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Translating learning objectives into movement

One major objective of this book is to introduce the possibility of learning while moving. In this section we want to address the question, How do I translate my own learning objectives into movement? There are a few key assumptions and attitudes and a few simple guidelines that facilitate this translation process.

An assumption central to this book is the consistency and congruency of human beings at different levels of experience. The moving person is a system of interrelated parts. The way we think we look affects the way we move. Our beliefs about the way the world works shape our bodies over time and determine how much freedom of choice we use. Self-image, body image is an influential dynamic in our ability to learn *how* to learn. For example, teaching a

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group of youngsters the fundamentals of math requires far less effort than teaching a group of older children fractions when they have adopted an “I can’t do math” or “I’m not good in math” attitude. So, since the person is a bodymind system, altering movement patterns will alter the system and will affect cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of the same theme.

The translation process is built around identifying the theme you wish to explore, the curriculum objective, the area of the topic you wish to emphasize. Words or phrases can be themes: *character, the action in this story, mysteries, ravine, maps*. Processes can also be themes: *tracing the outline, finding the map coordinates, making a simple sentence, dividing in half*. Recognizing that we experience through our bodies, even what we read and think, can assist us in opening up the movement possibilities of most situations, locating the central theme.

When developing your own movement activities, these sequential directions seem to give clear guidelines with room to maneuver:

1. Start with moving body parts and gradually include more of the body. Giving the direction, “Begin to move your hands in round lines through space,” is likely to be more effective than saying, “Let’s move our bodies in round ways.”
2. Involve the periphery of the body before moving into torso integration in the sequence. Hands, feet, and heads are more social and generally well-liked parts of people’s bodies. People will generally much more readily move these peripheral parts than the

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trunk of the body, which is more vulnerable, contains most emotional expression, and might be more guarded.

3. Feel confident in structuring your initial directions, moving gradually toward less structure as the class gets familiar with the activity. Specific, concrete directions at the beginning provide safety and boundaries within which the students can experiment. For example, the initial direction, "Use just your left arm to move away from your side and then back toward it," would be more effective than saying, "Move some part so you feel you're making space."
4. Contrasting and exaggerating are wonderful tools that you can feel free to repeat and repeat. Exaggerating a theme with the body can bring its qualities into relief. For example, if our theme were *sizes*, the qualities of big, bigger, and biggest could be translated easily into exaggerated body movement. Contrasting is doing the opposite, and is very useful in exploring the many polarities of our lives: day and night, hot and cold, up and down, huge and tiny, before and behind, and so on. Learning difficulties can often be solved by noticing which polarity the student is expressing and encouraging him or her to do the opposite. For example, moving while saying I don't know! in as many ways as the student can imagine can be alternated with I know! statements and gestures.

When beginning to use these guidelines, remember that you don't have to be a dancer, and you don't have to know

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the way it's going to come out. You need only focus on the question *What is the next smallest step here?* The guidelines are designed to *involve* students, as involvement is the spark that brings the theme to life. In order to develop your own movement activities, ask yourself these questions:

- What is the theme?
- How many small steps can I break this theme into? Or, put another way, how can I structure the environment to generate this response? In what sequence should I introduce the steps? (This step might require some practice and curriculum planning outside of class.)
- Would exaggerating or contrasting work with this theme? (Notice your directions and lean toward vivid descriptive words rather than abstract words. One student was practicing this translation process and was attempting to get his partner to move "aggressively." Both were rather stumped until I asked him to use words that described his actual experience such as *sharp and quick*, *puffing up*, or *pretending to be an ape meeting a stranger*.)
- What would be a fun part of the body to start with?
- Are my directions clear and specific? (Feel free to write them out at first.)
- Am I letting myself move my body and am I enjoying the activity? (This can be a key in involving the students.)

One alternative is to see if the theme is most involved with moving through time (math), space (proportions, sequences,

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geography), weight (impact of peer culture, political themes, responsibility), or a combination (science). Then you might choose an activity from the book in that area as part of your curriculum plan for that topic. From that experience you can add to or change parts of a written activity to suit your learning objective.

Several examples of translation follow, to give you an idea of how to design a movement activity from different curriculum themes—character development, understanding idioms, dividing, sequences, and touch. Each example will follow the above steps. When using the translation process, use the number of steps or activities that suit your time frame and the level of development of the topic. You'll have lots of recipes to choose from, and you don't need to cook the whole meal the first time. A five-minute interlude can be more effective than a longer activity if it's carefully and enthusiastically chosen.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

STEPS

- a. How do you know the character in this story? How does the character look? Mold your own body into the way you imagine this character appears: tall, short, chunky, skinny, young, old.
- b. How does the character stand? Let your body stand in that way.
- c. Imagine walking and moving from one place to another the way this character might.

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- d. Pretend you're another person looking at this character. What do you see?
- e. Find a partner and talk to her or him as this character. How does your voice sound? What kind of words do you use?
- f. With your eyes closed, travel inside your character and look for his or her feelings. What emotions does your character feel?
- g. Let the room represent the whole story, and become your character moving through the action of the story. How do you move: enthusiastically, hesitantly, wanting to go in two or more directions?
- h. If this story were a kind of machine, what part would your character be? How does your character help make the story work? (Several characters could actually make a machine.)

METHOD Exaggerating would work with steps a, b, c, d, g, and h. Contrasting might be fun with e and f.

BODY PARTS It would probably be easiest to begin with head and hands, adding shoulders and elbows, then feet and knees before moving the whole body.

DIRECTIONS Take each step you have listed, and write out directions after you answer each question with your own movement and feel the words that are most descriptive for you.

INVOLVEMENT Intending to let your body movement totally support what you say is the most effortless way to com-

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municate clearly and fully. Then forget about it and focus on the communication itself.

UNDERSTANDING IDIOMS

STEPS

- a. Make up your own list of body-related idioms. Some examples might include

keeping an eye on things	butterflies in your
keep a stiff upper lip	stomach
backing down	hard-headed
shouldering the load	cold feet
nose to the grindstone	head over heels
nose in the air	spine of steel
weak-kneed	sharp-tongued
putting your foot in your mouth	

- b. Have students make up together a list of such idiomatic phrases that they've heard. Explain any unfamiliar phrases.

- c. Make another list with more abstract phrases such as

see you around	down in the dumps
all over the place	mad as a hatter
flying apart	letting it all hang out

- d. Introduce the idioms in sequence from a to d, with the more concrete, teacher-initiated idioms first.

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METHOD Exaggerating works especially well with this theme. An effective sequence is to begin with very exaggerated movement, gradually making it subtler and less obvious until the bridge to verbal content can be easily seen.

BODY PARTS With this theme the key word is *literal*. Acting out each phrase beginning with the part of the body indicated, as with *nose in the air*, and expanding to let the whole body be a nose in the air is great fun for students and can lead them to the body experience underlying the idiom. With the more abstract phrases, notice which area, arms or legs, could most easily move through that phrase. For example, with *down in the dumps*, arms and shoulders could begin to act out the phrase.

DIRECTIONS Writing the phrases on the board as you do them, and having students write out their phrases and their responses in moving would be valuable additions to this activity. You might wish to add the history behind some phrases that are more colorful; for example, years ago, a toxic part of the process of producing hats created a distinct physical and psychological effect on workers that came to be known as being *mad as a hatter*. Examples of the history of phrases can lead students toward understanding the development of language and its roots in experience.

INVOLVEMENT Your movement participation in the beginning of this activity will spark the brainstorming of the students and add levity.

DIVIDING

STEPS

- a. Smallest step, dividing in half:
 - drawing imaginary line down the midline of your body
 - hands tracing around waist, separating upper and lower body
 - hands clasped, hands apart
 - two students making a circle together with their arms, then stepping back, separating hands but keeping the shape
 - even-numbered group shape of children counting off 1, 2, 1, 2 . . . 1s going to one side of room, 2s to the other, and forming new group shape
 - dividing the room in half, 4s, 8s, by making lines in space with body
- b. Dividing by single-digit numbers:
 - moving body parts represent the number to be divided and repeated rhythms signify the divisor. With each group of rhythms (i.e., 3 strong beats), that number of body parts stops moving entirely. How many times can you repeat the rhythm? Do you have any body parts still moving (remainder)?
 - one group of children is the dividend, another the divisor. The divisor comes in, captures their same number, and puts them somewhere else in the room, then comes again and takes another group somewhere else until the dividend group is separated or divided.

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METHOD Contrasting would be a useful underscore to the activity, by having one-half of the group or body moving one quality, the other half its opposite. Moving-not moving, under-over, and so on, are useful contrasts in this activity.

BODY PARTS In this activity, use the body parts in the various ways they can be divided. Bilateral features would be a good start: two eyes, ears, hands, elbows, knees, feet, and so forth.

DIRECTIONS Walk through an activity yourself to note any confusion that might be generated by your directions. Feel free to correct and adapt as you go along.

INVOLVEMENT You might be more the movie director than actor in this activity.

SEQUENCES

STEPS

- a. Move up and down very slowly, noticing what makes the next body part move.
- b. Do downward swings: starting with head arcs, adding shoulders, then arms, then hanging upper body over, arcing from waist, then swinging whole upper body from hips.
- c. Do leg swings: starting with lower leg, gradually larger to include thigh, then large swing from hip, then swing plus hop on opposite leg.

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- d. Use a gesture, like a shrug or a flick, and have it travel down, through, or across from one side of the body to the other, through the next body part.
- e. Do "Dominoes" activity in Chapter 2: each student in turn repeats the same movement with another body part.
- f. Do "Telephone," a variation of the activity in Chapter 3: students hold hands seated in circle, eyes closed, and "send" the hand squeeze to the next person in the determined direction.
- g. Play river rocks: students pretend to hop from one rock to another in an imaginary river that runs through the room.

METHOD Exaggerating would work well with steps a (exaggerating slowness), b (exaggerating the outbreath as they swing), c. Contrasting qualities would work well with d, e, f, and g, for which exaggeration could be used as well.

BODY PARTS In step a, imagine a weight on the shoulders, making the body sink. In step b, begin with the head. For leg swings, start with strongest leg supporting, the other swinging. Step d can begin with a hand or foot gesture. Dominoes, step e, would be fun to begin with elbows. In "Telephone" begin with a hand squeeze as indicated. Then you might use circling, shaking, raising arms, bringing hands into middle of circle, and so on. For step g, relax, create a river in the imagination first.

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DIRECTIONS AND INVOLVEMENT Demonstration is particularly valuable in teaching sequences, which can lead to activities in left-right discrimination, cross-lateral games ("Pease Porridge Hot") and sentence structure, for example. If you demonstrate with voice and movement at the beginning of each activity listed, you may find that the action moves more smoothly.

TOUCH

STEPS

- a. Work with phrases about touch:

touchdown	keep in touch
touching performance	I was touched by
touch and go	lost touch with
touchy	out of touch
untouchable	touching on a subject
a light touch	just a touch of spice
- b. In a circle of seated students, have each student move around, touching shoulders lightly and then firmly, getting feedback.
- c. Create a partner dance with some body part touching partner, and change parts in contact at intervals of a minute or so.
- d. Form a group dance with the same instructions as c.
- e. Suggest the following partner movement: one seated with eyes closed, the other touching in different ways. The partner whose eyes are closed reacts and

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- gives verbal feedback about preferences. Switch roles.
- f. Refer to the sensory awareness activities in the book, which involve touch.
 - g. Touch others in different roles: as family members, community authorities (clergy, doctor, dentist, etc.).
 - h. One partner lies down, eyes closed. The other partner touches different body parts lightly and briefly (relaxation: best with music).

METHOD Exaggeration will work very well with step a especially; b is structured as opposites; c and d could use exaggeration; e will have lots of variety and probably should *not* use exaggeration; h should exaggerate light touch.

BODY PARTS Step a would be best to begin this exploration, as touch is a volatile subject and has emotional content for most of us. This exploration could be used to explore students' attitudes about touch before moving to further exploration.

DIRECTIONS The structures for touch activities should be especially direct and clear to provide boundaries.

INVOLVEMENT Your modeling will be valuable to establish ease and comfort in these activities; spend some time exploring your own attitudes about touch so you can be clear in your presentation.