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## *Using Movement in the Classroom*

*All glory comes from daring to begin.*

—William Shakespeare

### **LET'S BEGIN**

Depending on your objective, movement can be used in a variety of venues, ranging from calming the environment to creating an adrenaline rush to simply transitioning students from one lesson or activity to another. Movement can be expressed and described by being less active or very active, depending on the purpose and the intensity of the activity and the objective of the lesson. The focus will be to figure out just when and how much movement is appropriate in different learning situations, and the effects it has on academic retention. We will examine the differences of movement, physical activity, and exercise and determine the effect that different activities, from a slight movement to a high-impact aerobic type of activity, have on the brain in terms of academic performance. Perhaps of most interest to teachers, this chapter will clarify the confusion that is often associated with movement in the classroom and explain why it is so essential in education.

## CHECK THIS OUT

Mrs. Wilson, a fourth-grade teacher in Fontana, California, prepares for yet another lesson at Coleman Elementary School. Her day is never dull; she teaches math, language arts, science, social studies, and physical education (PE) along with recess duty. All of this stuff to do, and no time to fit it all in! Who really has time to teach PE anyways when the emphasis is on standardized testing? “When every minute counts, there just isn’t any time for frill,” she says to herself as she frantically gets materials together for the children. Often she has to ask herself, “How can I possibly fit all of this into a day and cover all of the standards that need to be taught, not just covered, for the state of California? And if it’s not on the test, why cover it?”

On top of that, the 28 students that she teaches are very diverse as they come from many cultures and backgrounds. More than 50% are Hispanic, approximately 20% are African American, 8% are of Asian descent, and the remaining students are a mix of all other ethnicities. Two Hispanic students don’t speak English, and many of the students are classified as attention deficit disorder (ADD)/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and are a nightmare to keep on task.

Mrs. Wilson has come to the conclusion that if she can just keep them in their seats, focused on their work, and quiet, then mission accomplished! The thought of them getting up, moving around, and doing stuff only presents a vision of chaos. Mrs. Wilson does not want to lose control of what she is “used to doing” and teach out of her comfort zone. This is how she has done things for more than 20 years!

But one has to ask, is this really an effective strategy for learning? Are kids engaged in the learning process? And are there more successful and fun approaches to teaching and learning?

Take a moment to reflect on the “Mrs. Wilsons” at your school. Can you relate? Are there teachers experiencing a similar situation, or are you that teacher? As you read on, you will discover that movement in the academic classroom is essential to keeping kids focused, excited, enthused, and ready to learn, and you don’t have to lose control of your class. Our brains and bodies are not designed to sit down, shut up, and stay focused for hours on end. Your choice in planning with more action, when to use it, and how to “make it happen” will be a delightful addition to your academic learning environment.

## WHY EVEN BOTHER?

Before you begin the process of planning, there needs to be a thorough understanding of what the purpose of movement is in the classroom. When do you use movement? Why? What are the different levels of movement? What is whole body-brain activation? And why is aerobic activity even mentioned in this book? Classroom teachers are not PE teachers! Don’t worry; as you sink yourself into this section of the book, you will discover just how important it is to get those

brains ready for prime learning and how aerobic exercise is an awesome component of teaching that sets the stage.

## **MOVEMENT FACILITATES COGNITION**

- Movement anchors learning through the body.
- Movement energizes and integrates the body and brain for optimal learning.
- Movement makes learning fun.

### **Movement Anchors Learning Through the Body**

Just imagine, learning the multiplication facts or action words such as verbs by using your body. Doesn't that sound like a lot more fun than just sitting there? Most important, the facts and information are a part of your entire body. Through procedural memory, by doing, you learn. How does this work? The body is full of peptides and cells throughout that become engaged and have a memory of their own. Once it's in your body, you don't forget it! When kids learn about verbs by moving to the action word, hearing the music, and acting out the word with their bodies, they get it!

### **Movement Energizes and Integrates the Body and Brain for Optimal Learning**

Just as an artist needs to prepare the canvas for a masterpiece, teachers need to prepare their children in their classrooms for optimal learning. Each child is a bud on a bush ready to blossom; we as teachers just need to plant the seeds, but, most important, nourish the seeds with some energy and fuel that use the whole child. That is the only way children can grow!

What would be an effective strategy to prepare the kids for "what's coming up next" as you prepare your game plan? How can you include enthusiasm and excitement in the lessons and still keep students on task? With energizers, attention grabbers, jump starters, and cooperative games, students are ready for learning as the teacher now has their attention. Core concepts are included in the energizers. Learning is now integrated into action-based activities. New and novel goings-on leave no room for the ugly villain boredom.

### **Movement Makes Learning Fun**

What student could possibly be bored when learning is fun? Add fun to the curriculum, and teachers will have happy campers. Think back when you were a kid (okay, you still are); what were the most fun activities in your various classes? Usually, what comes to mind are lessons where there was action or movement incorporated. Why? Because kids need to move!

Of great concern is the obesity issue skyrocketing and affecting our children. Because of a lack of activity in the lifestyles of many kids, moving around is a great effort. Laziness may be a factor. To address these issues, (1) get them involved in active learning at earlier ages, and (2) make sure the energizers are not threatening, as some kids are not quite as active as others. Activities need to be all-inclusive.

## DIFFERENTIATE WHEN AND WHY TO INCLUDE MOVEMENT

There are many reasons to include movement into your classroom. There are many differentiations when to include it. Figure 1.1 is a very simplified approach to this goal.

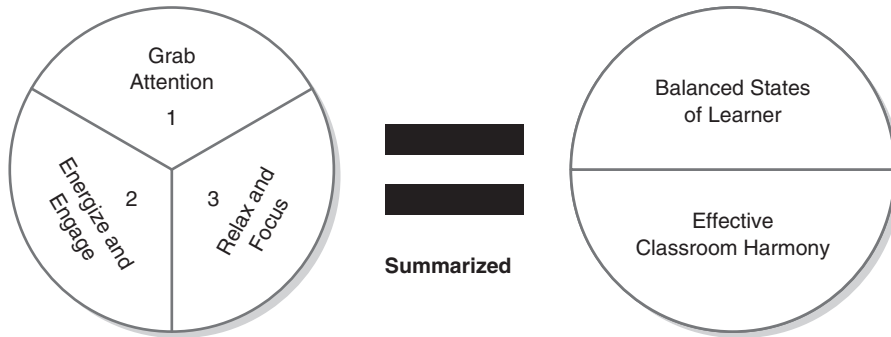
When reviewing the graphic organizer in Figure 1.1, we can see that there is a time and place to “get ‘em movin’.” At times, it is advantageous to arouse learners with an old-fashioned dose of jamming tunes and vigorous moves to get them engaged; at other times, students need to relax and focus. Let’s take a look at the differences and see what the different outcomes may be.

1. **Grab Attention:** Have you ever had students in your class who may have been there physically, but you’re just not sure if they are there mentally? This is when it’s a good time to “grab their attention.” This can be done by having students change seats, point to an object in the room, or perform a basic pencil roll. Grabbing attention is the same as getting them focused.
2. **Energize and Engage:** To energize and engage is to get the learners involved in the learning process by creating enthusiasm and motivation for their own learning. If students are not interested or do not take ownership in their education, they shut down and turn off to learning.
3. **Relax and Focus:** There are occasions when it is beneficial to calm down and relax before the students progress to the next lesson. Movement can provide super benefits for accomplishing this goal. Holding cross-lateral positions while listening to soothing music is just one idea.

The quantity of movement depends on your objective and the age of the students. For example, youngsters are very active in general and need frequent opportunities to move, while older students may need longer durations of an exercise but at intervals that are not as frequent. Each group of learners and situations is different. The instructor must be able to read the students and to adjust the movement accordingly.

Another important use of movement is transitioning children from one lesson to another. When done effectively, transitioning creates a seamless flow of great teaching interwoven with activity in a traditional classroom

Figure 1.1 Attention



environment. For example, once kids have finished a written test, the teacher could turn the process of handing in test papers into an activity. “In 10 seconds, when I say go, grab your test, stand up . . . go!” Play music. Pause. “If you would please, take 10 giant steps in any direction, give your test paper to the closest person . . . go!” Play music. Pause. “People with tests walk forward in any direction and drop the tests in the basket; testless people walk backward in any direction . . . go!” Play music. Pause.

Yippee! Not only did you as the teacher collect the assignments in a fun, active way, the students had fun doing it, and they finally got to move after working for so long on the grueling test.

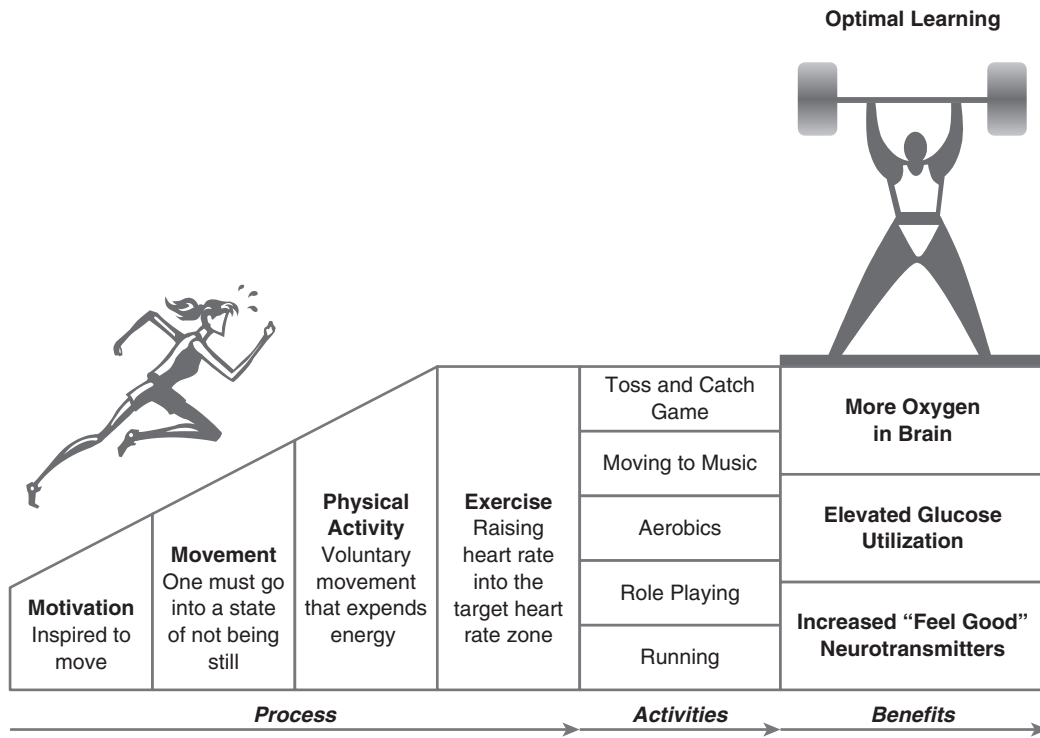
## WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES OF MOVEMENT?

As a classroom teacher, you need to understand what the differences of movement are and how they apply to academic instructors. Each component of movement is a huge part in the educational process. The evidence is clear: understanding movement before implementing it is vital to success.

Figure 1.2 does a great job of defining the differences of movement.

1. **Movement:** Not being stationary. For example, just the act of standing up out of a chair raises the heart rate, which changes the state of the learner. Moving the body (transitioning) from one place to another is another example of movement.
2. **Physical Activity:** Best described as a voluntary movement that is more involved than basic movement. When we are physically active in a classroom, we are exposed to great opportunities to anchor learning through the activity.
3. **Exercise:** Raising the heart rate into the target heart rate zone for a minimum of 20 minutes, ideally three times per week, if not more.

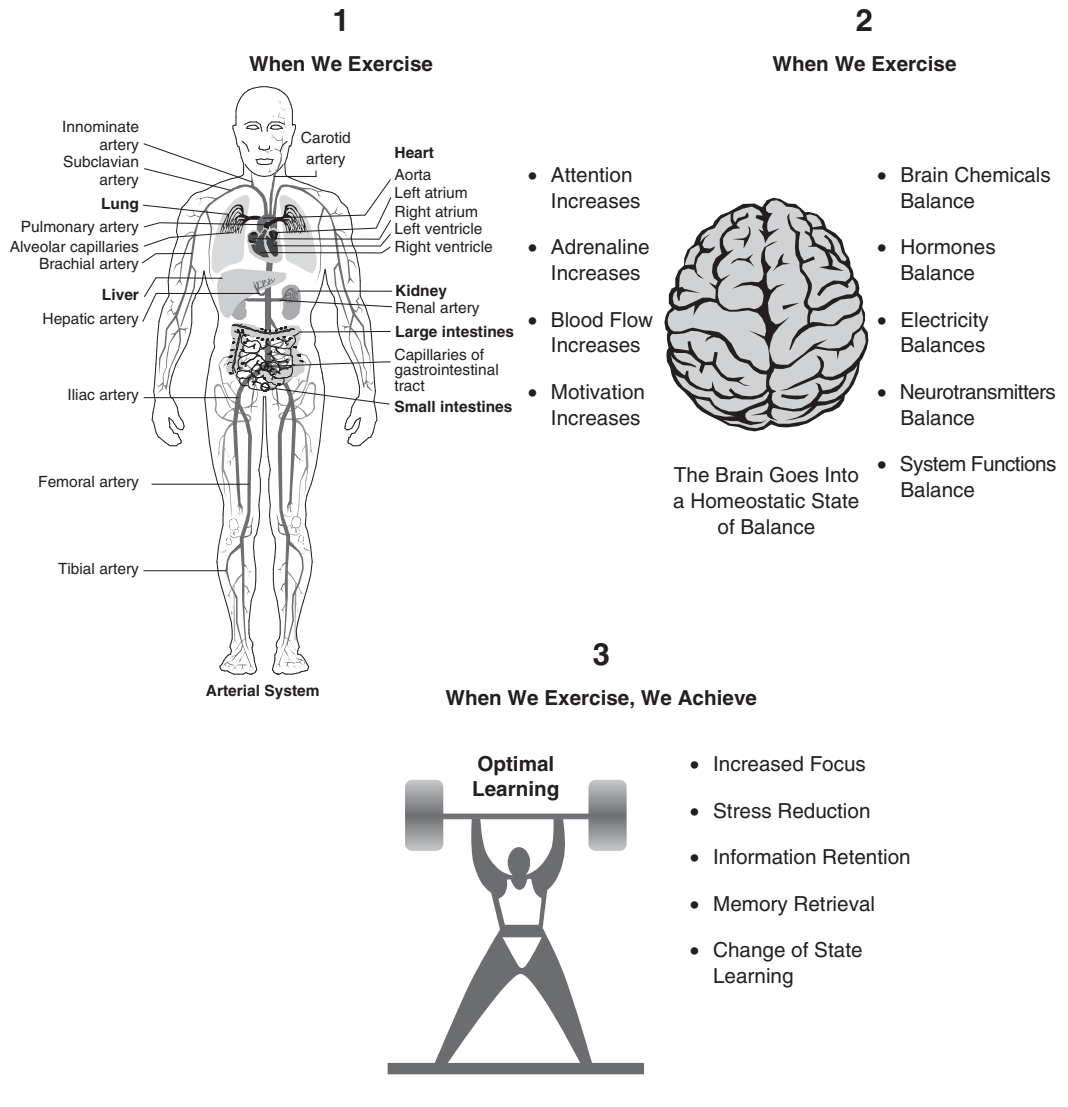
Figure 1.2 Optimal Learning



Instructional methods should alternate repetitive sedentary activities with more pleasurable, movement-orientated activities because our brain’s attentional system is set up to prefer high contrast, originality, and exciting connotations. Instead of force-feeding dull and ineffective content, instruction should take a cue from research and include more stimulating, interactive material.

Neuroscience is discovering at a dizzying rate that aerobic exercise is absolutely necessary for our brains to function at top condition. Scientists are demonstrating in study after study all over the world that, at the neuronal and cellular level, our brains are designed for and need aerobic, voluntary exercising activities to function at optimal levels. With such great emphasis placed on standardized testing, doesn’t it make sense to get students’ brains in top condition? Instead of focusing on test-taking strategies, doesn’t it behoove learners to “clean the slate in their brains” and remove all of the clutter? With more oxygen to the brain, neurotransmitters rockin’ and rollin’, and the brain nourishment for the neurons optimized to do their thing, wouldn’t it be advantageous for us classroom teachers to take this “exercise thing” a bit more serious? Absolutely! It’s as easy as 1, 2, 3 (see Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3 1, 2, 3



When we exercise, the body goes into high gear. Attention, adrenaline, blood flow, and motivation are elevated. This creates a balanced or homeostatic state in the learner. Why is the brain balanced? Because of the increase of brain chemicals, hormones, electricity, and neurotransmitters, the entire neural system functions more efficiently. What are the benefits of a homeostatic brain? Better retention, stress reduction, increased memory retrieval, state change, and a more focused

student. How do you get these benefits? By aerobic recess activities, quality physical education, and athletics.

1. **Warm-Up:** Preparing the body-brain for exercise.
2. **Fat Burning Zone:** Reached just before a participant reaches their target heart rate. Everyone is different, so each person's fat burning zone varies. A ballpark number would be 130 beats per minute.
3. **Heart Rate Zone:** Raising the heart rate into the aerobic zone for a minimum of 20 minutes, ideally three times per week, if not more. The positive benefits of aerobic exercise and the impact on the brain for optimal learning are impressive.

A highly recommended book is Dr. John Ratey's *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain* for an in-depth understanding of the science of exercise. This book is a must-read for administrators, superintendents, politicians, teachers, and change agents. Visit [www.johnratey.com](http://www.johnratey.com) for more information.

It has been demonstrated that activity is necessary to gain knowledge; because each individual comprehends and participates in a distinctive way, it is impossible to plan a single activity, engaging a specific method and predicting a patterned response, and still expect that all students will learn. Because an individual's brain changes physiologically as a result of the individual's unique experiences, it is impossible even to predict from day to day which singular activity might prove successful. Instruction must be diverse if it is to capture the attention of each member of a diverse group of students.

It is important for academic growth and individual well-being that instruction cultivates a child's intelligence, not the static number provided by standardized tests but a wide-ranging set of multiple competencies. Students need to be taught that there are learning preferences in the way the brain receives, processes, and expresses information so that they can recognize themselves as normal and validate their learning methods.

## WHOLE BODY-BRAIN ACTIVATION

Although classroom teachers might be tempted at times, it is not possible (or appropriate!) for teachers to take off their students' heads and pour the information into them. Why do they need the rest of their bodies anyway? The body only gets in the way as the kids become too distractible and hyper by wiggling and shuffling around. Why doesn't the information poured into these students' heads stick? Where is it all going? Many a teacher is amazed that even after going over and over the material with students, they still don't get it. Weren't these the same little darlings that were in class day in and day out? Yikes!

Whether you like it or not, the body has to be included for true learning to occur. The body is not the largest part of our beings for nothing; we need to use it! Let's take a look at whole body-brain activation.



**Figure 1.4** Mind, Body, and Spirit

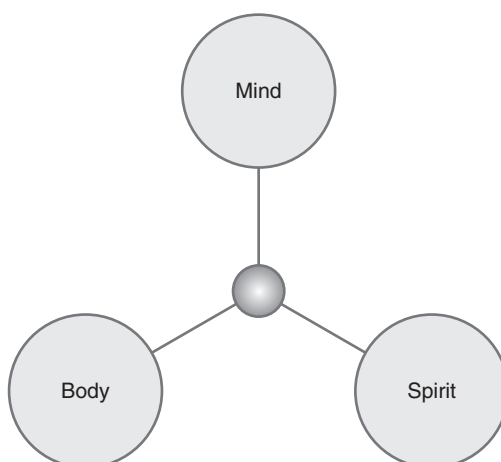


Figure 1.4 is excellent at demonstrating the importance of the integral entanglement and connection of the mind, body, and spirit. One does not operate or function without the other. Working in unison and hopefully for one common goal in the educational arena, the mind, body, and spirit far exceed the capabilities of the most advanced computer programs. When functioning in full capacity, the mind, body, and spirit can overcome impossibilities for those hard-to-reach learners. The human being is capable of amazing challenges when the whole is tapped into.

- **Mind:** The mind, or brain, is located at the top of our heads (hopefully). We as instructor need to capitalize on its maximum efficiency.
- **Body:** The body comprises many vital organs and systems, including the brain; it's the part that gets hyper and can drive a teacher crazy.
- **Spirit:** The spirit is the internal driving force that makes each one of us who we are from the core of our being. Without delving into religion or too much detail, let's just say it is our soul and operates in our minds and bodies.

No ifs, ands, or buts—in education we have to include all three dimensions into academia. Human beings are put together with a mind, a body, and a spirit for a reason. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Use it or lose it!

## MAKE IT HAPPEN

Now that the writing is on the wall and the evidence is in, without a shadow of a doubt, it's time as teachers to get moving in our classrooms! The critical information needed to make sense in planning is superbly explained and is coming up

in future pages. The following chapters will suffice the mission of “just doing it.” Chapters 4 through 7 include all of the activities, energizers, and attention grabbers to get movin’ and groovin’. Chapter 8 will get you organized, and Chapter 9 will keep you up-to-speed in assessment. In the meantime, the “Make-It-Happen Checklist for Movement in Your Classroom” (see Resources) is an excellent checklist to add movement to your classroom. By completing and filling out activities for A, B, and C, you can check to see that you have included movement into your classroom. With this checklist, you can monitor whether you are on target in your quest to liven up your classroom. Remember to start with baby steps and add more activity when you are feeling more comfortable. This should be a joyful, fun process for you.

## LET’S WRAP IT UP

It has been established that activity is necessary to gain knowledge, and, because each individual comprehends and participates in a distinctive way, it is impossible to plan a single lesson that suffices for every child every day at the same time.

It has been decisively and consistently demonstrated that movement has significant impact on thinking and learning by anchoring an individual’s thoughts and providing a framework for developmental processes. Body-centered learning that incorporates cadence, music, energizers, attention grabbers, and aerobic recess/physical education activities should be routinely included in instruction, and, yes, for academic teachers. Integrating subject learning with active learning should be an ongoing strategy that collaborating teachers use to maximum opportunities for students to learn content-area information.

Given the increasing numbers of students with ADD and learning disabilities, groups that are often highly medicated for movement issues, it is irresponsible to ignore data that many children who have been identified with attention problems have hypokinesia. Even more so than their peers, children with ADD and children with learning and mental disabilities need learning programs that incorporate movement into classroom instruction.

Students who are taught that learning truly can be fun will be anxious and ready for the next learning lesson. When students are engaged fully, the whole mind/body/spirit, into the academic learning classroom, nothing but magic will occur. The students will be there, ready and willing, to tackle any new challenge.

Not only will the students enjoy their education more, but teachers will have more fun to boot! So, to all of the Mrs. Wilsons out there, let’s make it happen in your classroom and fire up learning.