

MOVEMENT



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INTRODUCTION TO THE DIMENSION OF MOVEMENT

Attention toward the body: what moves?

When we look at how our body moves, we can describe how body parts relate or connect to each other. Do all the parts move simultaneously or does movement flow through adjacent body parts like a succession of dominoes falling one after another? Which body parts move a lot and which ones are held?

Postures/Gestures/Actions

Our body returns often to specific postures, gestures and actions. Can you name a few that you come back to over and over?

Posture: The whole body takes a specific position/shape

Gesture: A part of the body, often the arms or the head take a specific gestural movement

Action: The whole body is performing an action (for example: travelling, sitting down, extending or flexing body parts, turning around, running a hand through your hair, moving the leg in a repetitive rhythm...)

Attention toward the quality of movement: how do we move?

To understand how we move, we can use the concepts of “dynamics” and “effort” of the Laban Bartenieff Movement System. These refer to the qualitative aspects of movement. Dynamics give the “feel”, “texture” “tone” or “color” of the movement, and the dynamics are a key to the mover’s attitude, their inner intent and how the mover exerts and organizes their energy.

We are looking at four different factors that determine the quality of an action:

- Flow: Are you feeling that your body is moving with ease and freedom, or do you feel the movement of your body is restricted?
- Time: Is your movement sustained or do you have sudden impulses? Do you feel that 'time is on your side' or do you feel pressured and stressed? Do your movements have a beginning and an end, can each action be separated?
- Weight: Is your movement quality firm and strong or delicate and light?
- Focus: Are you directing your attention to a single narrow focus, or do you have a broad and spacious view towards your surroundings?

How is this relevant in adult education?

Adult educators' work is primarily a work of communication and performance: whatever we need to transmit, it will need to go through communication. And a good part of communication is in the non-verbal realm. Preferences in gestures or postures, repeating sequences of actions and our dynamic involvement, will determine the nature of our communication. We repeat our habitual movement patterns often unconsciously and bring these into our teaching activity. Sometimes we can be oblivious to what these patterns actually communicate to the learners. What we propose here is not a clean categorisation of what are "good" or "bad" gestures and postures, nor are we presenting a psychologizing analysis of body language. Instead, we'd like to give some vocabulary and perspectives to be able to decide to what extent our movements support the transmission of our message and our presence, and to what extent they may be a distraction.

Postures and shapes

Some of the postures and shapes that humans take are so recurrent that they have their own name. For instance, the four shapes below are identified in Laban's system.



Again, objectively none of these shapes are absolutely right or wrong. Some may feel familiar to us, others foreign, some we may use more, others less. But depending on the cultural context where we are, they can have different meanings. Typical expectations towards an educator / trainer are that his/her posture expresses openness, stability, attention to others. Some shapes are perceived to go in that direction, others less so.

How is this relevant in adult education?



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Gestures and facial expressions

There are also cultural expectations towards gestures and facial expressions: typically, in the European context we expect educators to smile and have gestures that transmit openness. But in the exact quantity, size, frequency of gestures there is a great diversity even across Europe. A music teacher for instance realized he often folded his arms and was wondering whether this was a “bad thing”. Another art educator felt bad for “not smiling enough”. It is very easy to become judgmental of one’s own movement repertoire. We’d like to invite you to replace judgement with awareness and replace the persistent internal critical voice with a curiosity which allows authenticity and promotes ease in oneself.

(3) Rodnae Productions, (4) Edu Carvalho, (5) Mwenda Mugambi
(6) Cottonbro, (7) Engin Akyurt, (8) Pavel Danilyuke

Actions

Movement sequences can become a distraction in a teaching process if they are outside of our awareness and disconnected from the content. Think of the so-called “involuntary” or “parasitic” movements, such as touching the hair or any other body part, or changing your weight continuously from left to right. But a sequence of movement can also be a resource to find our way back to a more embodied presence. Even self-touch movements or shifting weight are not necessarily “bad” in absolute terms and could equally help us to stay connected to ourselves and the ground. Using this physical means of checking in, we can return to our bodies and stay connected and present to our environment.



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Dynamics and efforts in service of connection and the message.

The dynamics of our movements can all be put to the service of creating connection and conveying a message. The timing of our movements can support the rhythm of our speech. Precise gestures can help decode the verbal message, and we can use our body to reinforce important elements of our verbal message. All this can also be a resource for connecting with others (please see the card “*Relating*”). But most of the time, it is not a question of using one particular rhythm or style, but rather, of becoming aware of what we do to be able to choose the rhythms and styles that are appropriate and authentic for us we adapt to the situation.

Questions for self-assessment

Questions to answer before watching your video

Open questions

- Do you have recurrent movement patterns in everyday life ? What are they?
- Do you have repetitive movement patterns that specifically show up during your teaching activities? What are they?
- Does stress influence your posture, gestures and dynamics? How?

Questions you can use to take quantitative measurement

Please answer using the 1 to 5 scale where 1 stands for "*not at all*" and 5 for "*very much*"

- To what extent are you aware of your postures / gestures?
- To what extent do you have recurrent patterns in your movements and gestures?
- To what extent do you take pleasure in your gestures and movements?
- To what extent do you think the way you move and the dynamic quality of the movement is in harmony with what you want to transmit to your students?
- To what extent does stress change your movements, gestures, posture and dynamics?

After watching your video

- Watching the video do you observe specific patterns? What parts of the body move more or less? Are there recurrent gestures and postures?
- Is there anything you feel like changing in your postures, movements, gestures or dynamics? What?

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