A photograph of two children running in a grassy field, looking up at a kite flying in the sky. The background shows rolling hills or mountains under a clear sky. The kite is a simple diamond shape with a tail.

# LEAP TO THE SUN

LEARNING THROUGH DYNAMIC PLAY

Judith Peck

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Learning Through  
Dynamic Play

by Judith Peck



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*This book is dedicated  
to the children who inspired it:  
Yours . . . and mine—  
Sarah, Jamie, Joel, and Sabrina.*

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Over my desk come many requests for review and consideration of materials for use in our public school system. With the numerous pressures and demands made upon the Board of Education today, I must admit that it is left with little time to devote to the reading of educational materials.

When Judith Peck sent her book to me for review I perused it rather hurriedly and then put it aside for future reading if and when time permitted. Somehow, the photographs and the contents generally captured my interest and haunted me so that I had to pull it out of the pile of manuscripts and reread it.

On second and more careful reading I was convinced that every child in the school system should be exposed to Judith Peck's unique approach to the teaching of the arts. An imaginative teacher, and even one with less imagination, would find the contents stimulating, and in turn the children would be equally stimulated.

Unfortunately, we do not have sufficient texts that possess this quality of appeal and value for the urban child. As Superintendent Helene Lloyd, an expert in curriculum evaluation, states, "The suggestions and excellent photographs would motivate teachers and group leaders to develop expressive movements with children. This is an area not emphasized sufficiently in all schools over the country."

I support wholeheartedly Mrs. Lloyd's appraisal and trust that teachers all over the country will be given the opportunity to use this superb book.

Rose Shapiro  
(Former President,  
New York City Board of Education)

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*Leap to the Sun* is designed for parents, group leaders, and teachers of children from three to eleven years of age. The projects and approach are suitable for nursery schools, grade schools, after-school groups, church and social clubs, camps, scouting groups, and for use in the home with one or more children present.

The purpose of the book is to utilize natural endowments and interests of children in a productive and meaningful way. Imagination, physical energy, and a need for personal expression are qualities that are universally dominant in children but not used sufficiently in education. When these natural qualities are developed, they serve to increase the child's perception, awareness, and understanding of self in relation to the outside world. Through imagination the child can visualize new ideas and project himself or herself into a spectrum of unfamiliar situations. With abundant energy the child can physically interpret what is observed, thereby expanding experience and with it understanding. With a zest for personal expression the child possesses a natural source of motivation to acquire skills, sensitivity, and genuine interest in the arts. The arts, in turn, are in continual pursuit of the understanding of self in relation to the outside world.

The methods and projects described in the text provide music, art, dramatic, and dance material; natural and social science programs; holiday projects; an exploration of natural emotions; and creative activities introducing a variety of ideas. Since ideas in a productive setting continually generate more ideas, growth continues after each session is over.

All of the projects are based on imagery and require no supplies; therefore, they can be adapted to any situation where children meet. The material is presented in an informal, nontechnical style, designed for men and women with no special training in either leading or participating in physical activity programs.

Part one emphasizes the value of childhood imagination, physical energy, and the need for personal expression in the learning process, and also explains the concept of teaching through imagery. Methods and procedures are given for using the projects in a variety of situations where

children gather. *Part two* contains fifty creative projects relating to movements of various parts of the body. These projects encourage the child to use the body with confidence as an instrument of expression. Simple directions are given that enable leaders to make effective use of the material. *Part three* consists of ninety projects carefully planned to expose the child to a range of provocative ideas and interesting activities. Through active discussion followed by physical interpretation of these ideas, the child gains an awakening of interest and a keener awareness of each subject. Moreover, the child's comments during the discussions, because they are acknowledged and often followed by group action, can lead to growth of confidence in the *value* of one's feelings and observations, a confidence which may be projected to other areas of learning. *Part four* contains fifteen stories with suggestions for adapting them as spontaneous programs. These programs can be used as separate group activities. They can also serve as entertainment for an audience of children by children. Because of the imagery and related vocabulary, teachers and parents might find the stories stimulating as reading exercises for seven- to ten-year-olds and as read-aloud stories for younger children.

## Acknowledgments

Accompanying the text are photographs of children involved in the movement activities. They were taken in an after-school program at P.S. 198 in New York City, sponsored by the Yorkville Youth Council in cooperation with the New York City Board of Education. Special acknowledgment and appreciation are extended to the leader of this program, Alice Teirstein, for her superb guidance of these activities. The photos, which convey the spontaneity and enthusiasm of the children's responses, were taken by Beatrice and Jules Pinsley of New York.

The landscapes, seascapes, and cityscapes were photographed by Erik Unhjem, graphics director of Ramapo College of New Jersey. These artistic studies are included to enhance and encourage discussions and to stimulate expressive movement; hopefully they will inspire a collection of other visual materials. Permission to use photographs of art works was granted by the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Carlock Studios in Ramsey, New Jersey; and artist Marion Lane of Ridgewood, New Jersey. The figure sculpture and the outdoor photographs of children engaged in dramatic pantomime are by the author.

Anne and Jack Sobel are especially to be thanked for their consistent personal support, encouragement, and optimism. My personal appreciation goes to Loretta Waligroski, whose competence and helpfulness have been essential and far-reaching, to Mary Kennan of Prentice-Hall for smoothing the publication way, and to Carol Smith for guiding the manuscript into print. I am grateful also to the many hundreds of children whose vitality and hearty responsiveness through the years have made this book possible. And finally, very deep appreciation is extended to my husband, Harvey, for the daily sharing of his strength, energy, and wisdom.

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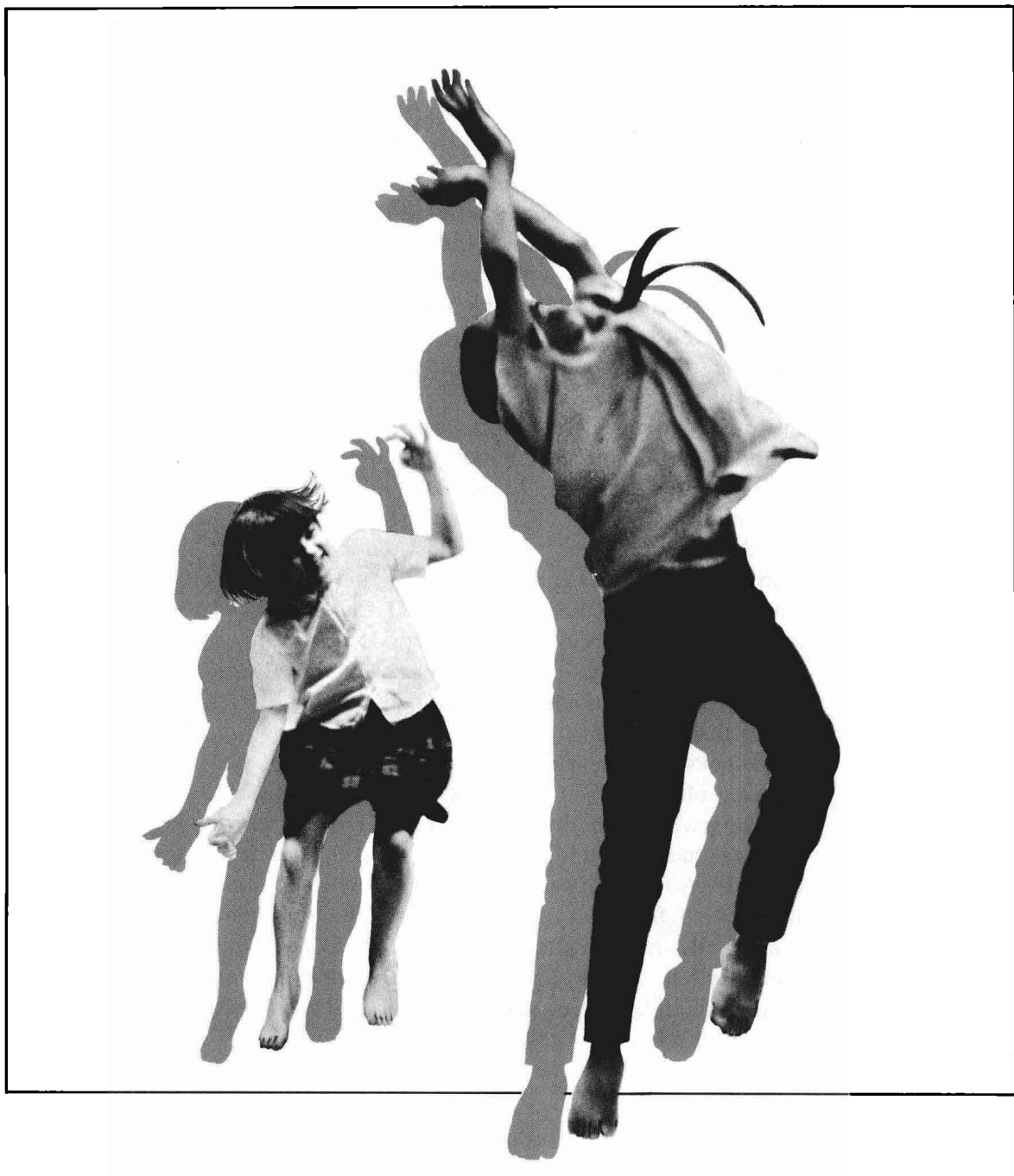
# Part one

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# Shoes off!

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*Around the world in space and time  
with nothing more than a boundless imagination  
and two bare feet.*



# Journey

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Creative energy, dynamic, fired by imagination—this is the energy of children. It wants to expand and to reach, to jump the river, skip the mountains, leap to the sun.

The energy of children is not a quiet, internal energy; it is not geared toward receiving information and digesting facts. And therefore, concentration should not be demanded as the first step in learning but the last. Concentration is pouring over loot that has been brought back to the lair of a child's mind by that artful eager scavenger—imagination. Without such loot there is really not much to get excited about.

Parents, group leaders of children, and teachers are becoming aware of this more and more. Classrooms are opening their doors, and children are spilling into the corridors, not only for space but for breath. The corridor is freer than the classroom. Concepts in education are expanding, and they need room to find our children's expansive imaginations, to catch and to use them. As it is, too much is lost out the window.

In too many homes and schools children are still drilled in disciplines of Neatness and Order above all (the N.O. Controls). In classrooms, children are captured and bound to desks—confining the birds to teach them why they fly. And as they sit and concentrate and try to learn about making nests and catching worms and landing on telephone poles, they forget just what it was they did to fly.

Ed looks out the window as the lesson drones on, idly watching the network of swaying branches, fascinated in a way by the movement, not knowing why, dreaming vaguely of strength as he wonders how the tree manages to stand so high, marveling that the squirrel jumps the twigs so unafraid. A flurry of seed is carried by the wind and falls to the ground. Birds perch, fly, land, peck at the seeds. The lesson goes on, children raise their hands and are called on. Ed watches through the window, wonders, feels excited, worries about the squirrel, does not understand so much, dreams about becoming great as a tree. And then the teacher calls him by name and brings him reluctantly back.

Where attention is, there the doors of learning open at a touch. When

# of discovery

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natural energy is there and used, the child does not dawdle and hesitate but rushes through to find what he is looking for.

Imagination is the key, and perception is the lock to be opened. Intelligence and sensitivity, the wherewithal of learning, can then be used for all the passages to come.

Intelligence can be expanded when a child's natural energy and imagination are used as the actual machinery of learning. Reach imagination and the child's own energy will motivate the desire and ability to learn. Once the process begins it perpetuates itself like so many other achievements of nature. It goes something like this:

- Imagination spurs investigation or trying to see.
- Seeing leads to perception. (Think of Ed and the tree and of his silent search for how the squirrel leaps with such confidence.)
- Perception leads to the desire to relate or to express what is perceived.
- Self-expression, if encouraged and well received, leads to self-confidence.
- Self-confidence leads to a continued desire to learn, to produce, and to succeed.

Imagination and energy combine in *dynamic play*, a term devised by the author to describe one approach to learning and to the creative activities in this book. Through physical participation, the children deal with concepts, ideas, and emotions. Through physical participation, they reach out to touch a vast world of people, animals, nature, and objects. *Dynamic play* is an adjunct to learning which is natural to children. If it is effective, it can help to create that first magnificent state of confusion so vital to learning and creative productivity.

The methods and projects described in this text provide music, art, dramatic, and dance material; natural and social science activities; games; stories; and creative physical activities of a varied nature. The subject

matter is chosen to expose the child to a wide spectrum of ideas relating to the world around, as well as to the world within.

It is good to have a group of children participating. A parent can invite two or three friends of the child to join in. A teacher or group leader can have the entire class participate at once or can divide the children into groups. Group discussion of the ideas stimulates perception and independent thought and gives children the desire and opportunity to add their own ideas to the melting pot. As these contributions are accepted and physically interpreted by the group, the child begins to gain the self-confidence so necessary to the creative act.

With this new confidence our hypothetical Ed is ready to think through, to interpret, and to expand his experiences. Then, as he makes his physical interpretation, with others or alone, he begins to acquire an intimate understanding of whatever is done—a tree spreading roots underground, a flower reaching for the sun, or a thirsty animal searching for water.

Since all the projects are based on imagery, few external supplies are required. There are no outfits, instruments, or materials to buy, and almost any available space can be used—a living room, classroom, basement, yard, or sidewalk. *Dynamic play* also adapts to situations in which children are already assembled. This includes schools, community centers, churches, nursery schools, scout meetings, summer camps, enrichment programs, and day care centers.

The projects are designed for children between the ages of three and eleven. They have been “child proofed” many times over, and only those that have proven consistently successful are included. It is likely that parents and leaders will rapidly gather new ideas suggested by their own children which will prove to be equally successful.

Here are some of the ways *dynamic play* might fit into existing schedules in school, at home, and in the nursery or recreational situations:

For a mid-morning stretch, the child or group might look out the window, feel the length of the trees and the breath of the wind, and return beside their desks to s-t-r-e-t-c-h . . . drop low like the massive roots extending far in many directions below the earth and spin high like the wind in pursuit of a dry leaf.

A science class might interpret the current experiment—a flame, a change in color, snakes, growth, earth alterations, the planets; a child at home can interpret a bug found hiding in the bushes and then imagine and interpret what the bug is hiding from.

A history class might enact a scene from the past and bring it to life within the classroom.

Holidays and special events can be discussed, and the class can be divided into groups for separate presentation of various incidents.