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Creative STAR<sup>★</sup>  
Learning Ltd

# Wild Dancing



## 50+ Ideas for exploring creative movement outside in the early years

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### **COVID 19 UPDATE**

This document was created prior to COVID-19 pandemic. The fast-changing changes to local and national guidance means that you will need to double check at your own setting, local and national level what is okay and not okay to do or have outside. Much of what is suggested can be easily adapted with a little bit of creativity and imagination. Also many things can be mitigated by handwashing before and after an activity such as water play.

### **Recommended books about the need for children to move**

- ★ *Balanced and barefoot* by Angela J Hanscome
- ★ *Every Child a Mover* by Jan White
- ★ Books written by Sally Goddard Blythe

## Introduction

These notes accompany the Creative Dance Outdoors workshop facilitated by Linzie McLagan and Juliet Robertson. The aim of the workshop is to provide suggestions and ideas for developing movement and creative dance outside as part of an overall approach to implementing a *Curriculum for Excellence*.

Dance activities, skills and concepts naturally lend themselves to the outdoors. Almost every culture has traditional dances which take place outside. Examples from the UK include Morris dancing, maypole dances and folk dances. More recent examples include dance raves at festivals, street dance, urban hip-hop, flashmobs and Parkour.

More than ever before there is a greater variety in spaces and places where people dance: parks, galleries, the lakeside, on a beach, and in the streets.

There are many reasons to dance and it is not simply the performance element which counts. Dancing brings people together, whether this happens outside or in – it is a way of building community. It is a way of expressing how we feel using our bodies rather than words. For young children, much of their learning and development is through movement. Many people dance for health reasons: it is fun, there is a feel-good factor and it helps keeps us physically fit.

When thinking about movement and creative dance with young children, a few basic principles can help:

- ★ It is about children feeling comfortable with their own bodies and in their own skin. Movement is the earliest means of expression.
- ★ Dance is a form of communication that extends beyond verbal language. It provides an alternative “voice” or expression for children.
- ★ It is about the feeling of movement – and of “being me” – developing self-awareness.
- ★ It is about improvising, being spontaneous and being in the moment. Our bodies instinctively respond through movement to stimulation, be this music, other people or events and activities
- ★ Performance and rehearsed dancing should be the exception rather than the norm. It is the process not the product that matters in the early years.
- ★ It should be playful and child-centred. When structured or adult-led activities take place, give the children time to explore the materials and ideas in their own way before, during or after a dance session.
- ★ Dance is a creative approach to physical activity and the development of coordination skills.

There is no right way to introduce expressive actions to children. This handout contains ideas to stimulate creative involvement rather than to expect a certain response or outcome.

*“The experiences and outcomes from each of the lines of development are complementary and interrelated and should be considered together when planning for learning. They do not place ceilings on aspirations for progress and development. Through them, all learners, including those with particular skills, talents and interests and those with additional support needs, will have opportunities to nurture and develop their interests and skills.”*

Curriculum for Excellence *Expressive Arts Principles and Practice* document

## Why outdoors?

- ★ Outside there is space and height to experiment with scale.
- ★ We can make the most of the outdoor space for bigger movement which cannot happen inside.
- ★ We can make the most of environment, whatever it may be – the affordance of the space as a context for creative exploration through movement and dance.
- ★ There are different stimuli than indoors which are multi-sensory and ever-changing.
- ★ There is room to move and use the whole body. Children feel a sense of freedom.
- ★ The outdoor area can be used to complement and develop what happens indoors and vice versa. This allows for learning to happen where it most suits a child's needs. Enabling children to develop their ideas over more than one day or session adds depth and continuity to the learning possibilities.



There are opportunities all year round for children to undertake movement and creative activities outside. Activities can be linked to:

- ★ Seasonal activities
- ★ Local and national cultural and religious celebrations
- ★ Community or whole school events including specific arts development projects
- ★ Children's interests
- ★ The experiences children have at home which can be extended and built upon in your setting.

*“The use of drama, art, music and dance allows children to experience the world in different ways. The use of expressive arts ensures diversity in the interpretation of places and natural and social events happening outside. Developing an awareness of space and its use as a stimulus for creativity and expression is another reason for taking learning outdoors. Expressive arts outside can offer opportunities for collaborative working on a large scale. Outdoor spaces and places also offer an increased variety of contexts for creating and presenting ideas. Contributing to, or, creating public performances outdoors can enhance the sense of community and understanding of what it means to belong to a place. There are specific practical skills and problem solving associated with taking expressive arts outdoors, such as projecting voices, making works of art that can withstand the elements and managing musical instruments outdoors.”*

Education Scotland (2011) *Outdoor Learning: practical, guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland*. Available to download online.

### The Dance Experiences and Outcomes (EOs)

NB There are many other benefits of creative dance which extend beyond these EOs. Dance can also be used a mechanism through which many other EOs are achieved.

- *I have the opportunity and freedom to choose and explore ways that I can move rhythmically, expressively and playfully. EXA 0-08a*
- *Inspired by a range of stimuli, I can express my ideas, thoughts and feelings through creative work in dance EXA 0-09a*
- *I have opportunities to enjoy taking part in dance experiences. EXA 0-10a*
- *I can respond to the experience of dance by discussing my thoughts and feelings. I can give and accept constructive comment on my own and others' work. EXA 0-11a*

# 1. Planning for creative dance outdoors

## Idea 1.1. Look, look again and listen

Observe how your children move in, through and about the outdoor space and in different places and talk to your children and their parents and carers about their interests. All this will help you plan your outdoor provision with movement and creative dance in mind.

For example, if you have a group of children who are really into being dogs, then encourage them with provocations such as, *I wonder...*

- ★ If you can bark and jump like a dog? Can you jump as high as my hand... good dog!
- ★ Whether you know any dog tricks. Can you sit up and beg? Roll over on the ground? Fetch a stick? Wag your tail?

You can use gestures and work with your pets on routines - watch Crufts to see how the dogs move with their owners and use this as inspiration for your own moves together! Naturally children can also be the owners as well as the dogs. In addition, if children want to have sticks (with string for a lead) as a dog, these can also become a different dance in its own right.

By carefully setting up the outdoor space and making the most of the outdoors as a stimulus, then creative dance will happen with support from interested adults who value this form of expression and responsive to how children think and move.

## Idea 1.2 Dance everywhere

Aim to give children opportunities to dance and move in different places and in different weathers. Dance with different people. Invite parents and older children to participate. Look at the YouTube clip of the guy who filmed himself dancing in different places all over the world – *Where the Hell is Matt?*<sup>1</sup> and explore the possibilities in your grounds and nearby spaces.



## Idea 1.3 Holding an informal outdoor dance event or festival

Invite parents. Make it part of a garden party. Look at multicultural dances (most of which happen outside) as an inspiration as well as traditional Scottish dances such as Highland dancing. Ask local dance and drumming groups to visit.

## Idea 1.4 Linking dance to key events and celebrations within the year

Look at your RME calendar and see if special dances are undertaken to celebrate different festivals or customs, e.g. maypole dancing in May, etc. A maypole can be made from a long broom handle embedded in cement in a plastic bin, with long ribbons in rainbow colours screwed into the top.

## Idea 1.5 Thinking about the physical and creative skills which children are developing

Consider skills such as: balance, coordination, developing a sense of space, agility, strength and flexibility. On top of this there are the imaginative, creative and problem solving skills that come with all expressive arts. It's more than movement alone.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlFkDbWwruY> and <http://www.wherethehellismatt.com/>

## 2. Integrating creative dance and movement into routines

### Idea 2.1 Bee-have when going to eat snack

- ★ When bees find a good source of food, they tell the other bees in the hive. They remember and explain their knowledge to other bees through the use of dance.
- ★ Observe how bees move. They travel from flower to flower to drink the nectar. As they do so, the pollen is carried on their bodies and arrives at a flower to pollinate or fertilise it. Look at which flowers they visit. Can you track a bumblebee as it moves through your outdoor space?
- ★ Listen to the music “The flight of the bumble bee”. Enjoy moving around to this music which is fast and flighty.
- ★ Make up a simple dance to show others where snack (food) may be found... perhaps it will include tasting honey! This can also work if children are used to foraging for food and can find seasonal goodies outside, either in the garden or at your local greenspace.

### Idea 2.2 The wobbly seat challenge

Outside there are a variety of different ways of having sitting which can be used to develop physical skills. Let children choose a seat that matches their balancing needs. For example, have stumps, big balls, bilibos<sup>2</sup>, a range of tyres and camping seats available for stories, snack and group work. Explore possibilities, such as:

- ★ Wrapping lycra over a tyre, then changing this for organza or another material.
- ★ Using a rope swing to sit on.
- ★ Looking for different objects to sit in, such as bread crates, an open suitcase or inside an empty wooden planter.

### Idea 2.3 Teaching children how to “freeze”

Movement and creative dance is also about stillness as well as action. Play games and practise “freezing” in different situations. It is useful to consider the skills of being able to control, balance, freeze and move on when they make different movements. On very cold days, make the connections between children freezing (staying still), feeling very cold and looking at the stillness of frozen ice compared with the water underneath.

### Idea 2.4 Ambulatory activities

When you have to move a class or group from one place to another, activities which you can do on the go come into their own:

- ★ In a natural space like a woodland, encourage children to think about different wild animals they may see there and how they may move. Use photos if need be to stimulate or remind children of local wildlife.
- ★ Play *Follow my Leader* to introduce a variety of steps, movement and walking in a line.
- ★ Funny walks. Children take it in turns to make up a silly walking movement. Others in the group must copy that walk.
- ★ Link much loved stories to movement. “*We’re going on a bear hunt*” facilitates movement and gesture. “*The Gruffalo*” is another story that works well improvised as a walk.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cosydirect.com/a-bilibo.html>

## Idea 2.5 Getting changed into and out of outdoor clothing

We all know children who can make as song and dance of this routine! So let's make it a treasured experience where songs and dance are used to bring joy rather than frustration to process. Take known songs into this context, e.g.

- ★ *Heads, shoulders, knees and toes*: use this to check we are wearing what we need today (thanks Marian Cairns for this idea).
- ★ *The Hokey Cokey*: put your left leg in, your left leg out,...(thanks to Elizabeth Henderson for this idea)
- ★ *If you're happy and you know it...* Zip your coat (zip, zip), wear your hat (warm "ooh" sound and head wiggle), etc.





### 3. Audit your outdoor space

Unlike a dance space indoors, there are additional features in the outdoor environment which can be capitalized upon. Consider skills such as: **balance, coordination, developing a sense of space, agility, strength and flexibility**. Think about the creative dance and movement opportunities in **every part** of your outdoor space, rather than in one identified zone, e.g.:

- ★ Opportunities for **crawling or moving through things** – tunnels, tyres, overgrown spaces, etc.
- ★ Look at logs, low walls or kerbs which may be suitable for **walking along or balancing**.
- ★ Places for **climbing and clambering**. Look at steps, slopes and hills as well as traditional playground equipment. Identify suitable trees for climbing. Think about mini opportunities such as **stepping up** onto milk crates or the use of a small step ladder for painting on walls.
- ★ Have objects **to jump over** and lots of different **jumping off points** in the outdoor space.
- ★ Have space or take children to places with lots of **space to run and move** around.
- ★ Provide opportunities for children to use their bodies in lots of different ways by careful placement of different resources in the outdoor area. For example, hang resources at different heights on a fence to ensure children do **stretch up on tiptoe or crouch down low**.
- ★ What can hang down in your outdoor space? Can you set up lines that enable items to hang so that children **stretch to reach** them?
- ★ Provide a variety of weighty items – gravel and sand which can be put into containers and **transported by children** around the outdoor space. A range of logs of different sizes or even bottle babies<sup>3</sup> can all help.
- ★ Have places where children can **pull themselves up**. This might be raised beds at different heights, or different sorts of steps. It's important for children who are just learning how to walk or who have mobility issues. It can also include monkey bars for **swinging along**. A simple addition can be a rope swing or trapeze set up high.
- ★ Consider how children can move between these features and the connections that can be made through travelling in different ways. Is it possible for a child to move through your outdoor space without needing to touch the ground?



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<sup>3</sup> Have a look at <http://nosuchthingasbadweather.blogspot.com/2014/01/outdoor-play-party-bottle-babies.html> if you don't know about bottle babies.

### Idea 3.1 Surfaces

Think about surfaces and how children can interact with them:

- ★ Are children allowed/able to go barefoot?
- ★ What about being able to crawl and roll around?
- ★ What do they feel like when children move across them via a wheeled toy?
- ★ Are there mud, sand, leaves, pebbles coffee beans and other surfaces for children to explore? If not, how can you enable children to access these opportunities?
- ★ Are some surfaces hard, and others soft?

If your outdoor space is quite barren, don't panic. Just think about offering temporary miniature versions on tarps, in paddling pools, on tuff trays or in a circle of stumps. Children do need to experience a range of uneven surfaces as part of their physical development. Getting your children off-site and into some local greenspace on a weekly basis all year round is ideal to help them develop their co-ordination.

### Idea 3.2 Dancing with plants

Working skills such as digging and weeding require repetitive movements and can build up stamina, muscle tone and strength. By thinking about what is planted in terms of its play value can also help. For example:

- ★ Branchings from old Xmas trees are great for waving around as well as for den building.
- ★ Big leaves such as palmate leaves from ash or horse chestnut leaves or large maple leaves work well for holding in each hand for natural pom-poms and cheerleading.
- ★ Some seeds such as dandelion clocks and helicopter wings from sycamores automatically engage children as they watch the seed disperse in the wind.
- ★ Never forget the joy of throwing leaves into the air... what different actions can you do before they all land on the ground?



### Idea 3.3 Bushes and trees

These are 3D spaces, vertical surfaces and places to hang things. This means you can put up streamers and other items for children to move through. Children also like hiding in them and climbing in and through and up them.

### Idea 3.4 Growing long grass

Long grass is incredibly good for developing physical skills. It's much harder to run or walk through long grass than a mown lawn. So have both available for the contrast and encourage children to realize how being in long grass causes movements to be exaggerated. Crawling through, crouching, hiding and popping up out of long grass is also enjoyed by children of all ages.

### **Idea 3.5 Places to perform**

There is no need for a stage or special dance area. Saying that decking and raised platforms do often get used for impromptu events and free play performances. Having a few props by such places is an invitation to be creative. They can also provide areas which can be kept clutter-free. In a woodland area, think about where you may have a wee clearing or space for gatherings which could do.

### **Idea 3.6 Doors, tunnels, archways and entrances**

Children love moving through these features which symbolize a change or transformation. If you can rig up a pair of curtains which can be opened and pulled together, then this also adds to the possibilities, especially if there is flexibility for the materials to be changed. What entrances can your children make in style? A few bits of fabric can also be fun to add into the possibilities.

Put beaded curtains, ribbon curtains and the draught excluding plastic strips at doors which lead into the outdoor space. These have a practical purpose of discouraging flying insects from getting indoors but are also worth play features as children weave in and around them.

### **Idea 3.7 Painting dance patterns on the ground**

Dances are repeated physical patterns and sequences. Paint traditional dance patterns in footprints on the ground so children can follow the pattern to make the dance steps in order. In Seattle at bus stops, brass footprints were put into the ground for waiting passengers to do just this. From here, children can make up their own dance patterns.

Having a simple square outline on the ground can lead to some fun ways of creating dance patterns inside it. For example, a child can stand in the middle and jump to each corner and back to the middle. This can be represented graphically with older children. Show the children how you draw a square, make a squiggle for the jump movement to each corner. Have a look at *Math in your Feet*<sup>4</sup> – but simplify the process and follow your children’s ideas and interests.

### **Idea 3.8 Water**

There’s lots of creative movement possibilities using water. Look for where water gathers naturally, e.g. in a puddle or how it moves through your outdoor space when it’s raining. Water makes patterns and can help children make connections between their movements and marks made. Different props will also develop different physical skills – it’s quite different using a mop to a roller brush to a paint brush.

### **Idea 3.9 Singing songs with actions**

Look around your outdoor space and think about songs, rhymes and poems which naturally work well outside but pay specific attention to those with actions, e.g.

- ★ Incy wincy spider – at a drainpipe.
- ★ Five little speckled frogs – at the balancing log or long seat.
- ★ I know a teddy bear – on a slope or hill

Put together some prompts for your team to use when working outside with your children.



<sup>4</sup> <https://mathonthemovebook.com/category/math-in-your-feet/> and do a YouTube search

## 4. Resources for creative dance outside

Most resources used outside have to be quite rugged to survive the elements and the range of surfaces experienced. Think carefully about which resources need direct supervision and which can be left out for free play. Undertake a risk benefit assessment (RBA) for the use of ropes, string and other long things as well as a generic RBA of the outdoor space.

General principles:

- ★ Rather than feeling you need a dance kit and special resources, consider the potential of what you already have in your cupboards. Look at the PE resources and raid hidden places and forgotten cupboards.
- ★ Use materials which are quick dry. Often light, floaty material works well outside. Have different sizes and textures for comparing the effects.
- ★ Look in pound shops for items such as space blankets which provide opportunities to explore movement with an alternative range of materials
- ★ Use natural materials and explore their potential for creative dance. Leaves, sticks, stones and cones all have potential.
- ★ Retire old dance equipment outside.

### Useful resources to consider

- ★ Commercially bought bowls, spinners and rockers are popular with children.
- ★ Different objects to throw and catch and roll – this can include feathers, leaves, cones, floaty things, flying discs, hoops, hoops wrapped in material, etc.
- ★ Provide targets for throwing or moving games – how many ways can you move a football into the goals?
- ★ Using different modes of transport such as on scooters, bikes, trikes, dolly crates, low level zip wires. Provide a variety of challenges for children on scooters and trikes to negotiate objects, build up speed, slow down, etc.
- ★ Big, yet light, objects such as pieces of guttering and throwing big air-filled shapes or balloons (paper ones can be made as a more environmentally-friendly alternative to the usual)

Children need opportunities to participate in their own time and way in dance and movement activities. This is about spontaneous opportunities initiated by children during their play. Think about making the most on the unique and essential nature of being outside by ensuring the experience offered is different to that indoors as much as possible.

Children need to be able to:

- ★ Choose resources from a range of choices.
- ★ Know how to use resources properly and care for them
- ★ Put away or tidy up resources after using them

Be mindful of clutter and when putting out props which invite movement. Consider where this should best happen and the quantities of resources which can be managed within the space. Little children can get very absorbed in an activity and forget to look out for other children and features. Also be aware of competing interests within a confined space. For example mixing balls and bikes in one area may lead to arguments and conflict.

## 5. Using the outdoors as a stimulus for creative dance

### (Inspiration and communication)

If you think back to your own childhood, you may remember the fun to be had walking on freshly fallen snow, feeling the wind on your face, experiencing the mystery of fog and the joy of jumping in puddles on wet days. These are unique sensory experiences that cannot be replicated indoors and which help children explore and learn about their world. Hearing a gull shriek and swoop down to pick up some leftover food can create excitement that can lead to movement and role play.

What is important is that children are given time both to explore and respond to stimuli. Observe children's reactions to stimuli, positive, negative or indifferent. Look at their ability to focus, concentrate or become absorbed by the stimuli. Consider the impact of this and how it is interpreted through movement and dance. The natural and man-made environments provide opportunities for all sorts of explorations...

#### Idea 5.1 Paving slab jump steps

Many practitioners will remember playing hopscotch from their childhood. The layout of some paving stones are perfect for creating this game. Other designs are not so good. Make the most of any paving stones and surfaces as a context for moving, e.g.:

- ★ Tiny tiptoe steps on small brickwork. Or perhaps this is where you carefully put your feet down so that they stay within the brick.
- ★ Avoid stepping on the cracks – in case a bear comes up! This challenge encourages children to jump in different directions and take different sizes of jumps.
- ★ Kerbsides for balancing upon. Whilst we want to teach children road safety, there may be kerbs within your playground or other places which enable children to balance. They also provide long mini jumping off platforms.

#### Idea 5.2 Sidewalk street dancing (for older children, e.g. Primary 1)

On a pavement or quiet street, or on asphalt in your outdoor space, create a series of body movements. You follow the signs and symbols and go through the actions, e.g.

- ★ Start line
- ★ 3 stars = do 3 star jumps
- ★ Squiggly line – walk through it
- ★ 5 "H" = take 5 hops
- ★ A swirl = spin around

Once children get the idea, they are able to make up their own symbols for different actions.

#### Idea 5.3 Chalk walks

- ★ Take a piece of chalk for a walk in a large asphalt space. If different children have different colours then it can be interesting to see what happens – do the marks stay in the same place or intersect and mingle? Encourage each child to move through their chalk marks and observe how they do this.
- ★ Draw lines on the ground for children to walk along: straight, zig-zag and curvy. What other patterns can children create to walk through?

#### **Idea 5.4 Copy shapes in the environment**

When going for a walk, model what a tree looks like under a tree. Stand like a fence post beside a fence post, crouch like a rock, turn jaggy like a piece of barbed wire. Take photos to capture the moment and re-tell the walk through these moves back in the class.

#### **Idea 5.5 Watch one animal**

Watch a cat when it walks by. Mimic its actions and the soft style of walking. Become a tiger and pounce! Any animal, large or small can be studied. Watching birds and other animals, and then miming their specific actions, can help children to understand how other animals move and behave. Move from one place to another like that animal.

#### **Idea 5.6 An animal parade**

When in the school grounds or a local space, brainstorm the types of animals you might see in different places. Then go for an animal parade. For example:

- ★ When passing the pond, waddle like a duck.
- ★ Near a park bench, nod like a pigeon.
- ★ Across flat grass, swoop like gulls.
- ★ By the wall, stalk like a cat.
- ★ At the lamp post, pretend to pee like a dog.

As the children's confidence grows, watch for good examples of movements from children. Get them to show other children. Then build this up into pairs of movements so that one action is followed by another. For example, one child can model a duck waddle. Another child may capture the act of grabbing bread from the ground and pretending to eat it like a duck. So children can put the two actions together. This is how sequences of movements are built up and patterns can be repeated, e.g *Quack! Quack! Waddle-waddle. Quack! Quack! Waddle-waddle. Quack! Quack! Waddle-waddle.*



*Visiting water play features when out and about is an opportunity to look at movement patterns. Take videos so that children can see themselves respond to the water fountains and timings.*

### Idea 5.7 Rain and puddle dancing

Having to move through water requires more effort than air, unless it's very windy.

- ★ Dancing in and out of puddles – Do this along to songs such as “The Hokey Cokey”
- ★ Do a rain dance. As the saying goes, “*Those who say sunshine brings happiness have never danced in the rain.*”
- ★ Look at gumboot dancing from South Africa as inspiration for moving and dancing with wellyboots on.
- ★ Make rain sounds using body movements – clicking fingers for drops of rain, rubbing hands for rain getting heavier, stamping on the ground for a tropical rain storm
- ★ With a shallow puddle, go for a splash dance routine where children all get a chance to dance around in the puddle and create lots of splashes. Which movements are most effective?



### Idea 5.8 Leaf dancers

Watch leaves being blown around, or helicopter seeds falling to the ground.

- ★ Can the children be superheroes and rescue a leaf or seed from hitting the ground?
- ★ How about throwing leaves as high as possible into the air?
- ★ Can you clap your hands when the leaves are up high and before they settle on the ground?
- ★ Can you clap your hands and add in another movement such as a helicopter seed twirl?

### Idea 5.9 Feeling the wind

- ★ Make flags and mobiles which move in the wind and can be held by children.
- ★ On a windy day, experiment with moving against and with the wind. Hold up different sorts of material – both soft material and denser stuff such as tarp and cardboard. Experience the joy of walking or moving into the wind, then turning the other way and being assisted back.
- ★ Handheld kites can be good dance props. Make these from old plastic bags.



*This is a wind sock created by sellotaping a space blanket into a funnel*

- ★ If your class have just made some ribbon sticks or hand-held kites and want to try them out, then go to a big open field, ask the children to spread out LOTS and then let them dance and move. Alternatively line them up and set each child moving forward one at a time.

### Idea 5.10 Use guided imagery outside

Relate this to the elements or nature or events happening outside. For example...

Lie on the ground

Imagine the sun

Imagine what it looks like and the shape of it

Think of the sun rising slowly,  
spreading its beams across the sky

becoming hotter and stronger

Then filling the land with sunlight

This can be linked to a story or myth linked to the sun and followed up with creating simple poetry or artwork about the sun.



### Idea 5.11 Footprints in the sand

Make footprints in the sand at the beach or in a big sandpit. Children do this spontaneously and adore creating trails.

Experiment with patterns based on different ways of walking on sand, e.g. skipping, jumping, walking backwards, like a duck, hopping.

- ★ Can the children retrace their steps and put their feet carefully back in their print?
- ★ What do the children notice when they try and put their foot in someone else's prints?
- ★ Where is the best place on the beach to make footprints and why?
- ★ Use language such as bigger, smaller, curved sides, symmetrical, longer, shorter, wider, narrower.
- ★ Use a foot dragged in sand on a beach to create a line. Children also like doing this for each other and adults to follow.





### Idea 5.12 Taking a stick for a walk

Sticks like being dragged along the ground. On a soft surface such as a beach or grit under a play park, children can take the stick for a walk and observe the pattern made of where we have walked and how we have moved. Make the most of the space.

- ★ You can model specific ideas beforehand. For example, sticks can be prodded into the sand, tapped in rhythms, pushed into the sand horizontally, create spirals and circles, to name but a few possibilities. Afterwards children can retrace their steps and see if they can copy their own actions. For this purpose start small and simple!
- ★ Draw lines on the ground for children to walk along, straight and curvy.
- ★ This can be extended to specific symbols to do specific moves, e.g. a star drawn in the sand can indicate that a star jump needs to happen

### Idea 5.13 Shadow explorations

On a sunny day, shadow shapes can be explored. Children will enjoy looking at the range of shapes and actions their bodies can make, as well as investigating the shadows of different features outside.

- ★ Can children make their shadow disappear?
- ★ Can they jump on someone else's shadow?
- ★ Can they dance with their own shadows? – we always have a partner in the sun!
- ★ Can they make shapes to complement this rhyme:

*Shadow, shadow curled up small  
I can make you grow up tall  
Now we're jumping stretched and wide  
Shadow, shadow at my side  
Tiptoe slowly; shadow go!  
I can lose my shadow though.*

### Idea 5.14 Being the shadow

Peg up a white sheet where the children can go behind it and create shadows. If possible, let children video each other's performances, using a tablet or other device. Have a range of props and objects of shapes and sizes for the children to use. They can experiment with how they look and add to their performances.

### Idea 5.15 Photo Booth Shadows

iPads and Apple laptops have an in-built app called "Photo Booth." The iPad can only take photos. However a laptop or webcam can be used to create little videos with deliberate distortions. Children will pose and move in different ways to record themselves.

If you just have an iPad, then use the "Thermal" or "X-ray" allows children to capture shadows made by each other in colourful and alternative ways. They can take photos of different poses and have fun trying to work out who is who.



### Idea 5.16 Freezing shadows

If the children are able to freeze in a pose, then another child or adult can quickly add eyes and mouths with white chalk onto the shadows before taking a photo, so that it looks like the shadows have become people in their own right.

## 6. Exploring movement and dance

### Idea 6.1 Mirror and reflective activities

Having access to mirrors or a reflective surface like a window pane allows children to see themselves. Alternatively, some children will be ready for working in pairs where they can watch the other child do the same actions as themselves. Say aloud poems which encourage movements, e.g.

*Mirror, mirror on the wall  
Who can ...  
...Stretch out slowly  
...Curl up tightly  
...Jump high quickly  
Most of all*

Explore other reflective surfaces outside such as puddles. If necessary create some, e.g.

- ★ Metal bowls and spoons in the water tray
- ★ A mirror in a tuff tray
- ★ A convex mirror to look round corners
- ★ Mirrored letters or numbers hanging from bushes

Have these at different heights and let the children enjoy looking into them and also making different shapes and movements and seeing how they look in the distorted reflections.

### Idea 6.2 Coloured speck chasing

When sunlight hits a coloured mirror and is reflected, then coloured specks are created. By manipulating the mirror, the specks of colour can be moved around the outdoor space. Children love chasing the shadows and trying to catch them, or touch them or jump on them.

### Idea 6.3 Allowing light to pass through

Collect scrap pieces of acrylic, Perspex, cellophane and other translucent objects. When these items are hung up outside on a sunny day, the light may pass through creating different shadows on the ground. Children can enjoy jumping from shadow to shadow. If the discs and stencils move in the wind then the level of challenge is increased on windy, sunny days so create coloured mobiles if possible.

## Patterns and pathways

Movement and creative dance involves creating pathways of movement – dance patterns. There are lots of possible ways of introducing this concept in child-friendly ways. Here's some ideas:

### Idea 6.4 The pirate's treasure hunt

On a piece of tarmac, mark the pirates ship and then several metres away draw a box of treasure or have a special treasure box sitting there. Give children chalk and let them draw their trail or path about how the pirate found their treasure.

Next, ask the children to tell the story of their treasure hunt through movement. When a child has drawn three squiggles ask her how to show that through moving or dancing. Each child can "dance" their trail.

### **Idea 6.5 Wall patterns**

Making big patterns and marks on walls using water helps children make the connection between their movement and a mark or a path. Provide props such as water, paint brushes, squeeze bottles, etc. Model patterns which are big, wide, tall and made slowly with clear movements, e.g. tall, long straight lines. These can be followed with short jaggy lines.

### **Idea 6.6 Water trails**

From here, children will move onto creating marks and patterns on the ground and other features. Challenge them to make a line or trail from one side of the playground to the other. Then ask them to dance their way over the trail, linking the marks to specific moves.

Water trails can be made by filling a plastic milk carton with water but having a small hole at the bottom. It can also be attached to a piece of string and swung like a pendulum...this will show a different form of pattern linked to movement.

### **Idea 6.7 Patterns in the air**

Using a variety of props: sticks, dance ribbons or other ideas, children can enjoy pattern making in the air. These could be magic spells, conducting an orchestra, pretending to be a bird – ribbons on soft bands attached to wrists works nicely for flowing movements.

### **Idea 6.8 Ball bouncing patterns**

If you are throwing, rolling or catching a ball with a child or group of children, then verbalise the patterns or actions, such as “roll, bounce, pass.” Build this up into pattern work by encourage children to copy each other, e.g. “bounce-pass, bounce-pass.”

What is a simple bouncing pattern that children working in pairs can invent, e.g. bounce, bounce, pass, bounce, bounce, pass? How can this be extended into throwing, rolling or other ways of moving the ball between two or more people?



### **Idea 6.9 Rope patterns**

- ★ Make lines and patterns with ropes of different lengths and sizes. Children like making zig-zag waves and snakes by moving rope up and down or side to side.
- ★ Rope lines laid on the ground also are popular for balancing along – the bigger and chunkier the rope the better! Remember to give children freedom to move the rope around and explore different patterns
- ★ Lots of lines can be strung up to make an obstacle course or trap for children to travel through without touching the rope. These can be done through a systematic pattern as well as more randomly.
- ★ Look for similar line patterns in the real world. Spider’s webs are best seen on dewy mornings. But looking at the patterns created by electrical wires can also be seen, or the pattern of whirlygig washing lines, etc.

- ★ Set up simple rope swings and hammocks. The act of getting in and out of a hammock requires all sorts of balancing skills. Rope bridges and slack lines help develop all sorts of physical skills needed for balancing.<sup>5</sup>



*This amazing raised rope net is in the playground at Spirit of Play, Denmark, Western Australia. It adds height and depth to the sand play area underneath!*

#### **Idea 6.10 Follow a feather**

Coloured shop-bought feathers can be clearly seen outside. On a windy day, release a feather into the playground. Let the children video where its journey and where it eventually comes to rest. Look at the movements of the feather. The group of children can each hold a feather and recreate its journey through building up the movements of the feather.

#### **Idea 6.11 Mix 'n' match fabrics with PE items**

The joy of loose parts is in the sheer range of combinations that can occur and how a child interacts with these within a given environment.

- ★ Find out what happens when you wrap a tennis ball in a piece of netting and then throw it.
- ★ Stick tennis balls in old socks for swinging around.
- ★ Wrap organza or other lightweight material around hoops. Try balancing them on your head.
- ★ Stretch lycra in, through and around objects and see the new worlds and shapes created.

#### **Idea 6.12 It's razzle dazzle time!**

It's time to turn unwanted bags into functional and weatherproof dance resources. Have a look at this blog post and enjoy the possibilities <https://creativestarning.co.uk/art-music-outdoors/repurposing-charity-bags-into-dance-resources/>

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<sup>5</sup> Remember to follow manufacturers instructions for slack lines, any local adventure guidance and risk assess any work with ropes.

### **Idea 6.13 For the love of lycra**

Unfortunately, lycra is not environmentally friendly, so whilst it's not great to buy, if you can find secondhand pieces then treasure them well. Children are fascinated by its properties and how they can manipulate it with their actions. A long length can be used in a myriad of ways. Do add it to your RBA for rope and long things as it does need careful management. Use it over a soft surface such as grass:

- ★ Hang up to create a soft, loose swing
- ★ Stretch it between two pillars or posts
- ★ Wrap it around a tyre
- ★ Have a piece free for exploration
- ★ Spread out at a low level for crawling under or onto.



### **Idea 6.14 Dancing the time away (for Primary 1 and older children)**

Create an analogue clock face outside using chalk. Mark on the hour times. A child can stand in the centre and move in different ways to different times. For example, another child might call out:

- ★ Jump to 2 o'clock
- ★ Step back to 6 o'clock
- ★ Wiggle to 3 o'clock

Another alternative for older children (Primary 1) is for each child (or pairs) to make their own hoop clock on the tarmac and for everyone to undertake this activity together.

### **Idea 6.15 Walking, talking partner sticks (for Primary 1 children and older)**

A simple activity that supports the development of teamwork, sensory and spatial awareness is a stick walk. The children each find a partner; each pair has a stick, straw or chopstick between them; one end of the stick goes against the index finger of the first child while the other end goes against the index finger of the second child.

The children take turns leading their partner on a dance, talking/communicating through the pressure on the stick, eye contact and other subtle physical messages; one of the aims is to use other forms of communication other than verbal; also, see how long they can keep the stick balanced without dropping to the ground; if it drops, just start again. The concentration on their faces is amazing! A further challenge could involve moving around an outdoor space sharing two sticks.

### **Idea 6.16 Messy dancing**

This is about developing movement skills creatively through large scale art work. Put a big old sheet on the playground and fasten it down with paper parcel tape or masking tape. Ensure your children are very well clothed – their job is to paint on the big sheet but in ways they want to – with their feet, spinning around, using their elbows, etc.. Have different music playing and see if it impacts on how children choose to paint. For natural alternatives create natural paint created from berries and so on.

### **Idea 6.17 Pebble dancing**

Let children find a pair of rounded pebbles to tap together. Explore how these can be tapped in different ways: high, low, between the legs, to the left, to the right. Make up a tapping rhythm e.g. up, down, left, right. Link taps to body movements, e.g. tap high when jumping up, tap low when crouched down, shake them in cupped hands when jiggling the whole body like jelly. Make this into a partner dance.



## 7. Responding and Discussing

As with so many aspects of play, the need for discussions around experiences is of key importance. Make time for these through your range of documentation and reflective processes. However, often it is the informal chats that can help reassure a child and give them confidence to express their thoughts and feelings. When a child calls out “Look at me” or “Look, look what I can do!” then this is a time to watch, acknowledge children’s achievements and offer suggestions for the next steps such as

*“Can you ...*

*... Reach a little further*

*... Jump a bit higher*

*... Stretch your arms more*

*... Wave your arms gently?”*



Practitioners can observe, guide and interact in different ways:

- ★ Describe how the child is moving, e.g. “I see you are growing taller and your hands are outstretched.” Exaggerate through description, e.g. Str-e-t-ch.
- ★ Use the language of movement and creative dance: parts of the body, action movements.
- ★ Model movement and creative dance as we work outside and facilitate play.
- ★ Talk about how the child’s movements make you feel.
- ★ Join in with the child and move and dance alongside and with a child or a group, though trying to avoid dominating or taking over when doing so.
- ★ Copy the child’s actions – if done carefully and with gentle humour, a child can enjoy the power within this interaction where they have “control” over you, the adult.
- ★ Putting props out which support that interest: magic wands may have streamers to highlight movement; capes which swirl out when a child twirls; stretchy bands for “catching” people or as reins for an animal; a tube of material or old sleeping bag for wiggling around like a worm or caterpillar; etc.
- ★ Offering to support the child or group to make their own or find their own props which aid movement and creative dance.
- ★ Start a beat or copy the rhythm of movement using a prop.
- ★ Think in pairs. To build up sequences of moves, start creating or thinking in pairs, e.g. jump and stretch, roll and stand, pounce and wait, etc.

### Idea 7.1 The language of movement and creative dance

Children will move in a variety of ways. Knowing and remembering these can help when responding to children and planning the next steps:

- ★ **Body parts:** head, hair, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, lips, eyebrows, etc.
- ★ **Actions:** shaking, nodding, lifting, tucking, closing, wiggling, wrinkling, circling, etc.
- ★ **How the movement happens:** fast, slow, gently, flowing, like a particular animal
- ★ **Shape and position:** up, forwards, down, backwards, diagonally, left, right, etc.
- ★ **Feelings:** Use language and expressions that connects to different senses and emotions

There will also be the relationship of movement between body parts and also between people.

After bout of physical activity or dancing, brainstorm action words with the children and develop a word bank. Use a word cloud app to portray the children's ideas:



Children may not understand an action word. This comes with time as children get opportunities to repeatedly do that action. For example, children may enjoy rolling down a hill, rolling their hands in a song, using a rolling pin in snack and rolling balls about.

### Idea 7.2 Use digital technology

Children love being able to see themselves. Mirrors are fascinating for young children and babies. They also enjoy looking at photos and video. Because videos capture movement, they are particularly useful tools for children to observe their own moments and what they are doing. This enables children to reflect on their performances or work and develop ideas or ways of trying new dance and movement activities.

### Idea 7.3 Use videos as stimulus for dance

There are lots of interesting and funny clips which can inspire children to move in different ways and also to give ourselves, as practitioners ideas for developing children's dance and movement opportunities.

- ★ The Sand Dancer
- ★ Flashmob dance clips
  - TV shows with dancing, if this is something that your children talk about and are interested in.
- ★ Parkour

### Idea 7.4 Masks

Masks have transformational properties. Children may well think, behave and act differently when behind a mask. Masks do not need to fully cover the face. Think of Zorro! The same rules apply to mask wearers as they do to puppets. You reprimand and/or compliment the masked personality and not the child. Simple masks can be made and decorated for outdoor use. Encourage children to change their movements and actions in line with the character and its emotions, feelings and story.



### Idea 7.5 Story telling through movement and dance

Perhaps the most well-known approach is the use of "The Bear Hunt" by Michael Rosen. Many practitioners will take children on a bear hunt outside and mime the actions from the book: going through long grass, up a hill, into a dark area, etc. If your outdoor space is bare, ask children how they can recreate each mini environment, or better still, just pretend!



Many other books work just as well. Useful things to consider are:

- ★ The suitability of the book – does it lend itself to being re-told through movement outside?
- ★ Whether the children are interested and up for this.
- ★ What props may be useful – these need to be suitably robust for using outside. Alternatively make up resources which have a limited lifespan.
- ★ The appropriateness of the outdoor space. You don't need to be on a beach to develop a story with a beach setting. Pretending to be at the beach is part of the fun.

Oral story telling works especially well outside. Encourage children to make up their own stories as they follow a rope trail or mark make on the ground. This develops children's confidence to create and develop stories as they get older too.



## Finally

Within this website and during any of my training sessions you will find lots of ideas and accompanying photos that contain elements of risk. It is important that you consider all the suggestions on a case-by-case basis to determine whether they are appropriate for the developmental age and learning needs of your children.

You also need to ensure that you are suitably competent and confident to ensure the routines, resources and environment are as safe as necessary. Remember to undertake a risk-benefit assessment for anything you feel needs it, be this using tools and ropes, experiencing fire, climbing trees and other experiences involving heights, moving heavy objects, working off-site, near water and so-on. Creative STAR Learning is all about enabling great outdoor practice but every educator and establishment needs to undertake this within a framework of safety.

Likewise it is important that wherever you are working you follow the land access laws of your country. Being respectful of others, leaving no trace of your presence and considering the impact of your practice on the environment are all part of your responsibilities as educators.

## About Juliet

Juliet is an educational consultant who specialises in outdoor learning and play. Previously, she was the head teacher of three schools ranging in size from 6 to 277 pupils. Juliet has worked at a national level since 2008 writing case studies, documents and doing behind the scenes work to help shape strategy and support for schools and ELC establishments. This includes heading up the team that wrote the Education Scotland document, *Outdoor Learning: A Practical Guide for Scottish Teachers and Practitioners* (2011), co-authoring *Loose Parts Play – A Toolkit* (2016 & 2019) and being part of the Scottish Government strategy group that created *A Play Strategy for Scotland* (2013). Most recently, Juliet contributed to *Out to Play* (2018), a Scottish early years document supporting practitioners to develop off-site provision in local greenspace.



Juliet is in heavy demand world-wide for her practical training. Since 2008, she has been one of the key people behind the scenes that has worked with Scottish Forestry staff to develop the SQA Forest Kindergarten award.

She is the author of two award-winning and best-selling books: *Dirty Teaching: A Beginner's Guide to Learning Outdoors* (2014) and *Messy Maths: An Outdoor, Playful Approach for Early Years* (2017). Her website, Creative STAR Learning is a source of information and support with more than one million visitors in the past four years. Juliet continues to work directly with staff and children in many ELC settings in the North-East of Scotland looking at practical ways to achieve excellent outdoor practice.

Please get in touch if you wish to know more about the training and support she offers to ELC settings and primary schools. Email: [info@creativestarning.co.uk](mailto:info@creativestarning.co.uk)

See you on the outside! - Juliet@CreativeSTAR

