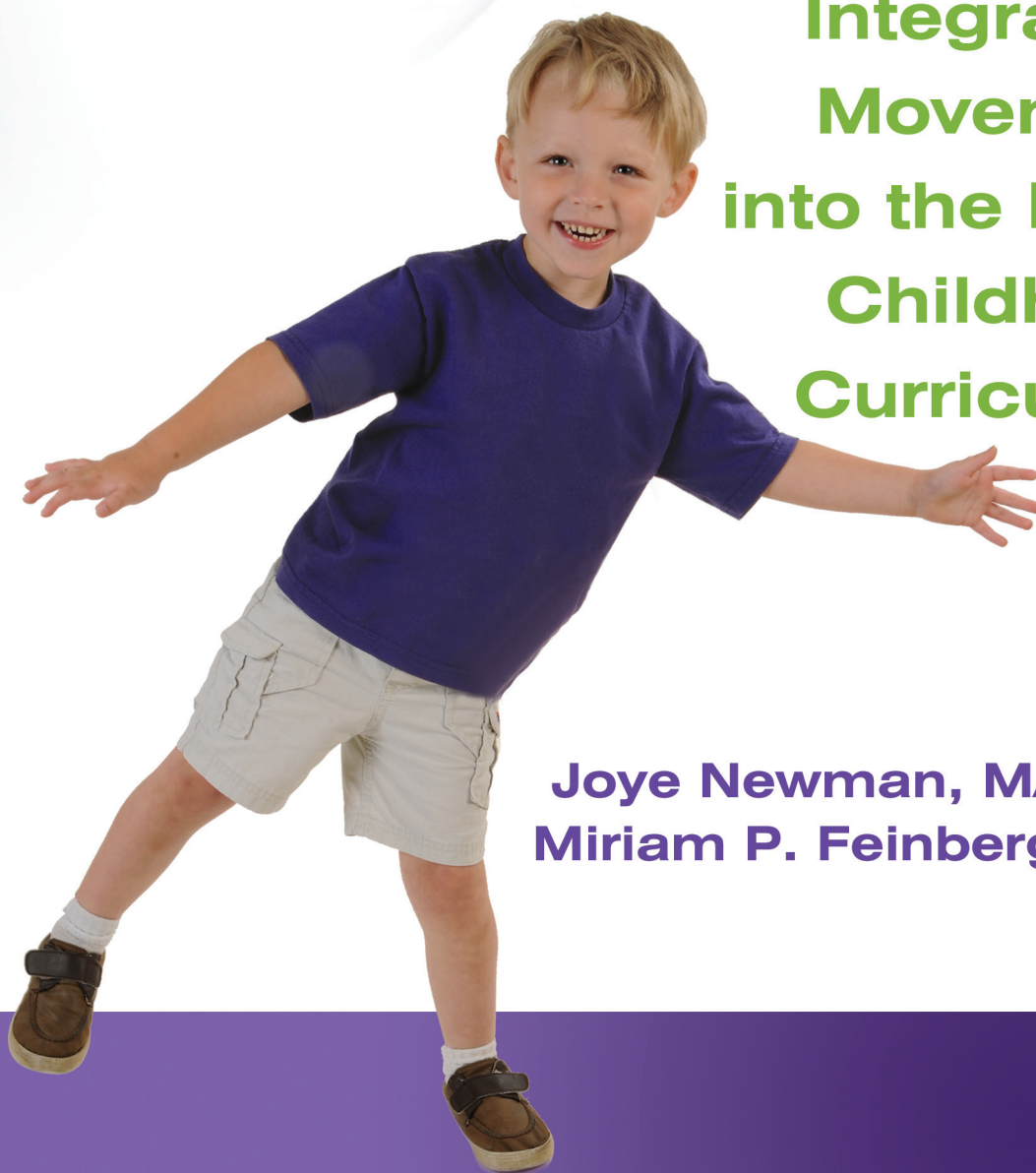


Move to Learn

**Integrating
Movement
into the Early
Childhood
Curriculum**



**Joye Newman, MA, and
Miriam P. Feinberg, PhD**



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**INTEGRATING MOVEMENT INTO THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM**

Joye Newman, MA, and Miriam P. Feinberg, PhD



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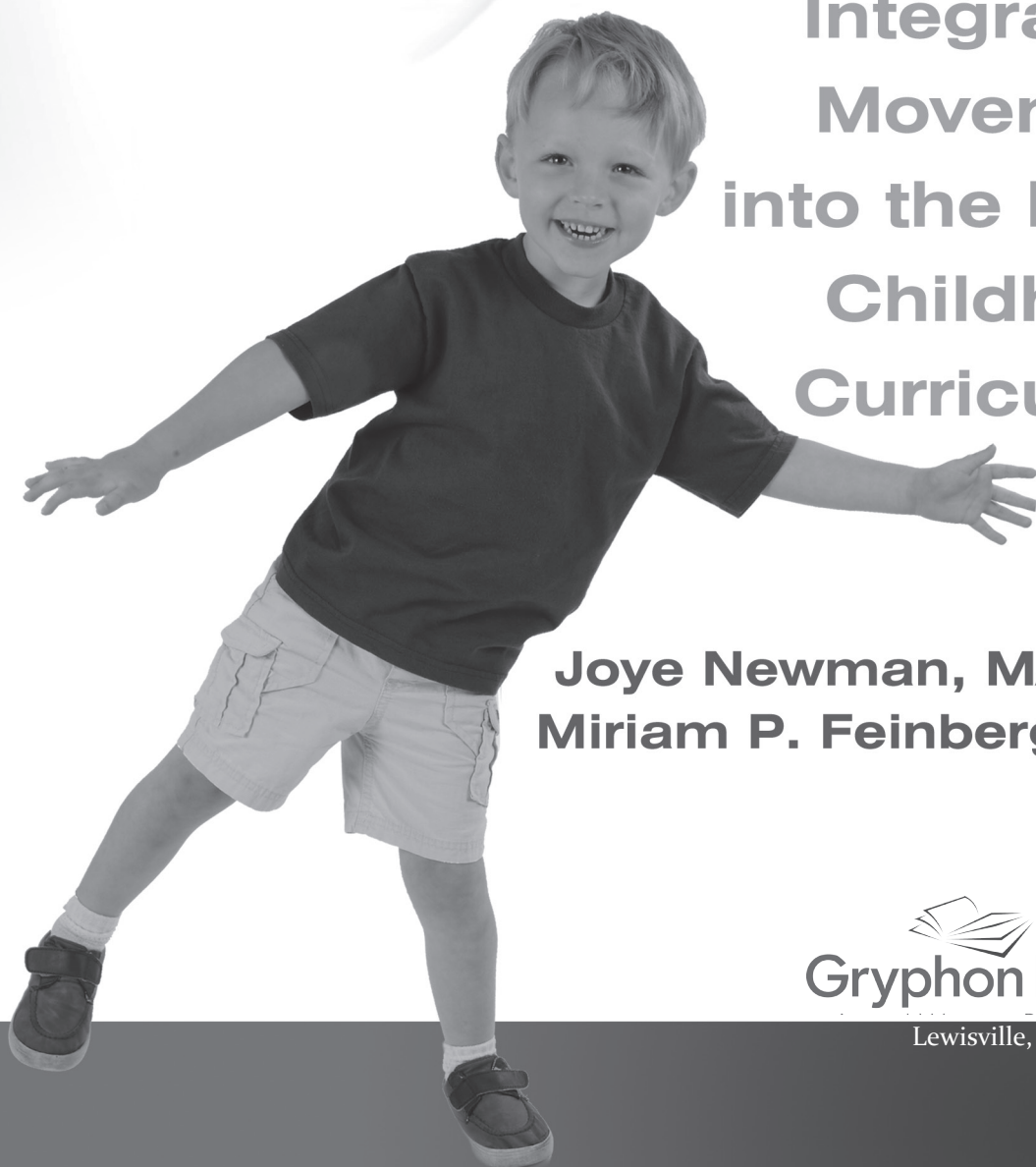
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**Gryphon House**  
Lewsville, NC





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## FOREWORD

Movement is a language, a way we communicate with the world. It is one of the first forms of communication children use. The baby who turns his head toward the sound of his mother's voice, the arched back that says no, and the burrowing snuggle that communicates contentment—these are all clear movement messages to a parent. As children grow, they use movement to express a need or a feeling. A caregiver can tell by an ear pull that a child is tired or by the reach for the bottle that the child is hungry. Somehow, we know what each of these movements mean, and we respond with our own movements and add the words to narrate the exchange. We “read” children by their movement language and respond sometimes without even realizing it. The first wave, the first steps, and the first blown kiss all mark a way of communicating that occurs long before spoken language develops.

By the preschool years, children are delighting in learning the language of moving their bodies in new ways. They are thrilled when they learn to snap their fingers or hop on one foot. Conquering the slide and monkey bars is a way of saying, “I am growing up!” As children learn more and more complex movements, they incorporate them into their lives. A spontaneous dance can express a multitude of feelings. A simple facial expression can speak a thousand words.

The sense of mastery that comes from motor skills provides a foundation for all other skills. After conquering walking and climbing, children are ready to play with the way they move. Children are fascinated by how objects and animals move. Have you ever watched a child imitate the movement of an animal or pretend to be an airplane? The freely expressed movement is often much better than what we could instruct them to do. They use many skills at the same time to express what they observe and construct their own knowledge about the world around them.

When we provide children with movement activities, we not only enrich their motor, cognitive, and social skills, but we also expand their movement vocabulary. They learn to listen to their bodies and express themselves with creativity and awareness. This expanded vocabulary of movements is similar to learning new “big words”—and we all know how much they love that! The oft-heard phrase of “Look what I can do!” is a celebration of these skills. We are so fortunate to have the ability to inspire children to use their bodies as a learning and expressive tool. May all children benefit from the brilliant ideas shared in this book.

—Ellen Booth Church



# Introduction


Human beings are born to move. In fact, we begin to move at the moment of conception and continue moving as long as we are healthy and capable. Movement is innate and fundamental to life. When we imagine happy young children, we picture exuberant and unbridled movement. This is not only natural but also necessary for optimal physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development.

With the advent of technology, many of us find that our lifestyles have become more sedentary. We often introduce computers and other technology to children at a very early age, sometimes even before they are physiologically prepared to master those skills. As early childhood educators, we are responsible for preparing children to handle the world in which they live. In many cases, this includes the ability to work with keyboards and screens. At the same time, we know that movement lays the framework upon which all future skills are built. It is, therefore, imperative that movement be a primary element in the early childhood curriculum.

With an awareness of the profound impact movement makes on the developing child, we look for ways to bring movement to all elements of the school curriculum. We believe that movement is an essential part of living and growing and should be encouraged and embraced at all times of the day. The clear way to present both movement and cognitive materials successfully is through an integrated curriculum, with cognitive and motor activities presented as one, thus encouraging children's learning and creativity in all areas.

**It is imperative that movement be a primary element in the early childhood curriculum.**





# The Importance of Movement

**Connecting movement to all areas of the curriculum, to all skills, is natural.**  
—MIMI BRODSKY CHENFELD

Those who feel comfortable in their bodies are often more competent and seem to find life easier than those who are less at ease physically. As adults, we have an incredibly large repertoire of movements that we take for granted. For instance, when driving a car, one automatically lifts the directional indicator handle to signal a right turn. Imagine being in a car where the signals are reversed. One would need to think every time a turn is required, making driving much more difficult. From the time of birth, each new experience creates neural pathways that grow and are strengthened by further movement. As these movements become automatic, the brain has greater capacity to focus on new information.

In the past, children had a variety of movement opportunities from their earliest ages. Those movement experiences built a foundation for the development of sensory, visual, and perceptual motor skills, allowing children to concentrate on learning. Today, parents and educators frequently offer electronic gadgets and videos in the hope of teaching new skills, without realizing that those practices deprive children of opportunities for physical activities and human interaction:

- Manipulating an avatar on a screen does not provide the sensory, perceptual, or visual-motor input that is generated from actual physical experiences. For instance, rolling down a hill sends information to the middle ear about gravity and gives information through the skin concerning touch. Both of these messages become essential when the child learns to write but are not attainable when interacting with an avatar.

- A child who interacts with a game pad is limited in his field of vision. Concentrating only on the electronic instrument in front of him deprives him of the opportunity to alternate between looking far away and close-up. Alternating the distance of visual focus, necessary for copying from the board when in school, is developed when a child throws and catches a ball with a partner.
- “Moving” through a two-dimensional world is quite different from actually moving through space. The spatial awareness that a child acquires by moving herself forward and backward, sideways and diagonally builds skills needed to organize her paper, her desk, her thoughts, and her body.

Scientists now recognize that stimulation through movement and sensory experiences during the early childhood years is necessary for the development of the mature brain. Research has shown that cognitive development and motor development may be fundamentally interrelated. The period for the development of basic gross-motor skills appears to be most available from the prenatal period to around age five. It is clear that teachers who provide experiences (including motor activities) engaging all areas of the cortex can anticipate deeper learning than if they engage fewer areas.

Children from birth to age six are developing the foundation for who they will become for the rest of their lives. While we can teach them information, we cannot teach skills that they learn only by moving. It is our responsibility as preschool educators to promote movement opportunities through an environment rich in sensory, perceptual, and visual-motor experiences.

# How to Use This Book

This book presents a variety of classroom and outdoor activities in six curriculum areas. As you use it, you will notice that ideas presented in the integrated curriculum areas often overlap. For instance, “Let’s Have Sound Day” on page 23 under Language and Literacy could as appropriately be placed in the Music curriculum category, as could “Dancing with Your Ribbon” on page 52, which is currently found under Mathematics.

In designing these activities, we have been mindful of important aspects of early learning:

- **Providing preschoolers with numerous sensory-motor experiences**  
We emphasize visual-motor activities, including those integrating visual information with fine- and gross-motor movements.
- **Integrating a variety of gross-motor activities**  
The activities involve coordination of movements, postural control, and locomotion such as rolling, jumping, crawling, and creeping.
- **Combining music with movement**  
Adding music to the activities provides additional learning opportunities, enhances the auditory system, and develops the sense of rhythm. Music can be a social activity, eliciting communication in a variety of ways.
- **Offering directed movement activities to do outdoors**  
Even though nondirected playing on the playground is beneficial to young children, directed movement, both indoors and out, is equally important.

○ **Incorporating opportunities for social awareness and self-expression**

The activities are designed to encourage freedom of expression within a wide range of abilities. As there are no right or wrong responses, everyone can succeed at his own level, feeling a sense of accomplishment.

Feel free to use these activities exactly as they are presented or change them to meet the needs of your students. Some of the activities are brief, while others are more involved and might require longer periods of time. We have not included age ranges with the activities, as each classroom is unique in its physical, emotional, and social character.

Wherever possible, we have listed the activities in order of difficulty. Ideas offered can be used as references or as a day-to-day guide, regardless of the number of children in your class, the physical size of your classroom, and the quality and quantity of equipment available to you. The majority of these activities can be modified to include children with a broad range of physical and intellectual challenges. Suggested activities will enhance the learning experiences both in the classroom and also outside, during circle time, with small and large groups, and as one-to-one interactions.

Moving children are developing children. There are many ways that we can help them develop through movement. They can be invited to jump to the line rather than simply walking there when they line up at the door. They can point with their elbows rather than using only words to identify a specific object. They can use body parts requiring movement in ways other than walking when transitioning to a new activity.

**While everyone benefits from the inclusion of movement, such activities are crucial for young children's development in all areas and should be purposefully integrated into every part of the early childhood curriculum.**



# Language and Literacy

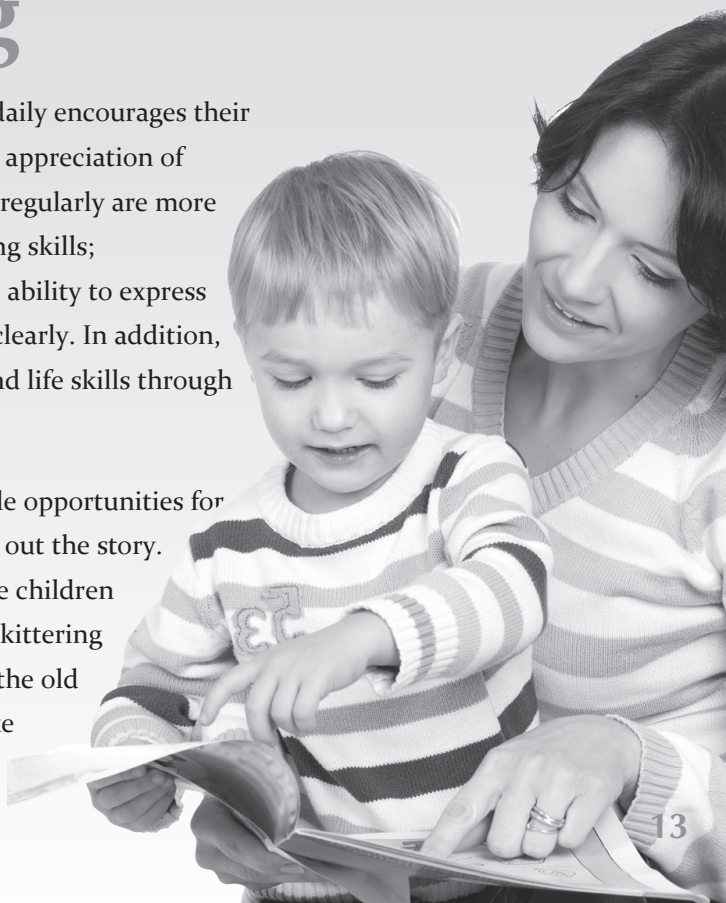
## CHAPTER 1

Literacy, defined as the ability to read and write, is essential for children's success in school and throughout life. Although reading and writing skills continue to develop during one's lifetime, the early years are crucial for the development of literacy. While we do not encourage teaching reading and writing during the preschool years, the seeds of literacy can be planted through literacy-rich experiences.

## Prereading

Allocating time to read to children daily encourages their language acquisition as well as their appreciation of literature. Children who are read to regularly are more likely than others to develop listening skills; lengthened attention spans; and the ability to express themselves confidently, easily, and clearly. In addition, they gain new information, ideas, and life skills through literacy activities.

Many children's books provide ample opportunities for movement by asking children to act out the story. In *Goodnight Moon*, for instance, the children can imitate the story characters by skittering like the mouse, moving quietly like the old lady, or making their bodies look like chairs. When reading a book that



provides less obvious means for movement, it is still possible to find ways to move, sometimes by inviting suggestions from the children themselves.

## Let's Say Good Night

This is a great activity to do just before nap time, when the emphasis is on *quiet*. When you need to get the children moving and grooving, focus on *loud*.

### WHAT TO DO:

1. Read *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown to the children. Any children's book that features a quiet mood will work for this activity.
2. Ask the children, "Is *Goodnight Moon* a quiet story or a loud story?" Listen to their responses.
3. Ask the children to stand up and spread out so they have room to move without bumping into each other.
4. Ask, "Can you show me a quiet way to move your arms?" Let them move their arms quietly. As they do, comment on their movements: "Cammie is moving her arms quietly over her head." "LaToya is moving her arms quietly from side to side."
5. Continue the activity, encouraging the children to move different body parts in a quiet way:
  - ☐ legs
  - ☐ head
  - ☐ fingers
  - ☐ feet
6. Ask the children to show how they can make noises with their hands. As they do so, comment on their movements: "Taylor is clapping." "Kenny is trying to snap his fingers!"
7. Continue the activity, encouraging the children to make noises with different body parts:
  - ☐ feet
  - ☐ knees
  - ☐ elbows



## How Does Snow Look?

This slow-paced activity can be relaxing. For children who are able to move each limb separately, snow angels can be very calming.

### WHAT TO DO:

1. Read *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats or *Snow* by Uri Shulevitz to the children. Any children's book that features snow will work for this activity.
2. Talk about snow with the children. Ask, "How do snowflakes look when they fall?" "Do they fall fast or slowly?" If you live in an area where snow is a rarity, consider viewing a short video clip of snowfall.
3. Ask the children, "Can you move across the room *very* slowly, just like a slowly moving snowflake?" Encourage the children to move, and comment as they do: "Brenda is slowly turning." "Jerry is slowly stepping."
4. Encourage the children to move slowly in other ways:
  - on tiptoe
  - while sliding on their tummies
  - while walking on their knees
  - while walking backward
5. Ask the children, "What color is snow?" Ask them to look at their shirts. If they have white on their shirts, encourage them to twirl around the circle back to their place like a twirling snowflake.
6. Encourage them to move if they are wearing white:
  - on their shoes—march around the circle and go back to their places.
  - on their pants—slide around the circle and go back to their places.
  - anywhere else—slink around the circle and go back to their places.



7. Tell the children, “When it snows, you can make snow angels by lying in the snow and moving your arms and legs. Peter in *The Snowy Day* makes snow angels with his body.” Ask the children to lie on their backs on the floor.
8. Tell them to slide one arm over their heads and then slide that arm back down to their sides. Continue, asking them to focus on different body parts:
  - Slide your other arm over your head and then back down to your side.
  - Slide both arms over your head and then back down to your two sides.
  - Slide one leg out to the side and then back straight down.
  - Slide your other leg out to the side and then back straight down.
  - Slide both legs out to the side and then back straight down.

## The Peddler and His Caps

This activity provides opportunities for pretend and actual practice with developing balance.

**Preparation:** You will need beanbags for part of this activity, one for each child.

### WHAT TO DO:

1. Read *Caps for Sale* by Esphyr Slobodkina.
2. Talk with the children about how the peddler manages to balance the caps on his head. Ask them for their ideas about how he does it.
3. Ask, “Can you move around the room pretending to carry all those caps on your head?” Let the children pretend to balance the caps as they move.

4. Continue the activity, encouraging the children to pretend to carry the caps on different body parts:
  - ☐ on one hand                      ☐ on their backs
  - ☐ on their elbows                      ☐ on one foot
5. Give each child a beanbag. Ask, "Can you move around the room carrying the beanbag on your head?" Let them try to balance their beanbags as they move.
6. Continue the activity, letting them balance a beanbag on different body parts:
  - ☐ on one hand                      ☐ on their back
  - ☐ on an elbow                      ☐ on one footAsk the children to put the beanbags in a box or basket when they are finished.
7. Encourage the children to copy you as you move. Say, "Now, I'll be the peddler, and you'll be the monkeys. When I move a certain way, you copy me the way the monkeys copied the peddler." Move around and let the children try to copy you.

## Where Should We Go?

Encourage the children to move to any part of the classroom they like as they listen carefully, responding to your movement words. This activity emphasizes the development of spatial relationships and listening skills.

### WHAT TO DO:

1. Read *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* by Dr. Seuss to the children. Talk with them about places they would like to go and ways to get there.
2. Tell them that you are going to go all over the classroom. Ask, "Can you look all around the room and find something round (or curvy, square, or red)? Find a way to move to that object without walking to it, such as crawling or hopping."

### Simple and Inexpensive Classroom Equipment

- Masking tape in various colors
- Paper plates
- Beanbags of various textures
- Balls of various sizes
- Rolls of elastic tape to be cut into various lengths
- Chalk
- Hoops
- Ropes of various lengths

3. Ask, "As you look around the room, can you see something green? Can you go to that place moving way down low?" Encourage the children to move close to the floor. When they reach their destination, ask them to come back to the circle by moving way up high, perhaps by walking on tiptoe.
4. Continue the activity, asking the children to move in a variety of ways:
  - quietly
  - loudly
  - quickly
  - slowly
  - by yourself
  - with a partner
5. Encourage the children to travel to any spot in the room moving on one hand and two feet.
6. Continue, encouraging the children to travel in a variety of ways:
  - moving on two hands and one foot
  - moving on one hand and one foot
  - moving on two different parts of your body

# Prewriting

Well-developed sensory-motor, perceptual-motor, and visual skills are essential for successful writing. These include proprioception—the awareness of sensations coming from muscles and joints. Most children will have the complex skills needed for writing at approximately six years of age. Until then, it is our responsibility as early childhood educators to offer introductory activities that encourage children to practice these skills:

- Proprioception—using a pencil with appropriate pressure (not too much or too little)
- Laterality—holding a paper still with one hand while moving a pencil across the paper with the other hand
- Awareness of directionality and the ability to move body parts in the desired direction
- Easily crossing the midline—moving a hand or eye across the vertical center of the body

## Let's Make Cereal Chains

Before children can hold pencils, they need fine-motor control. This activity lets the children practice pincer movements by stringing. Rather than showing the children how to pick up small objects, provide them with materials and the time to practice on their own. The pincer movement will develop naturally.

**Preparation:** For this activity, each child will need a 6"–8" piece of string. Tie a knot at one end, and dip the other end in a bit of glue to provide a "point." They will also need some round cereal, such as Cheerios. Fill small bowls or cups with the cereal, and set them out on a table for the children.



### WHAT TO DO:

1. Ask the children, "Can you take some cereal out of the bowl?"
2. Ask them to pick up the pieces one at a time and place them in a line. Let them practice putting the cereal in a line on the table.
3. Give each child a piece of string. Encourage them to thread the cereal onto the strings.
4. When they are finished with the activity, let them eat their cereal as a snack.

## Let's Use Rhythm Sticks

Before a child can write smoothly, she needs to be able to hold her paper still with one hand while moving her other hand to form the letters. This activity lets the children practice moving one hand at a time.

**Preparation:** Give one set of rhythm sticks to each child.

### WHAT TO DO:

1. Ask the children to pass the rhythm sticks around and around their bodies, passing them from one hand to the next. Let them practice the movement.
2. Ask them to try passing the sticks around their bodies in the other direction.
3. Invite the children to hit the floor with both rhythm sticks at the same time.
4. Ask them to hit the floor with one stick at a time.
5. Encourage them to show their own ways to move one stick while keeping the other stick still. Comment on how they are moving their sticks: "Jenna is waving one stick in the air"



and holding the other stick still.” “Chase is tapping one stick on the floor and holding the other stick still.”

## I’m Here and There

Before a child can recognize differences in certain letters, such as *b* and *p*, *b* and *d*, and *q* and *p*, he needs an understanding of directionality. One of the best ways to reinforce directionality is to use words and phrases such as *above*, *below*, *beside*, *in front of*, *behind*, *over*, *under*, *up*, *down*, *backward*, and *forward*.

**Preparation:** Give each child a beanbag.

### WHAT TO DO:

1. Ask the children to show you a way to be *in front of* their beanbags. Comment on their choices: “Matthew is sitting in front of his beanbag.” “Gracie is standing on one foot in front of her beanbag.”
2. Ask them to show a way to be *next to* their beanbags. Comment on their choices.
3. Tell them that you will say a word, and they can listen and figure out where to put their beanbags:
  - *above* you
  - *below* you
  - *beside* you
  - *under* you
  - *over* youComment on their choices.



## Follow the Flashlight

Before a child can write fluidly across the page, she needs to be able to track her eyes smoothly from side to side.

**Preparation:** You will need a flashlight for this activity.

### WHAT TO DO:

1. Ask the children to lie down on their backs on the floor. Tell them that you will turn out the lights for this activity.
2. As they lie on the floor in the darkened room, shine a flashlight very slowly on the ceiling. Ask the children to watch the light as it moves.
3. Ask them to hold up a finger and point to the light as it moves.
4. Continue the activity, encouraging them to follow the light with different body parts:
  - ☐ one finger from each hand
  - ☐ an elbow
  - ☐ a foot
  - ☐ a chin
  - ☐ a tongue
  - ☐ another part of the body



# Move to Learn

When we imagine happy young children, we picture exuberant and unbridled movement. Not only is movement natural, it is also necessary for optimal physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. Moving children are developing children. With **Move to Learn**, it is easy to turn your classroom into an environment that encourages movement activities rich in sensory, perceptual, and visual-motor experiences.

Through simple strategies, **Move to Learn** seamlessly integrates fine and gross motor-skill development across the early childhood curriculum:

- Language and Literacy
- Mathematics
- Science
- Social Studies
- Creative Representation
- Social Skills

With most activities listed in order of difficulty, choosing the right one for your class is easy! Regardless of the number of children, the physical size of your classroom, or the quality or quantity of equipment available to you, the ideas in **Move to Learn** are flexible enough to get every classroom moving.



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