



The Creative Skills Podcast

Episode 7: Development Patterns and Creative Movement with Skye Reynolds (Part 1 & 2)

Transcript

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Part 1 Transcript

Heather Armstrong (00:09):

Welcome to episode seven of Starcatchers Creative Skills Online. I'm Heather Armstrong and on this podcast, we're hosting a series of chats with the amazing artists who usually deliver our training for the early years workforce in Scotland.

This month I spoke to Skye Reynolds, she's a dance artist, performance maker and movement practitioner. Skye has been delivering creative movement sessions as part of our programme for seven years and her workshops are always a brilliant balance between theory and practice.

And actually, when we recorded this episode, we had so much to chat about that we've actually split it into two. This week, in part one, you'll hear us talk about some of the theory around how children develop and learn through movement. And next week, in part two, we'll chat about how you can put some of that knowledge into practice.

Hi Skye, how you doing?

Skye Reynolds (00:54):

Hi, Heather. I'm doing fine today. How are you?

Heather Armstrong (00:57):

Good! I'm excited to talk to you. So, I'm just going to kick off the same way I do with everybody and just to give people a little bit of context, tell us a wee bit about your practice in early years.

Skye Reynolds (01:07):

My early years practice began when I was working for Dance Base and I was teaching outreach for three to five-year-olds and then, out of that, Dance Base invited me to teach a class for zero to three.

And it was a really complex age range, and I hadn't encountered that breadth of difference before. So, I really started to explore and experiment with my own dance practice. And I started to find some approaches that really underpinned what I was doing. And I think it was at that time I became really interested in the overlaps between movement and dance and early years. And I started to explore more deeply some of the somatic training around that - that I've continued to develop.

Around that time that I started working for Imagine as a dance artist. And then I met Starcatchers and I began working with you and sharing some of this approach with classes for kids ranging from zero to five and running workshops. And then my practice has become more consolidated through training and experiences with you since then.

Heather Armstrong (02:11):

Nice. Now obviously we're recording a podcast, so people can't see us, but what I'd love to do today is try and talk you through a little bit - to give people an idea of what happens within a session. And it's particularly related to the developmental movement patterns that I know you've done a lot of research into. I think they're really useful for early years practitioners in terms of understanding how the body develops and moves. And then we'll talk a little bit later about how we can then use those ideas in practice.

So, if everybody can just, people who are listening at home, if you can imagine we're in a room and right now we're looking at a baby who's laying on its back.

Skye Reynolds (02:52):

Some of this work that I'm going to share with you comes from Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, who started an organization called Body-Mind Centering, and she - through her own explorations as a dancer and as an occupational therapist - she really started to discover the value and the importance of really integrating the developmental movement systems of the body. And that's the patterns that we're going to talk about, but it also expands to the skeletal system, muscles, reflexes.

I really invite people like Heather said to sort of listen with your whole body, even if you're not going to lie on the floor and try it out.

But you know, a baby's been in a womb. So, it's been in a very supportive fluid field and dark environment, and there are different movement patterns that are starting to emerge in the womb. The baby's spine is shaped in a C curve. So, we don't yet have the curve in the back of our neck and our lower back. So, if you were to feel that now you could feel that that curve moves towards the front of the body and the curves in the back of the head, the pelvis and the chest - they move back. So, you know, that C curve, that moving back curve, is our original shape. And that's, that's what the shape we're in when we come out of the womb,

Heather Armstrong (04:07):

Is that why they come at all froggy? Because they're all just curled up?

Skye Reynolds (04:11):

Yeah! Well, that's also to do with the kind of a tone. So, in the womb, there's a pattern, which is a really early embryological pattern that's really about condensing and expanding as the whole body's moving. A mother will feel that more as the baby grows and it starts to expand against the wall of the womb, the uterus.

So, when the baby's born, it's in this C shape with this quite strong tone and it hasn't encountered - the baby hasn't encountered gravity yet because it's been in a fluid system. And once we encounter gravity it has a weight to it. So, at the beginning, a baby will be organizing its body, in relation to the weight of gravity. And that, that will slowly - gravity, the weight of gravity - will slowly help the baby to extend out and to open its limbs up.

And that's a process of that will come from being, being put on the back, lying on the tummy and learning how to organize the head, to bring the head away from the floor and coming through the sides of the body.

And this is this early stage, if you're lying on your back right now, you might want to just explore bringing your hands towards your mouth, bringing your feet in. Everything at this point is really connected to your navel. So, if you imagine you're like almost like a starfish that's radiating out from the center and the way you move your arms and your legs, it's all connected to the center of the body. And so there can be this opening and closing pattern. A lot of movement at this stage is going to be happening through the mouth and the head. And you'll notice that if you swallow and you generate some saliva, can you feel how your digestive system starts to connect? And that's the front of the body.

So, there's this early connection through the whole midline and to the tail. And this is going to be the beginnings of your rolling pattern. So, the baby through turning the head and this pattern of reaching from the head down to the tail, and then eventually back up from the tail to the head, is going to start to eventually roll over. And I think usually this will often happen when the baby's on its tummy and it will roll to the back, but it will also happen the back to the front.

And eventually a baby will coordinate this pattern in a sequential way. So, there'll be more control and the baby will be able to initiate it. Because at first, for any of you who have seen a baby roll over, they just kind of like roll over don't then? And then they sort of get stuck.

Heather Armstrong (06:36):

Yeah. So, for their babies at home, right now, who are on their backs, will they just try leading by the head, trying to rollover in a flop. And they'll see won't they?

Skye Reynolds (06:46):

Yeah, yeah, exactly. And it's really to kind of feel this sense of your spine, the center of the body. And, you know, this works also being connected with animal movement, which I've always found really useful. So, while it's a spinal pattern from the head to the tail or the tail to the head, it's also a fish movement because fish don't have arms and legs and they, they navigate through the sea using their spines. So, when a baby has rolled over it, while it's developing that pattern, it's also developing an underlying pattern, which is the one lying on its tummy, where it will start to be coming away from the floor.

Also you'll notice if you're doing it right now, if anyone's rolled over onto their tummy to get to get up from the floor, to bring your head up, you'll have your arms in front of you. So, on either side of you, but sort of slightly in front of your head, you have to kind of push don't you?

So, there's this, there's this reaching away from the floor and this pushing away from the floor and the arms are going to be working sort of symmetrically. So, the arms are working together in this position and the legs are free to move and they'll be moving together as well. And this is an underlying pattern to the spinal movement, but it's also the second pattern that I'm going to tell you about, and it's called homologous pattern, but it's really about the upper body and the lower body. So, a baby is organized its central axis, and its sort of attention in that space. So often a baby's sort of lying on its back, it's looking around with its eyes, it's rolled over, it's looking around and now it's starting to push away and there's an intention to sort of go up and out.

And this pattern it's sort of like an amphibian. So, you can imagine a tadpole with its little fins and then its tail or a frog. So, this when a child gets a little bit older, it can come into this kind of frog-jumping pattern - legs, and arms. The arms are doing something more or less symmetrical and so are the legs. So, it's really a differentiation between the upper and the lower.

So, the spinal pattern is a baby sort of working out the front and the back of the body and here it's working out the upper and the lower.

Heather Armstrong (08:53):

Okay. So, we're on our tummies, we've started using our hands at the same time and our legs at the same time is that when baby starts moving?

Skye Reynolds (09:01):

Yeah. And I think this rolling over is this, you know, it's a pattern of locomotion. So, the baby's rolled in space. It's now coming up and again, underneath it, it's going to be integrating some different patterns that are important for the next stage of movement. So,

some of those will be, as the baby's on its tummy it might have already started to push itself back. You know it might want to go forward: "I want to go forward. I want to get that red ball" because now there's agency in the hands. A baby can often pick up one thing with one hand or pass things from hands. [The baby] wants to go across the floor. It's going backwards. The push reflex is strong.

And also sometimes there's a locomotion - the baby might be turning around itself - but what is eventually going to happen is it's going to belly crawl, right? And this is where we start to see a pattern, the homolateral pattern, which is the right side and the left side. So, the right arm and the right leg are going in the same direction and the left arm and the left leg are going in the same direction. And Heather, what do you know if you just try that now, what does that feel like?

Heather Armstrong (10:01):

I'm going to be honest folks at home, it feels a little bit weird!

Skye Reynolds (10:06):

It looks great. So, you know, if you start to try this one at home it's really a reptilian pattern. It's always a useful way to remember that it's sort of a lizard crawling. It's a belly creeping and it, you know, it can go obviously backwards and forwards, but underlying this, this movement are patterns like reaching and pulling along the floor, pushing through the floor.

So, it's very active and the forces that a baby is using at this time are helping to also kind of shape spirals in the bone, tone through the body. The pelvic bones are not yet fully fused, so there's quite a lot of movement there - more than we have. And, you know, the spiral coming up through the thighbone, into the hip is being... The forces going through that are being engaged and transferred as a baby's pushing through its feet in this stage of creeping on the belly, and sort of commando crawling.

So where have we gone? We've gone from - we've kind of rolled. We've gone through the front and the back of the spine through rolling we've come onto our front. So, we're able to push through the arms and lift the upper body, and the legs are able to do something as well, something else symmetrical. And then we've started to do our homolateral pattern. So, we've got right left, right left. And eventually we'll get into this crawling pattern, which is when the right and the left leg move together forwards or backwards and the left and the right move together forwards or backwards. And that will happen at some speed. Won't it?

Heather Armstrong (11:41):

Yeah. Yes. So again, for people who are being babies at home, you'll hopefully find that as you start controlling around it's a lot easier than trying to drag yourself along on the belly and things like that.

Skye Reynolds (11:52):

During this phase children will have already started to pull themselves up into, into cruising. So, there'll be often sort of spiraling using the spinal pattern again, to come up, there'll be on two feet to push. And then there'll be doing the sideways cruising, which is back to your homolateral, and then eventually into the walking. So, it's really those four patterns that we were looking at there: from being on the back, coming out of the womb, those early stages up to walking.

Heather Armstrong (12:22):

The reason I'm really encouraging people to do this is because I know in the workshops, before we get so much feedback, saying about how it really helps people understand what very young children go through.

It's that thing - it's one thing to watch it, but it's a whole other thing to like actually put your body through it and go, wow, you're working so hard. Or, and also, wow what can we see from lying on our bellies? And all that kind of thing.

I'm glad you mentioned about that thing about the fact that not all babies or young children go through all these stages because that comes up a lot in sessions as well, doesn't it? People say "Oh well, my baby never crawled, they went straight from bum shuffling to walking". But it can be quite beneficial for children even once they are walking to revisit some of these movements can't it?

Skye Reynolds (13:07):

That's the kind of approach I've taken. And actually, there's a lot of different things going on neurologically here that are helping to sort of orient and organize the body in space. And as the head is turning and shifting its position in space. It's good, we're getting feedback. Our bodies are getting feedback through our senses and our brain as to where we are in space. Some children don't spend a lot of time on their tummies - that's just not part of their, of their home environment. So it's useful for us when we're working in nurseries to allow children that time, because neurologically the suggestion is that if patterns aren't fully integrated before you move on to the next one, then it's not as easy for the next one to be integrated.

I think these patterns of movement whilst they really support a child's organization in an efficient and way of learning and developing through movement. They also remind us

about what's going on at their level, because as practitioners they encourage us to come down, come down to the ground, be close to the floor, be at the same eye-level as the children you're working with. And beginning to sort of see. And that also develops a kind of relationship and communication that creates a different type of interaction.

Heather Armstrong (14:31):

You were saying earlier on about babies' hands and how they start to organize themselves. And as movements start to get more conscious, then it starts to kind of like build that agency in them. To me, that's really important as well, isn't it? I think sometimes we think about dance or creative movement as very much a kind of like physical thing, but actually it's really tied to self-expression and voice as well, isn't it? Particularly when you're working with wee ones who don't have vocabulary.

Skye Reynolds (14:57):

You know, there's a lot in what you just said, because we no longer have the big divide between the mind and the body. I think we all know now we're past that. And obviously for small children and babies their communication is physical. They rely on their bodies for survival. So, this idea of expression and having that expression supported and encouraged is a really big part of building a foundation of confidence that's going to help children grow from that place as they come higher up into the world.

Areas of this kind of development that interest me as well is that the skin is the biggest organ in the body. And it develops out of the same embryological layer as our nervous system and our brain.

Heather Armstrong (15:48):

Oh, wow!

Skye Reynolds (15:48):

So, it's the kind of outer layer, which is called the ectoderm, which kind of wraps around at the embryological stage. I mean, if you were just to touch your hand now and just give the back of your hand a little stroke, you're immediately receiving information about that touch and that's what's happening as we move. And as we grow, because movement is there's a feedback system through the surface, and that's what a baby is learning from.

And that will include the touch of the mother or the carers, the way they're held, the way they're placed. And also, the environment that a child has to learn and the stimulation that's available.

Heather Armstrong (16:27):

Yep. Now, I'm going to take you back a little bit, because you mentioned a couple of other systems earlier. If we can understand what's happening in wee ones' bodies, then we can relate to them so much better. So, you told me that we don't just have five senses anymore. What's that about?

Skye Reynolds (16:47):

I know! It's amazing to think that we only thought we had five senses. Technically they say we have a vestibular sense and proprioceptive sense, and there's also one called interoception. So actually, that's sort of eight senses.

Heather Armstrong (17:03):

Oh, wow.

Skye Reynolds (17:03):

And they're actually just kind of like fancy words for things that we do all the time. But the vestibular system - the apparatus of that is in our inner ear. And it's really the way that we record balance and orientation in space and even movement through space - so acceleration. And there are different little semicircular canals and things called otoliths that as they move around with fluid and hair - small, tiny hairs - they register, they register where we are in space.

Heather Armstrong (17:35):

That'll tell us whether we're spinning or whether we're upside down?

Skye Reynolds (17:38):

Exactly. So, if you're tipping your head forward, now there's going to be some, information being processed there that will tell you "I'm moving forward." If you kind of tilt to the side, or if you turn - you make those things faster with acceleration - you're going to get more information.

So this system is also connected with our proprioceptive system, which tells us kind of where our body parts are in space and how they are, where they are in relation to each other. So, if you wanted to just close your eyes and - don't cheat!

Heather Armstrong (18:14):

No, no, I'm not!

Skye Reynolds (18:14):

And please feel free to join us - anyone who's listening. Just close your eyes. And immediately you have a sense of where you're sitting and where the floor is, if your feet are on the floor, and how your spine is. And so, there's already a kind of increased sense of

the body, a sense of feeling your body with the eyes closed. But if you take your finger in front of you and hold it roughly in front of where you think your nose is - and I'm doing this with my index finger. And then bring your index finger towards the tip of your nose and see where you end up.

Heather Armstrong (18:50):

Oh, yes, I did it Skye!

Skye Reynolds (18:53):

Oh, I didn't. I ended up at my right nostril!

Heather Armstrong (18:59):

Well, someone needs to work on their proprioception!

Skye Reynolds (18:59):

I'll be doing that after we get off the podcast! So, you know, that gives you a sense of these things that we take for granted. You know, eyes closed in the dark. And they are senses that we can develop and practice and train, and they support each other, those two senses.

Skye Reynolds (19:19):

And lastly, the intrceptive sense is about our inner body. So, organs, breathing, having a sense of heart rate. Having a sense of how this internal system feels.

Heather Armstrong (19:32):

The really interesting thing about that was, well a couple of interesting things. One is when we think about experiences for wee ones - and whether that's about movement, or whether that's about visual art or music or whatever, or just being outside - we talk a lot about sensory experiences, but I think as long as you're only thinking about those five senses, you can be limited in terms of how you're presenting opportunities for wee ones.

It also helps explain why wee ones do some things they do, but also what they *need* to do. The spinning is the one that I keep coming back to and being upside down, which I know also links into schemas. But it really starts to make sense, doesn't it? It all starts to fit in. And it means that when you are thinking about experiences for wee ones you can start to build in these ideas.

Skye Reynolds (20:20):

Yeah. The thought that comes to mind is that these things are biological urges. So, you know, the vestibular system, this sense of balance and orientation spinning going upside down. These are senses that want to develop. They're actually nerves, cranial nerves that help us to kind of become humans and to survive and to organize ourselves in space. So,

the more we can understand and integrate those opportunities, the more of a kind of full experienced child we we're going to have who's going to feel confident about their movement and confident about the opportunities that they're presented with.

And I think that's kind of what our job is - to really not have obstacles in our way or expand our learning so that we can create spaces where children can grow. You know we don't want to underestimate how much touch is useful as a kind of movement pattern because we respond to touch, and we actually need to touch things to know where our bodies are in space. So that's also proprioceptive feedback. And this is also part of the way we handle children and the way that they're supported physically, as they grow - and understanding a little bit more about what's happening in the body can help us to give the appropriate feedback.

So, when we know they're getting to that point where they want to push through their feet to propel forwards we can provide possibly a little bit of stimulation and support around those areas to help them get where they want to go. Because children will also emotionally respond to how, how their needs are met, won't they? So, if they're not able to have agency to progress in when they're at the development stage they need to pass through that can also create some kind of emotional upset and frustration that can be confusing for parents and carers as well.

When we talked about the interoception - I think we are seeing this more now because of mindfulness and this sense of children being asked to bring attention to their breath, notice how they feel the calming. A lot of practitioners and carers will be working with quiet time and having rest. And the instinctive and intuitive way that we respond to that need in children who need to what we call self-regulate.

On a physical sense, it's really about having that time to just be with yourself and not with the constant stimulation of the outside world. There's really interesting information coming out through Dr. Stephen Porges about the polyvagal theory which is about our vagus nerve. And it's very much connected to our nervous system, the autonomic nervous system, which has our sympathetic nervous system and our parasympathetic nervous system.

So, bear with me a moment! It's connected in a very simple way with our flight and fight responses.

Heather Armstrong (23:09):

Okay.

Skye Reynolds (23:09):

What's exciting about the polyvagal theory is the suggestion that there's another pathway out of stress. So there's this idea that we have mobilization, which is activation, and we might have a stress response and there's immobilization when we might not really know what to do, we just kind of freeze.

And one way to move through this state is called the social engagement system which is really about engaging socially. So, it's about eye-contact, facial expression. And it's very much about the inside of that sort of down from the face, neck to the heart. So, it's about breathing and it's about things like humming and singing.

It's actually really beneficial for our health and wellbeing to engage socially with each other. And that promotes a sense of calm and confidence. So, you know, that's something also we might want to think about with children that if they're getting over-activated or overstimulated, or even if they're getting very under-activated. There's something very valuable to be learned from this idea that we can engage and sing together. Singing is one of the ways to come back into a sense of communication and regulation - it comes back to the body. It's the vagus nerve and the vagus nerve is a cranial nerve. And what it stimulates is facial expressions and also, it's to do with the sound of the voice. So it really all comes back to our system that we have within us, a system that is designed to help us regulate ourselves.

Maybe we should do another podcast where we just hum!

Heather Armstrong (24:46):

Thank you so much Skye. I think thinking about it in this way, and particularly the way that you share your practice as well, really helps me think - this isn't about "dance" - air quotes - and it's actually much more about development and linking it into agency and emotion and all that kind of thing as well. So, thank you so much for that!

Skye Reynolds (25:11):

Heather, it's been an absolute pleasure!

Catherine Wilson (25:19):

Thank you so much for listening. Now that you're an expert in developmental patterns, tune in next week for part two, where Heather and Skye talk about how to put these ideas into practice.

Just a wee reminder that if you let us know what you think about creative skills online, you could win £50 worth of arts supplies for your setting. If you had to <http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/creativeskillsonline>, you can fill in a short survey. It only takes five minutes and it really helps us out.

The Creative Skills podcast was hosted by Heather Armstrong and our guest was Skye Reynolds. To find out more about Skye's work, head to skyereynolds.com.

For resources that tie into Skye's episodes go to <http://www.starcatchers.org.uk/episode7>. You'll find videos, Wee Inspirations ideas cards and our reflective practice worksheet that ties into the ideas shared today. You can also sign up for our live online chat with Skye there. You can also find all of our past episodes and their resources free to access a time that works for you.

Our intro music is "Road Building" composed by Abigail Sinar and performed by the RSNO for "Hup" in 2014.

The Creative Skills Podcast is part of Starcatchers Creative Skills programme: training for the ELC workforce in Scotland, funded by the Scottish government. To Find out more head to <http://www.starcatchers.org.uk> and click on "Training and Development".

Part 2 Transcript

Heather Armstrong (00:17):

Welcome to the second half of episode, seven of Starcatchers' Creative Skills Online. I'm Heather Armstrong. On this podcast, we're hosting a series of chats with the amazing artists who usually deliver our training for the early years workforce in Scotland.

This month I spoke to Skye Reynolds, she's a dance artist, performance maker, and a movement practitioner. If you've listened to the first part of our conversation you've already learned about how children develop and learn through movement - and if you haven't already listened to that, I'd really recommend you do - because this episode is all about that wealth of knowledge and how Skye uses it in really practical ways with wee ones.

So, in the last episode we spoke a bit about developmental movement patterns. When you're thinking about creative movement experiences for wee ones, you actually use that knowledge in really practical ways, don't you?

Skye Reynolds (01:03):

It's very practical to play and move close to the floor when you're with wee ones. And that doesn't mean spending the entire time on the floor, but it does definitely mean spending some of the time on the floor. And I have quite a few different ways of doing that but one way that I played with for many years when I was running classes [is] I would suggest an environment. So, it was usually a jungle environment or a sort of seaside environment because kids have such vivid imaginations. And children's books and stories and songs are often talking about animals and nature.

And, depending on the energy in the room - if I walk into a room with kids and they're all really tired, I'm probably not going to suggest that we all get up and start jumping up and down. But if I walk into a room with kids and they're all jumping up and down, I'm probably not going to suggest that we all get down on the floor immediately. So, depending on how we begin, eventually let's say we're on the beach or we're going to the sea - we will end up under the waves or swimming, and we will come down to be say, sea snakes. And we will be crawling and sliding along the floor and bumping into each other and reversing and rolling around. And then we will start to kind of make our way up to having a look around and coming more into the crawling and sliding. And I might even sort of describe that as like an, you know, an underwater visit or a fish that's scuttling across the bottom of the floor or a crab creature.

And this will often be a place where I might ask children to suggest ideas and effectively what I'm wanting to do is encourage them to spend time on the tummy sliding and seeing each other rolling around and gradually coming up into a crawling position.

And then from there we might create little tunnels. We're under the sea, we might be a coral reef. We're sliding under each other's bodies. If there are parents in the room often the children will want to ride on the backs of the [adults]. So, you have sort of carrying creatures.

And then we will make our way up onto our feet where we might kind of emerge from having been a sea creature into being a child at the beach and we'll play and jump and dive in the waves. And once, once we've kind of explored those lower levels it's easy to come up and go back down. So, it becomes part of our movement language.

Heather Armstrong (03:36):

I love that this idea of like using a narrative to take very young children through those movements in a way that kind of makes sense to them. I've seen when you work with wee ones you do this beautiful thing where you ask for suggestions, you will turn around and say, "Oh! Look at Kayleigh's crab. Isn't it wonderful!" - to me [that] is less about getting a kind of perfect performance, but it's about trying to encourage certain types of movement? Is that right?

Skye Reynolds (04:05):

I think it's probably a combination. Partly it's because the landscape of movement for children is just so varied and there's no one way of doing anything. I think copying is [also] obviously a big way that kids learn, but they all had their own way of interpreting a creature or an animal. And there's usually so many variations. I could never have thought of all of those things.

So, it's really fun to be able to invite a child to share what they've come up with. And for everyone else to have a go at copying. And then often what I find is other children will want to share what they've created and for everyone to copy and try their idea. And obviously some children are really shy and hopefully, as I think a lot of practitioners do, we'll have sort of sensed who those children are so that they're not going to be put on the spot.

But I think something that I found that really helped me was to say what I was wanting to share with the kids and do it at the same time. So, I very rarely stand still and deliver a bunch of information. If I'm going to be a crab, I'm becoming a crab and so are they. So, I think when we're all in that moment of becoming, being asked to share or look at what someone's doing, becomes less about a preparation of an idea, and it's more just catching

the moment and then the next moment, um, and it doesn't become something that's, um, fixed. It's much more of a fluid experience, I think.

Heather Armstrong (05:40):

It's so important for wee ones to have that kind of visual example, isn't it? And also, I talk about this a lot, don't ask children to do something you're not happy doing yourself! Because they'll pick up on it – like, “Well, she's not hopping like a bunny” or, you know, “He's no pretending to be a gorilla”.

I know from my background in drama, and I'm sure it is the same with movement, if you do have participants who are a bit shy and not so sure about exploring their bodies, the best way to get them over that is to be a really confident example, isn't it? Just being able to say “Let's just give it a go”, you know?

And I think it's a really lovely idea that you bring to your sessions, rather than about trying to get everybody to do everything exactly the same time and uniformity and things. It's really refreshing for me to kind of get away from that and get some more kind of exploratory - and to me - fun, part of movement.

Skye Reynolds (06:54):

Goal driven activities can create a real sense of strain because there's a product that we're aiming for, or a movement that we *have* to achieve. And it's not that we can't end up there, but how we learn how to arrive there is what is the pleasurable part of the journey. And I think with early years, that my interest is in being in that place of pleasure and joy, which so many and the majority probably of the children I've worked with are in.

And of course there are children who find it much more difficult to express themselves and to relax. And we don't always know why that is. I think I have had a couple of children in my classes who, who don't immediately respond and sometimes they don't do anything actually.

I've had one experience where a child, his mother brought him to the dance space class for six months before he did anything. And she said they were working out whether he had some other things that were going on with his development at the time, but he liked to be able to watch things and then to be able to do them. She said that was kind of how he was interacting. And one day he just turned up at class and he just did the entire class. And I did have a bit of a routine. We were all just astounded because he hadn't done anything, he had been watching. So, he had been doing something he'd be very engaged in that way and he'd wanted to be there, but he hadn't sort of physically participated in a way that we had recognized. And then suddenly he just did the whole lot.

And I feel like I've, on several occasions, wanted to encourage nursery practitioners and parents that it's absolutely fine with me for their children to just watch and just to be there and I can see that those children are taking in a lot. And if, if I have the opportunity which I have on, on several occasions to keep working with them or see them in repeated classes, you can see that they start to interact in their own way, which might look different.

And sometimes girls are put in these ridiculous dresses and they're not allowed to get them dirty and they're only tiny, but they can't really move in them. They're already at a slight disadvantage because they've got a beautiful party dress on that they can't roll around and they're not supposed to roll around in it. So, they might find another way to interact eventually. And sometimes that's through the use of a prop - a scarf or a ribbon just patience.

Heather Armstrong (09:38):

You use scarves quite a lot, don't you?

Skye Reynolds (09:40):

Scarves are so lovely because, you know, for a start, I've never seen anyone pick up a scarf and not move. Whether they start playing, making a shape with the scarf, or waving it around. You'd be trying to get them to wave their arm in a circle for the last half an hour, and suddenly they might start running and throwing!

So, I used them because they they're going to reach some of the children that might not feel so comfortable moving without a prop. But there's also different textures and different ways of communicating. I use them because they're light and they're really easy to use for even babies. Children with additional learning needs often like to kind of hold onto them.

They're also, sensorily, they create a different type of feel for the skin, which kind of brings us into touch, which we haven't really talked a lot about, but it's also really important for movement.

Heather Armstrong (10:39):

You're absolutely right that touch is really important for movement, but it can feel probably more awkward between adults than it does between children. But you play little games with scarves, don't you - that kind of help with that touch and that closeness?

Skye Reynolds (10:54):

Sometimes I'll do a little sort of "cleaning" activity where we'll just sort of "clean" ourselves down with the scarf and we'll explore different words. So that might be for children who are using language, or I will just sort of say the word and demonstrate soft touch or tapping. And I think it's a good way of introducing appropriate touch and also this idea that you can feel yourself that.

If you hold your hand you're touching and being touched by your own self. And sometimes the kids can get very excited, but often they really like to "clean" their friends, or we put scarves on our heads sometimes and we'll swap scarves.

Heather Armstrong (11:49):

Oh! [That's] so clever because there's two things happening there. So, there's a lack of self-consciousness and the scarves are really encouraging wee ones to explore all the different ways their bodies can move, but when they work together, it can also be used to support connection and cooperation. It's a really nurturing atmosphere you're creating, isn't it?

Skye Reynolds (12:06):

Yeah. The way I'm sort of approaching the work on a creative movement level is basically creating experiences where the kids can move their bodies without a sense of judgment or censorship. They're able to express how they feel as well when they're doing that. And we'll do little exercises, depending on the age of the children, obviously, but we'll do things like throwing the scarf up and perhaps catching it on your arm or your back, or sometimes on your foot.

So, we're getting a sense of how we organise our bodies in different ways and how we balance in different ways. Then what do we want to do with that? So how do you in your own body as an individual, want to move and play and express yourself and what can you do?

I was working with some children last year in a project called "Little Big Dance". I was mentoring one of the artists and we came in this workshop. We came up with this idea of "I Can" which the children immediately just grabbed hold off. And really, we were just playing games in circles and in lines where they would show us what they could do, and then they would invite another child to come in and do what they could do and then the other child, and they just loved it. And we actually saw children who weren't participating when we started to do that activity, they wanted to join in. They wanted to show us what they could do.

Heather Armstrong (13:37):

What I really love about that is, first of all, it's that kind of strength-based thing, isn't it? So, it's starting with what you can do, which is just beautiful at every level. But also, it's that idea of if we were working with like pre-verbal children or children whose language is just emerging - this idea of saying "I can" and then letting them show you physically, what they can do, is [giving them] an amazing sense of their own agency and their ability to communicate.

Skye Reynolds (14:13):

I know. I completely agree with you on every level there, Heather. When we're going to interact with someone it makes much more sense to begin at a place where we can do something, rather than trying to do something that we can't.

What was lovely is some of the children, what they shared with us was very simple - they weren't doing backflips. I think one boy was doing something with his hands and he was so pleased with himself and it was beautiful. And that was the point. It didn't really matter what we're doing, it's that we're sharing what we feel we were comfortable doing. And that, I think, is a place where we can start to build trust and we can start to open up a bit and we can try other things.

I'm really happy when I'm working with children. When we get to that place where I feel like we've somehow communicated on a level where we're happy to be together and to be in a space where it doesn't matter what we're doing. And we're just showing ourselves to each other, in whatever form that takes. And like you said with pre-verbal children, or children who have English as a second language, or children who literacy delay or who are neuro-diverse and have a different engagement with language - it reduces the pressure on, on them. I don't know exactly about this "I can" exercise, but the principles in that are the same.

Heather Armstrong (15:48):

Yeah. You did a little residency for us a few years ago at Hillend Children's Centre, didn't you?

Skye Reynolds (15:56):

Yeah, I was in a residency that was supported by Starcatchers and the Scottish Government. That was probably one of the most significant learning experiences I've had on my journey. It was over a six month period and I was pretty much going into the nursery once a week. And it was also a nursery that decided to have their, pretty much all of their staff trained in the Creative Skills programme. So, there was this lovely sense of a creative shift or a creative opening that was happening whilst I was there that really supported what I brought in, in the work I was doing there, which was very special. And what was new for me was that it was an integrated nursery, and they had a room that was for children who had been diagnosed as autistic. And there was quite a broad spectrum of diagnoses in those children.

There were some highlights - there was, as you know, Heather, there was this wonderful moment where I was able to connect with a young autistic girl who was called [redacted]¹. And discovering through working with her - which was very unexpected to me and to my

¹ *We have removed children's names to protect their identity*

colleagues in the nursery, and her carers, cause I hadn't worked a lot with autistic children before - was just discovering a new sense of communication, which was really about touch and weight and a completely non-verbal communication that she immediately responded to. And in such a way that I discovered that this young five-year-old had the physical skills of a trained dancer and definitely a contact improvisation dancer - someone who had a lot of experience and confidence with moving. And we were moving around the room together.

I mean this is a girl who, at the point that I met her, was non-verbal, she was five and she didn't make much eye contact with her carers. And she had certain activities that she liked to repeat a lot. And suddenly we discovered that she's a dancer and that she had an incredible sense of her vestibular and her proprioception and she watched things a lot. She would watch people moving. So, she was absorbing and stimulating. I don't know enough about it, but she was taking this information into her body in a way that she was able to express and express herself very articulately.

And then we started to introduce this type of work in that room. So, we brought in physio balls, we started to bring in touch and contact between the nursery practitioners and the kids with the children being on the, on the practitioner's knees and rocking, taking weight, lifting, finding safe and accessible ways for people who are not necessarily experienced in this type of work to, to engage with.

We brought a jungle gym into the room. So, we had sort of some different types of activities that were going on for the kids, able to stimulate their movement skills in different ways. And what was so lovely was that the staff embraced this work because they could see that it was working. And we all did it and different staff members would come in.

[Some of] it was as simple as we taking our shoes off. Sometimes in settings, children and staff, keep their shoes on all the time. So, we would have a space, we [would] clear the space, we take our shoes off and we're already connecting in a different way. We'd come down to the floor.

And then of course there was, there was other work that I was able to, to share and explore with some of the children and with the additional needs.

Working in dance and movement, some of these ideas are very normal and instinctive and, and probably most dancers have worked with these ideas before. I think connecting physically - I have obviously done some additional training and I have a certification now in the infant developmental movement education - but I think connecting physically with children [was crucial].

There was one boy who spent most - he's got cerebral palsy - and he spent most of his time in a chair. He literally had to have his head held up and he would come out to the sensory room, but whenever I worked with him, we would be out of the chair and we'd be on the floor. I'd be working in supporting his body and we'd be looking at different ways of moving.

And I think the practitioners hadn't had chance to experience those type of ways of moving before. So, we were able to shift some of the approaches to movement and to encourage new ways of moving with the kids, which I was really happy about it because it feels so natural.

Heather Armstrong (21:03):

Yeah. And a lot of the time, that communication, it's about - there's a bit of leaning together or different kind of pressures of touch and really taking the time to kind of like tune in to what that other body's doing. Isn't it?

Skye Reynolds (21:19):

Yep. When I first met [redacted], she was busy in one of their play sessions and she was putting coins into tins - which is probably the enclosure schema. And I was trying to interact with her cause I didn't really know how I was going to begin a session with her - and she was not interested at all. And then that session ended, and they asked me to do something [as a group] and I suggested that we all go into the carpet area and take our shoes off, and everyone sat down on the floor. And I sat next to her and she wasn't looking at me and I just lent, I just lent a little bit towards her. And I think she might've even moved away. I can't remember. Or she just did nothing.

And then I did it a few more times just to very gently to see if she was going to respond. She started leaning back and that was the beginning of the dance - she wanted to play. She understood immediately what I was suggesting. It was an invitation. And that invitation was extended, as you said, with the pressure, the weight.

That's where the physio balls [came in] and they were fun because the kids could, could play with their own weight. And we would support that if they were rolling around.

But often they would go, sometimes on their hands and knees, and the children would be on their backs or going underneath, or they loved this one with the legs in the air where the children would rock and balance. The kids love being in that position and fit together, pushing feet together, hands together. So definitely, [it was about] this exchange.

There were also children in that room who didn't really like the pressure. There was a couple of kids who were very sensitive to touch and they quite enjoyed the physio ball -

having a sense of control over the physio ball - but they weren't so interested in the other ways of leaning and lifting, or rather, being lifted.

Heather Armstrong (23:22):

And I suppose that's about knowing the children you work with, isn't it? It's about recognising that actually what is going to work for one child isn't necessarily going to work for the other and just being able to tune into that.

Skye Reynolds (23:33):

Yeah. And I think it's definitely an invitation, you know? It's not about doing something *to* a child. It's about being there with the child and seeing where we're going to go – how are we gonna play? What's the game? What's the landscape?

I'm no specialist in autism at all. I'm a very intuitive movement practitioner and I've learned some things from people who know more than I do. But I do think that, on what's called the autistic spectrum, there are children who really respond differently to touch. Apparently, some are very sensitive to touch and don't enjoy it as much as others. With some, that includes that firm pressure but with some others that [same] firm pressure has been a really nice way of having a non-verbal communication.

Heather Armstrong (24:40):

This is reminding me - and it's a kind of half memory, so you need to help me out here - and this wasn't necessarily about children on the autistic spectrum or even additional needs, but I remember talking about children and their need to kind of “shove”. Do you know what I mean? And you were kind of suggesting some things, [to] I think it was a childminder that was at one of our sessions. I can't remember now, but it was something about saying, that it's quite a normal thing for children to want to shove, but sometimes that kind of comes out in shoving other children over.

Skye Reynolds (25:17):

Yeah. I mean, the way I kind of engage with “shoving” or this, kind of, pushing.

Heather Armstrong (25:26):

Pushing, you would call it. Sorry “shove” [laughs]. “Shove” I think is a very Glaswegian word!

Skye Reynolds (25:30):

Yeah. And you know, you do see it and it's like - how are we going to navigate this? I mean, pushing and pulling is also part of the developmental landscape of children. So, pushing and reaching and pulling - they're part of those very early patterns of how we navigate and how we get ourselves across the room, how we get ourselves off from the floor. So, they are integrated into our movement and we need to do them because we push

off the ground every time we take a step. So, it's part of our relationship with gravity as well.

So, I will often encourage a relationship with pushing with the floor or with the wall. So, you know, things like that wheelbarrow game where you take someone's legs and you're constantly having to push into the floor or crawling is pushing or handstands against the wall where kids have got their hands on the floor and they've got their feet on the wall pushing and their centre of gravity is often a bit lower.

It's quite a safe place for them to be on the wall. I usually will demonstrate it first. It's about that anti-gravity thing, when the head goes upside down for adults, sometimes they feel a bit cautious about it, but kids [like] having legs up the wall and hands. I think this idea of giving them movements that are going to involve the whole body. So, it's not about pushing another child over, but it's about using your own weight and pushing yourself through the floor. So, this traveling through the floor as an animal at different speeds or sometimes, you can work with people. You can do things with partners pushing into each other's hands, pushing into the floor.

Heather Armstrong (27:25):

Yeah, you mentioned the feet earlier on. So like sitting on your bottom and putting your feet against each other, and almost cycling against each other?

Skye Reynolds (27:34):

Yeah. And using that as a starting point, perhaps for movement rather than the end of movement. So that the pushing becomes part of stuff that we're doing rather than, rather than the whole thing.

Heather Armstrong (27:48):

Yeah, it just come back into my mind again recently, particularly when I think about kind of lockdown and children - well at the moment they're not at nursery, but by the time this comes out, they will be back at the nursery, thank goodness. But you know, not spending as much time outside anyway because it's Scotland and it's winter. But also, just not having access to the same kind of spaces and the same kind of physical challenges that they might usually.

Skye (28:15):

You know, one way of looking at that is how can the home space be transformed into a jungle gym or an obstacle course? Or how can we get onto the sofa in a different way, or get off the sofa in a different way? Or go under things, or use the wall as a place to do handstands or sliding up and down the wall?

I mean, I've done these things in my own house because I've had to keep myself my own

body stimulated! For people who want to work creatively in the home with kids or in the garden, if it's possible to kind of create pathways or invent a landscape that you have to journey through going over things and under things and around things. Even using each other's bodies - the adult body for lifting, for climbing. This sort of idea of tunnels and puzzles, we're adapting our shape all the time to the environment.

Heather Armstrong (29:15):

What a lovely idea though, to take that - you know, if you've got two kind of fairly small children and one's just shoving the other over all the time - it's like, well, actually let's *use* that need to shove. And actually, let's turn it into a handstand against the wall. Let's turn it into a tunnel. Let's turn it into a game where we're still interacting with our bodies, but it's in a much more positive way to try like burn off some of that energy and some of that very understandable frustration as well.

Skye Reynolds (29:46):

Yeah and maybe there's something about the imagination in there, you know? This might be something that we'll be exploring more in the next year when we start to be coming out of our lockdown spaces and seeing what kind of energies we all have moving forward. But, you know, imagine that you've got, there are balloons all around you and you're pushing all the balloons around. Or you're sending planets into space. Or maybe you're a superhero who's having, an imaginary fight with your enemies or your villains. Or you're having to chop your way through a forest.

So how can we use the imagination -which is so vibrant in children? It's so incredibly vibrant actually, isn't it? That there's this sense of things that are really real.

And for us to be able to learn and share that joy from them - that we had once - these things are still part of the world of the child. The imagination is so alive that the physical interaction with that imagination is just an extension of their body. And you see that in the way they'll express their, their bodies when they're in stories. If you're, physicalising a story and there's a bear suddenly it's real fear. It's a real jump or it's chasing a butterfly, you know?

Heather Armstrong (31:07):

Yeah. I love that as well. It's like, it makes me quite sad - if you ever talk to practitioners, then they say "Well, you know, they're just not interested in stories" or "They can't sit down and listen to a story yet". And I'm like, they don't need to! They don't need to!

And just exploring that idea that yes, actually, what we need to do is instill that love of narrative and instill that love of story. And if we can do that physically while exploring the story, then that's a really positive thing. It's really lovely, isn't it?

Skye Reynolds (31:36):

Yeah, it is. It's reminding me of one of the practitioners at Hillend. She actually originally trained, I think, as a visual art practitioner. And so, she has all these other art skills as well as her nursery practitioner skills.

And she set up this room, this environment with lots of incredible sensory invitations which were kind of hidden away. And the children came into the room and she wanted to take them on *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*. And so, she did.

And as the children got to each stage in the story, there would be an environment that would be revealed from a part of the room. It would be pulled out and that they would encounter whether it was kind of some kind of mud - or even the imagination of mud through some sort of dark fabrics. And it was really, it was, it was a beautiful compliment to the imagination. It doesn't necessarily need to be lots of clever props and art materials, but what she was exploring was how to do exactly what you just said - how to shift the storytelling time into a more embodied practice and [figuring out] what her way of doing that going to be.

I had so much fun as well. And then of course rhythm came into it because there's this repeated challenge isn't there? And the kids, they've got a rhythm - they're being stimulated sensorily, and there's also a listening aspect. And spaces to inhabit an imaginary world. And then also a closing time - so, you know, we've finished now, and we're coming back to nursery.

Heather Armstrong (33:12):

See, this is why we need practitioners to feel confident across lots of different art forms, isn't it? I know, like dancing, creative movement, it's so often thought of just in terms of physical exercise, but it can cut right across the curriculum - so many different areas, eh?

Skye Reynolds (33:26):

They all overlap and intertwine. Whilst we can dig more deeply and take the focus into a particular area that we might be more familiar with, the landscape of story and art and music, they all come into all of our workshops because that's what creativity is. It's not one thing - it's a place of play and anything that's permitted in play is permitted. It can't be taken out. So that's the deal, isn't it? I think when kids are playing and when they're moving, it's lovely to be able to encourage sound-making actually, because it's also part of how the body expresses itself and what sounds the body can make. And that doesn't necessarily just mean verbal sentences.

Heather Armstrong (34:15):

I think that's a really important point though - people tend to think that they're

comfortable with one form of creativity, but not another. So my background is drama [so] I'm super comfortable with kind of narrative and imagination or that kind of thing. I was less comfortable with movement.

Other people will be like: "Oh, I'm really comfortable with music or singing, but I'm not comfortable with visual arts". And I think the reason I would always encourage people to work across art-forms and particularly to try to explore art forms that they're less comfortable with is exactly because of that overlap.

And even just, you know, I will never become a dancer and I will never become a teacher of creative movement. And that's absolutely fine! But just by exploring that creative movement that will enhance other art-forms that I then explore, you know? And it does mean that, particularly if you're working with young children and you're needing to be reactive to what they're interested in, the broader skills that you have, then the better able you are to be able to be responsive.

There's something about creative activity as well. You can't go through a creative process with another human being, without tuning into them. You can't go through that creative process without really paying attention and picking up on their cues. And to me, that's where creativity and bonding really intertwine.

Skye, I could literally talk to you forever! It's always an absolute joy. I'm going to stop it there, but I know you're going to be back because we're going to be doing some work together, which I'm keeping secret at the moment - but all will be revealed soon!

All I've got to say now is thank you so much. And you will be coming back in a few weeks to run some live Zoom sessions as well. So, if people have been listening to this today and they're like "Okay, this is all sounding really interesting, but how does this look like at a practical level" we will be pushing our furniture back and we will be on Zoom and we will be perhaps rolling about as babies together?

Skye Reynolds (36:22):

Oh, I hope so. Bring your baby grows. Or maybe just onesie pyjamas.

Heather Armstrong (36:31):

Just wear something comfortable! Thank you so much Skye. I'll speak to you soon.

Skye Reynolds (36:35):

Thanks so much, Heather. It's been delightful sharing an afternoon with you.

Catherine Wilson (36:42):

Thank you so much for listening. Just a reminder that if you let us know what you think about Creative Skills Online, you could win £50 worth of art supplies for your setting. If you head to <http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/creativeskillsonline>, you can fill out a short survey. It only takes five minutes and it really helps us out.

The Creative Skills podcast was hosted by Heather Armstrong and our guest was Skye Reynolds. To find out more about Skye head to our website at skyreynolds.com.

If you head to www.starcatchers.org.uk/episode7, you'll find even more resources from Skye's episodes: there are videos, Wee Inspirations idea cards and a reflective practice worksheet that ties into the episodes. You can also sign up for a live online chat with Skye, and yes, we will be pushing back the furniture and dancing together!

You can also find all of our past episodes and their resources, all for free, for you to access in your own time.

Our intro music is "Road Building" composed by Abigail Sinar and performed by the RSNO for Hup in 2014.

The Creative Skills podcast as part of Starcatchers Creative Skills programme, training for the ELC workforce in Scotland funded by the Scottish Government to find out more head to <http://www.starcatchers.org.uk> and click on training and development.