

**Marion North**

## **Movement Education<sup>1</sup>**

The study of human movement in Western culture is in its infancy and its full development lies in the future. No doubt, some years hence there will be a department of movement in every university and it will be recognized that the scope of the subject is as broad as that of any other discipline presently studied. Ideas about what movement is vary, even among its exponents working in schools and colleges. Thus, it is not surprising to find colleagues in other disciplines ranging in their attitudes towards the subject from great enthusiasm to sceptical indifference. The range and variety of work in movement education, developed over the last twenty years, is both the strength and weakness of the subject: strength because of the vitality and richness of activity, weakness because some of the work which can be seen under the guise of "movement" shows misunderstanding of its most significant aspects and, therefore, should probably never be inflicted upon children or adults. But this can also be said of many other subjects taught in schools, and the contribution of movement to education should not be assessed on the basis of the least understanding of its exponents.

### **I**

Perhaps I could start by saying what I think movement education is *not*. It is not physical education, though many aspects of movement understanding and practice have been incorporated in some physical education programs to the great enrichment of the work. It is not dancing (in the sense of learning set dance forms, or in the sense of expressive "prancing about"), although the art form of dance is a facet of movement education which can greatly contribute to an education program by formulating movement expression. In the

same way, those artistic activities in the dramatic sphere where movement is either an integral part, or even perhaps the starting point or main activity (i.e., dance-drama or mime and caricature), are not in themselves movement education. And, although it has been used in connection with personality assessment, movement is not a science in which personality can be measured, tabulated and compared statistically with other tests of personality traits — though again, there are clearly defined areas of movement which can be differentiated, described and to some extent assessed. Also, real movement education has nothing to do with the vague floating about in space to some external music or sound, which unhappily can still be seen in some educational establishments. Finally, I should say that movement education like, for instance, music, art, craft, or poetry, is not dependent upon the ideas of any one person — it is not a “system” which can be labelled as originating with one school of thought, one personality or cult. This is not to say that we do not owe a great deal to those individual pioneers who gave us a new way of looking at movement in this century.

In trying to describe what movement education *is*, or should really be about, the first distinction to be made is between the *content* and the *method* of presentation. Movement is something which everyone knows a great deal about whether consciously or simply by being in a constant state of motion, vibration or activity of some kind. Just because it is such a familiar area of experience, and because it is transient, ever-changing and ever-flowing, many people have difficulty conceiving its richness of manifestation and its all-embracing and fundamental character. We know intellectually that all created things are in constant motion — not just moving, but moving in ordered, patterned, rhythmical motion. Our whole world depends upon this order of movement: the inter-relatedness of one rhythm to another in immense subtlety and intricacy. In the physical world, this is easily recognized by modern methods of observation and measuring. In the realms of thought, motion, feeling and spiritual values, similar rhythmical patterns and forms can be discerned. The ancient wisdom, “As above, so below,” recognizes just this link between different levels of being. It also helps to explain why movement at one level or in one aspect of life can influence another level.

We have now a vast accumulation of knowledge about movement. The use of a particular terminology to describe movement has frequently taken the less serious student away from the fundamentals to superficial quibbling about jargon. The wiser student, with greater knowledge, recognizes that it matters little if the movement descrip-

tion is pictorially made (e.g., “wringing the tiger’s neck,” or “diving for the golden needle at the bottom of the ocean,” as in the T’ai Chi Ch’uan system); or made almost totally through sound rhythms and patterns, caught in stone and sculptured shapes, painted on canvas; or felt directly as movement sensation in the body. One medium is more suitable than another according to circumstances and situations. Some kind of agreed terminology and notation<sup>2</sup> — a kind of shorthand — helps communication between students of movement, but experience, knowledge and recognition are primarily essential.

Just as twenty different people looking at a room might give twenty different views of it, so we find that movement is recognized from many aspects. Apart from the personal angle of viewing, there are different inner attitudes of people which lead to their different kinds of awareness. There are the mechanistic viewers — those who might see the room as a floor, four walls, a ceiling, made of so many tons of bricks, concrete, tiles, etc., and held by a measurable amount of cement; others will see the room as an enclosed space, an area contained in position by the outer structure; others will see the detailed proportions, the relationships between the size of window and door and wall; others will be aware of an atmosphere within the room — contributed by the people who live there, their belongings, their thoughts and feelings; others will see the decorative details either in or out of context; and, presumably, there are those who will capture in this word, “room,” some concept of all these aspects and their relatedness one to another. So with movement.

The mechanistic viewers want to test and isolate detailed measurable aspects of movement. It is quite possible to do this but it gives only a very partial view of the whole “room.” The people who see movement as skilled action, at the service of an outer activity, are also dealing with one aspect of movement only. Those who teach games, gymnastics, agilities and other skills, do admirable work in this field but their teaching does not provide a comprehensive movement education. This would be analogous to describing one wall as though it were the whole room. Indeed, rather than movement being relegated to a part of physical education, traditionally-based physical education could better be seen as an integral part of a whole movement education program. Those practitioners of movement who see only dance and drama as a full movement program are equally limited. I think it is fair to say that most teachers recognise, when they include such aspects in their work, that they are in fact selecting one or two personal choices from the wide range of movement activities. This may or may not lead them to introduce

to their pupils the real stuff of movement — the real awakening of experience through movement and the recognition of the interrelatedness of all things through movement.

This is probably the crux of the whole idea of movement education. Music, poetry and painting use sound, words and colours to formulate inner experiences. So movement, the primary, most elementary, most primitive medium can be used for individual or group formulation. *It is not the doing of the activity which is of primary importance, but the linking of the inner being and the outer form.* Initial expressive movements (the spontaneous activity shown in gesture and stance) are transformed into the appropriate forms of patterns and rhythms, and become not *signs* of emotions but *symbols*.

## II

Activity is often elevated to an educational end in itself. But, in order to formulate an inner experience, it is necessary to have at our command a whole range of movement vocabulary and the capacity to use it. The teacher must have some knowledge of this range, gained through personal experience as well as academic study. Styles of movement capacity are entirely personal, though the possible range is common to all human beings. (It is interesting that each species of animal has its own range, more limited than that of the human, though frequently more specialised and efficient within those limits.)

Qualities such as decisiveness, persistence, attention, ability to relate to others, and leadership may be seen in specific movement configurations. This is the basis of personality assessment through movement. The study of movement should lead us to become more awake and aware of ourselves, and of our relationships with others and the outer world. It is the *principle* of moving which must be understood and practised, not a series of specific, stereotyped movements. Movement knowledge in this sense is a tool and a material at our service. Our ability to use this material is dependent upon our individual stage of development and awareness. Children can respond to a level of being beyond their obvious stage of development, i.e., they can respond without consciously knowing or being able to explain. This response transforms the ineffable experience into a personal expression which therefore becomes a communication not only to others, but also to oneself. Through experiencing movement based on universal forms, i.e., fundamental and recurrent patterns, a meaningful connection can be made between the

person's inner and outer world.<sup>3</sup>

How does a teacher evolve his method of presentation? Surely this is immediately connected with his personal attitude to, and understanding of, the material and medium as well as his attitude to his pupils. If he sees movement as only a skill, as a performance, or as a series of learned movement patterns, he leads his pupils towards these aspects. If, however, he recognizes that movement also can be a medium through which a pupil can gain a broader educational experience, through which he can participate in universal rhythms, patterns and symbols, then he will attempt to provide the kind of environment, stimulus and guidance which will lead to this end.

"Freedom of expression" is a catch-phrase often not defined by those using it, so that many misconceptions have arisen, not only in movement education but in educational method generally. By some, and I think happily a dwindling number, "freedom to express" is seen as an opportunity for formless, undisciplined licence. Ideas that children must be "uninhibited," must be allowed to "be themselves," must not have anything "imposed upon them," have led to all kinds of vague, useless self-indulgence on the part of children and students and their teachers. This would be serious enough if it were only useless and timewasting, but it can be truly negative because it impedes the growth process. Teaching requires something more than stimulating a response. It is as necessary to provide stimulating opportunity for formulation, for building a framework and a structure, as it is to allow individual contribution and invention by the pupil. For this, a "vocabulary" of movement must be available, and the presentation must incorporate within it a disciplined framework. This might be a set rhythm, a set pattern, a dictated form or relationship — in fact, any aspect of movement within which the pupils can make their personal contributions. Choice can only be free if it is made from experience and knowledge of what is possible, and where the person is no longer at the mercy of pure instinctual drive or rigid form. As children advance in age and experience, the range of choices will both widen and become more subtle.

Gradually, a child can be led from simple "phrases" in movement to more complex and related "sentences," from contrasting alternatives to transitional routes of changing motifs. Themes develop from simple "sentences" to comprehensive "statements," requiring formed compositions for their expression. In dramatic form, the universal or the general is reflected and constrained in the characters and the interaction between them; in the pure movement form, universal patterns, rhythms and formations are more directly experienced.

For older pupils, there is a positive advantage in participating in a well-composed sequence. The discipline in participation is the same, whether the pupils themselves create the composition, by experiment, selection and gradual formation, or whether they learn an already established form — or indeed, whether they experience a mixture of the two.

We are, of course, expecting a great deal of our movement teachers. Not only should they be able to train and lead their pupils through an experience and knowledge of the vocabulary of movement and be able to observe and help the pupils to develop, select and discern appropriate motifs and forms for their compositions, but also be to some degree creative artists themselves, able to make appropriate compositions for the varying needs of their pupils. It is therefore quite evident that teachers attempting such a formidable task must themselves have a degree of personal maturity, together with a sustained experience and real knowledge of movement. One hour a week for a year or two as a student teacher (when, after all, the student has little knowledge and experience in allied areas to relate to his movement work, and while he is still grappling with his own development and knowledge of child development) is barely a preliminary introduction. Practice in teaching will enhance their understanding and skill, provided that a sound basis has been acquired, and refresher courses including personal participation become the necessary nourishment for their development. These must be provided in greater profusion and of better quality than are available for the majority of interested teachers.

### III

Movement touches directly at a person's primary — even primitive — sensations, feelings and intuition. If we are going to dare to touch this sensitive area of being, it is well to be aware of the possible dangers as well as the possible benefits. From this point of view, those who are unaware of the deeper areas of personality would do better to restrict themselves to objective and practical movement. By so doing, however, they would deprive their pupils of the educative experience which perhaps can really only be given through movement. The genuinely sincere student or teacher need not be afraid of this medium, for there is an inbuilt safeguard for the sensitive and aware — that is, the safety of form, whether in rhythm or shape. Rhythm or shape holds the pupil safely, while allowing him to be in touch with his primary sensations. Without this "holding," a child could lose

himself in a frightening, undisciplined world, reminiscent of early infancy and leading to regression. In effect, then, a movement teacher, and any good teacher, must act as mediator of the various forms of expression of his pupils, and also become the integrator by virtue of the discipline of form.

There is no substitute for the direct contact which a teacher gives his pupils. Many outer objects and situations, however, can enrich and stimulate the teaching of movement: music and sound, stories, mythological characters and situations, natural objects and forces, visual and poetic imagery can all contribute. These may be immediate, through experience, or indirect, through television. Television can also be used as a means of sharing other children's work in movement.

In summary, movement education in schools gives a basis for many kinds of skills: gymnastics, in which agilities are developed; games, in which skills of manipulation and team work are stressed; dance, where skilled performance merges with expressive and symbolic movement. Any child will benefit from an all-round program of movement incorporating both the practical and the artistic.

## notes

1. This article is based on the "Introduction to Movement Study and Teaching," written in 1970 and extended in Marion North, *Movement Education*, London: M. Temple Smith Ltd., 1975. Although certain trends are observable which were not so clear five years ago, the situation in England is still such that the best movement education is in the primary schools. However, heartening advance are being made in secondary and college level studies.
2. There are many contemporary systems of movement notations in practical use for writing down working movements, expressive movements, ballet, dramas, etc. No doubt one of these will ultimately prove most efficient and will be universally adopted, as is music notation. At the present time, Labanotation seems to be the most comprehensive and efficient.
3. The journal *Architectural Design* (October 1965) issued a leaflet by Keith Critchlow on "Universal Space Families" showing the relatedness of crystal shapes and patterns. A movement teacher would recognize many of these as the basis of spatial harmony in movement. There are similar fundamental rhythms of audible sound in music, rhythm in movement and poetry.