

## 10 Reasons to Promote Emergent Literacy through Movement & Active Learning by Rae Pica

*Early childhood professionals know the many benefits of physical activity and play. They understand that young children are experiential learners, that they need to move, and they move to learn.*

*Today there is a clamor for more accountability and testing, although children have not changed. They still need to experience concepts using their whole bodies to understand the concepts completely, including literacy and language arts concepts.*

*Following are 10 reasons why you should use movement and active learning to promote emergent literacy.*

1. **Children learn best through active involvement.** Prepositions, for example, are very much a part of physical experiences. As children move *over*, *under*, *around*, *through*, *beside*, and *near* objects (under the monkey bars, through the tunnel, over the balance beam), these words take on greater meaning and significance.
2. **Spatial orientation is necessary for letter identification and the orientation of symbols on a page.** The only difference between a small "d" and a small "b," for example, is the direction in which the curvy line faces at the bottom of the straight line. When children form the straight and curving lines of letters by using their bodies and body parts, rather than simply attempting to copy them from a chart on the wall, this experience enhances their sense of directionality and spatial orientation. When children move within a room or within a space from left-to-right or top-to-bottom, they become comfortable with these important directions.
3. **Actively experiencing the rhythm of words and sentences helps children find the rhythm necessary for reading and writing.** Whether children are clapping or tapping out the beat of a fingerplay or moving to the cadence of a poem, they hear and feel the rhythm of words.
4. **When children demonstrate the meaning of words physically, their understanding of the words is immediate and long-lasting.** For instance, when children depict such

action words as *stomp*, *pounce*, *stalk*, or *slither*—or such descriptive words as *smooth*, *strong*, *gentle*, or *enormous*—the words have much more relevance than they would as part of a vocabulary or spelling list.

5. **Adverbs and adjectives become much more than abstract concepts.** When children perform a "slow walk" or "skip lightly," they learn the meaning in both their bodies and their minds.
6. **Playing together provides opportunities for children to speak and listen to one another!** When children invent games and rules for games, they are using and expanding their vocabularies and learning important lessons in communication. Talking about experiences, depicting them through actions, and then discussing the actions contribute to language development by requiring children to make essential connections among their cognitive, social/emotional, and physical domains. We know that when young children learn something in one domain, it has a positive impact on the others.
7. **Stringing actions together to form sequences is similar to linking words to form sentences (and eventually paragraphs).** In other words, whether children are making up their own dances or stories, they must choose components that flow naturally. Both require breathing room (a pause in the action, or a comma) and, finally, an ending (a full stop, or a period).
8. **When children act out the words of a poem, the plot of a story, or the lyrics of a song, they must ponder the meanings of the words.** And because those words are important to them—and such activities are fun—the poems, stories, and songs take on greater relevance. The children are also using multiple senses, which means more is learned and retained.
9. **Movement activities provide opportunities to cross the body's midline.** Doing so requires the left and right hemispheres of the brain to communicate across the corpus callosum. This integration of the brain's hemispheres is essential to the ability to read and write.
10. **Confucius said it best:** "What I hear, I forget. What I see, I remember. What I do, I know." When young children experience

emergent literacy concepts with their bodies, they are moving in leaps and bounds toward becoming capable listeners, speakers, readers, and writers!