

Growing Through The Motions

by Hannah Green

An Interview With Connie Frey, Registered Movement Specialist

Adult educator Connie Frey offers movement as self-exploration and creative resource work.

She was recently the guest cross-disciplinary presenter at the first Victoria School of Writing. I interviewed her about how she encourages lifelong attention to movement and how adults, too, have access to the rich and educational world of movement.



What inspired you to work with movement?

As an adult I reconnected with movement expression and freedom when studying improvisation. Then I went to graduate school for dance/movement therapy. I was following my conviction that movement as communication and expression, movement as play, movement as exploration, are potent and meaningful. Not just utilitarian and not simply for looking at and judging!

Over time, moving with people in many situations, I experienced movement as our means for knowing ourselves and being with others. Then, studying creative dance with pioneer Barbara Mettler, I realized that each person has a unique capacity to create satisfying dances. I've been inspired working with adults of all ages, so-called beginners and those I fondly call "livingroom dancers."

My next inspiration was to move into authentic movement with the trust and wonder gained from dance/movement therapy and creative dance. This movement practice is profoundly simple,

where people follow their own impulses for movement and stillness~as they occur~observing safety constraints. Ground rules are well-defined because structure is important to freedom, like the river's banks.

How do you create an environment for self-exploration through movement?

One of the ways it's created is while attending certain activities~such as a movie, spiritual ceremony, or live theatre~we're entering a context distinct from everyday life. The fact people come to move already opens space, both literally because we have more room to move in studios and figuratively, meaning "space" for immediate self-experience.

Once people come they have already said, "Yes." That's the start of the work happening! Then I facilitate opportunities which value each person as their own best resource for paying attention and exploring movement and sensory awareness. Because movement is the medium, we're primarily focused in living answers: "How am I in this moment?"

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I've noticed that people treasure having time and space to follow their ongoing curiosity, to be intimate with themselves, without explicit directions or predetermined goals. Through guided explorations and structured freedom rich awareness, insights, and responses sprout.

What do you feel brings people to your classes and workshops?

People often come without knowing why or with a vague sense of what for. I believe people are following a kind of knowing. I feel that the knowing continues in the work itself, as one follows interests and curiosity. Often people say they want to be on friendlier terms with their bodies. Maybe something happened in the past that's robbed enjoyment or self-acceptance, so they're seeking what else is possible.

Some who come are practicing other expressive activities like art, acting, or writing. Even trained dancers wanting to reclaim creative spontaneity have participated. All these individuals use movement experience as a taproot to enrich their creativity.

Some people want something other than the demands of their typical schedules, a place to follow their preferred rhythms. For persons who are investigating themselves

deeply, movement becomes a means of self-exploration. They seek a context where the whole person is accepted.

What do you as the facilitator bring into your work to help people engage themselves?

The largest contribution is my orientation. People "get it" very fast that it's okay to be interested in self-acceptance and self-involvement~that each person is their own plentiful resource. I've observed this "can do" attitude with individuals in mental health settings, with those beginning to identify their basic creativity, and with others who felt they couldn't accept themselves physically.

One of the things that people often find surprising is a capacity to co-create and have meaningful contact through moving with others. I recall numerous people telling me how group movement experiences altered their views of what's possible in interpersonal relationships and between members of the human race.

What do you mean by co-creating? Can you expand on that?

For example, in the group dance, movers follow the movement feeling~the kinesthetic qualities and kinesthetic empathy~to create collectively. That can be astonishing for people because usually we think of having to talk, discuss, have summit meetings in order to come to an agreement. Tapping into movement awareness and feeling together may be surprising to people~that kind of connection and shared expression.

Without having to come to a verbal understanding.

Exactly~or figure it out in advance! The creativity happens as it happens. I don't have to have been trained in dance from year three. I don't have to know something specific in advance. I'm following my feeling for movement, which has been with me all my life. We already use it in everyday life, spontaneously or unexpectedly moving in response to others' movements.


Your work with creative dance and authentic movement deepens awareness and understanding of the self. It's as if this brings us back to what we did at the beginning of our lives, which was movement.

Yes! We never outgrow the need to move in our own way, at our own pace. When we were children, it was our medium of relationship. Some people claim everything we conceive is based on primary sensory experience. At the least, children learn about their world through movement, particularly touching and engaging physically, fashioning a language of movement to communicate.

What happens as time goes on? Is there a loss of movement?

Maybe what you're suggesting is that it's valuable to ask ourselves: Looking back over my life, how has my movement changed? Have I lost motility? Am I recalling something I long for? I often hear: "I haven't done this since I was a child!" or "This reminds me. I'd forgotten." Such connections accompany one's changing movement-life: felt experiences and ideas about what's possible.

As to loss, I believe movement is lost by restrictions in our



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behaviors, that is, organically embodied. Think of how children are required to contain movement impulses: bodily functions, spontaneity, and participation in social constructions like school behaviors. Also, children imitate those around who are influencing their development, or make other kinds of psychophysical adaptations to particular life experiences.

In saying that, it's apparent how movement is affected by our life experiences, which are very individual and complex.


Yes, very individual and particular. Yet, while we identify the complexity, resuming and enriching our sensory attention is possible and more available than many people expect.

What's one way you would like movement in our culture to change?

I'd like us to not confuse lack of awareness of movement with lack of movement. We don't lack movement. That's not to undermine anyone's desire for increased movement and well-being, or freedom from habitual patterns. I'm pointing to our non-noticing of movement that's already occurring. Movement meaning both inner motions and outer actions. I'd value greater awareness of movement.

What do you hope people will go away with from your work? How do they grow from their experiences?

I've heard people say they go away with an enlarged sense of self and increased bodily self-esteem. Some discover a new source of pleasure. Generally people value movement adventures as a vital way to feel alive and learn. For some it's liberating to realize creative expression is a birthright. Other examples include realizations such as "going to one's depths isn't only about pain" and "my body holds a lot of information." One woman described her experience this way: "It is what it speaks and it is what it moves."

People take away self-attention, "listening" to themselves differently in moving through everyday life. Basically, I hope that people experience movement as a personal resource for lively expression and wisdom. 

Connie Frey is a registered movement specialist and doctoral candidate. She has designed movement programs since 1978 and currently offers a summer intensive, ongoing individual and group classes, and custom-designed workshops for organizations. Enquiries are welcome at 388-5393.



On Track by Lara Lauzon

If you have a question on developing your fitness program you can write to us attention: On Track

Stretching for the Game

As a soccer coach~should children approximately between the ages of 8 to 10 years stretch prior to playing?

I have been asked this question many times, not only by coaches, but by parents and children who are involved in sport activities. Some information that describes the difference between a warm-up and a stretching session may help you to prepare your athletes for their soccer games.

First of all warming up or getting the body ready for exercise raises the heart rate and increases the muscle temperature. In a sport setting, the purpose of the warm-up is to help with the smooth transition from inactivity to activity. By slowly enlarging blood vessels in all parts of the body, oxygen is absorbed by the muscles more readily as the heart rate and circulation of the blood increases. This helps the athlete adapt as the activity level becomes more intense. The increase in muscle temperature helps to improve muscle elasticity. This prepares the athlete for the stretch session.



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