

Dance Based Teaching and Learning: Activating the Curriculum through Dance



Alison Marshall

alisonmarshall@earthlink.net

Art is nothing if not teaching, for it teaches us, in various ways on various levels, about nature, about ideas, about ourselves, and about itself.

Robert Grudin, *The Grace of Great Things*



Through the study of the arts we:

- Learn basic forms of communication
- Learn about the interaction among historical events, the arts and cultures of people, past and present
- Learn to perceive subtleties and complexities and develop artistic judgment
- Learn to make assessments on the basis of standards and criteria
- Learn that problems have multiple solutions
- Sharpen cognitive capacities
- Increase perceptual abilities
- Find opportunities to describe, analyze, compare, interpret, infer, generalize and develop hypotheses
- Acquire multiple forms of literacy (cultural and aesthetic)

Education in the arts benefits students by:

Cultivating the whole child by building multiple literacies (e.g., developing intuition, reasoning, imagination and dexterity) into unique forms of expression and communication initiating students into ways of perceiving and thinking that will help them see and grasp life in new and further ways.

- Teaching the analysis of nonverbal communication and the making of informed judgments
- Enhancing understanding of themselves and others
- Acquiring the tools and knowledge to take charge of their own learning, assessing where they have been, where they are and where they want to go
- Promoting the processes of thinking, creating and evaluating; developing attributes of self-discipline and personal responsibility; reinforcing the joy of learning and self-esteem; and fostering the thinking skills and creativity valued in the workplace
- Giving them knowledge of potential career pathways or involvement in the arts
- Encouraging experimentation with and utilization of current technology

- Fostering a lifelong appreciation for and support of the arts
- Learning artistic modes of analyzing different situations, which brings an array of expressive, analytical and developmental tools to everyday experiences
- Learning the importance of teamwork and cooperation
- Making decisions in situations where there are no standard answers
- Recognizing the essential role the arts have in sustaining the viability of cultures
-

Whenever possible and within the limits and needs of individual districts, students need direct contact with professional artists and arts organizations that help develop and deliver arts learning and address the state arts standards. Access to learning in the arts is enhanced through the development of partnerships between schools, national, state and local resources (e.g., museums, symphonies, artists in residence, traveling exhibits, theatre companies, arts centers, dance companies). Success will be realized when all students have equal access to all the arts.



Integration of the Arts

Learning is an integrative process. Integration means identifying concepts shared among two or more discipline or content areas and teaching to the natural connections between them. All subject matter disciplines are comprised of concepts which apply to multiple content areas but which may approach or represent the idea in different ways. Opportunities occur almost daily for teachers and students to use what is learned in one discipline to clarify or enhance an idea, concept or skill in another. As learners work across the disciplines, there are many opportunities to discover relationships that lead to the process of **understanding ideas and concepts**. This way of learning involves thinking, feeling, and doing behaviors that enable students to be more flexible and inventive in their approaches to problem-solving processes. All teachers, regardless of the grade levels or subject matter that they teach, are encouraged to find links between various content areas and the arts. The integration and balancing of different discipline areas in the curriculum with arts based learning offers a larger repertoire of multi-modal teaching/learning opportunities and builds skill in problem solving, communicating, and working with others.



Dance

Creative Movement: An Overview

Students are rarely asked to consider how they move or to discover new body shapes or ways of traveling. The world of today's students is typically information rich and action poor. Yet movement is an inherent, intrinsic element of all of our lives. From their earliest days, students use movement as their primary form of expression. In running, sliding, jumping or skipping, students find a release for unspecified physical energy; just as in emotionally charged movement, they find a sure way to express deep feelings. Sadly, their potential can atrophy through disuse or habituated misuse.

Children's dance is too often characterized by pink tutus and images of falling snowflakes or trees blowing in the wind. But dance is not simply a pantomime of some animal or event or an attempt to look like something. Creative movement is an attitude and approach that is predominantly concerned with process. It is about communicating through movement. In creative dance, students explore the quality of a movement. The idea is not simply to "move like a giant" but to discover the ways a giant might move, to explore weight and gravity, the ponderous quality of slow, heavy movement, length and speed of step.

Dance provides a quintessential opportunity for learning by doing: it is a form of **inquiry-based learning**. As we dance ideas, we make our thinking visible so we can identify and then reflect on our perceptions and make our movements ever more intended. The process requires perception of the worlds in our minds and around us, the actual making or production of dances and ongoing reflections upon the work itself. Referring frequently to specific understanding goals help students make connections between what they are doing, what they are thinking and what they can learn from the experience.



Dance is

Non-verbal expression through body movement.

learned by members of a particular culture or group of people

influenced by everyday behavior.

Dance usually has a specific pattern and is sometimes repetitive.

Dance communicates information about the culture within which it exists.

The people in a culture create dances that fulfill specific needs.

Dances are influenced by many factors and changes may occur over a certain period of time.

Learning Outcomes influenced by dance based learning experiences

- Dancers increase their knowledge and vocabulary through an understanding of the elements and principles of dance
- Dancers learn to solve movement problems that are both simple and complex, honing their creative problem-solving skills.
- Dancers increase their learning in other curricular areas as dance is integrated into the curriculum
- Dancers increase their listening skills and learn how to follow directions.
- Dancers sharpen their skills of observation and learn how to make informed judgments.
- Dancers gain an understanding of the dance histories and cultures of the world's people.
- Dancers expand their creative skills through improvisation and composition.

Physical Outcomes:

- Body awareness
- Healthy practices
- Exercise for life

Interpersonal Outcomes:

- Working together
- Building collaborative skills

Academic Outcomes:

- Developing an experiential and content based knowledge of dance
- Acquiring discipline based dance knowledge, applying it in new, authentic, integrative ways
- Using dance as an entry point to understand integrative connections between: movement and number relationships, patterns, geometric form, spatial design, literature, writing process and choreographic process, scientific method, etc.

Elements of Process:

- Includes: observation, sequencing, focus, expressive skills, draft and revision, improvisation and pattern development

Elements of Technique:

- Includes: developing/performing finished combinations, contributing to the group effort, flexibility and skillfulness

Elements of Choreography

- Includes: pattern, form, theme and variation, gesture, style, expression, ethnic and cultural influences

The Elements of Dance: Body, Space, Time, and Force

Body

Parts: Head, neck, arms, wrists, elbows, hands, fingers, pelvis, spine, trunk, legs, knees, feet, toes, ankles, heels, shoulders, etc.

Shapes: Curved/straight, angular/twisted, symmetrical/asymmetrical

Relationships: body parts/other body parts, individuals/groups, near/far, meeting/parting, alone/connected, mirroring/shadowing, unison/contrast, over/under, above/below, around/through, beside/between, gathering/scattering, etc.

Balance: centered/off balance

Space

Personal space: the area immediately around you in which you can move

General space: the entire space that you can move through

Direction: forward, backward, sideways space

Place: self-space/general space

Size: big/small, far reach/near reach

Level: high/mid/low

Direction: forward/backward, right/left, up/down

Pathway: curved/straight/zigzag

Focus: where the dancer is looking – close, far, direct, indirect

Time

Time literally means a period during which something exists. Usually the words rhythm and tempo are used to describe information about time in a dance.

Rhythm in dance can be determined by the grouping of beats into specific measures of time. These kinds of groupings form rhythmic patterns

Tempo signifies the relative speed of the rhythm. Speed can range from very fast to very slow.

Speed or tempo: fast, slow, varied, duration

Rhythm: pulse, pattern, breath

Force/Energy

Energy can mean action, power or type of force. In dance, the

movement can be described as having a particular energy quality. The basic energy qualities are sustained, percussive, swing and collapse.

Sustained: a continuous flow of energy

Percussive: specific stopping and starting of energy

Swing: a fall and recovery of energy. Like a pendulum

Collapse: a total release of energy

Energy: sharp (sudden) - smooth (sustained)

Weight: strong/light

Flow: free/bound

Source: Green-Gilbert, A., (1992). *Creative dance for all ages*. Reston, Virginia: National Dance Association. pp 5.

The Vocabulary of Dance: Movement Terms

Locomotor movement refers to the ways we move through space: walk, run, jump, hop, leap, gallop, slide, crawl, roll, skip, shake

Non-Locomotor or axial movement refers to movement we can do in place: bend, twist, stretch, swing, push, pull, fall, melt, sway, turn, dodge, poke, kick, lift, carve, curl, lunge, slash, dab, punch, flick, float, glide, press, wring, shake, rise, sink, wiggle

Performance Elements:

Dancers, Music, Costumes, Lights, Set and props, creating the environment for the dance, theme, idea, story, image

Dance Forms or styles: Hip hop, polka, jazz, tango, ballroom, modern, ballet, flamenco, salsa, square dance, break dance, Irish step, African etc.

Dance and Movement Warm-Ups

The intent of a warm-up is to warm the instrument (the body) and introduce aspects of the learning experience that will follow. Physical warm-ups help us to understand the physical work that we will do and help our bodies to know that we'll treat them with care, appropriate caution and respect. Warm-ups help build strength, endurance, flexibility, trust, and body awareness and serve as an important signal to the start of a dance experience or lesson. Warm-ups help to get the blood circulating and the muscles warm and stretched. Warm-ups can include stretches, axial movements (in place) such as bending, twisting, reaching and shaking, and locomotor movement (moving through space). Warm-ups generally begin with smaller scaled movement (including breathing) that moves to larger scaled more active movement.

Sitting Warm-ups

Sitting Shapes /Move to 8

Students begin, sitting on the floor or in chairs in a comfortable way. Ask them to notice the shape they are sitting in. Is it a closed shape? An open shape? Angular? Rounded? Call out "1-2-3 change shape". Each student then changes from the shape they are sitting in to a new sitting shape. Repeat this several times. Now ask the students to rise on count one from their low level sitting shapes on the floor to a high level standing shape at count 8. The students change shape on each count, moving through 8 distinct shapes from sitting to standing. Collapse to the floor and repeat several times. Repeat rising to a count of 4.

Variations:

Students begin in a small shape and take 8 counts to rise into a large standing shape and 8 counts to melt to the floor.

Repeat the sequence in 4 counts. Discuss whether they moved faster or slower and why.

Repeat the sequence in 2 counts and then in 1 count.

Repeat using specific axial movements (for example, bend and stretch or pull and push).

Source: General Dance Training

Standard:

Standing - Axial Warm-ups

Movement in place, moving around the axis of the spine

Standing Combinations

Repeat your selected warm up movement sequences several times each. Use music with a steady, identifiable rhythmic beat.

Standing twist: wrapping arms around center torso in each direction, going back and forth several times.

Stretches are used to extend, reach, lengthen, open the space in the body gradually increasing range of motion.

Reach: lengthen arms up overhead moving from side to side body alternate sides 1, 2, 3, 4, reach over side 1, 2, 3, 4

Curl: 1, 2, 3, 4 from the top of the head down

Uncurl 1, 2, 3, 4 from the base of the spine, to lower back, to mid back, to shoulders, and then head comes up last.

Rolls: head, shoulder (forward and backward), wrist, ankle, hip (bowl scoops) knees.

Shake: out your hands, wrists, elbows, shoulders, ankles, knees, hips, torso, neck, head - shake down (several counts), shake up, shake slow shake wide, etc.

Open into large standing X, arms reaching up, head looking up, legs grounded

Swing: in place, moving front to back, three counts up, three counts back.

Scrunch: hands, shoulders, eyes, etc. Release.

Source: General Dance Training

Standard:

Locomotor Warm-ups

Locomotor movement patterns create designs in space and travel in different directions. Changes in level include movement low on the floor (low level) to movement off the floor into high level standing shapes (high level).

Applying Dance Based Learning in the Classroom Curriculum

Movement Patterns

The intent of this warm up is to encourage movement throughout the space in response to the provided cues. Each person will move to the same word cues but will interpret how to move in response to the cues somewhat differently Each pattern should be repeated aloud by the leader 4-5 times.

Sample Combinations – (Repeat each combination several times)

- Walk, walk, walk, walk, turn, slide, slide, shake.
- High step, high step, low step, low step, slide, skip, skip, skip
- Reach, reach, shake, shake, slide, slide, slide, shape.
- Short, short, long, long, short, short, short, crunch.
- Backwards, backwards, sideways, sideways, pigeon-toed.
- Stretch, stretch, bend, bend, pull, pull, pull, push.
- Run, run, run, run, jump, jump, jump, shake
- Slide, slide, slide, slide, leap, leap, leap, turn.
- Make up your own combinations.

Variations:

Try repeating your movement pattern the first four times then change your movement interpretation the fifth time.

The leader devises a movement pattern but doesn't tell it to the group. Instead, the leader simply moves the pattern for the group. After the group has seen the leader move the pattern a few times the group is asked to name the pattern and then move the pattern.

Source: Alison Marshall

Standard:

Pattern Making

This warm-up is a variation on the Movement Patterns (above). Instead of students interpreting a given verbal cue through movement (Movement Patterns) students will now create their own movement phrase- a short pattern that can be repeated several times. Choose music that has a strong identifiable beat. Give students several minutes to experiment with various movements and combinations in order to create and determine one they like. Once students are comfortable with their phrase ask everyone to move their phrase simultaneously, start to finish, three times through. Next, ask the students to name the phrase pattern they have created as they move (right step, rise, turn, etc.)

These two warm-ups provide an opportunity to explore pattern from opposite entry's, first basing movement on verbal cue and second creating a movement phrase pattern then naming that pattern.

Source: Alison Marshall

Standard:

Movement Explorations

Move Shape Move: Basic Elements of Dance

All dances are made from the combination of MOVES (walking, running, turning, leaping, etc.) and SHAPES (open, closed, symmetrical, asymmetrical, low-mid-high level, etc.) that the dancer makes.

Using music or word cues and rhythmic clapping, the group moves in a free form, improvisational way throughout the space following the word cues given by the leader. Responding to the word cue "move," everyone in the group moves throughout the designated space based on their own movement choices, eventually paying attention to pathway, movement, flow, patterns of movement, speed, level and relationship to the others moving in the space. This is a great opportunity to reinforce the idea of personal and group space.

When the word SHAPE is called out (or music is silenced) everyone will FREEZE in place. Ask the dancers to notice the shapes they have made. Take a moment to look at some of the other shapes around the room.

Continue with the SHAPE-MOVE-SHAPE pattern, adding instructions and questions you ask of the dancers during SHAPE segment. Sample instructions and questions are listed below.

- Feel the shape you are in.
- Where do you feel your point of balance?
- Hold your shape but change the direction your shape is facing.
- Add a rounded element to your shape.
- Where is your point of focus? Change it.
- Create a shape that has curved lines.
- Add an angle to your shape. Two angles.
- Change the level of your shape. Make it bigger - smaller.
- Add a moving part to your shape.
- Make your shape strong enough for an eagle to land on it.
- Make a brand new shape you've never made before.
- Connect your shape to someone else in the group.
- Expand your shape. Contract it. Make it tighter, looser.
- Move your shape to the space behind you.
- Change your shape to an asymmetrical shape - a symmetrical shape.
- Where do you feel tension in your shape? Do you change the points of tension when you change your balance? Where do you feel the tension (pull) and compression (push) in your shape?
- Move over, under, around and through the shapes made by individuals and the joined shapes of partners and small groups.

Source: Mary Joyce, First Steps to Teaching Creative Movement and Alison Marshall

Standard:

Quadrants: Exploring Qualities of Movement

Inform the dancers that the dance floor space is divided into four quadrants by two (imaginary or marked), perpendicular lines. Assign each quadrant a quality of time (fast or slow) and force or energy (smooth, flowing, lyric, rounded or sharp, jagged, percussive).

sharp, jagged, percussive fast	smooth, flowing, rounded, lyric fast
sharp, jagged, percussive slow	smooth, flowing, rounded, lyric slow

Dancers can begin in any quadrant they choose. The quality and timing of movement in each quadrant should reflect the quadrant labels. Dancers can move between the quadrants in any order and can stay as long as they like in any of the quadrants. The dancers should move through all the quadrants before the improvisation ends. They can revisit any quadrants they like. The dancers begin to move with the start of the music. The leader should use music that uses varied rhythms, styles and qualities.

The intention of the improvisation is to give dancers opportunities to discover and create varied movement qualities and patterns, to recognize and explore movements they are familiar or unfamiliar with.



Source: Modern dance improvisation training

Standard:

Shape Phrase Dances

Ask each student to move to an open space in the room. Direct each student (dancer) to create a series of three shapes they will be able to remember and repeat. The three shapes should be interesting, distinct and sequential. Work quickly. Once everyone in the group has created their own 3-shape sequence ask the whole group to simultaneously perform their sequence. Repeat this several times so that everyone is familiar and comfortable with the movement sequence they have designed/choreographed. Have the dancers move to different places in the space to perform their shape phrase. Ask them to have different points of focus or to face in different directions as they repeat their shape phrases. Once they are comfortable with their phrase, begin working with variations. Ask dancers to vary their phrase: moving quickly, moving slowly, moving from this third shape to first shape in a flowing pattern.

Next ask the dancers to get into small groups of 3-5. Have each dancer in the group show their shape phrase to the others in the group. The dancers now create a short piece that includes or incorporates some aspect of each of the individual three-shape phrases. Dancers can begin to experiment with sequence, staggering start and finishing times, repeating phrases, etc. This is a chance to try out choreographic tools and choice making. How will the movement study begin and end? When each small group has finished making their piece, show the pieces to the whole group.

Variation: This is a good opportunity to include discussion about watching dance; what did you see and what made it interesting to you? These two questions form the framework for the feedback response: 1) What did the group watching notice about the dance? 2) What questions do those who watched have at the end of the piece? Each dancer should have the opportunity to be both dancer/presenter and audience.

Extension: 1) try joining 2-3 of the small group pieces together. 2) Use the original phrase created by the group to make variation phrases- i.e.: call and response, ABC (rondo) form, theme and variation.

Everyone returns to their own individual 3-shape phrase. Now play several short cuts of music, in quick succession, varying the musical styles – Latin beat, blues, traditional Celtic, etc. Move to each musical selection repeating the 3-shape phrase. Ask the students how the music impacts their quality and style of movement? How did you vary your movement phrases as you moved to the music?

 Source: Alison Marshall
Standard:

Component- Theme Dance Studies

Create groups of 5-7 students. Each group will improvise and craft a dance based on the cue elements you provide. The groups will work quickly to compose the dance. Teamwork and improvisation will be the choreographic process. Review the components that will be included in each group's dance:

Cue elements for the dance might include:

a high, middle and low shape

a group traveling shape

a spoken phrase

an ending shape in which dancers are connected

a turning movement

a beginning and ending shape

a group connected shape that changes level

a held shape and a change in focus, etc.

Then provide a context for the work so that the groups will create a study that includes the (dance) components and is based on a curricular topic from your classroom (indigenous animals of the rain forest, structure of an atom, three and four sided geometric shapes, etc.)

The context is the theme of the dance. (Rubric attached) This experience can serve as a useful assessment tool or process as each group demonstrates what they understand about the dance components and the curricular theme.

Each group should be familiar enough with their piece they make that they can repeat and perform it. Again, all students should have an opportunity to act both as performers and audience. This is a good study for groups to share with one another in informal performance. Discussion can address using the same elements to create different results – problem solving with multiple solutions, and aspects of interpretation.



Source: Alison Marshall

Standard:

“Understanding is being able to carry out a variety of actions that show one’s grasp of a topic and at the same time advance it.”

-David Perkins, Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education





“He who would learn to fly one day must first learn to stand and walk and run and climb and dance: one “cannot fly into flying.”

--Friedrich Nietzsche



“Teaching is an instinctual art, mindful of potential, craving of realizations, a pausing, seamless process, where one rehearses constantly while acting, sits as a spectator at a play one directs, engages every part in order to keep the choices open and the shape alive for the student, so that the student may enter in, and begin to do what the teacher has done: make choices.”

--A. Bartlett Giamatti

Alison Marshall, PhD, is a teaching and performing artist, choreographer, and arts consultant who designs and presents dance and theatre based learning programs in schools, businesses and communities. Her performance and choreography work has been presented at a variety of venues including the New Works Series San Francisco, Naropa/Colorado Summer Dance Festival, Boston Dance Umbrella, Tropfen Amsterdam, Jacob’s Pillow (2008 choreographers lab) and Phoenix Theatre. Her community based dance work has included projects and performances in Mexico, The Netherlands and the United States.

As the Arts Learning Director for the Arizona Commission on the Arts she designed and presented over 200 professional development workshops in dance and theatre-based learning. She has served as an editor for The Teaching Artist Journal, as co-director of Detour Theater Company with developmentally delayed adult actors, and is the co-author of a design arts curriculum and teachers guide titled *Architecture and Children*. Alison holds a doctorate in Integrated Arts Education with a specialization in dance and is on the national dance faculty at Lesley University, College of Creative Arts. She has served as faculty in dance and education at Arizona State University West, the University of Washington, Prescott College and the Project Zero Summer Institute, Harvard Graduate School of Education