Movement appears to be a key component of musical development, because it promotes active bodily involvement that stimulates young children to make connections between sound, movement, and intention (Nijs & Bremmer, 2019). Movement is evident in children’s musical behaviors from infancy (Malloch, 1999; Trevarthen, 2002). Krueger (2009) highlighted that “we listen to music with our muscles” (p. 98), to support the connection of the enactive model of perceiving and experiencing music. As Gruhn (2019) noted, we can regard musical thinking as an internalized form of movement.

Referring to the spontaneous musical play of young children from different countries, cultures, and civilizations (e.g., India, Malaysia, China, and Latin America), Lew and Campbell (2005) concluded that children in all global societies participate spontaneously in playful musical activities that allow them to move, entertain, socialize, and express themselves. Music is a part of young children’s culture and “playing with music” is a natural form of expression for them (Yi, 2021, p. 20). Thus, singing, “rhythmicking” (engaging in some manner of rhythmic behavior), jumping, and dancing have been revealed as fundamental to musical engagement (Campbell, 2010) for them. Furthermore, the incorporation of movement has been identified in the singing games or play-songs that children in early childhood use in their social interaction and musical engagement (Trehub & Trainor, 1998). In many cases, music and play happen simultaneously as mutual actions in early childhood, and musical play can provide an important context for musical growth and understanding (Smith, 2008).

Gordon (2003), Taggart (2000), and Valerio et al., (1998) also stressed that playing with music is essential in the early years of music engagement; therefore, playful activities incorporating movement in creative ways provide rich and powerful music engagement opportunities for young children by acknowledging their natural disposition to move to music.

Movement activities can be a powerful tool to increase students’ motivation and interest to participate in music, enhance their musical understanding, and promote valuable musical experiences. Many scholars have emphasized the need to integrate movement into music classrooms at the preschool and early elementary (kindergarten through second grade) school levels (Achilles, 1991; Cohen, 1999; Sims, 1985; Young, 1982) due to its critical role in musical comprehension. According to the concept of embodied music cognition (Leman, 2016), meaningful music-making is the outcome of active bodily involvement, during which individuals associate music patterns with movement patterns and construct a “cognitive architecture” that allows them to apprehend musical meaning (Leman & Nijs, 2015). Systematic kinesthetic experiences allow young children to understand musical
concepts (Leman, 2016; Shiobara, 1994; Young, 1982), support rhythm ability (Conway, 2003; Gordon, 2003; Howard et al., 2013), and promote creativity (Gilbert, 1992; Lloyd, 1998; Pica, 2004). Significant research findings also firmly emphasize the relationship between movement and musical enjoyment among young children (Carlson, 1983; Dunn, 1999; Taebel, 1974; Young, 1982). Pica (2004) argued that movement activities can be non-competitive, child-centered forms of participation in a music classroom that facilitate exploration, discovery, and enjoyment.

Kinesthetic experience is connected to awareness of the body and self-regulation (Bremmer, 2015), and therefore, current studies encourage educators to advocate music and movement as a tool to support individual agency and active participation inside and outside the classroom (Sutela et al., 2021; Williams, 2018). Accordingly, Custodero (2010) stated that bodily experience in music-learning settings enable young children to become responsible for the meaning-making process themselves and, as such, to become autonomous learners. In an interview, Professor Cynthia Taggart (faculty member and current president of The Gordon Institute for Music Learning) stated,

Movement and music learning are inseparable, particularly in early childhood settings. Children internalize musical styles by experiencing them through movement first. Children will be more expressive musically if they have explored the entire range of their bodies’ movements and can call on their movement vocabularies to express themselves through movement. (Cynthia Taggart, personal communication, January 20, 2022)

The use of movement in music education was established at the beginning of the 20th century by Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (1930) pioneering method, Eurhythmics, in which students were encouraged to hear, feel, and express music with their whole being. Music education leaders after Dalcroze, such as Orff, Kodály, and Gordon, argued for the importance of using movement in musical development, especially in the early stages of the learning process (Choksy et al., 1986), to understand the body’s role in music learning. For example, the Orff approach combines music, movement, and speech, while Kodály observed that Hungarian children strengthened their rhythmic competency through learning traditional dances and other movements. Similarly, Gordon emphasized the importance of movement for rhythmic comprehension and underlined that performing rhythm should begin from large movements that engage an individual’s whole body (Gordon, 2003). In a typical music education classroom, movement is implemented in a variety of ways, from large indiscrete muscular movements (movements that do not conform to beat or pulse) to beat-synchronized movements, such as clapping, tapping, finger-tipping, and marching. However, regardless of music educators’ choice in each case, “movement has been associated with music learning by many people for more than one hundred years and has been lauded as an agent for facilitating learning in general” (Jacobi, 2019, p. 38).

Taking into consideration that appropriate and meaningful movement activities enable children in early childhood to participate in music-making with their body and mind, and thus, generate explicit musical representational knowledge for them (Retra, 2010), examples and considerations surrounding the use of movement activities in preschool music classes are shared in this study. The inspiration to integrate playful movement activities with my preschool students was sparked by Gordon’s (2003) assertions that acquiring a movement vocabulary is fundamental to fostering beat competency and developing stylistic performance, and that young children teach music to themselves when emerged in music play.

### Designing Activities Based on Laban’s Movement Framework

Although not a music educator, Rudolf von Laban developed a movement framework that influenced music education. Laban (1971) argued that the structure of music can be expressed through movement and is inseparably linked to the perception and understanding of musical concepts. Therefore, kinesthetic experience in various qualities of “effort” could provide individuals with a movement vocabulary that helps them experience music with comprehension. For this, Laban (1971) proposed four “effort elements”: time, weight, space, and flow, as follows:

1. Time refers to how sustained or quick the movement is.
2. Weight refers to how strong or gentle the movement of the body is.
3. Space refers to the direction of movement.
4. Flow refers to how free or bound the bodily tension is.

He argued that none of these elements exist in isolation; rather, they appear on a continuum with interaction and in combination. Grace Nash (1974) and Edwin Gordon (1997) strongly advocated the use of Laban’s movement framework. Nash (1974) argued that the combination of Laban’s effort elements contributes to the development of musicality, and Gordon emphasized the use of these elements for rhythmic development.

With the aim of increasing movement experiences for preschool students, I present the movement...
activities that I incorporated and that have been shown to work effectively in my classroom. The activities also can be effective with early elementary school students. Drawing from Laban’s movement framework, I propose practical suggestions that: (a) enhance body awareness and support expressive movement performance, (b) encourage the use of flow and nonlocomotor movement, and (c) develop locomotor movement with stylistic interpretation. The recommended activities aim “to help students experience music in overt, ‘whole body’ ways and, as a result, increase their musical understanding and develop their beat competency.” (Cynthia Taggart, personal communication, January 20, 2022)

Practical Suggestions

Through my experience of teaching music for almost 25 years, I have realized that a general instruction to preschool children to “move,” without any other condition or description, is often insufficient to “unlock” and activate their bodies. Therefore, the movement activities employed in the teaching-learning process should be well-organized and structured to enhance children’s movement vocabularies. My music classes usually have 15 to 20 students; therefore, to ensure a positive and engaging learning environment for them and help them regulate themselves and participate smoothly in the activities, I establish routines (Byo & Sims, 2015) and clearly communicate what I expect from them.

For example, I sing or chant the guidelines for activities (e.g., crafting a melodic/rhythmic guideline song/chant using the resting tone or based on the meter of the song that will follow), and I use different songs for distributing and collecting musical props. I create a circular seating arrangement on the floor for my students, where each one has a spot to settle, and I develop communication cues (e.g., using signs with my hands, such as clapping my hands together for making a circle, facial expressions, flash cards or puppets) so that they are aware of how to use the space in the room (e.g., for getting into groups of pairs, I show them two puppets that come closer and form a group, and for bigger groups, I have different colors of circles on the floor carpet that students could move into and work as a group). As Koops (2018) stressed, the careful design of engaging activities, the smooth transition between them (e.g., avoid silence between activities since it allows other off-task behaviors, and alternatively use for example a chant to bridge two activities) and the practice of mindfulness can support positive behaviors and avoid meltdowns. A safe, welcoming, and engaging learning environment is crucial for the immersion of students in kinesthetic experiences.

Use of Space and Materials

The ideal setting for incorporating movement activities is a pleasant music room with a soft floor for sitting, a spacious and uncluttered footprint, and little or no furniture to encumber movement. Playful musical activities in a safe environment provide an appropriate learning context for students to experiment with their bodies and achieve better quality of movement. I usually use props for my activities, which I organize in cloth bags and place conveniently in the room for quick access without interrupting the flow of activities. Using props can be extremely helpful in encouraging preschool children to move; bean bags, colorful scarves, ribbons, soft balls, scrunchy bands, and hula-hoops can become means of expression for young children. Encouragements such as, “Dance with your scarf as you listen to the melody,” “Balance your pillow on your head,” or “Make a shape using your ribbon,” can inspire even the shyest children who lack the confidence to experiment with their bodies. All these ideas could be introduced to the students via songs or chants performed by the teacher or through recorded music.

In my music class, I use all these musical stimuli to promote movement; however, in this article, I choose to share activities (student favorites) based on four melodies and a chant originating from traditional songs, to which my students are enculturated. These musical examples can expand repertoire choice for music educators who are unfamiliar with Greek and Cypriot folk repertoire. They include Greek and Cypriot songs (some of them my own arrangements) in mixed meters and a variety of modes. As Cameron et al. (2015) noted, using complex polyrhythmic music for movement might be challenging for individuals who are acculturated in western musical tradition. The melodies have words, but I mainly use them without words to avoid the need to connect the movement to the specific meaning of the text.

In this way, I foster students’ deeper and more complex listening (Kratus, 2017) abilities and promote the embodiment of the perceived concepts through movement (Bremmer, 2015). The use of songs without words was advocated by Gordon (2003) as well. The musical elements incorporated in the repertoire inspired me to design activities that provide rich bodily experience. For this age level I mainly focus on meter and rhythm, melodic contour, form, dynamics, and the expressive qualities of music.

Following, within the next sections of the article, I provide for each aspect of movement a general framework with a variety of different practical suggestions that I use in my teaching for preschool students and could be used as a pool of ideas for music educators to construct activities that suit their teaching setting. However, to foster a better understanding I also incorporate five specific
example activities (see Example Activities: I, II, III, IV & V) that I authentically use with my students in my culture, aiming to present in more detail example teaching process. My experience has shown that it is crucial for teachers to move with students and model several ways of using the body. The greater the variety of movements performed by the teacher, the farther the students stretch their movements.

**Body Awareness and Expressive Movement Performance (See Example Activity I)**

Body awareness is a preliminary goal for children in early childhood, thus I focus initially on the use of body parts in different ways to support a more complex movement repertoire that integrates the whole body in the kinesthetic praxis at a later stage. As Pica (2004) and Jacobi (2019) argued, body and space awareness constitute the core of music lessons that aim to develop movement concepts. Through body awareness activities, we encourage the awakening of the body, and students begin to explore the use of the body to move in space and time, using different weights and tensions. In the activities, I sometimes provide my students a specific element to listen for and move to, or I allow them to feel the music and “align” their movement accordingly (Nijs & Bremmer, 2019). In this case, each student might move to various elements of music. An introductory activity that my students enjoy is when I sing a welcome song and encourage each one to create a unique movement or statue/shape when their name is called.

I sometimes begin a session with warm-up movement activities based on real life scenarios or imaginative stories that I create and narrate. They enjoy when I tell them to imagine that we are in a long tunnel trying to get to the other side of an island and escape from pirates. We stand in a line, one after the other, and I narrate. We move ourselves according to the changing conditions of the tunnel; if the tunnel becomes narrow, our bodies shrink to fit in, or if it is full of sand, we use our weight to traverse the thick environment, or if it is full of water, we step on our toes and hold our heads high. Our movements become curvy or straight based on the different descriptions and the quality of the imaginary space in which we are moving. Stories like this offer opportunities for different types of movement and can frame an authentic movement experience that facilitates bodily awareness, while fostering imagination and creativity.

Another idea is to encourage students to imagine walking on different floor textures, such as sticky, slippery, or sandy. I extensively use play-acting—moving like different animals, such as elephants (heavy strong movement), cats (delicate smooth movement), and kangaroos (hopping on both feet), or enacting famous cartoon characters. As Cheung (2010) argued, movement activities should allow young children to use bodily actions to communicate an image, idea, or feeling. Therefore, imaginary scenarios that frame movement can support body awareness and heighten students’ creativity.

Another favorite activity that promotes body awareness is painting using different body parts. I encourage students to suggest body parts that they want to involve in painting, such as the feet, head, hips, and shoulders. I usually ask them to propose different colors and styles for their painting to encourage their contribution and engagement in the activity (Sutela et al., 2021; Williams, 2018) and to elicit different qualities of movement. So, the painting might turn out to be, for instance, a smooth, red painting process using feet, or a splashy, bright green one using hips. I have had students who proposed using their nose or their toes to paint in a circular movement. For this activity, I usually sing any melody or song, using neutral syllables, varying its tempo when I want to stretch their attention to follow the music while painting. I might perform the melody staccato or legato, accented or unaccented, and sometimes incorporate dynamics in my singing to facilitate a variety of movement qualities from my students. As I move and model for my students, I also observe and pick up on movement ideas that they demonstrate, as a way of complimenting and reinforcing new ways of movement that go beyond imitation.

In the example activity I, that supports body awareness and awaken body parts in diverse ways, students pretend to be balloons that gradually inflate and grow bigger, or spin quickly in space while deflating (see Example Activity I). Students explore the use of time (slow to fast), space (from lower to upper) and weight in this activity. When I sing the melody using different expressive qualities, students alter their movement accordingly.

**Use of Flow and Nonlocomotor Movement (See Example Activity II & III)**

Gordon (2003) advocated the importance of incorporating continuous flow movement to facilitate rhythmic development (Laban, 1971). The use of continuous free-flowing movement encourages children to act and engage while listening to music and promotes concentration. Flow movement encourages embodied interaction with music (Leman, 2007), facilitating the coordination of the body as well as musical thinking (musical cognition); thus, at a preliminary stage, I encourage students to release the tension from their bodies and move freely and continuously, integrating all the body parts. The concept of flow eventually is associated with the invisible process of controlling one’s breath while singing, which is the experience of flow transference.
To encourage flow movement for shy and unresponsive students, I use props such as scarves, ribbons, or flashlights. Moving scarves or ribbons, or creating light effects using flashlights, facilitates the simultaneous flow movement of body. In addition, I sometimes suggest imaginary scenarios to embody, such as being a feather or jelly. Flow movement allows children to experience balance and offers awareness of the dimension of time in relation to space. As Gordon (2003) stated, the association between time and space appears to be the foundation for rhythmic competency. Tempo instabilities might be the result of an individual’s inability to place their weight regularly over time (Gordon, 2003).

Flow offers an enjoyable kinesthetic experience and cultivates student imagination. In example activity II (see Example Activity II), students incorporate flow movements using different body parts (e.g., head, hands, shoulders) by providing an imaginary embodiment of butterflies. I also incorporate “move and freeze” into that activity.

The contribution of nonlocomotor movement (nonlocomotor movements refer to movements of certain body parts, or even the whole body, without causing the body to travel) to rhythmic ability was revealed in the studies of Blesedell (1991), Croom (1998), and High (1987). In light of this, I encourage students to use pulsations in body parts corresponding to the felt pulse of the music, along with continuous flow movement. I employ this after I observe that my students have acquired flow movement. I also use bouncing, swaying, and twisting to help students experiencing pulse. For my students to experience the different nonlocomotor and locomotor movements that I consider important, I act as a model; I demonstrate the movements and involve them in activities so that students experience the different movements by themselves. However, I also share pictures of those movements in realistic contexts (e.g., athletes running, or jumping).

I encourage my students to twist their bodies to the pulse of a melody or hold hands in pairs and move back and forth to the pulse. Experiencing pulse in groups using a scrunchy band or hula hoops is also effective and enjoyable. Large side-to-side (swaying) or up-and-down movements using the feet also offer opportunities to maintain a steady beat. Using an object like a soft ball and moving it to pulse while seated in a circle, is another good idea for strengthening their understanding of pulse.

What I suggest with example activity III (see Example Activity III) is that large, nonlocomotor movements—individually, in pairs, and in groups—encourage coordination and contrast, which are associated with the development of rhythm and the understanding of expressive qualities of music. In this activity, students experience large, intense nonlocomotor movements in the strong beats of the 7/8 meter of the melody and smaller movements in the other two beats, incorporating Laban’s elements of space, time, and weight. Getting psychically synchronized as a group to experience the pulse of this mixed meter helps them understand the pulse through their bodies and eventually “be” the beat (Nijs & Bremmer, 2019, p. 93).

**Locomotor Movement With Stylistic Interpretation (See Example Activity IV)**

Locomotor movement activities (locomotor refers to body movements that move the body from one place to another) also provide an opportunity for students to be immersed in music. For this, I begin with a move–freeze activity, in which students are encouraged to move around in different ways (e.g., walk, gallop, hop) filling the space of the classroom, while I sing a song. When the singing stops, the students must freeze. Again, the use of scarves or ribbons may support this activity, providing the means for more focused movement. Thus, students can make straight or curvy pathways (based on melodic contour), take large or small steps (based on note length), make strong or gentle movements (based on expressive qualities), and or make quick or slow movements (based on tempo). In this way, musical concepts are interpreted successfully through movement. The students’ active involvement in receiving, choosing, and interpreting information also enhances their creativity Cheung (2010). As reported by Byo and Sims (2015), such activities also help preschool children develop self-regulation and self-efficacy skills to establish a positive learning environment.

To facilitate active musical engagement and bodily experience for my students, I use walking, running, jumping, hopping, and galloping with my stories as a way to nurture the development of rhythm. The realistic pictures I have in the room, demonstrating locomotor movements, support my students’ movement vocabulary. Dalcroze’s Eurythmics uses walking as the point of departure in rhythmic training, and Orff Schulwerk includes walking, stamping, tapping, and skipping to develop an accurate sense of rhythmic pulse (Jacobi, 2019). Based on the style of the song or audio used in the lesson, I incorporate the aspects of weight, time, and space in the locomotor movement activities to facilitate awareness of the stylistic representation of music through movement, and enhance students’ musicality (Gordon, 2003). Thus, for example, walking could either demonstrate weight, strength, and tension in every step, or could be light, tip-toeing, and elegant. In this way, the element of pulse is reflected in the interpretation of music. Rhythmic patterns also could be represented in movement patterns (movement schemas), incorporating body parts such as the shoulders, head, hips, hands, and legs.
For example, in activity IV (see Example Activity IV), starting from the flow experience, students are encouraged to incorporate jumping (use of weight) in the strong beat of the 7/8-meter chant and then improvise movement patterns using other locomotor movements such as walking, hopping, leaping, or stomping to show the pulse. In this way young children experience the 7/8-meter through locomotor movements.

**Locomotor and Nonlocomotor Movements (See Example Activity V)**

Students show creativity when asked to present a rhythmic pattern incorporating a gesture using a combination of locomotor and nonlocomotor movements. The change of meter in a melody could be experienced through different types of movement, such as marching in a duple meter, or swaying in a triple meter. Moreover, the structure of music could be understood through the presentation of simple dances, with all participants in the class. For example, the ABA form of a melody could be experienced through a circle dance where children move clockwise in part A, and in and out of the circle in part B.

For example, in activity V (see Example Activity V), I sing a traditional Greek melody that has different meters in phrase A and B (duple and triple), and I encourage students to either sway side to side in the first phrase and dance with a waltz-like step in the second. Students in groups also are encouraged to create a dance for the melody. They enjoy this task since it enables them to decide suitable dance-steps for the melody. This activity incorporates movement in individual and shared spaces. Sometimes, I provide my students the opportunity to work in groups and decide suitable dance-steps for music. Students enjoy the social and collaborative aspects of such activities.

**Closing Remarks**

Movement is an essential component of music-making. The perception and understanding of the entire spectrum of music passes through the human body, which unquestionably participates in every musical experience. “Playing with music,” in the sense of engaging in an active embodied experience, is the most natural form of expression for young children (Yi, 2021, p. 20), and as Cynthia Taggart stressed, “young children must learn to coordinate their bodies through movement exploration as to learn gradually to coordinate that movement with their breathing, singing, and chanting.” (C. Taggart, personal communication, January 20, 2022)

Many music education approaches (Dalcroze’s *Eurhythmics*, Kodály, Orff Schulwerk, and Gordon’s *Music Learning Theory*) embrace and incorporate the use of body in the teaching-learning procedure. Laban (1971) argued that the architecture of music can be expressed and experienced through movement, and his effort elements are associated with the perception and understanding of musical concepts. Meanwhile, Nash (1974) and Gordon (2003) emphasized incorporating musical movement activities into Laban’s framework to facilitate the perception of rhythm and encourage expressive music performance. “Building on the relationships between bodily experiences and musical meaning, music educators have the opportunity to design ‘movement-based’ music activities that stimulate children to make sense of music.” (Nijs & Bremmer, 2019, p. 90) Designing and implementing movement activities in early childhood musical contexts support the development of an essential movement vocabulary that enhances musical comprehension. Moreover, the establishment of well-organized movement activities from the early years, derived from Laban’s movement elements, could function as a foundation for performing music expressively, and provide the necessary background for enjoying the musical experience (Conway, 2003).

**Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**ORCID iD**

Maria Papazachariou-Christoforou  
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6256-5451

**Supplemental Material**

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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**Author Biography**

Maria Papazachariou-Christoforou is an Assistant Professor of Music Education and Pedagogy at European University Cyprus and the LifeLong Music Engagement Research Unit Director at Research Centre SoScieAtH. She taught general music in Cyprus public schools and served as the Coordinator of public Early Childhood and Elementary Music Education in Cyprus. Her research focuses on early childhood and elementary general music, informal music learning, and children’s musical identities.