

Chapter 14

Movement Literacy as a First Language

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ABSTRACT

Movement is an inseparable part of our daily lives. Research indicates that learning through the moving body (embodiment) is meaningful learning. This chapter presents language of movement as a necessary avenue in the study of literacy and learning, and describes perceptions, uses, and applications of kinesthetic language as part of the learning experience. The language of movement is described as a literacy learned at three levels: Level 1 focuses on movement tools as applicable in learning in cultural fields. Level 2 is fed by movement aspects and perceptions as they support a learning space. Level 3 is fed by perceptions of relations between variables, seeing each existential space as composed of a collection of stimuli equal in value to and enabling focus on the creation of a learning space. A learning space can be envisaged as one that offers a rich arena for mutual interaction of expression, learning and creation, enriching and supporting the expansion of the learner's world, necessary for active, innovative, experimental, inquisitive, and boundary-breaking involvement.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a fundamental existential human need. Language enables interpersonal communication involving a sender-transmitter and recipient-receiver of messages (Muchnik, 2002). Using language, a person can form messages and transmit them to those around them, and to the society in which they live. Human communication is communicated in many languages and it is difficult to imagine significant social, intellectual or artistic activity in the absence of language (Rom, Segal & Tsur, 2003; O'Grady, 2001). Language may be verbal or non-verbal and according to Ogden and Richards (1989) even spoken language includes gestures and shared history that give meaning to the words. Messages can be transmitted by such gestures, facial mimicry, dance, whistling and other means, but language expressed in

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speech or in a set of symbolic gestures for the deaf, is the human-being's main tool of communication. Burkitt (1999) sees communication as a complex web of interactions that include the verbal but is not limited to verbal language. Language can be used to transfer information very quickly and accurately more than by other means of communication (Rom, Segal & Tsur, 2003). There are different and unique types of languages.

The common denominators of verbal and non-verbal languages are principally the following characteristics: symbolic and complex norms. In any language there is a sender, recipient, channel of communication, code and context. What differs between the different languages is the tool by which they are transmitted. Verbal language is transmitted through the voice, hearing, writing and seeing while non-verbal language is transmitted through many varied tools without the use of voice or writing. The ability to shape and understand meanings is available in many expressive systems including language, media, the arts and popular culture. The language of movement is one of the non-verbal languages, an essential road in the study of literacy and learning.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT, MOVEMENT, AND MEDIA LITERACY

According to Vygotsky (1978), there is a complex interaction between social-cognitive development and learning. The child is surrounded by verbal and non-verbal communication from birth, and selectively and gradually acquires the different linguistic components, intuitive abilities and dialect from those around them (John & Goldstein, 1964). The child learns to use a system of oral and non-oral symbols and rules in order to communicate with those around them. A distinction is drawn between communication and language. Communication involves the mutual exchange of information between one who sends the message and one who receives them. The information may be transmitted through a scent, song, gestures, tone, writing, painting, or language. Language is a symbolic form of communication. Even animals have communication systems, for example the elaborate dances of mating birds or the movements of bees to transmit information about food resources, but these techniques and gestures only transmit limited and stereotyped messages and so it is difficult to call them "languages". Several characteristics have been identified as the essential components of a "language" such as physical understanding and movement as embodiment of language.

Movement as Physical (Somatic) Understanding

Physical understanding is one of the initial stages in language development, that evolves in parallel with mystic, romantic, philosophical and ironic understanding (Egan, 1997). It develops when the infant begins to discover their body, and to recognize that the body is used for certain purposes. This investigative process provides the foundations for the development of human understanding within conditions of space, time, causality, effort and reaction, pleasure, pain etc. To become literate in the sense of movement means being able to cope in the contemporary world, where visual stimuli are no less important than verbal messages. A link has been found between children's optimal mastery of motor skills and their mastery of language (Iverson, 2010). Gradual motor development in infancy creates a broad range of experiences and opportunities for investigation and these play an active part in the development of language as part of the communication process.

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