



## EXPERTS SPEAK

Gina's background was originally ballet, but she has spent the last 27 years teaching movement and dance in mainstream, early years and SEND settings as well as dance schools. Whilst teaching, Gina found the time to create the 'Hi-5' dance programme to run alongside the Australian Children's TV series and the Angelina Ballerina Dance Academy for Hit Entertainment. Her proudest achievement to date is her baby Littlemagictrain. She created this specifically to help children learn through music, make-believe and movement.

Gina has qualifications of teaching movement and dance from the Royal Ballet School, Trinity College and Royal Academy of Dance.

# GINA BALE

# How to Ensure All Children Engage in Movement and Dance



**M**ovement is vital for all children, no matter what their physical abilities or environment. Movement helps all children develop large body movements known as gross motor skills. These movements help build and develop the muscles needed to stabilize their core. Gross motor skills need to be mastered before they can refine their fine motor skills. Developing their gross motor skills develops physical literacy and gets them ready to write. Movement and dance develop the key school readiness skills that are needed for writing and drawing. Movement and dance improve concentration, listening and attention skills, core control through the development of their gross and fine motor skills. There are so many benefits of encouraging children to move and dance, no matter what their physical and emotional abilities.

To help children develop their skills, teach movements in small bites. Repeat the movements, at the speed and pace that is best for them. Revisit the movements through role-play and make-believe. This repetition enables you to continually assess and differentiate as you scaffold their learning using Vygotsky theory 'Zone of Proximal Development'.

- Scaffolding will be vital in your strategy to help the children with the tasks by simplifying the movement to fit their current ability.
- It is important to maintain motivation while managing any frustration they may feel as they try to master the movement.
- Always ensure you demonstrate the idealized version of what you want them to achieve at that stage of their learning.
- The use of make-believe and imagination help, as this allows you to revisit the movements in different ways through new storylines and music.

Repetition is not just about building the connections in the brain it is also about the pathways being set with the Myelin wrapping around the nerve fibres. Myelin is the key to increasing the speed of processing and accuracy of movements. I recommend the book 'The talent code' by Daniel

Coyle for more information on the importance of Myelin in our development.

Remember to manage your expectations and allow the children to achieve their potential and progress in the time that they need. The biggest hindrance to children's movement is adults. As adults, we bring in our assumptions to the class of children's abilities and their potential to progress and develop.

## **Make movement engaging**

A fun and engaging way to help children join in is through the combination of make-believe, music, and movement.

Make-believe (role-play) helps children build relationships with each other. Improve their speech and language, communication and listening skills. To encourage this the use of illustrations are helpful. They capture the children's imagination and give you so many opportunities for additional learning. Role-play brings the movements you want to focus on, to develop gross motor skills, to life. I have listed just a few ideas and the storylines I use, that can be linked to a target movement or skill they need to develop.

## **Crawling**

Diving 'under the sea' to find your very own turtle shell. Crawling along the seabed as the turtle, on your hands and knees, looking for some yummy seaweed sandwiches.

## **Running**

Go on an 'African Safari' and put on your Zebra stripes and run as fast as you can from the lions.

## **Jumping**

Put on baby bears wellies in 'Visiting the bears' and see how many puddles you can jump in.



## **Stretching**

Reaching up high, on tiptoe, putting the washing on the line in 'Teatime'.

## **Balancing**

Join the Flamingo on a 'Visit to the Zoo' and see if you can balance on one leg.

## **Importance of having the right music for the movements**

At Littlemagictrain we have been very fortunate to have music specifically created and styled to fit the adventure stories and characters along with added layers of musical interest. We use a large range of styles, tempos, metres, different instruments, and dynamics. This music includes jazz waltzes, polkas jigs, threes, fours, and sixes with a twisting jellyfish, a galloping horse, sarabanding turtle and even a jiving kangaroo. You will even hear a kazoo played like a squirrel and a theremin, Otamtone, windchimes and sound effects that have taken a lot of time getting just right.

Use different styles of music to engage and motivate your children. Think outside the box and use different styles of music ranging from opera to heavy metal! Remember it's not about what you like, but what gets the children moving and dancing.

## **Your use of language with children**

Did you know that the Language we use in movement sessions can have a profound effect on children and stay with them for life?

We all want children to build and develop their physical skills but at the same time, we need to understand that their goals and level will vary and that's ok! You need to think about how you phrase and frame your instructional language around their different abilities and needs.

Remember your use of language has such a huge

impact on their well-being, making them feel able to achieve and develop.

If you want the children to "stand up!" or "walk/run/jump around the room" and you have children that have mobility issues, use the phrases "ready to move?" and

"Let's move around the room". Follow this with feedback "we have all moved around the room".

It is also important to individually use their name with the instruction, so they are clear about what is expected of them. I also verbalize my movements which helps with the development of speech and language skills.

Don't forget the speed of the movements you are asking for will be different for each child and their needs. To help the children, model the idealized version of what you want them to achieve at their stage of learning. Remember don't let your assumptions of their abilities prevent them from achieving more.

## **Don't forget your voice!**

Your voice and how you use it in the session plays an enormous part in making sessions fun and exciting. Don't be monotone, but at the same don't overstimulate the children – it's about finding the Goldilocks zone for your children! Be expressive and always encouraging whilst paying attention to their verbal and non-verbal feedback.

## **The magic bag**

It is recommended that you have a bag of props and sensory items as you never know what will be needed on the day, to engage the children, which will allow them to experience movement in a sensory and creative way. A list of a few of my must-have items. Do have fun with the children trying them out:



No: 1

## The Parachute

Do invest, if you can, in a parachute as this is a wonderful piece of equipment that can be used in so many ways to help children.

### Movement activities with a parachute

An example of some of the activities that I do to help develop large body muscles and the core to improve their posture and stability.

- Pushing the parachute away with the movements of reaching, stretching, and pushing.
- Rolling or crawling on the parachute as you shake it.
- Sitting in the centre, trying not to topple over, as you pull them around the room on the parachute.

### Calming activities with a parachute

Have all the children sitting or lying on mats in the centre of the room as you and some assistants lift the parachute, down and walk around in a circle to music. The children enjoy 'The Swan' or 'Aquarium' from Carnival of the Animals by Saint-Saens.

This activity is wonderful for children who have difficulties with movement as you are stimulating them visually with the colours, music, movement of the parachute and feeling of the air around them.

### Some ideas combining a parachute and make-believe:

- "Under the sea" looking for turtles, crabs, watching the water moving above us. Shaking from side to side as the waves get stronger and stronger!
- "Picnic on the Moon" lying on the moon looking up at the stars and planets - add a light display.
- "African safari" running underneath the trees

and through the long grass hiding from the lion.

No: 2

## Space blankets and pom poms

Children and babies love the sound and texture of the space blanket, making it ideal for so many different adventures using make-believe.

Some ideas combining space blankets, pom-poms and make-believe:

- "Picnic on the Moon" the space blanket can be their rocket, spacesuit or even the moon they land on.
- "Picnic on the Moon" pom poms are another favourite as you can catch and feel the stars, meteors and food that floats away.
- "North Pole" pom poms are ideal for a snowball fight!

**In conclusion, your ingredients to success are to be sensitive to the needs of the child and engage them in a multi-sensory way through the play.**

1. BE FLEXIBLE AND SENSITIVE: To ensure movement is engaging for all children, including sensory pathway, you need to be sensitive to their needs and feelings. You can plan to "A", but the mood of the day is "B".
2. IT IS ABOUT THE CHILD NOT YOU: Yes, you will have targets they need to achieve but there are fun ways of doing this. Just think how much easier it is to teach a class of fully engaged children rather than ones that aren't.
3. USE/CREATE A MULTI-SENSORY ACTIVITY BASED ON IMAGINATION AND PLAY: Who wouldn't want to join in?

### References:

- Coyle, D., 2010. *The Talent Code*. Crawley: Arrow Books (ISBN 9780099519850)