

The Journey

Ideas for Learning

Communication

Listening skills - importance of being listened to and listening to others.

Stories relating to journeys - personal, historical, made up - spoken, written, drawn, painted, sculpted etc.

Debates/discussion - trying too hard v doing your best

- getting it right v making mistakes
- end gaining v awareness/being present
- taking a risk v sticking to the familiar
- healthy eating v takeaways
- body awareness v body image
- talking v texting

Technology - how much is too much?

Health, Movement and Body Awareness

Anatomy - body mapping major joints of the body and how they work/how we move.

Coordination - good coordination requires the natural balance of the head, neck and back. A lengthening spine and a balanced head promote easy upright posture and efficient functioning of the whole self. Freedom in the neck muscles is essential to allow the head to retain a dynamic (not fixed) relationship with the spine. Although

young children are naturally well balanced in their early years, this can quickly be lost as bad postural habits creep in. Encouraging awareness of themselves in activity, not tensing unnecessarily is very important.

Exercise - recognising and describing how their bodies feel during different activities. See 'Games, Activities and P.E' below.

Resting - use the Constructive Rest exercise – lying down on the floor, on your back with knees bent to allow muscular tension to release and the spine to regain length. You can imagine lying on a beach and making an imprint with your body in the sand or imagine lying on a mirror and 'seeing' the image of the back of the body. It's also nice to hold another's head gently, just barely lifting it from the surface of the floor to encourage the neck muscles to free.

Breathing - remembering to breathe especially when concentrating. Helps to relieve tension, stress and anxiety. Fast/slow movement – how does it affect our breathing? Using the 'lie down' exercise described above to become aware of breathing – breathing down to toes, breathing into fingers, placing hands on tummy and noticing the movement as the muscles of the lower torso expand on the in breath and release on the out. Imagine an umbrella in the torso, the handle in the pelvis and the top just reaching the top of the sternum – when we breathe in the umbrella opens, when we breathe out the umbrella closes, this is a good way to experience the full 360 degrees of expansion in the ribcage.

Meditation - seated or lying down in the Constructive rest position, placing hands over belly button and sensing/observing. How does it feel, what do you notice?

Vision - being observant, remembering to look! Peripheral vision - how much can you see? Being present with themselves and their environment. Place small images around the room and see how long it takes the children to notice them, I usually place about ten – butterflies, wild and domestic animals, sea creatures, birds, planets, film characters, dinosaurs, animal skeletons etc.

Another observation exercise is to ask them all to close their eyes and one child at a time volunteers to describe the room layout as they remember it, adding things or correcting things as more children offer. When they open their eyes they are often surprised at what they missed out.

Healthy eating - cooking, sharing and communicating!

Working - sitting in balance at desks and operating IT equipment. Look for tension in necks and shoulders, encourage long spines. See 'Balancing' in Games, Activities and P.E

Creating, Sensing and Experimenting

Being Curious.

We have a relationship with our selves, each other, the world, with materials.

We move, react, interact. Explore, discover. Space to be curious.

We all learn in different ways. Individual and collective.

If we do not define an outcome but allow a sensed relationship to occur with a material, we find our own ever developing mastery of it.

We can discover...

- Paint all types
- Soft chalk pastels
- Charcoal
- Graphite
- Oil pastels
- Pencils
- Pens
- Clay

- Inks
- Implements/tools, brushes of all sizes, tools to cut, shape, define. What is a tool? It could be anything.
- Types of paper, Watercolour paper, rough, smooth, enormous pieces of paper, tiny, tissue paper, handmade paper etc, etc.
- Fabric
- Felting
- Knitting
- Sewing
- Dyeing
- Cutting
- Glue, lots of ways of sticking things together, lots of types of glue.
- Printing
- 2D, 3D
- Wood
- Stick
- Stone
- Carving
- Mud
- String, wrapping, tying, joining together
- Sticky tape, sellotape, masking tape, insulating tape
- Cardboard, boxes, flat
- Construction

...The possibilities are endless.

Leaving materials/tools out to be explored. Smudging, rubbing, soft pressure, hard. Fingers toes? Flow, scratch, stamp, poke. stab. drag, precise controlled, free. How does your body interact to make marks. Shape, form. Touch, sense.

Abstract mark making. Attaching implements/tools to sticks, short long. How can you move to make a mark with that?

Shapes of paper, big, small. On the floor, on the wall, on a table, inside, outside. Same materials but on different planes.

Discovering individually, collective.

To music, fast, slow, contemporary, Classical. Jazz, Blues, Pop, Country, Gregorian chants! To the sound of water, a river babbling, the sea rolling, bird song, a storm. The sound of a busy city.

Open ended questions. Asking, commenting. I like that colour, the shape of that line.

Journeying with materials, telling stories.

Giving time, observing, joining in.

Is this my creation, or ours?

The physicality of materials and tools. Touching, sniffing, seeing, all senses. Light, shadow, colour. Emotions, felt.

How do materials change and interact, in terms of environment and what we do with them?

A constantly flowing connection.

Nature

Being with nature and being outdoors is very healing for everyone. It allows the nervous system to 'quieten down', relieving stress and anxiety.

Local environment - what is it like?

What improves and harms their local, natural and built environment and what are some of the ways people look after them?

Nature in towns, cities and the countryside - you don't have to go to the countryside to see nature in all its forms – plants, birds, animals, trees, geography, geology.

Nature trails - could include own artwork to place or find on trail or to make after things collected.

British wildlife - habitat and behaviour, conservation, how to identify etc.

Games, Activities, P.E

In all activity it is important to remind the children to be aware of themselves. If they are using too much tension then they can STOP and LOOK at their surroundings, think of their HEAD AS LIGHT AS A FEATHER (they can imagine a feather pointing upwards at the crown of their head), let their BODY SOFTEN and remember to BREATHE. They can do this when seated, standing or engaging in physical activity eg. P.E and games.

Balancing

Head balancing lightly on top of the spine

To encourage this, if you can get some nice bird feathers and using hairgrips fix a single feather to the crown (at back of the top of the head not the middle) pointing upwards, very much like Native American Indians and other indigenous tribal peoples sometimes do. It gives a nice sense of an upward direction without using any tension or holding. If everyone has one during a lesson or activity then it's also good from an observational viewpoint - you can see the balance/unbalance of others as well as having an awareness of your own! The important thing is to have a free neck - this means that the muscles at the back of the neck are not tightening unnecessarily.

Centre of Gravity

Our centre is about an inch below the belly button. Yoga, Tai Chi and other martial arts all work from a connected awareness to this point. It creates a centre of balance at not just a physical level but also mentally and emotionally too. Knowing where your centre is

creates better coordination and also promotes a sense of calm. Encourage an awareness of their centre in movement and exercise.

Games which Encourage Balance

1. Balancing hardboard squares (corners rounded off) on top of the head and moving low to the floor and up again, turning, quickening pace etc. Trying it with eyes open, eyes closed. Tensing and relaxing - what is the effect on our balance?

2. Balancing on apparatus, lines drawn on the floor.

3. Balancing with each other eg. back to back going into squat and back up again. Facing forwards and holding hands and leaning back to go into squat and up again. Make sure the neck and shoulders are free of tension. Be aware of your centre.

4. Using 3ft garden canes with the ends taped for safety - in twos, each partner places their middle finger of their right hand on the very end of the cane and begin to move around the space, they have to keep the right amount of contact between them otherwise the cane will fall. When they are moving in balance together it flows, when they are tense and not paying attention to each other it becomes difficult.

5. Balancing balls on different parts of themselves, balancing sticks/rulers on their fingers and remembering always to breathe!

Dancing

Let children dance freely. Provide all different kinds of music. No right or wrong way – just dance.

Games for the New Years – Bill Harpe

This book is a fantastic resource for everyone working with children, young people and adults . It is a collection of games put together by Bill Harpe and co-workers at the Blackie (Great Georges

Community Cultural Project) in Liverpool, established as Britain's first community arts project. These games are creative and cooperative games. They are communication games where there are no winners and losers. Traditional games may have their place but we very much need to balance these out with non-competitive games if we are ever going to build self-confidence, know that we can make mistakes without disappointment, that it's okay to feel vulnerable and we can work together and support each other.

A few examples of these games are briefly explained below. If you are interested in obtaining a copy go to the website for details at www.theblackie.org.uk.

1. There is sometimes a great difference between doing something as well as possible and doing something as quickly as possible. Traditional obstacle course games are generally completed as quickly as possible but this game focuses on the nature of the journey through the obstacle course rather than the speed.

To play - the obstacle course is contained between two white lines. A blindfolded player within the white lines is being talked through the course by another player on the outside of the lines. There are obstacles within the lines that the blindfolded player has to negotiate with their partners' directions. They must not come into contact with any of the obstacles/objects but must pass around, over or through guided by partner. Both players are free to talk throughout but if an obstacle is touched even with clothing, then the journey will come to an end. If the journey should be completed without touching, then this indeed will be welcomed as something of a remarkable achievement.

2. There are as many different journeys which can be made across a room or space in the course of a game as there are journeys which can be made around the world.

To play - a group of players are travelling across a room using a small number of wooden boards or cork tiles as 'stepping stones'. But there are eight players and only five boards. The group spend

some time devising (without using words) the way in which they are going to travel. An example may be that the players balance on four boards while the fifth is passed overhead from the back of the group to the front and placed on the floor. The sequence is then repeated until they reach the other side. If someone wobbles off the board and touches the floor then they can devise a movement that the whole group do eg. raise their arms as far as they can and then resume the journey or they could clap a rhythm together following the lead of the player who touched the ground. There are lots of ways of crossing the space and lots of things to do together if one loses balance.

3. **Unmistakeable** games - the consequences of making mistakes in a game are usually negative. The player making the mistake is generally placed at a disadvantage, often penalised, and sometimes required to withdraw from the game. The consequences of making a mistake in these **unmistakeable** games are positive and sometimes remarkable. The nature of the games ensures that the players making mistakes are able to convert their mistakes into opportunities.

An example - players gently rise and sink with boards balanced on their heads (hardboard squares with rounded corners). Any time a board has fallen off, the player losing the board goes over to a black/white board or a large sheet of paper and makes a single mark towards the creation of a flower. The player then returns and replaces the board on their head and begins to move, gently rising and falling.

4. 'Upside down children's games'

To play – this game is based on Musical Statues but instead of standing still the players stand on a carpet/cork tile when the music stops. If there are ten players start with ten tiles and then take a tile away after each stop. No player is 'out', they just have to share with others! The game finishes when there are three tiles left and the whole group are balancing, lifting and supporting one another – a human sculpture. Adjust number of players/tiles to suit.

Finally...

If you have any games or activities to share please email me and I can include them here.

As I have said before, it is not easy to make massive changes to our education system as the National Curriculum is what teachers have to follow at this time, but we can ensure that we provide a learning space that encourages all children to be allowed to take time, to be curious and to experiment, to let go of the fear of getting it wrong and to feel and sense themselves in connection with the world around them. Re-establishing good mind-body coordination improves overall learning.

So there is nothing to fear, **let's do it!**

Here's to some happy and interesting journeys.

'We play all the time, but we don't feel we have the right. It's the politics of it that's wrong, not the teachers. We are trained to be sheep and we forget to gambol like lambs. And once we realise we might get eaten with a bit of mint sauce, we give up. Fearful all the time of getting it wrong and ending up trussed up on someone's plate!' – Shelagh Whitehead

For training/workshops, please get in touch.

www.annewhitehead.uk.