Early Childhood Building Blocks

LET’S MOVE—Exceptional Opportunities for Motor Development

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INTRODUCTION

LET’S MOVE means what it says. It gets children moving! LET’S MOVE (Language-Experience Themes and Systematic Movement Opportunities for Valuable Extensions) is an early childhood planning framework that promotes children’s optimum development by increasing their activity levels through literature-based active learning experiences. The program incorporates brain research (Schiller & Neil, 1999) with developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive literacy and movement education strategies for prekindergarten.

These experiences, based on themes in children’s literature, are presented in three tiers:

Tier I: Interactive Movement
Tier II: Motor Activity Stations
Tier III: Motor Learning Laboratories

The three tiers provide plenty of time for important practice, and they also help shape attitudes (“Physical activity is fun!” “Reading is fun!”) and habits (“I read and move everyday!”).
LET’S MOVE SUPPORTS GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT:
Movement is essential for children’s social, emotional, physical, and aesthetic growth and development. As well, ongoing physical activity can result in greater understanding of many cognitive concepts; this link between cognitive and motor development is supported by brain research by individuals such as Dr. Carla Hannaford (1995). By making systematic physical activity part of the curriculum (in addition to the blocks of time set aside for free play), we ensure there will be ample time for nurturing the many aspects of children’s growth and development—and for helping to fight the problem of childhood obesity.

LET’S MOVE SUPPORTS ADAPTA TiON TO CHIL DR E’S NEEDS:
The National Research Council (2001) reports in Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers that “quality preschool programs address cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, and because young children vary considerably in each of these domains, teaching strategies need to be adapted to meet the specific needs and prior knowledge and understanding of individuals and groups of children” (p. 224). Teachers who use LET’S MOVE methods can and do purposefully plan environmental designs that are flexible enough to meet children’s needs and align with the overarching goals of their early childhood program’s curriculum.

LET’S MOVE LAYS THE FOUNDATION FOR EMERGING LITERACY:
LET’S MOVE embeds movement experiences within literacy themes and rich curriculum. When quality children’s literature is shared with children in such a way, the work of authors and illustrators sparks a range of responses. These responses stimulate imagination and creative activity, leading to playful action and interaction with story elements. Elements such as setting, characters, dialogue, and action provide vehicles for responding to literature through playful movements that delight everyone involved.

IN A NUTSHELL: LET’S MOVE provides cognitive, social-emotional, aesthetic, and physical benefits because:
• Young children learn best by doing.
• Movement programs are success oriented.
• Successful completion of motor tasks promotes feelings of competence.
• Children enjoy motor exploration (the process), which is more important to young children than performance (the product).
• Learning has more meaning when experiences are integrated across the curriculum, rather than when each content area is taught in isolation.

NATIONAL PHYSICAL EDUCATION STANDARDS

DID YOU KNOW? There are National Standards for Physical Education for prekindergarten developed by the National Association for Sport & Physical Education (NASPE). The ones that correlate well with the LET’S MOVE approach include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motor Skills Standard 1</th>
<th>All students will demonstrate the use of fundamental skills and motor patterns.</th>
<th>Personal and Social Skills Standard 5</th>
<th>All students will demonstrate responsible personal and social behavior in physical activity settings.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Concepts Standard 2</td>
<td>All students will begin to understand and develop a vocabulary of basic concepts associated with movement, and use them to guide their performance.</td>
<td>Diversity Standard 6</td>
<td>All students will demonstrate cooperation, sharing and consideration of others, in a physical activity setting, regardless of differences among them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Lifestyle Standard 3</td>
<td>All students will participate in at least one activity they enjoy that is associated with each component of fitness.</td>
<td>Values Physical Activity Standard 7</td>
<td>All students will begin to show enjoyment and self expression through interactions with others during a variety of physical activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically Fit Standard 4</td>
<td>All students will have fun participating in health-enhancing activities which promote physical fitness.</td>
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THE THREE TIERS

TIER I: INTERACTIVE MOVEMENT

*Individuals or groups of children engage in movements, responding to text during a reading activity* (for example, children pantomime as words are read). A Tier I activity (see sample lesson) is primarily teacher-led during circle time or meeting time.

Young children need movement opportunities while learning and using language. Their oral language skills are foundational to reading and writing. “In language-filled activity and play they learn more words, more concepts and information, and more about books and how print works” (Roskos, Tabors, & Lenhart, 2005, p. 1). Before, during, and after reading, educators can engage children in movement exploration based on the selection of children’s literature. Following the lesson, educators extend children’s learning by revisiting the story for guided practice or independent exploration.

TIER II: MOVEMENT ACTIVITY STATIONS

*Individuals or groups of children perform movements, having used text as a prompt for setting up a station or center* (for example, children perform a bear walk by crawling using their legs and arms). A Tier II activity (see sample lesson) is primarily student-led, as children respond creatively or repeat movement patterns to build psychomotor skills during free choice or center time.

Preschool children ages three to five years enjoy having choices. Young children like to come up with ideas for play and use materials symbolically. The children’s choices will provide input for co-construction of environments, which will facilitate their learning in engaging and challenging ways. Following a shared reading, the teacher and students list characters presented in the selection or brainstorm a list of characters appropriate to the story. Then the teacher and students discuss and explore the movements performed by the characters in the story before they select areas in the classroom for activity stations where the characters’ movements can be safely performed. After selecting locations for stations, the teacher and students set up the movement activity stations. Finally children rotate through movement activity stations and perform the corresponding movements.

BEFORE GOING ON TO TIER III

Children are ready to actively engage in Tier III, the motor learning laboratory, after the educator effectively scaffolds the children’s successful participation at each of the other two tiers. During Tier II, you should assess the children’s readiness for the MLL in the following ways:

- Observe children’s behaviors during shared reading, shared writing, interactive movement, and activities at the movement activity stations.
- Observe children’s interactions during large-group and small-group LET’S MOVE activities. (For the Tier III MLL sample lesson, you could use this assessment point to identify activities related to the meadow theme that children can perform with minimal adult interaction.)
- Observe children’s performances during movement exploration, motor modeling, guided practice, and independent practice to identify motor experiences that will benefit individual children in acquiring fitness.
- Observe children’s understanding of labels, signs, and posters for the movement activity stations to identify successful rotations throughout the MLL.
- Observe children’s creativity in extending ideas and applying their personal experiences during reading, writing, and motor activities. (For the Tier III MLL sample lesson, are there children who can model safe and novel ways to perform fish movements while traveling on a scooter board? Are there children who can demonstrate a beanbag toss into a container that represents diving muskrats?)
- Observe children’s comfort, levels of enjoyment, and motivation to participate. (For the Tier III MLL sample lesson, are there children who need guidance and support in working in small groups while waiting to take a turn to leap like a frog from lily pad to lily pad in the “frog pond” movement activity station or waiting to jump on the mini-trampoline in the “dragon fly” movement activity station?)
- Record children’s progress with anecdotal records, checklists, and rubrics.
TIER III: MOTOR LEARNING LABORATORY

Individuals or groups of children progress through a series of movement activity stations based on themes related to a story (children might swim over a river in the swimming activity center or perform climbing-tree actions in the climbing activity center). A Tier III activity (see sample lesson) is primarily a lab-like environment in which children move from station to station to respond creatively or repeat movement patterns to build psychomotor skills during a motor activity time.

Early childhood educators take an environmental approach when creating, designing, constructing, and implementing a motor learning laboratory. The MLL follows a theme in children’s literature which provides children with numerous motor experiences related to a variety of texts (fiction, nonfiction), print (signs, posters), and genre (poems, finger plays). The MLL features several motor activity stations designed to allow children to explore movement; try out manipulative, nonlocomotor, and locomotor movements; engage in fine, gross, and perceptual motor activities; and share in movement with others or perform individual movements. The children represent the story elements of setting, character, dialogue, and action in a variety of movement activity stations, based on several selections of literature which make up the MLL. The MLL systematically provides physical activity, which promotes motor development and fitness components. The focus of the MLL is strengthening motor-neural pathways for movement efficiency, stability, and coordination.

In setting up the MLL, use movement-based strategies to provide for a range of motor experiences:

- Set up a station with locomotor movement pathways (tunnels to move through, a cone obstacle course to negotiate) for moving at various levels (high, medium, low) and for practicing agility (transfer weight while moving in a pattern). Always keep in mind safety issues—for example, provide mats in a potential fall zone to protect children as they perform the various movements.

- Dedicate a station to nonlocomotor movements based on brain research using activities that cross the midline, such as figure eight patterns or cross-crawl patterns. (Children can make figure eight patterns with scarves, ribbons, or streamers. They can perform cross-crawl patterns by going on “elephant walks”—bending forward as they walk and swaying their “trunks” left and right; they form their trunks by extending their arms and clasping their hands together.)

- Provide a station for perceptual motor development (a suspended ball that children can hit, bowling, a beanbag toss).

- Design a station with fine motor experiences (stacking blocks or canisters; using tongs to sort pom-poms by color, by size, or by color and size; performing a finger play).

- Provide a station with apparatus to build fitness (e.g., a balance beam for toe-to-heel walking to develop balance, a mini-trampoline for jumping to develop cardiovascular endurance, a scooter board for hand walking to develop strength).
USEFUL TERMS TO KNOW

Before you go on to explore the LET’S MOVE activities, you might find it helpful to review the following terms, which are used in the three tiers.

BODY AWARENESS. Body awareness is developed as children learn what their bodies can do. Children explore shapes their bodies can make, balance on different parts of their bodies, and transfer weight from one part of the body to another part as they develop in body awareness.

FINE MOTOR DEVELOPMENT. Fine motor development involves small muscle movements of the body’s extremities. Most often, fine motor skill development refers to the child’s developmentally appropriate use of small muscles of the hands and feet. Fine motor movements include grasping, reaching, holding, pushing, and buttoning. Fine motor skills require dexterity, precision, and the ability to manipulate.

FUNDAMENTAL MOVEMENT. Fundamental movement refers to the use of different parts of the body for moving the body in space. Fundamental movement skills involve such activities as walking, running, throwing, catching, and striking. Fundamental movement skills are the foundation of the complex motor activities found in sports, dance, gymnastics, and recreational activities.

GROSS MOTOR DEVELOPMENT. Gross motor development involves the entire body or large body parts. Most often, gross motor skill development refers to the child’s developmentally appropriate use of large muscle groups. Gross motor movements include walking, running, rolling, skipping, bouncing, and throwing. Gross motor skills require agility, balance, coordination, flexibility, speed, strength, and endurance.

LOCOMOTOR MOVEMENTS. Locomotor movements refer to the ability to be mobile. They include gross motor activities such as walking, running, skipping, jumping, leaping, hopping, sliding, and galloping—but not activities such as bouncing or throwing.

MANIPULATIVE MOVEMENTS. Manipulative movements include gross motor activities such as bouncing, catching, kicking, and striking, and fine motor activities such as cutting, holding, grasping, and lacing.

MOTOR ACTIVITY STATION. A motor activity station is an area of the room where movements are performed. Motor activity stations give children nonlocomotor, locomotor, and perceptual motor experiences that use fine, gross, and manipulative movement opportunities. Usually, students rotate through several activity stations to explore a range of movement qualities (levels, time, force, flow) and patterns (straight, zigzag, curve, spiral).

MOTOR DEVELOPMENT. Motor development involves a change process in physical behavior that is influenced by an interaction between heredity and environment (Gallahue, 1996). Interactions among children’s maturation, prior motor learning experiences, and new motor activities contribute to overall motor development. Motor development is generally sequential.

MOTOR LEARNING LABORATORY (MLL). A motor learning laboratory is a mini-lab-like area (indoor and/or outdoor) in the classroom’s physical environment where movement activities take place. Children’s literature theme-based MLLs incorporate information from a story or group of stories that may be fiction or nonfiction. While engaged in the MLL, children use vocabulary words and phrases related to the theme, movement, and physical activity. A well-planned MLL includes safe and developmentally appropriate areas for practicing gross, fine, and manipulative motor activities to enhance coordination, balance, visual-spatial integration, endurance, and strength.

MOVEMENT CONCEPTS. Movement concepts are classified in a variety of ways: body awareness, space awareness, relationships, and qualities of movement.
MOVEMENT EDUCATION. Movement education is noncompetitive physical education. It is designed to build children’s confidence and movement motivation. While performing developmentally appropriate fundamental movements and exploring movement elements (force, time, patterns, etc.), children develop skills that will be used in sports, dance, and so forth.

MOVEMENTS. Movements describe ways of moving the body in space. Motor abilities involve three basic types of movement: locomotor, nonlocomotor, and manipulative.

NONLOCOMOTOR MOVEMENT. Nonlocomotor movements (sometimes called axial movements) include swinging and swaying, pushing and pulling, bending and stretching, and twisting and turning.

PERCEPTUAL MOTOR DEVELOPMENT. Perceptual motor development involves the child’s sensory skills and his or her ability to take in, interpret, and respond to information through movement. Perceptual motor skill development involves sensory awareness, spatial awareness, and temporal awareness.

PSYCHOMOTOR DEVELOPMENT. The progressive acquisition of skills in the psychomotor domain involves both mental and motor activity. For example, over time a child may grow in the ability to gesture to express feelings and thoughts, draw from memory, build complex structures, and create movements to express emotions.

SENSORY AWARENESS. Sensory awareness relates to children’s use of their senses as they move. Part of sensory awareness is an understanding of force, which develops concepts of strong and light.

SPATIAL AWARENESS. Spatial awareness relates to children’s own use of personal and general space. Spatial awareness encompasses directional concepts of back and front and the ability to move backward, forward, and sideways. While combining directions, children learn pathways of moving in low, high, and medium levels. Movement offers the ability to move inside or outside, on or off, and near to or far from, as well as around or through and over or under.

TEMPORAL AWARENESS. Temporal awareness uses the element of time. Time offers movement variety as children experience quick and slow movements.
SAMPLE LESSONS

HERE ARE THE SAMPLE LESSONS FOR EACH TIER:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier I Sample Lesson:</th>
<th>Tier II Sample Lesson:</th>
<th>Tier III Sample Lesson:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We’re Going on a Bear Hunt</td>
<td>Clouds</td>
<td>Over in the Meadow</td>
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REFERENCES AND RESOURCES


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Barbara Trube is an associate professor of early childhood education at Ohio University–Chillicothe. She has more than thirty years of experience in inclusive private and public school programs for children as a teacher’s aide, teacher, education coordinator, assistant principal, and principal. Barbara received her Ed.D. in educational administration with a concentration in special education from the University of Texas at Austin. She was a member of the Ohio Early Learning Content Standards English Language Arts development team, the OELCS Guidance Document writing team for standards integration, the Teaching Early Language & Literacy CORE Curriculum for Educators (Preschool) (2004) introduction writing team, and the ELA model curriculum writing team. Barbara has presented at numerous international, national, and state conferences with a focus on project-based, integrated curriculum in early childhood education.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Nancy Brannon at nbrannon@ohiorc.org or Nicole Luthy at nluthy@ohiorc.org. Visit http://rec.ohiorc.org to see the REC website and other Early Childhood Building Blocks.

A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT OF
## Early Learning Content Standards

**ACQUISITION OF VOCABULARY FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD**

| Conceptual Understanding | 4. Demonstrate or orally communicate position and directional words (e.g., inside, outside, in front of, behind). |

**READING PROCESS: CONCEPTS OF PRINT, COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES AND SELF-MONITORING STRATEGIES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD**

| Comprehension Strategies | 4. Begin to visualize, represent, and sequence an understanding of text through a variety of media and play.  
6. Connect information or ideas in text to prior knowledge and experience (e.g., “I have a new puppy at home too.”).  
7. Answer literal questions to demonstrate comprehension of orally read age-appropriate texts. |

| Self-Monitoring Strategies | 8. Respond to oral reading by commenting or questioning (e.g., “That would taste yucky.”). |

**READING APPLICATIONS: LITERARY TEXT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD**

| Reading Applications | 1. Identify characters in favorite books and stories.  
2. Retell or re-enact events from a story through a variety of media and play events (e.g., dramatize a favorite story).  
4. Participate in shared reading of repetitious or predictable text. |

**WRITING PROCESSES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD**

| Prewriting | 3. Begin to determine purpose for writing (e.g., writing invitations to a birthday party). |

| Drafting, Revising and Editing | 4. Generate related ideas with assistance. |
## Early Learning Content Standards

### Writing Applications for Early Childhood

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Applications</th>
<th>1. Dictate stories or produce simple stories using pictures, mock letters or words.</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Name objects and label with assistance from adult cues (e.g., table, door).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Play at writing from top to bottom, horizontal rows as format.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Dictate words or produce writing approximations for a variety of purposes (e.g., menus in dramatic play, note to friend).</td>
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### Research for Early Childhood

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research</th>
<th>1. Ask questions about experiences, areas of interest, pictures, letters, words, logos or icons (e.g., EXIT on a sign in the grocery store).</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Use a variety of resources to gather information with assistance (e.g., pictionary, informational picture books).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Recall information about a topic dictated or constructed by child.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Share findings of information through retelling, media and play (e.g., draw a picture of the desert).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Communication: Oral and Visual for Early Childhood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listening and Viewing</th>
<th>1. Attend to speakers, stories, poems and songs.</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Connect information and events to personal experiences by sharing or commenting.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Follow simple oral directions.</td>
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