



# I SEE YOU TOO

The value of improvisation  
in early childhood development and wellbeing



PRIMED FOR LIFE

More  
Music

A partnership project funded by Cumberland Council, Lancashire County Council and the Arts Council England



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



**Lancashire**  
County Council 

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 BACKGROUND TO PHASE 2:

**'I See You Too' aims to build on the success of Phase One of this project. As outlined in the report from the earlier phase, our work focuses on exploring,**

*'how mirroring and engaging playfully in children's movement supports wellbeing and development, particularly neurophysiological development incorporating both the body and the brain'. [I See You phase one report](#) (1.0 p.2)*

A key aspect of both phases of the project was that they should be open-ended and flexible with a child and practitioner focus, enabling us to match our interactions and interventions with the specific needs of each setting.

The projects were not based on 'artistic performance' or 'session delivery' although both children and adults would experience the 'artistry' of movement/dance/music specialists and see lots of movement activities in action through 'playmating' and mirroring.

Both phases also provided 'in the moment' \* CPD (continuous professional development) for practitioners in response to whatever aspects of children's Physical (and wider) development arose during the sessions. This was followed up in specific staff meetings for settings when requested and where possible.

*\*We are grateful to Anna Ephgrave for her concept of planning 'In the moment' (2018, 2020) which we feel is the best way to describe our approach to CPD : offering spontaneous, impromptu training 'in the moment' in response to the sensory and physical exploration practitioners see children engaging in.*

#### **Our aims in both phases were to:**

- Raise awareness of the importance of the body in early childhood and to amplify the role of movement as a 'language' for communication.
- Support children's instinctive creativity and development and in the Prime Areas.
- Co-create through improvised play with children and adults.
- Raise practitioner awareness of the importance of movement play as a key factor in children's all-round development, particularly in the Prime Areas.
- Provide CPD on essential aspects of Physical Development,
- Raise practitioner confidence and skill in observing and responding to children's movement play in ways that will increase children's motivation for movement and promote good physical development and wellbeing
- Increase practitioner wellbeing and confidence through motivation for playful movement with children and for themselves.

**In Phase 2 of the project, we extended our remit to include a broader geographical location and some school-based nurseries, as well as PVIs (Private, Voluntary and Independent settings). A key development in this phase is the inclusion of musicians (from local community music organisation [More Music](#)) to support the improvisational work and to heighten awareness of children's creative collaborations. (See 1.5 for other key differences in Phase 2.)**

### 1.1 PROJECT FUNDERS:

Arts Council England (National Lottery Project Grants) provided match funding

Lancashire County Council

Cumberland Council

Ramsden Robins Day Nursery Barrow (PVI - independent contribution)

### 1.2 THE SETTINGS:

5 in MORECAMBE : (Lancashire County Council)

3 in WORKINGTON: (Cumberland Council)

1 in BARROW (Ramsden Robins)

### 1.3 PRIMED FOR LIFE: About us

**Anne O'Connor:** Early Years Consultant with a background in Early Years teaching and specialising in the Prime areas of the EYFS.

**Anna Daly:** Community Dance Artist working across the North West for over 25 years. Specialising in Early Years dance, movement and play.

Together we advocate for a wider understanding of the body as the child's first place of experiential learning. Children are biologically driven to create these strong physiological foundations for later life through their physicality and the senses, and we support practitioners/educators/parents to appreciate and not rush through this important time in a child's development. Our skills and experience enable us to notice and hold space for children's physical expression, communication, creativity, and exploration with blended approaches from dance and early years practice, that facilitate and amplify the unbounded physical/bodily intelligence of young children.

#### Supporting Musicians

**Ben McCabe** is Creative Producer and the Early Years Lead at our partnering organisation [More Music](#). Ben is a multi-instrumentalist musician and singer and was involved in supporting production of the project as well as improvisational play sessions in some settings and all family events.

**Bryony Jarman Pinto** is a singer, songwriter and musician who was selected to be part of More Music's [Early Years Mentorship](#) programme. Bryony was involved in both family events.

**Jill Walmsley** musician and singer, was also part of the Early Years Mentorship programme at More Music - highlights [here](#). Jill was involved in improvisational play sessions in some nursery settings.

#### **1.4 THE SESSIONS:**

**We aimed for up to three half-day activity sessions with each setting.** NB Unexpected OFSTED inspections and staff sickness impacted on the number of visits we were able to carry out in some settings.

#### **LANCASHIRE: Morecambe (Autumn term 2024)**

Sandcastles Nursery

Heysham Community Pre School

Bare Necessities Nursery

Mossgate Nursery

Time 4 Nursery

#### **CUMBERLAND: Workington (Spring Term 2025)**

(Nursery settings within maintained schools)

Derwent Vale Primary and Nursery School

Victoria Infants and Nursery School

St Gregory's Catholic Primary School

#### **WESTMORLAND s FURNESS: Barrow (Summer Term 2025)**

Ramsden Robins (previous participants in I SEE YOU Phase 1) one week residency

#### **TOTALS**

27 half day sessions at individual settings

5 days residency

7 bespoke staff CPD sessions at individual settings

3 network sharings of the project approach and learning

#### **1.5 KEY DIFFERENCES FROM 'I SEE YOU' (phase 1):**

We changed the organisation of our visits in Morecambe and Workington to allow more immediate time for reflection, both for ourselves and with managers/practitioners when available. (See 3.5: Time for reflection). Rather than squeezing in 2 visits on the same day to different settings (often some distance away from each other) and then reflecting at a distance some time later, we allocated a full day to each setting. We were with children during the morning. In the afternoon, with permission from the settings, we found somewhere quiet where we could go through the footage, select the most useful and delete anything not essential. Where possible, we shared this reflection time, with a manager, and/or practitioners, allowing time for broader discussions and incidental CPD whilst viewing the videos. In one instance we

were also able to share footage with the children. We provided each setting with a USB drive on which we saved their footage for them to keep for their own records and training purposes.

In line with our Arts Council England funding, phase 2 of the project also included the following aims:

- Advocating for children's voice and creativity using film and video footage/images produced in the project (with permission) and shared with a wider audience (e.g conferences, symposia, articles etc)
- Introducing musicians into some of the sessions, with a focus on using the voice as an instrument to complement movement play and dance.
- Offering a face-to-face joint introductory and/or reflection session to all settings.
- Bringing EYFS practitioners from the settings together in collaboration with local dance/music specialist artists for professional 'playdates'.
- Devising family sessions: to take place either in a setting or a local venue, for families to engage in relaxed, nurturing movement play with their children
- Returning to a setting we had worked with in phase one of the project for a 5 day residency.

## 2.0 COMMON THEMES

**As with the first phase of the project ([see report here](#)) there has been a wealth of material gathered over the sessions, and several common themes or strands presented themselves as 'stand out' points of the project. Given the 'interconnectedness' of everything in a young child's life, there will be many crossovers and some repetition of examples within these strands, but we believe that only serves to emphasise the magnificence of a child's perception of their world and why their 'viewpoint' matters.**

### 2.1 YOU SEE ME... I SEE YOU TOO! Connecting through mirroring

As before, one of our main aims has been to offer children the experience of feeling noticed and 'tuned in to', specifically through the 'language' of movement and dance. Our interactions with the children have often been mostly non-verbal where the initial connection has been through a mirroring of the child's movements, no matter how small.

By mirroring the smallest of movements, Anna lets the child know they have been noticed and their movements (no matter how simple or mundane) are worthy of notice. Children are used to mirroring and 'copying' the movements of adults – particularly in action songs and rhymes – but it is a novelty for a child to realize that they have control of the 'game' or 'movement conversation'.

Following the child's lead in this way,

*'Also encourages the child to bring attention to their own movements and they often began directing and composing sequences for themselves and the adult. This could also be described as 'sustained shared thinking' where both adult and child are focused on creating, sustaining, and developing this 'movement dance' together.'* (I See You' 2:1 pp 5-c)

There were many examples of where this activity heightened the relationship between child and adult – sometimes the interactions were 'serious' and measured, other times they were more light-hearted and caused great hilarity and enjoyment, as well as satisfaction for both adult and child. As examples, in one setting a child initiated lying on their back with their feet up against the wall to create an extended 'dance'

with Anna.\* In another, Ben, mirrored a child's vocal play whilst sat at the table together, building a composition of sounds and upper body/finger movements that entertained everyone around them!

\*This triggered a useful discussion with practitioners about the value of empty wall/floor space for children to experiment in this way. It can be rare to find clear space like this in a setting, yet it provided opportunities for movement play and good proprioceptive and vestibular stimulation for children who were less confident or mobile on their feet.

## 2.2 I SEE ME! Sharing videos with children

An unplanned but satisfying opportunity occurred at one setting, for us to share the videos and photos we'd taken in the morning, with the children that same afternoon, on a large screen TV. The children were delighted and very interested to see themselves and others and began to mirror the same moves whilst watching and commenting on what they saw each other doing. We weren't able to repeat this same experience again but feel that it definitely has potential for intensifying and cementing the experience for children (and practitioners). It also offers a way of exploring the language of movement, as children bring words and descriptions to their physical experiences *after* the event, but without the words or the need to use language dominating the initial, spontaneous movement play.

## 2.3 I CAN DO IT! Exploring risk through movement play

Understanding and managing risk is an aspect of EYFS provision that is under constant discussion and that we are very aware of in our work with practitioners and families. We also know that children will only develop good skills of personal risk assessment if allowed opportunities to explore activities that challenge them – allowing them to try different ways of exploring natural and man-made environments (eg resources, apparatus and surfaces) – as well as what they can do with their bodies at different stages of development and learning.

*It is true that '...no environment will ever be 100% safe. Even well-supervised children manage to hurt themselves, often in unpredictable ways.'* (Lindon, 1999, p9)

At the same time, an unstimulating environment can be equally hazardous if children are bored and they become reckless.

*'Without challenges and risks, children will find play areas uninteresting or use them in inappropriate ways, which become dangerous.'* (Bilton, 2005, p73)

We encouraged and responded to children's curiosity and ingenuity for extending their full-bodied use of resources (e.g. getting inside barrels and rolling them) and using playground areas (e.g. slopes) as well as equipment and spaces indoors to create satisfying and sensory stimulating activities.

With support, we saw children extend the potential of fixed apparatus (e.g. slides and planks) by layering extra challenges onto the activity (e.g. coming down the slide 'through' a curtain of gauze fabric / wobbling the planks). It was important that children had adult support and monitoring when they explored risk in this way – but it was also possible for that support to be 'hands off' unless needed. Similarly, children used 'big loose parts' (e.g. bicycle wheels) to create challenges for themselves, testing their abilities – and their

nerve – and sometimes building their own safety processes into the activity (e.g. when a child moved the bike wheel closer to the wall to steady it while she balanced on it.)

From our experience, we are aware that attitudes to risk (and risky ‘behaviours’) can vary from setting to setting. We also appreciate how very hard it can be for practitioners (especially those less experienced or those carrying most responsibility) to observe and wait before rushing in to prevent risky or stimulating play developing – we have to make those judgement calls ourselves too, all the time! However, with support and training, we have seen practitioners grow in confidence for themselves – and for their children. As in the first phase of the project,

*‘The more they understood the neuroscience involved, the less likely they were to see heightened risk (as opposed to genuine hazard) and shut down the movement experience.’*  
[\(I See You report p.10\)](#)

It is worth remembering that risk is relative to the child: what feels ‘brave’ to one child might be ‘easy peasy’ to another - and a step too far for yet another. With increased knowledge and awareness, practitioners are able to draw on an extra ‘physical development lens’ to observe children and their actions. This helps us to understand what children are trying to do with their bodies (in response to a powerful biological drive) rather than our being frustrated by ‘inconvenient’ movements or reacting over-anxiously to risky moves or challenges.



#### **2.4 MY TURN! Sensory seeking and attachment needs**

It is usual for children to want to have a go at something they see other children doing – especially if it involves an adult – and we see plenty of this in our work. For example, children wanting to be swung by an adult, tipped upside down etc, once they see us offering it as an experience.

Across all the settings we saw children who were content (even eager) to make sure their friends had a go and were happy to wait their turn. Of course, we also saw children who were highly anxious that they should have their turn and made sure that the adult knew this, by constantly clamouring and monopolising the adult attention, or actively preventing other children having a go.

We see this high demand in particular with regard to joint (shared with adults) vestibular and proprioceptive activities e.g. spinning and swinging, being held, wrapped up, sliding and ‘hammocking’ with blankets etc. Sometimes this is inevitable - ‘sharing’ is developmental and linked to maturity - but it is also possible that these children are desperately seeking sensory activity as well as attention. Early vestibular and proprioceptive experiences are joint activities shared with adults before children can do them for themselves and ideally occur quite naturally in the kinds of attentive play that we all like to engage babies in e.g. swaying, swinging, jiggling, lifting up etc. These shared experiences come instinctively to some parents – and they know how to swing or jiggle a baby safely and with just the right amount of challenge and responsive attention to suit the child. Sadly, and for a variety of reasons, it seems that this is occurring less naturally in some families and as a result, children are arriving at nursery or school not just with high levels of attention/attachment insecurity, but also underdeveloped sensory systems.

We recognise how hard it can be in settings to give both the necessary physical and emotional attention to these sensory and attention/attachment hungry children – but it is worth remembering that if we can find the time, effort and funding for 1-1 sessions to boost children’s literacy etc., then perhaps finding time to address children’s more fundamental sensory needs, might more effectively address their emotional and cognitive needs, as well as their physical development. (see 2.15. Connection; 2.16 Adult as Apparatus )

## 2.5 I’VE GOT YOU: Physical development and co-regulation

Movement play offers children lots of opportunity for co-regulation with adults and also other children. Offering a soothing, sensory experience when a child is very distressed, is often an instinctive co-regulating response (e.g. stroking, rocking etc.) but it is worth remembering this can also be effective when a child is communicating their stress/distress/overwhelm through challenging or dysregulated behaviour. (See 2.10 It’s Just Right)

We also saw children co-regulating each other, where the more experienced child helped another to wait their turn, by coaxing, encouraging and guiding the game in a sensitive way so that the other child grew in confidence and responsibility. Although an adult was involved in the game, by observing rather than intervening, they allowed both children the opportunity to grow through the process. Plenty of time for repetition also helped, enabling the children to play the game as long as they needed to, in order to reinforce the learning and gain maximum satisfaction.

It’s worth remembering that physical activity and movement play is a perfect opportunity for children to observe others as well as practise, rehearse and refine their own self regulation skills. Check out [Developing self-regulation through physical play — Siren Films](#) for lots more ideas about this.

## 2.6 I SEE YOU DANCING: Early dance moves



One of the key things for us in this work is to raise awareness not just of the importance of dance in early years – but also that dancing doesn’t always look like dancing!! Some aspects of children’s free play feed directly into their later abilities to engage with more formal aspects of dance, choreography and improvisation. As well as exploring different moves and accompanying attitudes, expressions, speeds and intensity – children’s free movement play also includes turn-taking, sequencing, mirroring, sharing rhythm, creating and refining movement motifs – all of which feature in improvisation, choreography and dance composition.

We saw children making up their own moves as well as responding to Anna’s invitations and random props wherever we found them. On one glorious occasion, a playful group dance developed in response to the combination of music and the presence of a large indoor rug with circles on it. It began quite casually, with children jumping from spot to spot but progressed beautifully (and without adult direction) into a group dance with several children moving independently and in opposite directions - but also in perfect synchrony with each other and the music.

In one example of extended movement play (40 minutes plus) with one child, we saw her move from initial shyness to dynamic movement composition where she ultimately composed long sequences of movement (on foot, on the floor and using a table to hold a pose and from which to push off) specifically for Anna to follow and join with. This developed into both a Duet and a Trio at various times, as other children came and went, joining in and developing the 'piece', through improvising together with music, space and movement.

We know that many settings enjoy using dance / music and movement videos and audio programmes etc. to promote children's dance / PD and these have their place. Our purpose is to raise awareness of the value of 'seizing the moment' for dance in everyday life and continuous provision, and recognising children's inherent drive to express themselves physically through movement play, especially when given the opportunities.

With increased knowledge and understanding on the part of practitioners, there is a greater likelihood that children's self-led dance and movement play in the moment, will be seen as just as important as movement programmes. It is to be hoped children are then less likely to have to stop their self-led movement/dance play in order to go and follow an adult/screen directed movement /dance programme!



## 2.7 ALL FALL DOWN! Practising and enhancing falling as a movement experience

Something professional dancers share with babies and young children is that they are both very good at falling down! Babies do it constantly when they first begin to walk and it is an important part of motor development. In fact, we only learn to walk by falling.

Dancers have to relearn and practice how to do it safely and with the least impact on their bodies - and just like children they do it over and over again! This was a theme that we observed on several occasions, especially when we brought out the duvets, as they not only provided a softer surface to land on but also offered uneven surfaces to negotiate. Far from being a hazard, they became a fun way to experiment with falling.

The experience of practising falling in this way is very valuable. It brings confidence, not just in moving successfully on uneven surfaces, but also in the act of falling itself, reducing fear and anxiety and increasing the ability to right oneself when toppling



over and getting up again from the floor. However, as adults (if we aren't dancers or acrobats able to turn a fall into a roll) we not only become more fearful of ourselves falling but we can also worry excessively about children falling, seeing it as something to prevent them from 'choosing' to do in their movement play. (see 2.3 I Can Do It). Using resources like duvets or mats encouraged some practitioners to play more adventurously themselves, experimenting and enjoying the sensations of falling.

## **2.8 IT'S ALL TOO MUCH: Sensory overwhelm**

Prior to our visits, many of the settings commented on their concerns about children's behaviour, so it was no surprise to us to see several children struggling with sensory overwhelm. We are always aware that our arrival into a setting can present a challenge to some children (and staff) so we always try to 'slide into' the provision so that we cause as little disruption as possible, recognising that not just our presence and activity, but our voices and any props or music we bring, can be overwhelming for some children. We are also aware that, for some, the slightest little change or challenge to the norm can be enough to cause them to go into survival mode. Sometimes this might mean withdrawal and staying away from us (though probably watching); for others it might present as more erratic or challenging behaviour, targeting us, or more likely their peers or familiar adults. It is important to us that children should be soothed by people they know well, but we also have some sensory strategies that we know work effectively with children and will use them if the time feels right – judging our responses by children's physical, as well as their emotional reactions to the experience. (see also 2.10 It's Just Right)

We are very aware of the pressures faced by settings (and by families) struggling to cope with behaviours that seem out of the ordinary; are more usual at a younger age; or happen more frequently and intensively than they would expect. This is an indication of the trauma carried by many of our children, possibly from the pandemic when these children would have been born or conceived, but often from existing family circumstances made worse by poverty, food insecurity or adult stress/anxiety/poor mental health, in these difficult times.

We really appreciated when settings were happy to help us create both movement spaces free of hazard and distractions, and long, uninterrupted periods of sustained play. We know that this was sometimes a challenge, but it worked best when routines and schedules were flexible enough to allow children to transition in their own time from a sensory/movement experience into the next thing e.g. snack time, lunch, gathering for story etc. and to be able to spend as little or as long at the activity as they needed.

We were privileged to work in several settings where practitioners' knowledge of their children and understanding of their emotional needs, allowed them the chance to engage with us for long periods of sustained activity and to transition in and out of the experience in their own time.

## **2.G STUFF: Less can often be more**

In our own work, researching the suitability of props and resources, we have explored the possibility that sometimes too much 'enrichment' can be detrimental to both physical and emotional wellbeing, leading to sensory overload/overwhelm. Delightful though many resources are these days – and we know settings take great care with the aesthetics of their environment – we find ourselves choosing to use fewer props and equipment. Not only do we want to explore the impact of this on creativity in general, it also means that we don't have to use valuable time stopping early to involve children in tidying up etc. Learning to tidy up *is* a useful life skill, but we don't want it to restrict children's time and motivation for the real learning that the resources or activities are providing.

### Our most useful resources:

- Lycra and soft blankets
- Voile/gauze/transparent fabric – long and short lengths
- Scarves
- Duvets

Often though, the most stimulating and satisfying experiences came from just offering ourselves – down on the floor (see also 2.16 Adult as Apparatus) as well as upright/on foot as movement partners. (see also 3.4 Musicians)

We were very grateful for settings who supported us with some sessions indoors/outdoors where we deliberately kept equipment/furniture to a minimum and followed the children's lead in using the empty space for moving freely, sometimes to music, exploring the full range of their imaginative and creative moves!



### 2.10 IT'S JUST RIGHT: Physical, sensory and emotional environments

We are extremely lucky that this work affords us so many 'magic moments' when everything comes together to create just the right experience, in that moment, for an individual or group of children (and adults). Sometimes it's a fleeting thing and sometimes we can be surprised by how long a child will choose to sustain an activity or experience. Who says babies and young children can't concentrate! We see evidence all the time of little ones focussing and concentrating on movements (large and small) that interest, motivate, delight or even puzzle them – especially when both the physical and emotional environment fosters and allows that sustained focus.

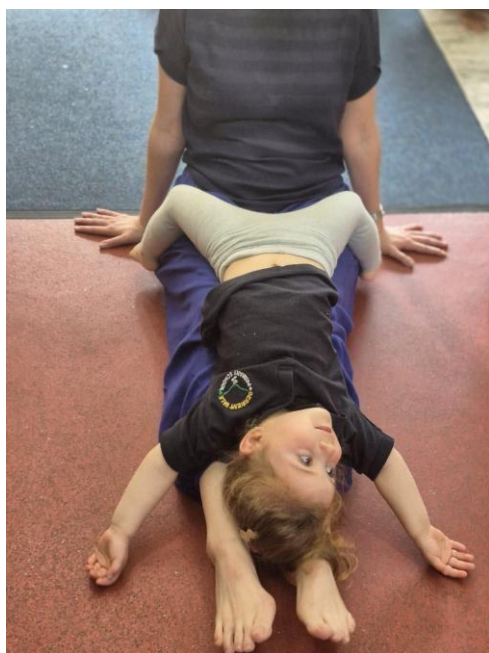
We saw and experienced so many moments when just the right combination of sensory input helped to soothe a child, especially if they were having a difficult time. For example:

- Soothing a distressed and very agitated child (with SEND) by wrapping him lightly over his shoulders in a blanket (where he sat on the floor in the middle of a throughway) and just holding him gently from above and behind so that he could still see his familiar people. His body and demeanour almost instantly calmed, and he was content to sit and be held in this way for a sustained period, despite everything else going on around him.
- A child who quickly told us that it felt good when we swung him (hammock style) in a blanket and asked for more, describing exactly which way worked best for him. He called it 'deep down dancing'.
- A boy who returned time and again for a gentle back rub (leaning over the adult's knees) in between playing a vigorous game with his friends. He was able to describe exactly how he needed it (not too 'heavy') and knew when he'd had the right amount and was ready to run off and play again.

- A child (undergoing assessment for ASD) responding almost invisibly to Jill playing guitar by staying very close, facing the guitar. She demonstrated a sensory awareness of the vibrations of the music, by reaching her hands and her foot towards the sound and experimenting with this sensation. She gently indicated when she wanted the adult to continue playing but didn't want to have a go herself.
- A toddler bringing a soft brush to a familiar adult who then gently (and for a long time) sat with them brushing their hands and face with it. The child (and adult) were so relaxed and at one with the experience, it was actually very soothing just to be an observer and watch it happening.
- Creating collaborative dance moves to accompany singing (outside) with a trio of children that travelled across the playground.

What we also know is that the adults taking part in these experiences, or just being privileged to watch, also benefitted from the soothing interactions.

**When so much of a practitioner's day is stressful and time pressured, we wonder where the opportunities for both adults and children to relax and 'reset' can, not just be found, but more importantly, be prioritised?**



### **2.11 JUST YOU AND ME: Working one-to-one with children**

We are very lucky that during the course of the project we are able to focus on individual children sometimes, particularly as we see children who know they need the time and space to fill up their 'bucket' of love and attention.

These are the children who ask for more physical and emotional connection: sometimes politely with words and sometimes communicating more 'loudly' with voice and behaviours. Not only are these children telling us they need 'Time IN' (connection) rather than 'Time OUT' (isolation) but we are also offering them the equivalent of 'booster sessions' not in maths or phonics as is usual, but in attachment and connection. We would argue that for many children, the reason 1-1 academic booster sessions often work is because of the potential for improving the security of attachment and relationship, regardless of the curriculum content! This is also the case with uninterrupted, sustained, physical activity time together – improving the quality of the

movement experience (and enhancing physical development) as well as connection and relationship.

### **2.12 TRICKY SPACES: Making the most of the environment**

We are very aware that few settings (if any) are blessed with perfect environments, indoor and outdoor, for movement play and dance. We know it is possible though, to make the most of those 'tricky spaces' and sometimes, serendipitously, turn them into perfect places for different aspects of movement and physicality. For example:

- A long narrow room or corridor space opened up possibilities for back-and-forth games and movements.
- A low wall provided somewhere to ‘push off’ or hold a pose against before moving off again.
- An awkward slope provided lots of scope for exploring how, with adult engagement, children will experiment and find ways to safely negotiate ways down it and use effort and skill to clamber up it.

Staff commented that this gave them a new perspective on ‘awkward’ or previously worrying spaces/resources and a challenge to use them differently. We saw children expand and refine their movements when indoor space was opened up (reducing furniture /using floor space etc) and fewer time limits were imposed – giving them the opportunity for figuring out moves and repeating them in long, sustained periods of self-initiated activity.



**When we pay as much attention to children’s physical ‘learning’ as we do to all other areas of the curriculum, then it seems reasonable to consider how we can make specific *indoor* space available for children to explore movement as part of continuous provision, and not just outdoors or in PE sessions. Even in tight spaces it’s worth remembering that the floor is our best and most readily available resource and potentially more valuable to children’s learning and all-round development than any amount of furniture or equipment!**

### 2.13 MAKING IT UP TOGETHER: Co-creating movement and dance

An important part of our work exploring movement improvisation with children is to exemplify the possibilities of co-creation even with very young children. Giving children the chance to take the lead and show us what interests them, doesn’t mean we just sit back all the time, but it does remind us that we don’t always have to be the ones with the ideas!



We had so many wonderful examples of this especially with the added expertise of our musicians:

- Child and adult building a beatbox sequence together
- Child initiating (and setting up makeshift drums for) a joint drumming session with adult
- Children leading adult in a co-ordinated dance sequence indoors on a rug (with circles)
- Children building a den using adults for the tricky technical bits – and getting adults to try it

out for them by getting inside first!

## 2.14 SSHUSHH! Saying more with less talk

As with Phase 1 of the project, this has been one of the key factors of our approach.

*'Removing the emphasis on words also removes language barriers and takes away the stress that some children feel when having to verbally communicate all the time. They know movement is their first and universal language and are pleased, relieved and / or excited to find that we 'speak' it too!' ( I See You first report 2.14 p.16)*



It's worth emphasising that by encouraging practitioners to talk less doesn't mean we don't value the importance of adult-child verbal interactions in language learning – and we certainly wouldn't stop practitioners from talking. But, in our experience, the process of reducing talk for short periods, can actually heighten communication by:

- creating space for modelling non-verbal interactions that are an important part of communication and language skills (e.g. through facial expression and body language)
- reducing the amount of 'space filling chatter' that children hear. This is perhaps why, as constantly talking adults, we can find it quite hard to reduce our talk around children. We are used to constantly offering comments and instructions and questions – without giving ourselves a chance to consider how meaningful some of these interactions might really be – and whether they actually teach children the most valuable aspects of communication and language use.
- reducing the need for children to be always responding to our questions, comments and instructions takes away a lot of the need for children to engage in this kind of 'performance talk'. This is different from using talk to explore language and to develop vocabulary and communication skills that are embedded with meaning and purpose and not just repeating words on request or demand.
- connection between child and practitioner was heightened as the adult focused on the child in ways that were different to regular interactions.
- a more quiet, sometimes silent, attentive focus, can create a very different feel or presence. Children, particularly infants and babies, seem very aware of this and a space is often created in which something special can emerge.

**We know for ourselves and from practitioner comments, just how difficult it can be to 'calm the chatter' but we also now have so much evidence of the positive impact it can have, that we have nothing but praise and gratitude for those practitioners who 'gave it a go'. It was a privilege to see and feel the heightened connection and focus on children who we know felt very seen, as well as heard, in those moments.**

## 2.15 CONNECTION: You, me and everything else

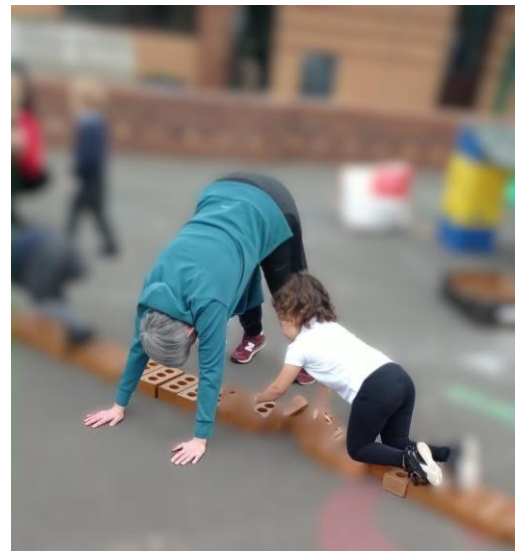
One of the most powerful aspects of this work has been not just in our own physical connections with children, but in having the opportunity also to witness these very intense moments of personal and creative connection between children and their carers.

It can be hard to explain the intensity of connection experienced when a child relaxes into a backward stretch over one's knees and is content to stay there, viewing the world from upside down, whilst swaying them gently from side to side. Although the move might look quite gymnastic in form, it isn't about technique or ability. It is a privilege to feel them totally comfortable in their bodies in a way that not only soothes and relaxes them, but also supports: their developing vision and balance; their fundamental need for proprioceptive and vestibular stimulation; as well as emotional and physical competence and security. There is trust, permission and safety in the way that we are able to hold them securely - physically and emotionally - whilst they take both physical and emotional risks.

To observe and record practitioners (and parents/carers) making these strong emotional connections through physical movement play, is also a privilege. Their comments afterwards are often about the intensity of feeling and the ensuing increase in bonding and attachment. They also comment on how it feels to give themselves 'permission' to take time to bring the focus to children's needs in this way, especially in the context of a busy day when so many other demands are made of them.



We believe having the time to do this again and again for a young child is as important as repeating phonics rules or practising letter formation – maybe even more so as this experience provides exactly what their minds and bodies need in order to be 'ready' for whatever school has in store for them. Once again we are grateful to those practitioners and parents who played along with us and let themselves experience these precious moments.



## 2.16 ADULT AS APPARATUS:

Linked to this is the idea of the adult body providing the apparatus upon which babies and young children can safely explore movement experiences. The adult, especially when they are down on the floor, provides a perfect safe place to explore rolling, climbing and clambering as well as balancing, tipping and being upside down. Babies and children who don't like 'tummy time' often prefer the feeling of lying on adult tummies or across knees. A sitting or standing adult is perfect for exploring potentially thrilling/scary experiences such as falling through knees, bending over backwards, being swung or tipped over. Unlike a piece of equipment or apparatus, a sensitive adult is able to adjust and respond to a child's emotional and physical state, reading their bodies to know where to pitch the experience, how and whether to extend it, and most importantly, when to stop.



Very often, for prolonged play, all that is required of the adult is that they just 'be a bridge to go through.' This can be simply standing so children can crawl through their legs - or bending over forwards or backwards, which demands more stamina and flexibility! Which is an important aspect for consideration throughout all of this work. It is important that practitioners know their own capacity for physically engaging with children and don't overstretch themselves. But it is true that this kind of physical connection is very valuable in creating and developing relationships and ideally should be recognised as an important feature of the practitioner role.



## 2.17 DON'T STOP ME NOW! Uninterrupted periods of sustained movement play

We talk a lot about the value of long, uninterrupted periods of sustained play, yet the reality for many early years settings is that 'learning' is broken up into timed sections of the day, (just as in Primary and Secondary schools) with a lot of time and energy spent (physically and emotionally) transitioning from one session to the next (e.g. lining up, moving rooms, tidying and replacing equipment etc.)

We have seen both children and adults struggling with this as we know practitioners are very aware that, contrary to expectations, young children are not only able to concentrate for long periods of time, but that they also benefit from extra-long 'lead in' and 'wind down'

times in their play and that abrupt switches of focus (even with advance warnings) can be very disruptive to learning and emotional health.

**Although predictable routines are important – it is also true that the most validating structure in early years is the one that provides the predictable routine of uninterrupted, sustained play.**

Within the bounds of a reasonable structure that includes breaks for eating, toileting and gathering together as well as 'end of session' routines like tidying up and getting ready to go home, true 'agentic play' (being active rather than passive in their play choices) enables the child to pursue an activity to a personal conclusion. This in turn, provides valuable learning in perseverance, self-regulation and confidence. (For more information on Agentic Play and the New Zealand ECEC curriculum see [Te Whāriki Online](#) and [Nurturing agentic children in early childhood education: thinking about children's agency with a childhood studies lens. | He kupu](#))

Just as we do as adults, children need time to process their learning experiences and need to be allowed adequate time to manage change and transitions during their day. Throughout the project we have been privileged to have been given the time to explore movement play in this way – and we are also aware of the huge pressures on practitioners to keep to a strict timetabling of routine activities throughout the day, sometimes even having to stop children's independent movement play, in order for them to go and 'do movement' in a structured session elsewhere!

### **2.18 LYING DOWN ON THE JOB: The importance of self chosen rest and relaxation for young children**

Given the busy and highly pressured days children (and practitioners) are likely to be experiencing, it feels important to mention the value of having time to 'stand and stare' AND also to lie back and look at the sky/curl up and snuggle/ flop out under a blanket and just relax the body and the brain. Sometimes children need a break from all the sensory stimulation going on around them and to just 'chill out' without it being seen as a 'waste of learning time'. It is in fact, the opposite, as a great deal of learning and brain development takes place during relaxation, not least, learning how to recognise what a relaxed body and brain feels like! It is impossible to regulate yourself back to a relaxed place of calm - if you don't know what that feels like in the first place. With very young children we help them get the rest they need by giving them nap time, but for older children, the opportunity to judge for themselves when they will benefit from a bit of 'down time' is an important part of developing self-regulation.

Most settings are well-equipped with 'soft' resources (e.g blankets, cushions etc) and we saw children making use of 'hidey' spaces (e.g. cupboards, under tables, dens, boxes etc) to rest in, after energetic activity sessions. It's also worth mentioning that seeing an adult getting comfy on the floor, stretching out on a duvet, or snuggling under a blanket encourages children to join in, much more than being told to lie down and relax!

*"Thank you for introducing us to the magic of Duvet Dance"* **Practitioner**

### 2.1 G IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS: Small movements /fine motor play/proprioception

Throughout both phases of the project, we have seen the importance of recognising and valuing the smallest of moves, particularly when a baby or child chooses to repeat them, knowing that the brain and the body are working together to embed and cement the physical learning involved. Despite our focus on 'big body' movement play/gross motor skills, we also see the value of small props and resources and the ways that children choose to use and incorporate them in play, sometimes with a story, but also just for the pleasure of the tactile and physical experience (e.g. cars wheeled over bodies, soft brushes, wrapping things, picking up and dropping etc.) And let's not forget the benefits of playing and squeezing into small spaces, hidey holes, tight corners, boxes and barrels and under tables – all of which provide valuable proprioceptive experience and help develop spatial awareness. We have been able to explore these aspects of neurophysiology in greater depth with practitioners both 'in the moment' as we see it happening, and also in follow up meetings and CPD sessions. (See 3.1 CPD)



### 2.20 IT'S THE BIG THINGS: Large movements/gross motor play/proprioception

**Equally important is the opportunity and encouragement for children to use their whole bodies for 'big body' movement play.** We were pleased to avail ourselves of all the 'large loose parts' resources, often found in settings such as - hoops, bike wheels (detached), tyres, rope and tyre swings, planks, barrels, crates, big cardboard tubes, as well as fixed structures like slides, steps and slopes. Particularly satisfying is when we observed children being allowed and encouraged to use them for resourceful, open-ended play, matching their physical curiosity with the potential of the resources, often encountering them in unfamiliar ways. This also allowed new physical experiences and risk taking, involving balance and falling as well as spatial awareness e.g. standing on things likely to roll or topple, (bike wheels, cardboard tubes) and climbing inside things, or sliding down the slide through a scarf 'curtain'. We have yet to see general acceptance of children being allowed to also climb *up* the slide and down the steps on the other side – although this would be a valuable gross motor physical skill in itself!

### 2.21 OOF! The importance of heavy play

Also valuable for proprioceptive development is the opportunity for 'heavy play' involving effort, stamina, perseverance and problem-solving as well as developing muscle and joint strength. This can be linked with tidying up, but children will often initiate this kind of play, setting goals and challenges for themselves. Having lots of large loose parts available (both natural and manufactured) is key to this as well as brooms,

dustpans, and other cleaning equipment. We saw children setting themselves challenges lifting and carrying things like tyres and very large pumpkins (useful even after Halloween!)

## 2.22 I HEAR YOU: Communicating through sound and music

As we've already said (2.14) enabling children to feel 'heard' as well as seen is an important part of our work and we have had practitioners comment that during periods of reduced adult talk they notice and can better 'hear' exactly what children are communicating to them.

We also know from the work of Ayres (1979) that movement has the potential to encourage vocalisation, probably because of the proximity of the vestibular system and language centres in the brain. It is possible that some children with speech and language delays may not have had enough vestibular stimulation to promote vocalisation.



A very successful addition to this phase of the project has been to include musicians in some of the sessions, encouraging them to use their voice as instruments in combination with movement play.

Improvising with voice and sounds, sometimes as communication and sometimes creating melodies together, we played around with pitch, tone, percussive sounds, rhythm, repetition, melody and humour.

## 3.0 OTHER ASPECTS

### 3.1 CPD: Continuous professional development for practitioners and artists

As in the first phase, several principles have underpinned our approach to providing CPD during and alongside the work with children. These include:

- Having (at least) two specialists working in partnership - usually one focusing on the children, whilst the other records the interactions (photo and video) and, where appropriate, discusses theoretical and practical aspects of child development with practitioners/artists.
- Feedback shows that this kind of 'in the moment' CPD impacts much more favourably on adults, who comment that they seem to learn much more this way and that scientific or theoretical information is more meaningful and likely to 'stick'.
- In terms of practical approaches, practitioners commented that they 'learned so much' by watching Anna and we would see the impact of this over time in the sessions, where some practitioners built on what they had seen and developed and enhanced their own existing movement /sensory play strategies.
- Being able to follow up with one or two key staff on the same day, using the videos as starting points, provided immediate reflection and the opportunity to discuss wider issues, e.g. children's PSED or language needs, in relation to their physical development and need for movement and sensory stimulation.

- As in the first phase, settings who were able to take up the offer of a later CPD session, showed high levels of intuition and understanding, as theoretical aspects were discussed in relation to the videos of their children at play.
- Working in this way also often gave us the opportunity to provide meaningful praise and reassurance to practitioners, especially those who might be anxious (about risk, looking silly, doing something different, changing routines etc.) and reminding them that they are already experts on the children they work with and that many of the things they do instinctively have a scientific and pedagogical basis and are very valuable in a child's day.

All the above aim to build practitioner confidence:

- In themselves and their own physicality
- In their children and their physical capabilities;
- In a curriculum approach that puts children's physical development - and their biological drive for movement and positive sensory experience - at the heart of their pedagogy

*"I See You Too, helped me find confidence in letting go and playing physically; joy and movement are learning experiences for young children."* **Practitioner**

#### **WEEK'S RESIDENCY:**

When one of our Phase 1 settings in Westmorland offered to contribute some funding so that we could return to them, we were very pleased to be able to match fund this and offer them a week's residency. It gave us the opportunity to take things at a slower pace, build our relationships with children and staff and explore the benefits and challenges of working in this way. The biggest challenge was probably for the practitioners in the setting! Having us around all week was very different to having us there for just 3 mornings spread over time - and despite our best intentions, it probably was more disruptive for them than we would have wanted. However, we were grateful for their forbearance and for enabling some wonderful sustained movement and sensory play to take place, indoors and out, and with children and babies of all ages. As well as all the 'in the moment' chats and reflections with staff during the week, having the opportunity to provide a specific CPD session whilst we were there, allowed us to build on practitioner curiosity about theoretical aspects of physical development, PSED and creativity. Their high levels of self reflection meant they were able to relate these to themselves, as well as the children. We are very grateful to Ramsden Robins in Barrow, for their enthusiasm, their patience and 'for going with the flow'!

### 3.2 ARTIST/PRACTITIONER PLAY DATES:

We were very keen to bring artists and practitioners together to have some time for themselves – so that practitioners could explore their own creative physicality alongside specialist dance and music artists. Just as importantly, artists could also benefit from early years practitioners and their specialist knowledge of child development and the realities of working with young children and their families. Sadly, due to the constraints of time and current shortages of staff in EY settings we were only able to hold one of the days and only one (brave) EY practitioner was able to join us. The day was still a valuable sharing of practice and the artists who attended felt the session had improved their understanding of early physical development and the ways in which this could inform their future practice.

*“I was fascinated by watching the most wonderful moments of synchronisation between you and the children in the films, you can’t script or predict these but with enough attention and care, there will be these magic moments and it creates a kind of feedback loop together in the moment.”*

**Musician: Morecambe Play Date for Artists and Practitioners**



### 3.3 FAMILY SESSIONS:

**We were also keen to hold 2 sessions involving families – one in each local authority.**

#### **Cumberland - Workington**

This took place in one of the participating settings in Workington and was included in a family ‘stay and play’ session, where the opportunity to join in with floor-based movement play with us and the two vocalists/musicians was offered as part of continuous provision. Parents and family members were able to observe their children playing with us and some took up the invitation to join us down on the floor! We were also able to ‘seize the moment’ to talk to some parents about the importance of sensory and physical development and to explain the value of the vestibular and proprioceptive play that they saw their children engaging in. We were grateful to the setting for allowing us to explore the possibilities of working in this way with families and for creating extra space for movement play within the class room on that day.

## Lancashire – Morecambe

We were pleased to be able to hold the Lancashire Family Sessions at More Music in Morecambe as we knew it was a venue that local families/childminders/settings were already familiar with and they kindly provided us with a large hall and the equipment necessary to offer a new creative space in which to hold the sessions, in the morning and the afternoon. The ratio of children to adults was perfect and the session, although mostly interactive, also included a short performance piece – ‘Pitter Patter Ping Pom’ - created especially for the event. See (3.5 Reflecting Together) for comments from participants

### 3.4 MUSICIANS:

The participation of vocalists/musicians enhanced the quality and breadth of what we were able to offer in the family sessions, and built on the work we were able to do together in regular sessions within the settings.

Although we experimented with instruments early on in the sessions, it was the opportunity to use voice as an instrument that offered the most potential for innovation. Mirroring and creating musical sounds with children during their movement play, brought another dimension to the experience and was particularly valuable for children who were non-verbal or reluctant speakers, as well as offering alternatives for children who used a limited range of sounds when playing (e.g. squealing). It also offered children the opportunity to experiment with rhythm and vigorous activity e.g. make-shift drumming sessions as well as ‘beatbox’ style co-creation, matched with small movements.

*“It’s been great to work together on this project, we have tried things we wouldn’t have tried on our own, enabling us to take risks to experiment with together. Like using collective vocals as a live and responsive soundtrack - felt really bold and was a great success, I would happily programme the event we created through this R&D.”* **Ben McCabe Early Years Lead at More Music**

As the artists made themselves available as ‘playmates’ rather than leaders of music/singing sessions, (valuable though these are) the potential was limitless in terms of outcomes. As always in this project, it demanded a degree of patience ‘and holding one’s nerve’ whilst playing, resisting the urge to lead but enhancing their ability to observe and ‘tune into’ what they saw and heard children doing, ready to mirror, to join in and, where appropriate, to develop and co-create the musical exploration along with the child.

### 3.5 REFLECTING TOGETHER:

For us, there was a very positive impact in changing the organisation of our visits to enable joint reflection with practitioners, immediately after the session with children. (1.4 The Visits) Obviously things were clearer in our minds so soon after the experience, but the biggest impact was being able to reflect together with managers/practitioners whilst looking at the footage. There are inevitably huge time constraints for settings so we were very grateful when they were able to do this and hope that the managers/practitioners also felt it was worth the time commitment. Feedback from these sessions was very positive and allowed us to co-plan with practitioners for following visits and pick up on practitioner interests and CPD needs.

As in phase one of the project, we also focussed as much as possible on ‘in the moment’ reflection and input with practitioners, offering insights, theory and positive reinforcement of what they were seeing and experiencing during the sessions. Once again, feedback suggests that this was often an unexpected and well-received bonus of the project.

We were also able to offer CPD sessions to specific settings and some were able to take this up. This gave us the opportunity to look closely at the footage with the whole team, providing not just the opportunity for reinforcing the learning on aspects of Physical and Sensory Development – but also to celebrate the creativity and capabilities of their children – and joyfully wallow in their brilliance!

We also offered a session in each local authority where we brought the settings together to share and reflect on each other's work and broaden the discussion. We are grateful to More Music for providing space for us to do this for the Morecambe settings. An added bonus was the provision of a huge cinema style screen which amplified the quality of children's play to movie standards!

### **Project evaluation and sharing**

A range of opportunities were built into the project for practitioners, families and others to offer evaluation. As expected, early evaluations reflected the uncertainty and anxiety induced by the open-ended nature of the project, but these turned into much more positive and satisfied comments by the end of their involvement. These reflected on their feelings of excitement and freedom to experiment and to learn and to try new things, as well as the chance to step back and observe other professionals rather than always having to take the lead. They appreciated being given praise for what they were already doing and the confidence that they were getting it right - but also encouragement to keep improving together with the backing they felt they needed in order to be able to do more of it. It was noted that leaders/headteachers who were not experienced or qualified in EYFS, were given useful new insights which helped put into place new and better individualised activities for all children, and particularly those with SEND. Practitioners were noticing children playing in new ways and were becoming more skilled at observing children's movement play. Most importantly, children were asking for more dance and movement play sessions!

#### *Comments from practitioners included:*

*"I think our biggest surprise was the engagement of the children who wouldn't normally engage with an adult. There was obviously something about your sessions that sparked them slightly more."*

*"Seeing joy on the children's faces - you could see it was a different sense of awe and wonder for the children."*

We were also pleased to be visited by EY advisors and consultants from both Cumberland and Westmorland, who were able to see the project in action. They reflected on ways they felt the project had benefitted children and practitioners, in that it offered **'a different way of working, a different way of thinking perhaps, about the children. A different way of meeting their needs and interacting with them'**.

As well as being curious about aspects of the approach (e.g. the increased focus on non-verbal communication; mirroring and following children's lead; adults joining children in movement play on the floor etc), their comments noted how the work has not just supported children's physical development, but also their risk taking, their communication and connection, imagination and creativity, whilst also strongly addressing issues of emotional regulation, neuro diversity and helping staff support children living with trauma. They believe this fits well with family support too, now that there are fewer services available and by targeting it in the early years, they reflected this kind of project could help families before things reach crisis point.

This was reinforced by a parent who attended one of the family sessions.

*"I loved the way the leaders mirrored the children's sounds, movements and energy. This kept the children engaged and the session flowed so naturally. It made me think about how important attunement is in attachment theory, and how these sessions could support parent and child attachment and mental health."*

## Reflecting on the family sessions:

### An arts organisation perspective

“It has been wonderful collaborating with Primed for Life on the development and delivery of I See You Too. Their genuine child-led approach has led to some beautiful moments of connection with families in our community and has enabled our musicians to further develop their skills, whilst collaborating with other artists.” [More Music Director - Marianne Barraclough](#)

[Parents/carers /family members and childminders](#) commented very positively on the family sessions held within school and at More Music, despite most admitting they hadn't been sure what to expect. Comments included:

*“I didn't understand what it was, I know what I thought it might be, responding creatively in our family group to a creative task maybe . . . i had no idea just how much space the children would be given to do what they want to do, express in their own way, and be really creative with that.”*

*“A fun, simple and relaxed session to connect with your little ones as they invite you into their world of play.”*

*“The simplicity of the session and the freedom for us all to just be with each other was amazing. The fact that talking was limited meant the children led the session and it really made me reflect on how much we tell children how to play instead of following their lead.”*

*“As a parent I realised how safe it was as a space for us all to be, that enabled me to step back from supervising and behaviour-managing in the parent role. I could actually become really present with my children and their creative play. I enjoyed witnessing them play with other artists/adults/experienced playmates in the space - it was really moving watching my young son respond, express and move creatively with adults he had only just met and happily taking up space and attention he was granted. I have not seen this from him in this way before, there were some completely original movements and interactions I have seen both my children do here this afternoon that they have not explored before. This is a different kind of 'creativity', rather than making a prescribed craft activity....more of a place to 'show up' and be present and create something organic.”*

*“My relationship to my own children has shifted in this held, child-led and truly creative space. Without saying anything, I was given permission to just be and see my children, rather than 'parent' all the time. This has moved me more than I can say.”*

We, too, were also often moved by our experiences with the children and the special people who parent, care and educate them. It is a particular privilege for us to work in creative spaces that are also places of relationship and to see and experience the ways that such a creative space can shift the relational experience, impacting positively on our relationships with each other, with our environment and with ourselves.

## Wider sharing:

We have been pleased to talk about the project at various events, symposia and conferences and have plans to continue sharing learning and practice wherever and whenever possible! These have included:

- **Baby Boo Symposium** - [Exploring materials through movement](#)
- **Magic Acorns** – Presenting national organisation webinar to wide, interdisciplinary audience
- **Workington EYFS Cluster** – sharing with staff in Reception/ Nursery sector
- **Lancashire CC EY team** – planned webinar to share information and outcomes of the project

## Resource materials created for sharing:

- **Two reports:** [SUMMER - AUTUMN 2023](#) and AUTUMN 2024 - AUTUMN 2025:
- **Autumn 2025 - The Film:** 'I SEE YOU TOO'
- **Magic Moments training videos** - collection of filmed short interactions with children from the project, for educational purposes.

## I SEE YOU TOO: The Film

Funding from Arts Council England enabled us to employ the services of a film maker who was also an accomplished dance artist with experience of working with early years children. Her insights and expertise were invaluable in producing an artistic piece of work that reflected the aims and principles of the project. Using some film clips from our time in settings and her own filming of the two family days, she incorporated our descriptions of the work into a short and powerful interpretation of the project.

**PLEASE NOTE: In line with our agreement with participants in the project, we are not sharing the project film on social media or websites. We are happy to share directly with you, Please contact us if you would like to see the film.**

## 4.0 CHALLENGES:

### 4.1 What's it all about?

As in Phase One, a major challenge at the outset for settings seems to be the unknown quality of the project and anxiety about what will be involved. We were able to offset this a little in Workington with an introductory meeting for the 3 settings to come together, along with key staff from Cumberland EY Services to hear about the main aims of the project and how we work. However, the open-endedness of our way of working (and the individuality of each setting) meant that there was still some uncertainty until we actually began working with them all.

### 4.2 Yes but...

We were aware that some settings were very keen to explore their interest in movement and sensory play further but, particularly in the school based settings, the pressures for more 'academic' and traditional approaches (and a busy schedule) impacted negatively on their opportunities to build on the work, outside of our visits. We understand this and appreciate their willingness to participate and explore possibilities with us. We also hope that their new insights into the importance of PD and sensory movement play gives them confidence in advocating for their children's bodies as well as their brains – and for the importance of movement play within education.

### Despite our best intentions...

We know that for some settings we probably were a disruption to their routines and rituals for organisation and time tabling, so we really appreciate their forbearance in working with us.

### And for us?

Although some of our challenges outlined in the first 'I SEE YOU' report still remain, this time they were slightly reduced in that we knew much more about what to expect – whilst also reinforcing the perspective that you never really know exactly how it will work out!

## 5.0 CONCLUSION:

### Perhaps we should leave the conclusion to our participants ...

*'It has given me the confidence to fight for the basics our young children need. Movement and play are essential to develop and grow and it feels like other aspects of the curriculum get prioritised.'* **Practitioner**

*"I have never been in a space where children have been so seen. As I was reflecting on this at the end of the piece, when we were all lying down on duvets listening to the singing and one of the W singers sang the words 'I see you and you see me' - it was truly moving. I just filled up with emotion. I feel like I have just witnessed some of the most beautiful moments in my children's lives, in this last hour."*  
**Parent**

*'Personally, I have loved having you in the classroom. So many courses today are meetings, where you are talked to and then expected to get on with it and put it into practice. Where this method allows practitioners and all staff members to observe, participate, join in, ask questions over multiple sessions. So much more engaging and beneficial.'* **EYFS Leader**

*'Physical Development has always been important to us here with us loving the outdoors, but when we are reflecting with Anne and Anna, we recognise that sometimes we weren't valuing the smaller more intimate interactions that practitioners have with children and how the impact of these could really promote sensory and physical development. So the project has given us more confidence to protect times that allow children to develop their wider sensory skills – not just the usual five but also vestibular, proprioception and interoception.'* **Nursery Director**

*"Oh good you're back. Are you staying?"* **Child on seeing us return after a few weeks.**

*"That was the FUN-NEST day ever!"* **Child to parent after the Family Stay and Play session**

**We believe the aims for this project have been met and we know this work makes a difference. We want to continue to help parents and practitioners have the confidence to participate in their children's movement play and advocate for what our children - and their brains and bodies - truly need.**

## 5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS:

Although we are fully aware of the challenges facing settings during these difficult and uncertain times, we believe this project has shown us that there is still a strong motivation to meet our children 'where they are

at'; to understand and respond to their needs; and to advocate for their rights to a full-bodied, playful childhood, that will equip them, not just for academic learning but also for good physical and mental health throughout their lives. We therefore feel the following recommendations are relevant and offer a range of ways in which practitioners could be supported to do their best for children and families - as well as improve their own health and wellbeing at the same time.

#### **Work in Settings:**

- Open up the project to more settings in different locations
- Target selected settings to maximise impact
- Revisit settings wishing to advance their knowledge and increase opportunities for physical and sensory development
- Support leaders and practitioners to appreciate the broader importance of sensory play beyond the visual/aural/tactile focus of sensory rooms e.g. highlighting knowledge and understanding of senses such as interoception, proprioception and the vestibular system and how to promote their development within continuous provision, indoors and out.

#### **Work with Local authorities and Support Organisations:**

- Continue to develop an 'in the moment' approach to CPD in Physical Development and creativity for practitioners and teachers, with long term input targeted at the particular needs of the setting and including a range of creative specialists.
- CPD for local advisory/support teams to increase awareness of the importance of Physical Development with regard to the following: PSED and CCL ; all other curriculum areas; behaviour and self regulation; SEND; Virtual Schools supporting children with trauma etc
- CPD for Primary School staff in KS1C 2 to raise awareness and understanding of why poor physical and sensory development may be impacting on children's later learning and attainment as well as their behaviour and emotional health. Also relevant to KS 3 C 4.
- Working with musicians and other arts specialists to explore creativity, improvisation, mirroring and agentic play in the early years, within continuous provision, as well as specific sessions.

#### **Work with families:**

- Supporting Stay and Play sessions in settings with a focus on involving family members in creative physical activity and sensory play
- Using video with children and families in settings, linking with 'in the moment' information and awareness raising for parents.
- Providing inclusive movement play sessions in family hubs and /or CPD for staff and users.
- Using the wealth of images created by the project to produce an easy-read booklet highlighting the essentials of physical development - for a wide audience of practitioners and parents etc.
- Facilitating creative 'stay and play' type sessions with local arts specialists in schools, early years settings, family centres etc.

#### **Wider audience:**

- Continued sharing and promotion of the projects at local, national and international levels through conferences, webinars, articles etc.

- Create a network across the 3 authorities highlighting good practice and advocacy for children's physical development and creativity.
- Develop the family event 'Pitter Patter Ping Pom' to become a touring offer for regional family arts events and festivals.

## 5.2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND THANKS:

### A big thank you to:

**All the staff, children and families we worked with.** Thank you for your generosity and patience and willingness to give it a try.

**Extra special thanks to all staff s children at Ramsden Robins** for making it possible for us to spend the week with them.

**The Early Years Lead advisors in Cumberland and Lancashire** without whose partnership, funding and faith in us this project would never have developed:

**Katie Clarke** - Strategic Lead Early Years, Cumberland Council.

**Elisabeth Bramwell** - Early Years Advisor C area SENCO, Cumberland Council.

**Annette Shepherd** - Early Years Quality Improvement Team Leader, Lancashire County Council.

**Music specialists Ben McCabe, Bryony Jarman Pinto, and Jill Walmsley** for their bravery, curiosity, creativity and willingness to go with the flow.

**All the families who attended the family sessions** for getting down on the floor with us and trusting the moment.

**Marianne Barraclough & Ben McCabe at More Music** for their generous and invaluable partnership.

**Louise Hesketh Curious Minds Programme Manager Networks & Partnerships** for additional support.

**Extra special thanks to Ellen Turner** for capturing the family sessions and creating a wonderful film reflecting our approach and the values we hold; with skill, sensitivity and an excellent eye for the artistry of early years children and amplifying those magic moments of awe and wonder.

**PLEASE NOTE: In line with our agreement with participants in the project, we are not sharing the project film on social media or websites. We are happy to share directly with you, please do contact us if you would like to see the film or for any further information**

**All photos by Anne O'Connor with settings permission.**

## REFERENCES and Further Reading

### Weblinks:

For more information on Agentic Play and the New Zealand ECEC curriculum see [Te Whāriki Online](#) and [Nurturing agentic children in early childhood education: thinking about children's agency with a childhood studies lens. | He kupu](#)

[Developing self-regulation through physical play — Siren Films](#)

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Lindon, J (1999) *Too Safe for Their Own Good* (National Children's Bureau) Bilton, H

(2005) *Learning Outdoors* (David Fulton)

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Connell, G. C McCarthy, C. 2013 *A Moving Child is a Learning Child: How the Body Teaches the Brain to Think (Birth to Age 7)* (Free Spirit Professional)

Ephgrave, A. (2018) *Planning in the Moment with Young Children: A Practical Guide for Early Years Practitioners and Parents* (David Fulton)