



Insights Article

Play in Motion: Unlocking Early Literacy Through Movement Based Learning

Jess Pasciolla, Playgroup NSW

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Often when we think about building early literacy skills, we picture reading, singing, and writing. What we don't always consider is how movement-based play strengthens the foundational abilities that become the building blocks of early literacy development.

In this article, the focus turns to the developmental links between gross motor skills and early literacy, the mechanisms that explain why movement matters, and the practical ways to integrate purposeful physical play to support emerging readers and writers.



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Bilateral Coordination

Bilateral coordination is the ability to use both sides of the body at the same time in a smooth, organised way. If you imagine a line running down the centre of your body, bilateral coordination refers to the skills and sequences that allow both sides of the brain to communicate effectively across that midline.

This ability also supports movements that cross the midline, like reaching an arm across the body. These movements are essential not only for developing the strength and coordination needed for writing across a page, but also for supporting smooth eye tracking. Strong eye tracking is a foundational skill that contributes to reading fluency later in life.

Supporting bilateral coordination means getting children up and moving. Activities such as:

- Pedalling a bike
- Playing hopscotch
- Kicking, bouncing, throwing, and catching a ball
- Clapping and following a rhythm
- Cutting shapes
- Rolling playdough with both hands

All of these motor experiences help build the foundations for early literacy by strengthening the body - brain connections needed for reading and writing success!

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Core Strength

The development of core strength in the early years, through physical movement and gross motor play, helps children build the muscles needed for good posture and the ability to sit comfortably in a chair. While it may seem simple, sitting upright to read and write frees up the cognitive resource's children need for active listening, processing information, and engaging with books and classroom learning as they grow.

The development of core strength in the early years comes from activities like:

- Tummy time or crawling
- Animal walks (bear, crab, frog)
- Climbing and playground play
- Balance activities (one-leg stands, walking a line)
- Wheelbarrow walks
- Simple kids' yoga poses

Strengthening core muscles in the early years through engaging in active play can set them up for future success in reading and writing and promotes positive classroom outcomes!

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Rhythm and Movement


When your child is dancing, clapping, and moving to a beat, they're developing skills that will support them throughout their early literacy journey. Recognising rhythm and beat helps children identify syllables, sound patterns, and the natural "music" of language. These abilities lay the groundwork for phonetic spelling and decoding words—both essential building blocks for strong early literacy outcomes.

Movement isn't just a way for children to burn energy; it's a powerful pathway to literacy. When children climb, balance, dance, pedal, clap, and explore the world through their bodies, they're building the neurological and physical foundations that make reading and writing possible.


By embracing movement-based learning in the early years, we give children the tools they need to become confident, involved learners - setting them up for lifelong literacy success.




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