

The Use of Creative Movement Method in Teaching Foreign Languages to Very Young Language Learners

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Abstract

The creative movement method is a holistic teaching method that enables children to develop language skills through art not just by looking and seeing, hearing and listening, speaking and talking, but also by conducting various motions and movements – experiencing while playing. Children can learn holistically only when their minds and bodies are an indivisible whole. When all their senses are engaged, children remember and recall information more effectively. The present paper describes the use of the creative movement method in teaching phonological awareness skills in a foreign language (English) to 13 Slovenian preschool children with a mean age of 5.8 years. The aim of the study was to determine children's success rates in producing words and alliteration after being given the first sound of word (vowels /æ/, /e/, /ɪ/, /ɒ/, /ʌ/) in English, both with and without movement support. Children participated in two 45-minute long teaching sessions (the second took place after two weeks). There was no additional training between each session and the test. The results of the test after two weeks from the last session show that creative movement support proved essential for children in recalling words and producing alliteration in English. The study also includes some guidelines for the method's use in teaching foreign languages to very young language learners.

Keywords: creative movement, alliteration, foreign language, phonological awareness, preschool children.

1. Introduction

The process of foreign language learning and acquisition should be as natural and similar as possible to that which infants and children undergo when learning their first language. Movement is children's first language, which they use for exploring and reacting to the world, as well as gaining control over their bodies (Blythe, 2012; Griss, 1998). Although learning through kinaesthetic activities, creative movement, and dance is wonderfully natural to most children, teachers instead of using this natural and spontaneous resource for creating learning experiences rather expend their energy subduing children's natural physicality (Griss, 1998). As a result, the use of creative movement method is still unknown to many teachers. According to Geršak (2006), children are not accustomed to this type of work because dance and creative-movement activities are too rarely carried out. It would be much easier to introduce this method in schools if children had already experienced these activities in kindergarten. However, including a creative movement method in teaching processes cannot all be done in one go, but must be done step by step.

The creative movement method is already well-established in linguistic pedagogy (for both L1 and L2). In the Slovenian national curriculum (Kurikulum za vrtce, 1999), dancing activities can be found in one of the six fields, the field of arts. Nevertheless, the aims of dancing activities are closely connected with those listed for movement per se. Through creative movement and dance children explore visual arts, drama, language, and thus learn how to create and communicate through connecting various forms of art (Geršak, 2006). Teaching methods through movement and art can be applied in several fields. In our case, we decided to use the creative movement method in the field of teaching a foreign language, namely English, specifically in developing phonological awareness.

2. CREATIVE MOVEMENT AS A HOLISTIC METHOD

The creative movement method helps children express themselves, communicate, and relax, as well as design, create, and learn various educational content through play and art (e.g. didactic movements, dance, merry-making games, social games, etc.). Such didactic techniques are considered holistic (Kroflič, 1999; Kroflič, Gobec, 1995), meaning that the verbal, corporal, and abstract levels of learning are all connected. According to Laird (1985) effective learning occurs when all the elements of the individual's personality, especially emotions, intellect, physical impulse (desire), imagination, and intuition, are activated. Marentič-Požarnik (2008) further emphasizes the importance of the social and cultural context of learning, through which children connect their intellectual development to emotional, physical, practical, aesthetic, and ethical aspects.

When teachers include creative movement in teaching, they engage more parts of the brain than traditional teaching methods do. Kinaesthetic learning involves all of the natural behaviours of the left and right brain hemispheres. As students manipulate dance elements (movement, space, time, energy and dynamics, visual relationships) with their body, creative movement naturally involves verbal communication using descriptive terms. Linking the experiences of movement with language – both receptive language (understanding that of others) and expressive language (sharing one's own thoughts and ideas) – builds the thinking skills of children. When children are given a problem to solve, they go through a thinking process to identify motions (Sousa, 2006). Giving children verbal directions about movement activity increases their listening skills as they translate words into movement. Absorbing information in one medium and expressing it in another enables them to deepen the process of comprehension (Griss, 1998). What is more, when the brain is stimulated and there is an emotional reaction, the brain stores that information better and with much longer retention times (Sousa, 2006). There has been a lot of talk lately about the mutual interaction between physical and mental development (Serlin, 1997). Embodiment is a central aspect of neuroscience, confirming that brain activity depends on repeated kinaesthetic and proprioceptive activities, which enables subjective experience and a sense of self (Gibbs, 2010). Many authors (Piaget, 1952; Gesell, 1940; Havighurst, 1953; Montessori, 1988 et al.) claimed decades ago that movement, motoric development, and play have crucial roles in a child's development and that cognitive, emotional, social, and psychomotor development are closely interrelated (Tancig, 2014, Geršak, 2016). Recent studies (Balcetis and Dunning, 2007; Beilock, 2009; Olmstead, Viswanathan, Aicher and Fowler, 2009) have also shown that embodied activities can have significant influence on various cognitive processes (Wilson and Foglia, 2011). Therefore, embodied cognition is of utmost importance in the educational process (Tancig, 2014, Geršak, 2016).

3. THE USE OF THE CREATIVE MOVEMENT METHOD IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES TO VERY YOUNG LANGUAGE LEARNERS

The creative movement method helps children develop various language skills, e.g. orientation and grammar skills, presentation skills, listening and dialogue skills, and reading and writing skills. It also aids in experiencing literary works (for example the emotional state of the character) and other situations (Griss, 1998; Geršak, 2006). What is more, by creating personal kinaesthetic experiences (rather than learning specific dances), they can learn more about the values, aesthetics, or histories of different cultures. For this reason, teachers are encouraged to invite people native to the cultures being studied, and/or experts in their knowledge, especially professional performers (Griss, 1998). Thus, children can also become familiar with the traditional dances. Teachers can show some simple movements from traditional dances and ask the children to vary them. They can be asked to differ for example between polka and waltz (Ramovš, 1981).

Our research focused on the development of phonological awareness because children develop a sensitivity to the phonological structure of language at an early age. Therefore, they should participate in activities that involve discriminating and distinctive listening. Discriminating listening is the basis for all other types of listening and is the basis for acquiring other language skills, especially speaking and reading. The teacher develops this skill with students by informing them about ambient sounds and providing them with simple listening games (Brumen, 2012), for example distinguishing between long and short words and identifying the initial and final sounds of the words. Distinctive listening activities, on the other hand, include segmenting words into syllables and sounds (Križaj Ortar, Magajna, Pečjak and Žerdin, 2000). It is necessary to teach the children how to decode and spell words if they are to comprehend what they read (Schuele and Boudreau, 2008). A lot of research (Konza, 2011; McBride-Chang, Bialystok, Chong and Li, 2004; Vellutino, Fletcher, Scanlon and Snowling, 2004; Li, 2010; Schiff, Schwartz-Nahshon and Nagar, 2011) has confirmed that a child's level of phonological

awareness (especially phonemic awareness (Moats and Foorman, 1997; Adams, 1990)) is one of the strongest predictors of future reading success in their first (L1) and second/foreign language (L2). What is more, poor phonological awareness is associated with poor auditory word learning both in L1 and in L2 (Bowey, 1996; Elbro and Jesen, 2005; de Jong, Seveke and van Veen, 2000).

The children in our study were taught how to recognise and produce a word with a given initial sound (one of English's vowels) and how to identify and produce alliteration. This is the beginning of phonemic awareness since it requires recognition and production of words that begin with the same sound. Children with well-developed alliteration awareness are usually good readers, because well-developed phonemic awareness is a prerequisite for understanding the relationship between a language's sounds and the letters in its orthography (phonics). The development of alliterative awareness is similar to that of rhymes, but it develops somewhat later. Children (as young as four years old) first learn to recognise and associate words that begin with the same sound, and only then to produce words with a given sound (Paulson and Moats, 2010). Even when recognising sounds, it is important to keep in mind that children first recognise the first sound in the word, then the last, and finally the middle one (Konza, 2011). In addition, it is easier to identify consonants (continuous sounds (*/f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, /θ/, /ʃ/, /m/, /n/, /r/* (*/l/, /w/*) are easier to identify) than stops (*/p/, /b/, /t/, /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/*), which in turn are easier than vowels. Even more difficult activities include identifying consonant clusters (e.g. <str> in the word strong) (Trehearne, 2003). All mentioned activities can be done through play and through movement. Thus children reinforce language acquisition. Activities that include movement are remembered better, as they imprint in the brain in the form of an image (Demšek, Drašler and Pišot, 2003). This has been confirmed by many studies, which will be discussed in more detail later.

3.1 Creative Movement Activities

Through movement play (e.g. imitation of animals or humans, recreating events) children develop creativity and imagination. Integrated and problematic movement or merry-making games develop children's divergent thinking, since the path to the goal is different every time. Improvisation promotes creativity, whereas movement to music, singing or recitation offers the child all the opportunities to experience themselves and others (Čok, Skela, Kogoj and Razdevšek Pučko, 1999).

Geršak (2006) lists the following activities that include the creative movement method (we added the examples that can be used in foreign language teaching:

illustrating with movement/through motion:

- we can say a word that imitates the sound of the object or action it refers to (onomatopoeia) and interpret it through movement, e.g. human (giggle, hiccup), vehicle (roar, beep), animal (woof, tweet), action (zip, knock), air (puff, whistle), explosion (boom, pop), alarm sounds (buzz, beep)
- we can create letters using straight and curved shapes with the whole body
- we can show antonyms
- we can show the movement that starts with a given sound

movement-didactic games:

- we can play with picture cards – we can arrange the cards (4 -5 pictures) in the order they appear in the story and tell it through movement
- we can play some singing games – e.g. "If you're happy and you know it"

rhythmic-movement games:

- we can have a syllable dance – create a movement sequence to accompany dividing names or other words in syllables;
- we can play clapping games, e.g. "Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker's man"; "A sailor went to Sea"

movement and dance dramatization:

- we can create a dance story: use the kinaesthetic sense (motor memory) to create and recall choreography based on a story. Children can experience movement through kinaesthetic dialogue between the characters, for example in the story

of Little Red Riding Hood; they can experience and articulate a character's emotional state (Little Red Riding Hood, wolf, grandma, etc.). The teacher can ask them to describe how each character is feeling and what their actions are, then children improvise the movements. They can add new characters. The main goal here is communication through movement, so children speak as little as possible.

· communication through pantomime (e.g. children pantomime occupations)

dance expression:

· children can create their own dances (they can express their emotional states, their every day)

· children can express action words with the whole body (e.g. jump, stretch, run, turn around, fall down, roll over)

· children can dance out poems that imply motion and movement; that means that children freely interpret the poem through their shapes and movement while the teacher is reading it

· children can play the Freeze game (Griss, 1998) – when the teacher bangs the drum, students freeze in place and express the emotion we call out and show on the flashcard

merry-making dance:

· children can create a movement in a circle by singing a song, e.g. "Ring a Ring o' Roses"; "Here We Go 'Round the Mulberry Bush"

movement-relaxation activities:

· a story massage: e.g. children can participate in Pizza Massage (it can be peer-to-peer massage) or Car Wash Massage (Thomas-Epple, Carpenter, 2010)

· guided imagery (visualisation): children listen to a story with their eyes closed and recall images, sounds, and/or feelings that calm both the mind and body

· yoga activities: children can do a cat pose, cobra pose, easy pose, butterfly pose, etc. and thus learn the vocabulary;

One of the key aims of the activities is that children learn to be comfortable in this process and then to gradually develop or initiate their own, personal creation. It is suggested to start from the children's previous real life experiences (e.g. riding a horse; emotional states that they are familiar with) or imaginary experiences for example from television shows, video games, art, literature, etc., supporting them in creating and communicating through movement with the help of external stimuli (e.g. costumes, masks, gym tools, small instruments, didactic cards) (Kroflič and Gobec, 1995). Sometimes pre-planned ideas can be set aside and children's ideas seen coming to the fore. There is no issue about whose idea is better or worse, but rather about which idea suits the situation best. The emphasis here lies on developing familiarity with the structure of the dance, with the music, and the pleasure found in dance.

3.2 Structuring the Lesson

In order to plan your lesson successfully it is important to consider objectives, space requirements, time allotment, materials (and suggested music) and group format (Griss, 1998). Let us explain it in more detail.

Objectives: We should always define dance/movement and content objectives (follow curriculum objectives in specific field, e.g. math, social sciences, language, art, etc.), because through movement we learn about the content. Further, when we specify objectives, we ensure that we teach the content by exploring different movement repertoires. Children learn the content in the specific field through the variation of movements (e.g. they learn the content by exploring dance types, the movement of particular body parts, group formats, movement patterns, movement motives).

Time allotment: In general, a half -hour class works well for kindergarten children (Griss, 1998).

Space requirements: Children need space to move, wherefore it is suggested to work in an open, uncongested space such as the gym, hallway, or outside in warm weather (but not on concrete floor or sand).

Materials: Various authors recommend the use of props or tools (Zagorc, 1992). These can be for instance music (children should firstly experience music in a live performance with rhythm sticks, drums, and tambourine, and only then the recorded one), objects, costumes, masks, gym tools, small instruments, didactic cards, etc. (Schmidt, 2006), hoops, silk scarves, elastic, balloons, yards of coloured fabric, sticks (Griss, 1998).

Group format: children can participate in the activities in the whole group, individually, in groups (three, four or five children – depending on the activity) or in pairs (children can, for example, mirror each other's movements) (Griss, 1998).

Lesson plan: Each lesson should have its own structure with a warm-up, a development, a culmination, and closing. The younger the children are, the more they respond to repetition and ritual. It is useful to have routine openings (warm-ups) and closings (cool-downs) (Griss, 1998).

a) The warm-up:

The warm-up activity engages the kinaesthetic part of the brain through movement not ordinarily experienced during the course of a day. Children should focus on their bodies, the space, and on other children in that space. In the warm-ups children can loosen up different parts of their bodies by swinging, rotating, bending, and extending. Movement qualities can range from very large to small, subtle movements, or from fast movements to slow motions; from lying on the floor to reaching way up, jumping high off the ground. We can add some nice, rhythmic music, as it provides energy, support, and structure, and helps children focus. Children can produce the rhythm with their own body (by stomping their feet and clapping hands while shouting for example ba-ba) or sing a simple opening song.

b) Development of the lesson

Offering or presenting a theme/stock-taking is a starting point. Together with children we must first quickly sketch an image, i.e. explain the topic verbally and add visual support (some materials and pictures can clarify the topic). If the activities are held in a foreign language, we must make sure that children understand the vocabulary. Then we encourage the children to develop the image with their own movement, which promotes their creative thinking and ability (Kroflič and Gobec, 1995). The children's enthusiasm whets their appetite for more dance discovery with as much freedom as possible. The exploration phase is important because here the children have the opportunity to investigate their collection of ideas and to develop and vary the movements by adding the elements of time (e.g. fast-slow movement), effort (e.g. heavy-light movement) and space (movement in one place/all over the place; stand up-lie down; movements in a circle/line). The teacher can help children seek and discover their own movements by asking them questions like "What will happen if...?" or "How could that be otherwise?". After children have enough exploration they are ready to improvise/show their work in progress within a still open yet somewhat defined framework (playing with a variation of movements within selected music/time/space/task). However, there is no static order of lesson structure – we can start with improvisation and get later to stock-taking because this process is constantly "on the move" (Speth, 2006).

c) Culmination/showing work

Giving children a chance to observe each other's work is a valuable experience. This need not take the form of individual presentations, as several children can present their work simultaneously. Thus children receive the message that their work is worth viewing. What is more, this is a way of setting up a level of expectation for the child to fulfil. From their observations they can learn that there are many ways to solve the same problem. They will also learn how to be brave performers and a respectful audience and how to give and receive constructive criticism (Griss, 1998). Observing others is important because there are neurons, mirror neurons, that are engaged not only when we undertake an action, but when we observe others undertaking the same actions (Rizzolatti and Craighero, 2004).

d) Closing

Closings, a term used to describe the ends of individual lessons, are important transitions because children must ground their energy in order to focus their attention on the next aspect of their day (Griss, 1998). We can accordingly try several activities: we can briefly verbally review the main points of the lesson, we can do a closing song in a circle (Griss, 1998), and children can lie down with their eyes closed and listen to a song or short story as a guided visualisation, do some yoga activities, or participate in a massage story.

e) Teacher's role

According to Kroflič and Gobec (1995) the creative movement method expects teachers to follow general pedagogical principles, such as the principle of action (just a short introduction of the topic and prompt invitation to movement; children can actively observe dancers or dance), the principle of interest (all children are not ready to move, so let them observe), the principle of individualisation (dance is primarily an individual expression, so teachers observe individuals in the group and briefly describe the quality of their movement or expression, e.g. "Peter, your movement to the sound of the word crack was strong and short!"), the principle of clear instruction (give clear and concise verbal and non-verbal instructions with visual and auditory support), the principle of real life experience (select content that is fun and interesting, and that come from the children's everyday experience), the principle of developmentally appropriate activities (younger children need more guidance; when we plan the activities we should think about what movements are natural to children, what movements they can perform), the principle of gradual and systematic progression (start with simple, familiar movement motives, for example children can participate in a movement dialogue – they can translate instrumental music into dance steps) and then gradually with the variation of dance elements connect them into motion phrases (seen in improvisation); very young children need more structured activities). In addition to general pedagogical principles, teachers also follow specific principles based on the principles of contemporary artistic dance and the principles of group dynamics, because dance education is a group activity. The specific principles of dance education are: the principle of naturalness of movement (starting from the child's movement, never from learning complex movements from the adult world), the principle of individual expression (children should find movements themselves or imitate the teacher's movements; nevertheless, children's own expression should be encouraged, not imitation), the principle of small group work (larger groups in kindergarten should be divided into smaller, from 7 to 10 children), and the principle of the group's self-management (i.e. a group of children gets an assignment, then creates a dance performance and finally presents it; preschool children need more help and support). Besides, when teachers plan their lessons, they should always use their knowledge about developmental psychology, group dynamics, and dance teaching methods. The teacher must be creative, but this is also related to talent and artistic orientation. In order to acquire more knowledge about teaching through creative movement in practice, the teacher should participate in practical seminars and workshops offered by dance and foreign language professionals.

In the process of creation, teachers are primarily organizers and animators, who encourage children to solve problems by themselves. If necessary, they can direct their actions and involve themselves in a dance as well (Kroflič 1999: 12). Pupils use natural movement as a means of expression, so the teacher does not need special movement knowledge but only a methodical knowledge, ingenuity, and originality (Lončar, 2011). Pupils are encouraged to express their own movement creativity through various learning contents. In other words, teachers do not have to do the movement. Children do not need to be shown how to move their bodies; the teacher's task is to learn how to be a director.

This is very important also because children's moving bodies and open space generally translate into play and noise unless they are guided in a different direction. Therefore, it is suggested to establish a nonverbal method to get children's attention and to stop all motion and sound; for instance, a strong drum beat works very well (Griss, 1999).

4. RESEARCH REVIEW ON MOVEMENT EFFECT ON LEARNING VOCABULARY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE AT AN EARLY AGE

Several studies have shown that subtle movements such as gestures have positive effects on learning vocabulary in foreign language (Quinn-Allen, 1995; Macedonia, Bergmann and Roithmayr, 2014; Mavilidi, Okely, Chandler, Cliff, Paas, 2015; Tellier, 2008; Porter, 2012;). Some of them were done with preschool children. Tellier (2008), for example, performed an experiment with 20 French preschool children (mean age 5.5), who were divided in two groups. 10 children were taught words with pictures and 10 words with gestures. This research showed that memorisation was significantly better when learning through gestures, which act as a visual and motor modality and thus leave a richer trace in memory. Similarly, Porter (2012) explored the effects of gestures on memory during French lessons with English children (aged 5–7), who were told two stories: one with pictures and one with both gestures and pictures. Her findings show significant advantage for the short-term retention of a story told with both gestures and pictures when compared with a story told with pictures only.

Mavilidi, Okely, Chandler, Cliff, and Paas (2015) investigated the didactic effects of enacting words through whole-body movements (e.g., physical exercise) and part-body movements (e.g., gestures) in a foreign language vocabulary tasks. 111 preschool children had to learn 14 Italian words in a 4-week teaching programme. Their memory for the words was tested

during, directly after, and 6 weeks after the programme. The results of the study revealed that children in the integrated physical exercise condition achieved the highest learning outcomes.

In a 4-week intervention programme on foreign language learning in preschool children Toumpaniari, Loyens, and Paas (2015) examined whether combining both physical activities and gestures could improve vocabulary learning in a foreign language over learning with gestures only or learning without physical activities or gestures. The results of the study confirmed that physical activity involving gross motor activities can lead to better cognitive functioning and higher academic achievement scores.

Khalili Paji, Talepasand, and Kianersi (2018) examined the role of pictures and gestures as nonverbal aids in learning English words as the second language in sixty 4-6-year-old preschool children. The findings showed that comprehension for word + gesture conditions was better than word + picture conditions and word-only condition.

Kapalková, Polienska, and Sussova (2015) had eighteen 2-year-old children learn new words either accompanied by a gesture or by a picture. The training consisted of four 20-minute sessions per week over a period of four weeks. The results showed that gesture training supported word learning significantly better than picture training across all three testing points: immediately after training, at a 2-week follow-up, and at a 6-week follow-up.

Rowe, Silverman, and Mullan (2013) in their research also concluded that gestures can be a powerful aid for the long-term recall of learning first and foreign languages in preschool children.

In general, these studies report positive associations between physical activity and vocabulary learning in foreign languages.

However, almost all of them included only part-body movements. In our study children therefore participated in a kinaesthetic lesson that included whole-body movements.

5. THE METHODOLOGY

5.1 The Purpose of the Study

The basic purpose of this study was to determine how essential it is for children to include movement support in teaching them to produce words and alliteration after being given the initial sound of a word (vowels /æ/, /e/, /ɪ/, /ɒ/, /ʌ/) in English.

We sought answers to the following questions:

Q1: How successful will children be in producing words and alliteration after being given an initial word sound (vowels /æ/, /e/, /ɪ/, /ɒ/, /ʌ/) in English without movement support?

Q2: How successful will children be in producing words and alliteration after being given an initial word sound (vowels /æ/, /e/, /ɪ/, /ɒ/, /ʌ/) in English with movement support?

Q3: Which words and alliteration will be more likely to be remembered?

Q4: How motivated will children be to engage in creative movement activities?

5.2 Participants

The study involved 13 children (N = 13) with a mean age of 5.8 years, most of whom (10) were monolinguals and 3 bilinguals. 9 of them were boys and 4 were girls.

5.3 Data Collection and Instruments

The study used the descriptive method of empirical pedagogical research, primarily adhering to a qualitative approach. The study consisted of two teaching sessions in English that included the creative movement method, along with the final test. Each teaching session lasted for 45 minutes in a playroom. Two weeks after the first teaching session there was the second one, and two weeks later the children had a test. There was no other training between each session and the test. Children were taught 10 words (apple, ant, octopus, olive, elephant, egg, up, umbrellas, itching, insects) through an invented alliteration song using the melody of The Wheels on the Bus.

SONG

The umbrellas are going u u up, u u up, u u up,
the umbrellas are going u u up, all day long.
The ants are eating a a apples, a a apples, a a apples,
the ants are eating a a apples, all day long.
The elephant is rolling e e eggs, e e eggs, e e eggs,
the elephant is rolling e e eggs, all day long.
The insects are itching, i i itching, i i itching, i i itching,
the nsects are itching, i i itching, all day long.
The Octopus is rolling o o olives, o o olives, o o olives,
the octopus is rolling o o olives, all day long.

The song was explained firstly with pictures and additionally with creative movements. There were two teachers in the group. One was an English teacher and another a dance teacher. They both planned the activities together. We used both languages, English and Slovene. Slovene was used for giving instructions and some detailed explanation about movement by the dance teacher. The English teacher spoke just English. Their aims were to examine how important it is to use the creative movement method in developing children's phonological awareness skills (producing words with the same initial sounds and producing alliteration) in English. Their dance/movement objective was that children imitate the teacher's movement motive and experience the movement in the space and different group formats. What is more, this way they wanted to encourage children's confidence and creativity in performing and improvising.

Each teaching session and the test are presented in the following tables.

Table 1. Teaching session 1.

Introduction part: The whole group of children was presented the sounds. The children were asked to observe the speaker's lips while slowly producing the sounds. Together we slowly moved our hands apart to accompany the pronunciation of each sound in a continuous way. Then we said the sound quickly and clapped our hands once. Then we presented new words in English through the song with pictures. After that, the alliteration phrases were transformed into movement ideas and introduced to children. So, they first heard the examples of alliteration, then saw their meaning in the picture, and finally experienced the phrase through movement. As there were more than 10 children participating, we divided them into two groups. One group was the audience (singing the song) and the other was performing. For example, the phrase "The ants are eating apples" was experienced by moving like ants and eating apples (paper balls). Then the groups switched.

Main part: We divided one group of children into pairs and the other group was the audience singing a song. This time the phrase "The ants are eating apples" was experienced in a way that one child presented an apple and the other an ant. After that, we gave two performers the role of the apples and the other two groups were given the role of the ants, so two groups of ants presented eating each apple.

Conclusion: Educators said each alliteration (not in the order of a song) and all children improvised the movement. In the end, they were invited to show the movement they liked the most and the others named their movement.

Table 2. Teaching session 2.

Introduction part: Children first repeated the words through the song with pictures and additionally with movements. Then we played a memory game with pictures (they had to find pairs – words that begin with the same sound, for example elephant-egg, ant-apple, etc.).

Main part: Children were divided in two groups. Firstly, one group was the audience and the other group of children performed creative movements (that they recalled) relating to the words that begin with one of the sounds (/æ/, /e/, /ɪ/, /ɒ/, /ʌ/). The observers connected the movement with the word and said it out loud. Secondly, we played a miming game. Two children chose two pictures and then showed the movements. For example, one presented an elephant and one an egg (from the phrase "the elephant is rolling eggs") and children from the audience had to guess the words and the phrases.

Conclusion: Lastly, children played the game “Find a pair”. Four children presented the movements of 4 pictures and the other children had to decide which movements/words belong together and why. Then we had 5 presenters and children again had to connect the movements that presented the words that start with the same sound.

Table 3. Test.

1. Children were asked to produce alliteration (two words) that starts with the sounds (/æ/, /e/, /ɪ/, /ɒ/, /ʌ/) without movement support.
2. Children were asked to produce a word that starts with one of the sounds (/æ/, /e/, /ɪ/, /ɒ/, /ʌ/) without movement support.
3. Children were asked to produce a word that starts with one the sounds (/æ/, /e/, /ɪ/, /ɒ/, /ʌ/) with movement support, which was shown by a dance teacher.
4. Children were asked to produce alliteration (a two-word phrase) that starts with the sounds (/æ/, /e/, /ɪ/, /ɒ/, /ʌ/) with movement support (a child was invited to show the movement together with a dance teacher).

Data was collected on the basis of video clips, a semi-structured interview, and a word and alliteration production test. Through the videos, the authors evaluated the activities and analysed the children's motivation and participation. One week after the activities were carried out, the children's preschool teacher conducted a semi-structured interview with each child and recorded their answers. She asked them if they liked the activities, which ones they liked most, and why. With the word and alliteration production test, the two authors investigated how successful children were in producing words and alliteration after being given the initial sound of a word (vowels /æ/, /e/, /ɪ/, /ɒ/, /ʌ/) in English, firstly without movement support and then with it. They also examined which words and alliteration were more likely to be remembered.

5.4 Data Analysis, Findings, and Discussion

The obtained results are presented as direct answers to our 4 research questions and are interpreted in accordance with the findings of the research presented in the theoretical part.

Q1: How successful will children be in producing words and alliteration after being given first sound of word (vowels /æ/, /e/, /ɪ/, /ɒ/, /ʌ/) in English without movement support?

The results of the test showed that it was very difficult for children to produce the alliteration without movement support. Only 1 girl out of 13 children produced 3 examples of alliteration out of 5 (up – umbrella, elephant-eggs, olive-octopus). That girl, according to her preschool teacher, likes watching English cartoons. In addition, one boy first said that the word elephant begins with the sound /ʌ/ and while he was thinking of another word he corrected himself: “No, elephant begins with /e/ and there is that another word – shows the gesture just by himself – jajce (which means egg in Slovene)”. He knew that the word starts with the same sound but he could not recall it. Cook, KuangYi Yip, and Goldin-Meadow (2010) explain that the speaker's increased gesturing at recall is not just a reflection of the fact that the information is hard to recall – when gesturing at recall is experimentally manipulated, the amount of data that the speaker remembers increases. Another boy produced alliteration (ip ip ip) that begins with /ɪ/. That example is not from the song, but it shows that he understands the concept of alliteration. Its understanding was also shown by another boy who said two words in Slovene beginning with /ʌ/ (avto – in English car, Avstrija – in English Austria). All in all, 4 children out of 13 were successful in producing at least one alliteration beginning with one of the sounds (/æ/, /e/, /ɪ/, /ɒ/, /ʌ/) without movement support.

There were similar results when they were asked to produce just one word beginning with a particular sound. 4 children produced the word up, 1 boy said the word beginning with /ʌ/ in Slovene (avto), and 1 girl recalled that there is a word beginning with /ɪ/ but said it in Slovene (komar – in English mosquito (used to explain the word insect)). To sum up, 5 children out of 13 were successful in producing words beginning with one of the sounds (/æ/, /e/, /ɪ/, /ɒ/, /ʌ/).

This task was difficult for children as we expected, because there was no systematic and explicit training for producing alliteration (just two teaching sessions), which was even more difficult because they all began with a vowel. Children had no visual support to help them recall the words. The only help was the melody of the song that helped them recall the activity that they participated in.

Q2: How successful will children be in producing words and alliteration in English after being given their initial sound (vowels /æ/, /e/, /ɪ/, /ɒ/, /ʌ/) with movement support?

To help children produce words and alliteration a dance teacher gave them some movement support. The results of the test showed that 8 children out of 13 remembered half of the words (5) or more. 2 of them remembered 8 words out of 10, and 2 of them 9 words. There were similar results in producing alliteration. 9 children out of 13 produced at least 1 example of alliteration in English, 2 of them produced 3 out of 5 examples of alliteration, and 2 of them 4 examples of alliteration. Overall, when a dance teacher showed children a movement that they were familiar with, they were able to produce more words and alliteration in English. This is accordingly consistent with what has been found in previous studies (Cohen, Peterson and Mantini-Atkinson, 1987; Mulligan and Hornstein, 2003), which concluded that seeing someone else perform actions can facilitate subsequent memory for those actions. However, when the children were invited to do the movement together with the teacher, they remembered even more words. 10 children of 13 recalled at least 1 more word, 4 of them recalled 2 more words, and 1 of them 5 more words. This is also consistent with what has been found in previous studies (Stevanoni and Salmon, 2005), where children who were told to gesture as they tried to recall an event they have experienced reported more details about the event than children who were prevented from gesturing.

This finding shows how important it is to have visual support and experience movement by yourself in order to recall information better. Thus, our research also confirmed that gesturing during encoding improved recall, whether the speaker chose to gesture spontaneously or was instructed to gesture as in the research of Cook, KuangYi Yip, and Goldin-Meadow (2010).

Q3: Which words and alliteration will be more likely to be remembered?

The alliteration examples that they recalled the most with and without movement support are octopus-olives, up-umbrellas, and elephant-eggs. Only 1 child recalled the alliteration insects-itching and 2 of them ants-apples, probably because the sound /æ/ does not exist in Slovene. The alliteration insects-itching was difficult for them to produce; however, when children were asked to do the movement together with the teacher, the word itching was one of most likely additionally recalled words (5 children). Other words were up (3 children), apple (3), olive (2), ants (2), elephant (2), egg (2), umbrella (1), octopus (1).

Q4: How motivated were children to do creative movement activities?

From the videos it was possible to see that children loved participating in the creative movement activities. As they had the possibility to observe the others while performing, it seems that they were more confident in improvising movements and there was no child who would refuse participating in the activity. Spontaneously they were showing the movements that they have learned. No child was forced to demonstrate the movement just by themselves if they didn't want to. They were also always singing together in a group. We helped them in singing and guessing the movements. Less and less help was needed every time. Participating in a group is important because it strengthens social relationships and satisfies the need for love. Thus, the activities take place in a safe and welcoming atmosphere, where every child is accepted and heard. Children mostly tried to copy the teacher's movement patterns accurately, because there were many new words to learn in just two teaching sessions and the study's aim was not to examine how children explore the movements by themselves but to examine the effect that using movement during encoding has on children's recall of words and alliteration. However, we wanted them to copy the teacher's movement accurately, but it seems that it was too demanding (to learn new words, understand and produce the alliteration, and focus on the accurate execution of the movement) for them in just two lessons. They tried to copy his movement according to their abilities, but they did not perform all the movements accurately (for example when they imitated ants, they did not focus on pointing their feet and palms out slightly). Although there were just a few spontaneous movements in the first part of the lesson, we saw more of them when they were asked to show the movements they liked. Children improvised the movements but not in the sense of developing or seeking new movements, but in the sense of consolidating and expressing already learnt movements. They replaced paper balls (used as eggs, apples) and imitated the rolling of the olive/egg and of the apple being still, with their body, each in their own way. They loved performing in pairs and groups and that at the end of the activities they got the chance to show the movement they liked most. When children played "Find a pair game", it was easier for them to produce the word than the whole alliteration phrase. Children were very fast in guessing the movement, so the teacher decided to include an instrument that enabled the performers to carry out their movements for at least 30 seconds. Thus, the children named the movement when they heard the sound of a tambourine. More than half of the group wanted to show the movements again and again. They loved imitating the ant, elephant, and umbrella. The octopus was rarely imitated and the insects never, so the teacher in the end reminded the children of the two that had been forgotten. In the second session they most often chose to imitate the elephant, octopus, egg, olive, and ant. Itching, insects, and umbrella were rarely imitated. They had problems with showing

that insects were itching firstly because it was shown as one movement (they were “hitting” insects on their body) and was later divided into two movements – one represented a flying insect and the other the feeling of itching, because we wanted the children to learn and connect the two words. It seems that it was a little bit confusing because we didn't separate the two movements in the beginning. All in all, they were listening carefully to the teacher giving the instructions. Even though some children in the group, according to their preschool teacher, have problems with concentration, emotional outbursts, shyness, almost no such behaviour was noticed in the first teaching session. In the second teaching session 2 children did not want to show the movements. To see what children think about the activities, their preschool teacher conducted a semi-structured interview with each child and recorded their answers. She asked them if they liked the activities, which ones they liked most, and why. The result of the interview showed that almost all children loved all the activities where the creative movement method was used and would like to do them again. However, there were 3 children who said that they preferred singing and not dancing, and there is nothing wrong with it, as all children are not ready to move, so we should let them observe. 1 child said it was difficult to show the movements. Some of them explicitly said that they liked showing animals, singing, and playing games. In addition, 4 of them explained that experiencing movements was useful for remembering words.

In our research, there was no repetition between teaching sessions because that was not the aim of the research. In order to help children learn more about recognising and producing words and alliteration beginning with given initial sounds we could do many different types of dance activities (e.g. improvised dance movements can be organised into a dance dramatization or didactic play; children can listen to alliteration stories, sing alliteration songs, and have a merry-making dance). Moreover, children can recognise the alliteration phrases in children's poetry or picture books and then translate them independently in the movement of the dance. The content of the lesson could also be upgraded by listening to the music and sounds of animals, watching videos, or – even better – watching real animals. That would enrich children's experience and help them create more expressive movements. This way their aesthetic senses would be stimulated, which is also one of the purposes of dance activities. What is more, if the weather is nice, the activities can be done outside the playground.

Overall, our findings are also in accordance with findings reported in previous research (Engelkamp, Zimmer, Mohr and Sellen, 1994; Mulligan and Hornstein, 2003), demonstrating that enacting phrases during encoding can facilitate memory for those phrases.

6. CONCLUSION

When children learn a foreign language through the creative movement method, it is important to give them time to explore and create a variety of movement patterns. Even if teachers have their own ideas for movement and share them with the children, it is suggested to encourage children to create variations of movement patterns. Through improvisation, children can create movements that come from their own experience (no problem if they show clichéd movements – e.g. the very common movement of a rabbit jumping on two feet). Then, they can upgrade that movement with the teacher's guidance method, which would probably help children retain new information in their long-term memory and develop different language skills even more effectively. However, this process takes time: time to listen to the children, time to experiment and develop, and time where the children are given space to explore their own ideas with the teacher. However, teachers usually say they do not have time to play and explore because they are in a hurry to reach planned goals as soon as possible. What is more, they have children with different language/cultural backgrounds and different abilities in the classroom, which already makes the teaching process difficult. And that should be precisely the reason for using movement as one of the teaching tools. Children love moving because it makes them happy. They confront challenges and use different ideas for solving the problems, which makes learning more meaningful and effective. What is more, children prefer learning in such a dynamic and positive environment because it is not boring, even for us adults. Every child can participate in the way they feel comfortable, either as observers of actions or their performers. In both ways they learn more easily and quickly than in a traditional, sedentary way. What is more, this method helps teachers see children's immediate understanding of the content and encourages them to find better ways of explanation together. This means that each child is seen and accepted. Moreover, children feel safe because the activities are done together and there is less stress as children are not called on to stand out individually if they do not want to do so. For all that, children need a creative and resourceful teacher who loves exploring and learning together with children.

All in all, we hope that this paper provides some useful guidelines for exploring the creative movement method in teaching foreign languages to very young language learners and that it will encourage teachers to share their practice through further research in this field.

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