

## Hopping, Jumping, Leaping, Skipping, and Loping: Savoring the Possibilities of Locomotion

Lois Barclay Murphy, Washington, D.C.

As I sat on a bench at the side of the road in the zoo, watching the children brought by their mothers or fathers, I rarely saw a little boy walking quietly beside his parent. One was hopping, another was jumping. Others were leaping, or skipping, or loping, raising each foot higher than it needed to be lifted for ordinary walking. Some children waved their arms. Each one seemed to savor the feeling of the moment, wanting to discover the possibilities of locomotion.

This curiosity seemed to disappear by the age of four or five, when the little boys now walked quietly along with mother or father.



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When does locomotion begin? One might say that locomotion begins at about four months, when a baby first succeeds in turning over on his stomach. He has to be able to do that before he begins to creep and crawl, which he succeeds in doing in several weeks. Some babies, however, do not creep or crawl. They want to be able to see everything, so they have to discover a way to manage locomotion while retaining a large visual area. I was told as a child that I managed locomotion by maintaining a sitting position, extending one leg, and hitching along. I couldn't move as fast as a crawling baby moves, but I could see much more. As an adult, I have seen other babies using the same system.

It is some time after creeping and crawling (or hitching) before a baby is able to stand up and take his

first steps. The timing varies from child to child. At a party for little children, I saw one eight-month-old boy running around easily, while the twelve-month-old host sat by himself, thumbing through a magazine!

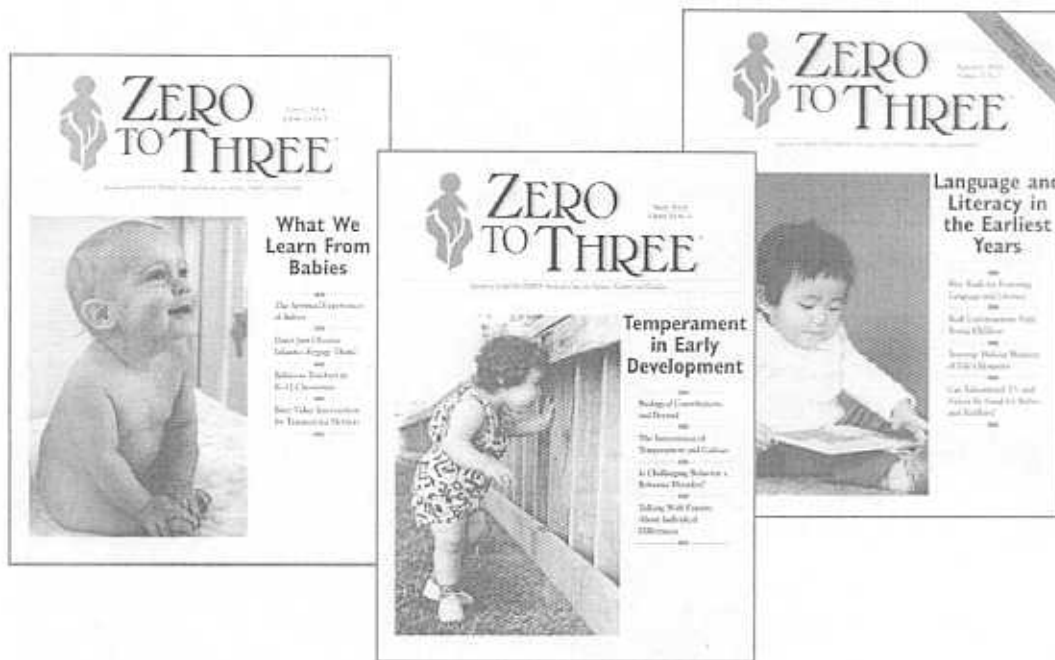
Usually we see children in the second year of life toddling around with uncertain balance and gait. This gradually smooths out over the next two or three years, so that by four, children can walk as adults do. But most of the time, they don't — even after they have achieved a "real" walk, until school age children mostly run, or stretch, stride, or bounce. Walking is not taken for granted at first — it is an achievement to be used and explored. Little children like to explore the possibilities in walking — walking on curbs and other special areas. They climb out of their strollers and push them for awhile. Only when they are tired do they climb back in, ready to be pushed.

What leads the child to go through these stages? From early infancy, an alert and active baby watches the people around him. He probably identifies with them, internalizing what he sees and developing the wish and intention to do what they do. (A "wild" child raised by animals does not develop the ability to stand up and walk and run, but gets around on all fours, like the animals he sees.) When I heard the enthusiastic yelp of a one-year-old who had managed to stand up alone, I realized how he had longed to be able to do that. He had watched the big people going around on their own two feet, and he wanted to do that too. §



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