



Movement: Gaining Control over the Will

By HeyZeus Oak

The days of young children are filled with movement. They climb onto chairs, crawl beneath tables, carry objects from one corner of the room to another, and run across the yard with tireless enthusiasm. To adults these movements can sometimes appear restless or chaotic. Yet beneath this constant activity lies one of the most important developmental processes of early childhood.

Movement is the means through which the young child gradually gains mastery over the body. Long before a child can think clearly or express themselves through language, they are already learning through movement. Each gesture, each attempt to balance, climb, carry, or jump becomes part of a quiet process through which the child slowly comes into relationship with gravity, space, and their own physical form.

In the earliest years of life, the child must first learn to inhabit the body. At birth the limbs move freely but without coordination. The infant stretches, kicks, and wriggles, guided more by

instinct than by conscious intention. Gradually these movements begin to organize themselves. The child rolls, crawls, pulls to standing, and finally takes those first uncertain steps across the room.

These milestones are often celebrated as simple physical achievements, yet they reveal something far deeper. Through movement the child is slowly gaining control over the body. What begins as spontaneous motion becomes purposeful action. The child begins to discover that an inner impulse can lead to an outer deed. This relationship between intention and action is the beginning of the human will.

In young children the will is powerful and untamed. It surges forward in bursts of energy and determination, much like a young horse that has not yet learned how to carry a rider. The child feels an impulse and immediately moves to act upon it. They run, push, pull, climb, and try again without hesitation.

Movement provides the means through which this powerful inner force gradually becomes guided and directed. Each time the child balances on a log, carries a heavy basket, or climbs a small hill, something subtle begins to form. The child is learning how to guide their own strength.

Just as a rider learns to work with a spirited horse through practice, patience, and balance, the child learns through movement how to guide the powerful energies of the will. The body becomes the place where this relationship slowly develops.

At the same time, movement strengthens the child's relationship to the senses. Through balancing, spinning, and climbing, the child stimulates the sense of balance, which helps orient the body in space. Through pushing, pulling, lifting, and carrying, the child develops the sense of self-movement, which allows them to feel where their limbs are and how they are moving.

These senses quietly build the child's inner map of the body. When they are well nourished, the child feels secure and grounded within their physical form. When they are weak or underdeveloped, children may appear restless, clumsy, or uncertain in their movements as they search for the experiences that help organize their bodies.

Rich opportunities for movement help bring these senses into harmony. Uneven ground, logs to balance upon, hills to climb, objects to carry, and open spaces to run all provide the varied experiences that children need. In such environments the child's body gradually becomes more coordinated and responsive.

In natural environments these opportunities arise almost effortlessly. A forest path offers what no indoor space can easily provide: uneven ground that requires balance, stones that invite careful

stepping, fallen branches to climb over, and hills that call forth effort and determination. The earth itself becomes the teacher. Each step asks the child to adjust, respond, and find equilibrium.

In such landscapes movement is never repetitive in the way it often becomes indoors. The child must continually adapt to the living terrain. A puddle invites jumping. A fallen log becomes a balance beam. A slope demands strength and coordination. Through these experiences the body awakens to its own capacities.

What appears from the outside as simple play is in fact a complex training of the will. The child learns to measure their strength, to persist through challenge, and to experience the satisfaction of overcoming small obstacles. Each success strengthens the inner connection between intention and action.

Natural spaces also offer something that carefully designed playgrounds often cannot: openness. A hill can be climbed in many ways. A branch can become a walking stick, a tool for digging, or something to carry home as treasure. Because the environment is not overly defined, the child must meet it with their own initiative.

In this way the natural world becomes a quiet partner in development. The landscape does not instruct the child directly, yet it continually invites effort, balance, courage, and exploration. It asks the child to move, to try, to fall, and to try again.

In earlier generations childhood was naturally filled with these opportunities. Children walked long distances, climbed trees, explored forests and fields, and helped with the daily work of the household. The landscape itself invited movement, and the body was constantly engaged with the physical world.

Modern childhood often presents a different picture. Many children spend long periods sitting, whether in cars, classrooms, or in front of screens. Play environments sometimes become carefully controlled, offering fewer opportunities for climbing, balancing, and physical challenge. When movement becomes limited, the child has fewer opportunities to truly take hold of the body as their own. The growing human being may struggle to feel fully at home within their physical form, and the deeper process through which the self gradually settles into the body may not unfold as freely as it should. This does not mean that something is wrong with the child. It often means that the child simply needs more opportunities to move freely and meaningfully within their environment.

In healthy early childhood environments, movement arises naturally within the rhythm of the day. Children carry water for cooking, help move chairs and tables, knead bread dough, sweep the floor, and dig in the garden. These activities invite purposeful movement while also giving the child a sense that their efforts are meaningful.

Outdoor play expands these possibilities even further. Climbing, digging, balancing, building, and running across open ground strengthen the body while also feeding imagination. Through these experiences the child encounters both challenge and success, gradually gaining confidence in their own abilities.

Circle games and movement verses provide another dimension of movement within the early childhood classroom. Through gesture, rhythm, and song, the children experience coordinated group movement. The teacher's gestures become a living example that children imitate naturally, allowing movement, language, and rhythm to work together.

What matters most is that movement remains alive and meaningful. When children move with purpose and joy, their bodies become instruments through which the will can act. Movement is no longer merely physical activity. It becomes the quiet training ground where the child learns how to guide their own strength.

Over time the child begins to experience a quiet transformation. The body that once moved without coordination becomes steady and capable. The child who once struggled to balance now runs confidently across the yard. Each new ability strengthens the invisible partnership between body and will. Through movement the child slowly learns not only to move, but to guide the powerful forces within themselves. Like a rider learning to work in harmony with a spirited horse, the child begins to discover balance, direction, and control.

In this way movement in early childhood prepares the ground for freedom. When the will grows strong and steady within the body, the child gains the foundation needed for independence and purposeful action later in life. The endless climbing, running, balancing, and carrying that fill the days of childhood are not distractions from development. They are the quiet work through which the child learns to take hold of the reins of their own will and ride forward into life with confidence and strength.

Author Bio:

HeyZeus Oak is the owner of Heart in Hand Preschool in Portland, Oregon, a fully certified Waldorf early childhood program and member of WECAN. He is a trained mentor through the Center for Anthroposophy and is devoted to nurturing reverence, rhythm, and beauty in the lives of young children.