

Case Study:

How dance transformed Amira's well-being.

A case study by Liz Clark in collaboration with Pen Green



Liz is Artistic Director of Turned On Its Head www.turnedonitshead.org. She works exclusively in early years and with children with special educational needs through creative movement and dance. She is an experienced trainer in movement and creativity and is currently Associate Artist for [People Dancing](#) with the responsibility for development of a [national network to support artists and practitioners](#) who want to work through dance in Early Years. From April 2020-April 2021 she was Lead Artist for the [Talent 25 research programme](#) into creativity with babies and their families in Leicester. She blogs thoughts and ideas about creativity, interaction and dance at ourcreativeadventure.com.

When I first meet Amira she is very wary of me. As an introduction to the movement sessions I am running at Pen Green I am visiting the nursery setting to meet the children. My aim is to develop a connection with the children who are due to take part in movement sessions. I am sitting on the floor and as I sit, Amira shuffles backwards, away from me. I roll a ball towards her, and she holds it. She looks to an early years practitioner for reassurance and her practitioner checks (with a thumbs up) to see if Amira is OK. A thumbs up back from Amira and I know I'm OK to stay sitting near her. Amira is very still. She looks at me, but over the next few minutes she hardly moves. I don't speak as Amira hasn't initiated any sounds or words herself. I am simply holding the space, present and accepting. Amira and I exchange eye contact. And after a while, staying close to her family worker who has gone to do something else, she moves away. You can see a 40 second clip of our interaction [here](#).



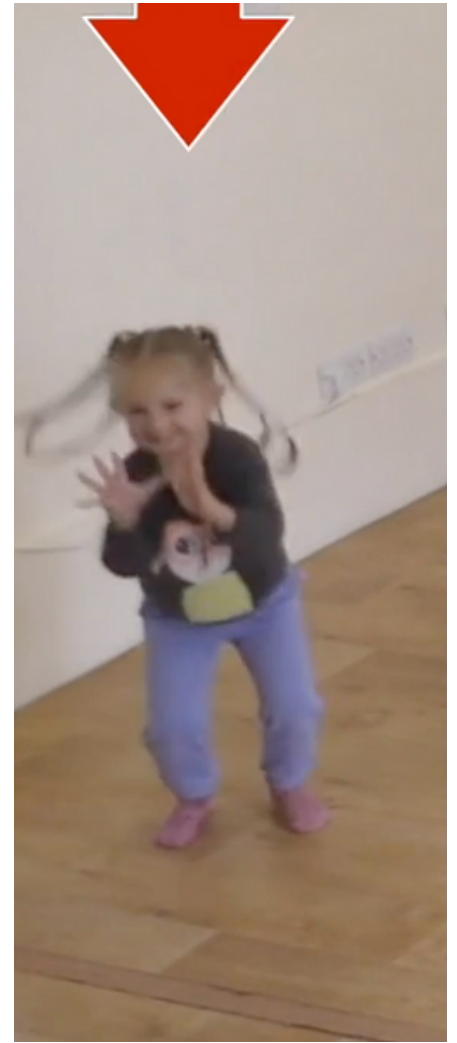
As a dance artist who values what the body both knows and shows I am intrigued by Amira's interaction of stillness. I observe her going to watch another child's play, she is tentative and appears unsure of herself, not joining the play, only looking. I think ahead to the movement sessions I am running at the centre the following week. I am fascinated to see what will happen, as Amira is invited to join. I feel a slight pang of concern for her and myself. Will the invitations I bring, and the permission to move I aim to create, be enticing to her? Will she sit in stillness during the sessions? I am fine with both moving and being still, joining and/or watching but wholly unprepared for what actually happened.

AMIRA DANCED! AND OH BOY DID SHE DANCE!

Her dance was one of jumping joy, exploding from inside of her. She danced somatically – effortlessly appearing at home with how her body feels. You can see a short excerpt, with Amira highlighted with a red arrow, [here](#). In the clip, the group have been invited to explore going through tunnels made by the adult's bodies. But Amira wanted to jump! The urge to do this dance is so strong inside of her. Let's be curious about Amira's dance....

Is she:

- Practising a physical skill?
- Moving purely for pleasure and enjoyment?
- Developing physical knowledge of how high her jumps will take her?
- Responding to a sound or the music?
- Developing kinaesthetic awareness in her body by landing on the floor after each jump?
- Having a thought that outworks in the body?
- Having a thought that could only work in their body (not through words)?
- Responding to something visual?
- Using her movement memory – is jumping her joy everyday?
- Working out her emotions – ridding her body of stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol?
- Exploring a schema – trajectory perhaps? Is she experimenting with direction, force, motion or cause and effect?



We may never know the answer but each day is a new day for creative possibilities and in developing physical literacy we can be prepared to be amazed by our children's movement explorations.

“Wow, I have never seen her so happy and relaxed! Amira continues to surprise.. It's wonderful to see her so happy and confident to use her body in a range of ways.”

Pen Green Practitioner

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I love creating spaces to see what amazing things our bodies will do, how they will interact and what they will create. A child-led approach to moving is fundamentally key to developing a child's physical literacy. These approaches can have truly remarkable and positive changes for children and in the setting as a whole. Amira's relationship with her body grew over the course of the three sessions I did with her. Her delight in moving was evident. In watching the footage of the sessions I can see her face is expressive and alert. She is spontaneous and purposeful, her body relaxed and energetic.

“The sessions with you were such a contrast to what she was like in nursery, we have seen a difference in Amira, she seems more confident, less reliant on adults, more assertive with others too. We also now know that dance and music in a context like that really work for her in terms of letting go and improving her wellbeing.”

Pen Green Practitioner

Throughout the sessions Amira would often hold her hands out for her friends to dance with her (which they did gladly). We are delighted that we were able to give Amira the opportunity to share her dance with us. Through this experience we developed a strong sense that there are many ways of getting things 'right' for Amira in terms of her confidence to use her body to express herself and will gladly take up the mantle to create spaces where this dancer can thrive.



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Accompanying Blog and Webinar

Liz's Blog on Physical Literacy can be found on our website;

<https://www.pengreen.org/stronger-practice-hub/sph-blogs-and-case-studies/>

Our webinar on Physical Literacy in Early Years is on Thursday 15th February 5-6pm.

<https://www.pengreen.org/event/webinar-physical-literacy-in-the-early-years/>



Professional Development Conference

Pen Green Research, Development and Training Base

Saturday 2nd March 10am-3pm

Join us to celebrate the success of our first year as a Stronger Practice Hub.

The conference is free to attend for all, with priority places going to early years settings and childminders in North and West Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, Leicester, Rutland and Lincolnshire.

<https://www.pengreen.org/event/stronger-practice-hub-conference/>