourages a sense that spontaneous movement play provides the foundations for a lifetime of learning about the feeling of life itself.
- 7** Between 2002 and 2005, fourteen early years settings across England joined the JABADAO team to test this new approach. A total of thirty-eight practitioners became close observers of sensory motor behaviour and early movement patterns, gathering information about changes in their own practice and benefits for children as well as observations about the ways children choose to move given expanded opportunities.

## **Emerging Themes**

Following involvement in the new training course and the adoption of a

Developmental Movement Play approach.

## **8 Effects of the new training course**

**Practitioner confidence:** all the research partners involved set up and sustained a range of new activities (page 51) amounting to a total of 51,159 child movement sessions between October 2002 and March 2005. All the research partners have significantly changed their approach. They now move more freely themselves and see more detail in children's movement. They are able to respond to, and enjoy, children's natural enthusiasm for movement in new ways. They also all believe that their new approach is beneficial for children in many ways.

## **9 Specific changes in practice: data from research partners**

- **A new understanding** about the role and significance of early movement has led to movement being seen as an underpinning for all learning, rather than purely concerned with Physical Development. New planning for movement activities reflects this change.
- **Activities:** all the centre-based settings are offering movement activity as part of continuous provision; activities have changed from an adult-led to child-led focus; some practitioners are offering DMP sessions during home visit sessions
- **Practitioner-child interaction:** practitioners are being more physical, supporting a wider range of movement and valuing children's spontaneous movement more
- **Resources:** all the centres have acquired new resources to support movement (often very cheaply) and are often using existing resources in new ways
- **Learning environment:** seven centres have set up Movement Corners with open access; five have created movement rooms. Ten centres have moved tabletop activities on to the floor to increase the amount of time children have for floor-based movement.
- **Involvement with parents:** practitioners are encouraging activities at home and engaging in informed discussion about movement development with parents. Some centres offer home bags to encourage more movement play at home as well. Some have involved parents through questionnaires about movement play. Several have created new leaflets for parents.

## **10 Benefits for children: data from research partners**

- **Speech and language:** research partners, and allied speech and language therapists, noticed that, for a significant number of children, speech and language seemed to improve in conjunction with involvement in movement play

**Research partners note:**

- **Physical development:** increased physical confidence, repertoire of movement, willingness to try new things, fun. Young children learning to assess risk for themselves
- **Emotional development:** increased self-confidence, with language development often cited as an example; increased support for self-expression
- **Social development:** a non-verbal way to support relationship building; big difference reported in socialising for the youngest children and with autistic children
- **Cognitive development:** little specific evidence due to young age group. However, an emphatic general feeling that increased confidence has supported all-round learning and development.
- **Transition / readiness for learning case study:** a Reception teacher reports a notable improvement in her class, seventy five per cent of whom had been involved in Developmental Movement Play during their time at nursery.

## 11 **Children's movement and development: data from research partners**

Given expanded opportunities to choose their own movement play two kinds of movement behaviour stand out:

- vestibular activity (spinning, tipping, tilting and falling)
- rough and tumble play (pushing, pulling, stretching, hanging and high impact tactile activity)
- involvement in making and responding to sound also scores highly amongst the range of sensory behaviours recorded

Practitioners encouraged early movement activities and then observed children's involvement:

- very few of the earliest activities were seen
- they recorded a strong parallel between increased involvement in, and development of, the movement patterns
- there was a very marked lack of Belly Crawling activity amongst the youngest children 0 -3. Since this pattern supports many areas of development this is of significant concern.
- There was more involvement and development in the Belly Crawling pattern in the three and over age group than in the younger age group
- There were high levels of involvement in Crawling (reducing at the age when children first start walking but picking up again as they get older)
- children were happy to work on the floor when given the opportunity

## 12 **Children's movement and development: indicators for further research**

### **How children choose to move**

Research and theory regarding sensory motor development suggests that children seek out the sensory motor experiences they most need to prompt their development. It is important to note that in our study children, across the spectrum, sought high levels of vestibular and proprioceptive activity when allowed to organise their own movement play. We note that the vestibular sense and the proprioceptive sense are not referred to within the range of senses that early years practitioners are currently encouraged to work with (sight, sound, touch, taste and smell), and in addition, they are areas of activity that are often squashed in favour of a more 'orderly' learning environment.

### **Keeping children safe**

Some children in our study were more driven to engage in movement than to attend to risk. However, most children were aware of risk and even very young children developed their capacity to assess risk appropriately. We conclude that although it is essential that adults are on hand to support movement play, adult sensibilities may be stopping children from engaging in significant early development through movement. Practitioners need to be supported to empower children to move freely and develop their own capacity to assess risk and act accordingly.

### **Movement and normal development**

We note that high levels of spinning, tipping, sliding and rough and tumble activities are often connected with *problems* in development within current early years literature. Whereas the JABADAO team is fully aware of these links, we feel that these activities may need to be reconsidered as an important part of high quality support for the normal developmental process.

### **Early identification and intervention**

All the research partners can now link the movement they see to a specific developmental framework. Where they see gaps, they know how to make an immediate and specific intervention that has the potential to address many areas of learning and development. In addition, the DMP framework enables an improved partnership to be made between external therapists (occupational, physio, speech and language) as there is the potential to share a precise theoretical/ observational / developmental framework and a greater understanding of the impact of movement on development.

### **The role of movement play in the curriculum: readiness for learning**

Practitioners have provided considerable anecdotal evidence suggesting that the DMP activities have had a beneficial effect on readiness for learning. Their observations have centred on confidence and self-esteem, speech and language development and attitude to learning. Further research is needed to provide more specific data.

## **13 Choosing Health: Choosing Activity: data on increase in children's involvement in physical activity**

All the centres reported an increase, some very marked – supported by both adult-initiated activities and new movement areas where children can choose to move when they want. Perhaps more importantly, this approach values movement, physicality and the body in a new way, which may have a more profound effect on children's future relationship to exercise and health than the increased involvement now.

## **14 Does DMP need specialists to deliver it?**

In three of the fourteen partner centres, movement specialists led the activities, and in one the research partner was a specialist dance and exercise worker. In the remaining ten, the early years practitioners led the project. In the evidence so far there is nothing to suggest that early years practitioners cannot become excellent facilitators of movement work using this approach, squashing the idea that creative movement work is done best by specialists. There is a crucial role for movement specialists in developing this approach – that is, to provide training and ongoing support to early years practitioners.

## **15 Is this approach easy to incorporate into existing early years settings?**

These practitioners found it easy if they had the appropriate support (from colleagues and from managers), but hard if this support wasn't available. This

approach requires, and supports, a culture change in the setting, with a new way of understanding the role of movement. This cannot be done without a whole team approach.

## **16 The next cycle of research**

Following review during 2006, a new cycle of research will take place between 2007 and 2010, designed to further test the results so far and to address some of the questions that have emerged. The project will aim to develop understanding about sensory motor learning, both as a foundation for the requirements of the school curriculum, (readiness for learning), and as a way that human beings establish and re-establish a felt sense of themselves and the world around them (kinesthetic awareness).

In 2010 the project aims to provide some clear evidence about:

- the ways in which human beings construct their world through sensory means
- the links between sensory motor awareness /development and a child's relationship to their physicality, learning, health and wellbeing

## **17 Current levels of interest**

Levels of interest in the approach are high, and early years practitioners across the country are already making many changes to their practice. These developments need to be well supported, by DMP specialists, in order to maximize the benefits to children. We are keen to develop the approach in partnership with all those responsible for young children's development and learning.