

Movement is The Key To Learning

By Anne Green Gilbert, Founder and Director of Creative Dance Center

Movement is the key to learning. I first became aware of this as a third grade student in elementary school. My kinesthetic intelligence flourished in a classroom where movement was central to my teacher's curriculum. I remember a sort of paradise there; everyone liked school that year, we all got along and the knowledge imparted is still in my memory bank forty years later.

Movement is the key to learning. Oddly enough, it was when I became a third grade teacher myself fifteen years later that I remembered this and used movement and dance to save myself from drowning in a classroom so heterogeneous I felt I was teaching in a one room schoolhouse. Spelling words with body shapes, forming punctuation marks and expressing the feeling of sentences through movement, learning multiplication by movement in sets of threes and fours, discovering the difference between lunar and solar eclipses through planet dances and choreographing our way across the Oregon Trail somehow made everyone equal. The gifted children discovered a new and exciting way to learn, the slower learners quickly became actively engaged and successful, the non-English speaking students could finally understand the curriculum through our new nonverbal approach. Instead of dreading the long school day, we eagerly awaited our next movement experience. Attendance went way up, test scores rose substantially; there was laughter, racial tension dissipated. We became a homogeneous company of mates dancing our way through the third grade curriculum.

Movement is the key to learning. I so firmly believe this that I decided to do a research project to prove it. Of course many renowned educators and scientists had noted the educational benefits of movement for

years. The names of Jean Piaget, Glenn Doman, Rudolph Laban, and Marion Diamond come to mind. Five years after my own experience as a third grade teacher in Illinois, I was training teachers at the University of Washington and received a federally funded grant to conduct research in the Seattle Public Schools. During the 1977 school year, 250 students from four elementary schools studied language arts concepts through movement and dance activities for twenty weeks. The third grade students involved in the study increased their MAT scores by 13% from fall to spring, while the district-wide average showed a decrease of 2%! The primary grade project students also showed a great improvement in test scores. Most significant was that the research showed a direct relationship between the amount of movement used by the classroom teacher and the percentage increase of students' test scores. The classroom showing the least increase in test scores used movement fifteen minutes **per week** for learning language arts concepts. In the classroom that showed the greatest increase, the teacher integrated movement and language arts concepts fifteen minutes **per day**.

Movement is the key to learning. Forty years after my own third grade experience, I am still using movement and dance to teach people of all ages and every single day I see some little miracle happen. Students cannot sit still for very long before the blood and oxygen flow to their brains significantly slows down, thereby slowing down the learning process. Bringing dance into the classroom will not only increase learning, but will make the classroom a healthier, happier place to learn and teach.