

# Learning through movement in the K-6 classroom. Integrating theater and dance to achieve educational equity

*by Rasmitadila Rasmitadila*

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## Learning through movement in the K-6 classroom. Integrating theater and dance to achieve educational equity

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## BOOK REVIEW

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**Learning through movement in the K-6 classroom. Integrating theater and dance to achieve educational equity**, by Kelly Mancini Becker, New York, Routledge, 2023, 220 pp. 23 B/W Illustrations, £26.99 (paperback), £120.00 (hardback), £24.29 (e-Book), ISBN: 978-1-03228-327-2 (hardback), 978-1-03228-325-8 (paperback), 978-1-00329-631-7 (e-Book)

The book *Learning Through Movement in the K-6 Classroom* written by Kelly Mancini Becker, aims to examine the importance of using movement, especially in theatre and dance activities in the classroom. The author is an educator, researcher, and performing artist currently teaching pre-service teachers at the University of Vermont, USA, about integrating art into classroom teaching. The author effectively emphasises the book's essence, namely integrating movement into each lesson content area in line with basic curriculum standards in general. Based on field experience in classrooms, especially K-6, this book explains how and why to integrate movement into each subject, such as math, science, literacy, and social studies. This book is divided into eight chapters, each consisting of sub-chapters that can be easily understood in detail by every reader and focus on how to achieve positive results in every movement activity in learning.

I started Chapter 1, the introductory part titled 'Let's get this moving'. In this first chapter, the author explains the positive results of using movement, especially in theatre and dance activities in the classroom, which can provide positive results for students, such as increase student engagement, deeper learning, and excellent retention, contributing to student health and well-being. Through the relevant research results presented in Chapter 1, the author can provide examples of several research results, such as brain research (Hardiman 2012; Ratey 2008) that movement, such as exercise, can improve brain function, memory, attention and mood. The heart can play an essential role in the highest thinking mechanism in successful learning. Furthermore, the author also explains that movement is related to cognitive functions, which can control students' emotions and foster creativity through visual arts, music, and movement activities. In particular, this first chapter also highlights how to improve educational outcomes for students who are traditionally marginalised, which is usually associated with racism and educational injustice.

For this reason, the author reveals this condition based on research by Dena Simmons (2019) who calls on teachers to utilise culturally responsive teaching that prioritises celebrating student diversity through life experience and knowledge so that it can improve student academic outcomes. This is one of the concrete and positive examples from this book that can encourage teachers everywhere who (I'm sure there are many) have diverse class characteristics to be able to implement movement in classroom learning (more inclusively). At the end of the first chapter, the author strengthens the reasons why schools need to implement movement in lessons, such as drama and art, because it can help students improve learning outcomes for students.

In Chapter 2, 'Getting Ready to Move', the author divides this part of the book into several sub-sections, each of which is explained by the direct experience of teachers and students in a learning activity. The author begins to present Chapter 2 by describing his direct experience in schools that have diverse backgrounds, such as conditions of conflict, war and other difficulties, which give the author the best experience about the power of art to transform the learning environment, providing space for all students to participate, succeed, and feel own. This second chapter invites readers to prepare teachers and students to carry out creative activities, such as setting boundaries agreements, and creating a conducive environment. This includes activities to teach and practice some of the skills necessary to ensure that students have safe bodies, are ready to work collaboratively and supportively and know the logical consequences of not engaging appropriately, including

inviting students to do something new in an art activity. In this chapter, the author also explains that it is necessary to build groups in learning so that students can collaborate, which can help build trust between students, enable them to start learning how to collaborate effectively and practice bringing their imagination to life for creative learning. At the end of Chapter 2, the author provides several examples of collaborative games accompanied by lesson plans that can be applied in grades K-2 and K-6.

Chapter 3, 'Getting the stage for success', invites teachers to practice movements with students with courage and try to be dramatic and a little silly – in a positive sense – which can encourage students to be imaginative and creative. The author explains some of the benefits of body movements and gestures in Chapter 3 based on research; in artistic activities such as acting and dancing, the author explains that they have been proven to increase learning and language acquisition, improve memory, understand mathematics and science concepts, and reduce cognitive load, including in learning. Whatever. Apart from that, the author explains the importance of music in learning, expressed in activities that can regulate the mood and change the energy in the class, which can calm the class. At the end of Chapter 3, the author also provides an example of a lesson plan with examples of actual activities that teachers can carry out for classes K 1-6 K3-6. Continuing Chapter 3, Chapter 4, 'Leaping for Literacy', the author invites us to explore how theatre and dance can be integrated with literacy to make the classroom a dynamic, engaging, and active space for deeper learning for all students. The author gives examples of several activities, such as drama and dance, which effectively develop literacy and other ways to differentiate teaching for students. Several studies have also explained that theatre and movement effectively improve literacy skills. Multimodal Approach: multiliteracy is an approach that can increase access to content, help generate more insights, and allow students to share their understanding differently. Classroom practices such as storytelling and theatre enable students to develop enthusiasm, imagination, experience and cultural understanding that may not be found in other subjects. At the end of Chapter 4, the author provides an example of a storytelling activity, complete with a sequence of scenarios that teachers can easily practice in the classroom.

Chapter 5, 'Moving through History', explains how theatre and movement can be integrated into social studies courses to increase engagement, deepen learning, and teach valuable lessons integral to students' understanding of social studies content. The author considers social studies one of the subjects naturally suited to integrating arts. The author also emphasises that activities in theatre and art often involve emotions. For example, when students have to act out a scene as a character in a play, this will affect their emotions. When students include emotions in their learning, other parts of the brain will be activated in long-term memory, increasing retention, which will also help motivation and involvement. Furthermore, the author also explains that theatre as a tool to engage in social studies lessons will help students learn and practice empathy. In this chapter, the author quotes Borba (2018), saying that teaching empathy to students, especially in theatre activities, will create a safe, caring and inclusive learning climate that directly impacts students' learning and academic success. When students are empathetic, they are less aggressive, better communicators, more resilient, more engaged, and get higher academic grades. At the end of the chapter, the author also provides an example of a lesson plan that integrates theatre and social studies lessons for grades K3-6.

In Chapter 6, 'Moving Math', the author explains more movement activities by students that involve the body in learning mathematical concepts to increase engagement, motivation and understanding of mathematics. Chapter 6 is exciting because the author adds more practical portions to mathematics lessons to reduce the difficulty of this lesson. The author uses several movement activities based on research results that show that the use of the body and movement (embodied cognition) positively impacts mathematics lessons. The author also gives an example of using arms or gestures in mathematics learning, which has been proven to help students learn and maintain an understanding of mathematics. Furthermore, many gestures are exemplified, such as when students understand mathematical concepts by using their hands to memorise equations, addition,

subtraction, angles, and multiplication; using metaphoric gestures (gestures that show meaning) will significantly impact mathematics lessons. Movement can be created to explore and express many mathematical concepts. At the end of Chapter 6, the author provides examples of mobile mathematics learning plans at several grade levels.

Chapter 7, 'Science in Motion', contains how teachers can involve students in science learning using movement and theatre. Like Chapter 6, in Chapter 7, the author also provides many examples of movements related to science subjects. The author cites several research results that emphasise that studying gestures helps students build knowledge, especially with complex concepts where students need more vocabulary and language to explain things verbally. The author also adds the research results of Hardiman et al. (2019), the use of movement (be it theatre or dance) as a learning strategy for science teaching has been shown to increase content retention by students, which makes it a valuable pedagogy for science teaching. For this reason, in Chapter 7, several theatre movements are an excellent way to teach observation activities in science. For example, science inquiry learning integrated into movements, such as lessons about centrifugal force, which students with specific movements practice, makes it easier to understand the lesson. The author also gives examples such as gravity, open and closed circuits, and the water cycle, which can be carried out by movement. At the end of Chapter 7, several movement lesson plans for several grade levels are also explained.

The final chapter, 'Moving Toward Authentic Assessments Using Arts', is Chapter 8 or the last chapter, which emphasises authentic assessment in arts learning, which is not just a vehicle for learning but an accurate assessment vehicle that provides information on where students are in the learning process. Authentic assessments are assignments, projects, or problem-solving challenges that reflect real-life challenges across various disciplines. The author also emphasises the importance of self-reflection and student involvement in the assessment process. The author explains the important thing in this chapter: using art in the assessment process provides opportunities to observe, see, and hear students so they are more active in their learning. Teachers can understand student progress, which has only been traditionally assessed using written tests. The critical thing in Chapter 8 is to provide an example of assessment accompanied by an artistic competency assessment rubric and a self-reflection tool, which is very useful for teachers and students after learning and experiencing new ideas.

So, what is special about this book for teachers, prospective teachers and students? This book is a convenient book that can explore ideas, theories, and, at the same time, practices that integrate arts such as theatre, drama, and movement in several classroom subjects. After reading this book, I found each chapter exciting and challenging to learn. This book can be read not following the chapter order, but readers can read it according to the reader's interests. This book is intended for educators, preservice teachers, and school leaders seeking to incorporate movement and arts into the school day. Besides, the book is intended to champion the arts and their value to schools, classrooms, students, and learning. Every movement in art with the process of understanding each subject has similarities in achieving learning goals. In each chapter, at the beginning, the author always tells a case or example of a situation relevant to the topic to be explained, thus inviting readers to understand the following knowledge quickly. Various research results strengthen theory and practice in each subject area, and how the movements in each activity – theatre & dance – that the author exemplifies enhance the understanding of readers, including teachers, in implementing them in each subject. In each chapter, the author provides a detailed example of a learning plan teachers can follow in each subject. This book is intended for educators, preservice teachers, and school leaders seeking to incorporate movement and arts into the school day.


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