



Introduction

It is believed that people have been dancing since the very beginning of time all over the world in different cultures and in different ways. We believe that dance is a common language for everyone and that everyone can dance. You can dance for joy and it does not always need to be in a certain way. Although people have been dancing for a long time it is not common to use dance in schools as a learning process, but it could be a great tool if you did!

Most children like to move and play games and there seems to be a limit to how long children want to sit still. Teachers may need to use different techniques to keep the children's attention. By using movement and dance children who don't want to be still can learn by being active. "Many educators believe that children learn best when they are doing because then they get more engaged in the subject matter" (Minton 2008 p.1).

Dancing is a good way to train both body and mind. It trains the creative ability to think outside the box. It also gives you body and spatial awareness, says Ninnie Andersson PhD student at Luleå University of Technology. Involving dance in a subject could give it another dimension and make it easier to understand. Students might associate it within their own experience and that will lead to memorizing the task better.

French professor Alain Berthoz writes about the importance of mind and body connection and he describes memory in a way that provides further evidence to use movement as a teaching strategy (Minton 2008. p.45).

We hope this methodology can provide the tools to teach dance with confidence in the class room!



Starting point

You could start by looking at the goals for the class, what are the students supposed to learn today, how can we do this by dancing?

One way to do it is to look at the actions in the subject or transforming subjects into action.

Example: In a literature class you will talk about a writer and read lyrics from the writer's book. The students can create movements that express the words in the text to create a text-based dance.

You could also find key words of the subject that you work with. In the same literature class the text might be about the Ocean. Select Ocean as your key word and then let the students dance freely only to that word. This might lead to associations to other words such as: swimming, sailing and raining. Let the students dance to those words. Put the dancing words in to a sequence and you will have created a small dance routine.

You can transform many academic concepts into action and body shapes. To create a dance you will use different movement components and positions and where they are being used in the dance space. As a teacher you will need to guide the students by giving them suggestions and ideas of how to combine the different movement so it will become a dance.

Here is a list of words that you can always use when creating a dance.

- Movement components: direction, speed, timing, size, energy, duration, rhythm, quality of the movement, shape, pathway, position, starting and stopping movement.
- Movement component position: over, under, around, behind, in front, beside and through.
- How you use the space and levels of moving: high, middle and low.

It is very good to have an open space to dance in. Maybe you can use the gymnastic hall in your school or otherwise move the benches in your class room to make an open space. Then you can move freely in that space and use your body in different ways. Try to feel the movement in your body. Sometimes it is also helpful to see how the movement looks in a mirror to get self awareness and to see it in another dimension.

Creating a dance

There are several methods you can use to make a dance based lesson.

Invite a choreographer/dance teacher

The choreographer can help you design the lesson with dance-based material such as dance exercises and choreographed material that the students will benefit from. You can use and repeat that material many times and also develop it in future lessons.

Introduce a subject and let the students create their own dances.

Introduce the subject and ask the students questions such as: Can we dance that word, that subject? How can we symbolize that subject with our bodies? Let the students be part of the process and let their fantasy be free. You might need to guide them through different movements and dance exercises so they are able to create their own dance. Examples: Dance the subject freely, dance the subject in slow motion, dance it very very fast, and dance the subject in a different level high, middle or low. To create a small dance routine you combine the different movements: The subject danced in the normal way, in slow motion, very fast and on a different level. This could be done as individuals or in small groups.

Different art forms

To create a dance you could also use other art forms in the process. For instance: pictures, images, music, objects, photographs, lyrics or key words. This will help the students to start talking, discussing and associate with the subject and inspire them to work creatively. As a teacher you can help the students to understand the subject. You can also introduce other art forms to keep the creative moment going.

Theme

To work with a theme is another way of using dance in your classroom. Example of a theme could be: rainforest, water or France. If you have rainforest as your theme you begin with *reading* a story or literature about the rainforest and the animals that are living there. Ask the student to make a *painting* to get the imagination flowing. Then create a *dance* that is inspired by the animals, the big trees and leaves in the rainforest. To work with a theme is a great way for children and younger students to see the connection between all the subjects.

Composition in a space/Make a dance as a group.

The students are divided into groups and every group creates different parts in the same dance. Examples: Some of the students are symbolizing trees, some of them are being a river and others are mountains. The composition starts with one group in one corner and ends in another. This is a lot of teamwork and you can create sculptures and different body shapes together. Some of the students could be people walking through the landscape.

Teacher skills

You do not have to be a dancer to use dance as an aesthetic learning process in your class. The thought of teaching dance might be frightening if you have never danced before. But try to be creative and have an open mind. As a teacher you can give directions to your students and guide them with your words to help them create a dance. Let the students be part of the creative process and let them bring ideas. It could be a great collaboration! By inviting a dance teacher to your class and see how the dance teacher dances with the students you can get some inspiration and direct tools to use for your next class. Use dance in a way you are comfortable with. Start with small exercises and develop them as you go on.

To dance

Sandra Minton writes that single movements or movement sequences are not dance but if you combine them together you could create a whole dance. (Minton 2008 p.49)

Everyone can dance and there are different dance forms. If you train to be a dancer you will probably study different styles of dance: ballet, contemporary, street or jazz dance. As a school teacher you don't need to use a specific dance technique, although you can if you have the knowledge. When dancing it is of great use to have appropriate music for the task that you are working with. Example: Soft classical music when working with a poem, rhythmical and a lot of drums when working with a theme about volcanoes.

To develop in dance or to get better dancing skills you will need to train your body physically and repeat the material to remember it 'in your body'. You also need training in memorizing the dance regardless if it is your own or others material.

Why dance

Dancing usually leads to better self-confidence. When moving and dancing you get more body awareness and you learn how to control your body. Interaction between people is essential in dance and the students learn to work together physically which will improve their social skills. Collaboration as a team is a good practice to help reach a common goal.

Sjöstedt Edelholm and Román describe how modern communication theory emphasizes that a greater part of what we say is interpreted by what our bodies show rather than what we actually say. Being able to analyze body language is important for mutual communication. Dance can help the students understand their own and other students body language. Individual creativity is an integral part of a learning process in which the student tests different thoughts, ideas, emotions, feelings, fantasies and experiences which helps the students to gain a greater understanding of themselves. During a creative process the students will use various tools to gain more skills about the basics for communication through dance and acting. (Sjöstedt Edelholm and Román, see Hjort, Unander-Scharin, Wiklund, Åkman 2002 p.155-156)

Students learn in different ways and some students learn better by combining theory with physical movement. That is why it is good to have different methods in schools. Dance is a wonderful tool to use as an aesthetic learning process!

Examples of Practices

Dance – Mathematics

Age: 12-14 year olds

Geometric figures

The students stand in a circle. Talk about different geometric figures and what characteristics they have. Start by showing a geometric figure with your body and also say the name of the figure. Examples: cone, circle, square and triangle. All the students repeat the geometric figure with their own body. The student next to you will do a new geometric shape and say the name of it. The whole class will do that shape. Every student will do a different geometric figure, one student at a time. You could then combine all the figures together without stopping to create a dance. Play some music, for example electronic music, and do the series of figures together as a group. Then you could divide the class into smaller groups. Each group chooses a few figures and find different “ways” to combine them. This will become a small dance. Let the students show each other and let the audience of the other students guess which geometric figures were used in the composition.

Duration: 10-15 min

Expected outcome: To learn the name and appearance of the geometric figures.

Dance –Science

Age: 13-15 year olds

Chemistry

$\frac{2}{3}$ of the class are hydrogen atoms, two by two students representing H_2 , and $\frac{1}{3}$ of the class are oxygen atoms, also two by two students representing O_2 . The students can move freely in the room making floating movements but never letting go of their partner. When two hydrogen atoms meet one oxygen atom they connect and form a water molecule while emitting heat. This means that six students must work together to form two water molecules three by three to complete the process. They then become steam. Express this by making floating and shaking movements and with a long distance to other molecules. After a while the steam cools down and form water. The students now move slower and dance closer together. By exchanging the oxygen with Carbon you can make many exciting hydrocarbon compounds and let them react with oxygen. This could lead to many variations of dances.

Duration: 10-20 min

Expected outcome: Better knowledge about different atoms, atomic bindings and various organic compounds.

Dance – Literature

Age: children 6-7 year olds.

Dance a book!

Language development - to read with your body.

Open the book on one page, if it's a children's book it probably has pictures in it. Let the children talk about the pictures, what do they see?

Read the text, put on some music and let the children dance freely. If the text is about monkeys let the children dance like monkeys. Then you can inspire them to dance like other animals like elephants, birds and snakes.

If the text is about monkeys throwing pillows around maybe you can bring a pillow and let the children be the monkeys throwing and dancing with the pillow. To dance and move to a book gives it another dimension and I am sure that the children will remember the book where the monkeys are dancing with the pillow.

Duration: 5 min/image, if you do many variations expandable to a 40 min.

Expected outcome: Language development, to understand the book.

Dance – Foreign language

Age: 9-14 year olds

Language learning for immigrants

When working with students who want to learn a new language, for instance immigrants, start by saying the words together: walk right, walk left, in front and behind. Then dance the words and in those directions. If the students know a little bit of the language they could write something simple on their own. Then find a rhythm in the lyrics and try to dance it. This is a good way of learning the language and a possibility for the students to express themselves. Play different types of music to each student. Example: If the starting point of the text was about nature then classical music might be appropriate.

Duration: 10-20 min

Expected outcome: To learn, understand and remember more words.

Dance – History

Age: 12-15 year olds

Alexander the Great

The Gordian knot, Battle of Issos or the founding of Alexandria in Egypt. Select a part of his life and re-enact it as a dance. Students can represent historical nationalities, countries, cultures, subject's, diplomacy, cultural exchange, trade, cooperation or a campaign

If you select a campaign it involves planning, preparation, transport, violence, speed, relief, feasts, and contemplation. Let different movements represent those different words and put them together in order to reenact an historical event.

Movements like attacking, withdrawing, drifting and surrounding could be tried out in the classroom. You could divide the students in to small groups and let them put a few of the movements together combined with fear and mystery. You could also work with directions, spatial awareness and quality of the movement. Students can increase or decrease the tempo of their dance. Put on some appropriate music and let each group show each other.

Duration: 30-40 min, expandable to several lessons.

Expected outcome: To learn the historical event

Dance – Geography

Age: 10-12

Sweden has a long coastline. Sail from one end to the other and let the students discover the geography along the way. Let the students represent different landscapes cities and the varying climate in a dance. Some students could be major cities, others rainstorms passing by, some mountains with reindeers and snow. Some students could be a landscape with cities, lakes and regional characteristics. The other students can visit this group and they 'perform' the landscape. Afterwards a discussion can help explain what the students experienced and learned.

Duration: One class 40 min, expandable to several lessons.

Expected outcome: The students should learn more about the landscapes they have visited.

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