

Physical Development

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Bobbie (3 years) and Salima (3 years 6 months) are good friends at the nursery they have attended for two years. A Developmental Movement Play approach has been embedded within the freeflow provision at this setting throughout. Both, therefore, have grown up with spontaneous movement play as an ordinary part of their day – indoors and out; and both take it for granted that adults will value movement communication as much as verbal means.

Today, Bobbie is sad when he arrives. He clings firmly to his grandmother as all the staff, in turn, try to interest him in finding an activity that will get him started with the day.

Salima, bright and chirpy, comes over.

‘Are you alright?’

‘No!’ Bobbie continues to hide behind his grandmother.

‘What do you want?’ asks Salima simply.

‘I need to dance!’ says Bobby.

Salima takes his hand and leads him to the movement play areas; she starts to move, turning slowly with her arms out. Bobby watches for a moment or two then, dropping his chin onto his chest, starts turning slow circles of his own. Salima stops, watches Bobbie a little, then mirrors his movement, her chin dropped like Bobbie’s. Watching him intently, and mirroring still, she lifts an arm in a gesture of her own, smiling encouragement. Bobbie lifts his arm – a little at first, then more. The two exchange movement ideas, each picking up on the other, before offering a new idea.

The pair move intently for five minutes or so and then Salima lies down on her tummy. Bobbie snuggles next to her and she rubs his back, with her hands at first and then with a stuffed lemon fruit ball used as a prop in the movement play area. She jumps up and puts a gentle CD on then returns to her task. Bobbie is very relaxed. They lie side by side, without speaking, for a time.

Bobbie jumps up. ‘I’m better,’ he says. And they both go off in their own directions to play different things.

Reflective questions

- Why do you think Bobbie needed to ‘dance’, rather than talk?
- What kind of environment and resources do you think support this kind of movement play?
- Both these children have had plenty of experience of movement play since they were babies. How do you think adults can support children’s natural ability to use movement to explore their relationships, so that they can use it readily in their lives to augment their capability and resilience?