

## *Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage*

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### **Encouraging Physical Development Through Movement Play**

By Carol Archer, and Iram Siraj

Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2015, 164 pages (Kindle Edition)

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A sedentary lifestyle is becoming more common for preschool aged children in Canada, resulting in negative impacts on their overall health and development (Timmons, LeBlanc, Carson, Connor, Dillman, Janssen, Spence, Stearns, 2012). Therefore, *Encouraging Physical Development Through Play*, a book targeted at parents and early childhood educators, is a timely read. Archer and Siraj posit, “movement-play is at the heart of physical development for infants and young children and ... is inextricably linked to other domains of a child’s development, including physical, cognitive, social and emotional development, communications and self-regulations” (p. 22).

The book is divided into six chapters, each focusing on a different aspect of movement-play. Chapter 1 includes recent research regarding the connection between brain development and movement play. Chapter 2 presents the positive benefits of daily movement and activity for both adults and children. In Chapter 3, parents, early childhood educators, and directors are challenged to ensure preschool children have enough opportunities to participate in daily movement-play, thereby promoting healthy physical and cognitive development. Chapter 4 provides a small-scale study completed by the

authors about the quality of movement-play along with the results of their study. The final two chapters feature ideas about promoting, leading, and managing the practice of movement-play at home and in early childhood settings.

Archer and Siraj present a unique challenge to all adults involved with preschool children. They challenge adults to spend more time engaging in physical activity with the children, and less time as sedentary observers. This supports current research on the important role adults' play in encouraging preschoolers to move and be active (see O' Dwyer, Fairclough, Knowles & Stratton, 2012; O' Dwyer, M. V., Fairclough, Knowles, & Stratton, 2012).

Many of the concepts and ideas outlined in the text are not new to the field of early childhood, nor do they question commonly held assumptions about child development. The book is intended to provide foundational knowledge to new or expectant parents, and those training to be early childhood educators. Included is useful information about physical milestones typically developing children reach from birth through age six, as well as how movement play benefits five key developmental areas: physical growth, communication and language, self-regulation, cognitive development, and social emotional well being.

Children who develop atypically are mentioned briefly but there is definitely a gap in this area. Today all early childhood settings have children who develop at their own pace, so a discussion of how to differentiate and scaffold for all children could have enriched the text.

Some of the ideas presented about outdoor play seemed idealistic and impractical in a Canadian context. Archer and Siraj proposed that children have "free-flow play from indoors to outdoors ... from when the children arrive to when they leave" (p. 51). Canadian licensing requirements necessitate children having adult supervision at all times and specific adult to child ratios maintained. Therefore, this kind of free-flow play would not meet licensing requirements. Even if it did, in many places across the country, cold Canadian winters, as well as high UV rates and humidity warnings in the summer, prohibit extended periods of active playtime outdoors. Children in early childhood settings across the country do participate in outdoor play, but always under the supervision of their caregivers, adhering to weather guidelines and restrictions.

However, even when weather restricts the amount of time that can be spent outdoors, there is an expectation that in licensed childcare facilities provision is made for

daily movement-play. There may be more freedom for free-flow within a building allowing children to engage in movement-play spontaneously. Some early childhood centres have small climbing structures, slides, or tunnels in each playroom, while others have a specific gym or active movement space. Archer and Siraj adamantly promote movement and active play on a daily basis regardless of the setting, as do Canadian licensing departments.

The second half of the book begins with a “small-scale study” that Archer and Siraj conducted, on improving the quality of movement-play in preschool settings. They developed a unique movement-play scale (MPS) that was used to assess the quality of movement-play in a preschool. The MPS looked at three specific things: spaces and resources, adults engaging in movement with children, and planning for movement-play from observations of the children. The MPS assessment could be used for beginning or furthering a staff discussion about movement-play as each of the three areas had accompanying rubrics and discussion questions. Archer and Siraj’s study added to the research base about movement-play, an area they identified as lacking. However, the results presented are somewhat underwhelming.

The final two chapters focus on the importance of developing a supportive partnership with parents, allowing the promotion of healthy living and movement play, and on the significant role preschool managers plays in promoting movement-play. A key component of developing “effective partnerships with parents and carers” suggested by Archer and Siraj is home visits.

During my twenty-five years as a manager in early childhood settings home visits were not part of our practice and seem an idealistic expectation. Chapter six reiterates common knowledge that “effective implementation of a programme and sustaining best practice are associated with effective leadership” (p. 120). The chapter also provides a unique template for writing a physical development policy that could easily be utilized in a classroom or early childhood setting.

In summary, this is an informative book about the importance of movement-play for preschool children. The text does a good job of challenging adults to consider the influence they have on the quality and quantity of movement-play of preschool children. I recommend this book for use in initial training courses, and to centre directors as a tool for ongoing professional development with one proviso. If using the text as a teaching

tool, consulting and aligning with Canadian guidelines seems prudent, as the book is written with a British system in mind.

## References

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