



## **Developing the Whole Child - learning about the world through our senses**

**Ai Fujii Nelson, Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company Director of Education**

Dance Education has always been an integral part of the mission statement of the Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company. For over 40 years, the company has travelled across the United States, Europe, Asia and South Africa to teach, perform and declare our motto: **"Dance is for Everybody!"** Joan Woodbury, company co-founder, wrote: "The ability to think creatively and to be involved in creative-problem solving needs to be encouraged and practiced; it is through experiences in the arts, and specifically dance, that the human being becomes more compassionate, more understanding, more knowledgeable, more inquisitive, more flexible and more human- and that all these experiences in the arts must happen in the school setting. They are CORE to a child's education."

### **Benefits of creative movement in the classroom:**

Research shows "children in early childhood are sensory, motor, and concrete thinkers who learn best from processing information physically through bodily movement and through their senses." This is exactly the kind of learning experience that takes place in creative movement classes. Students are provided with a variety of opportunities to explore and investigate their creative ideas through their movement, engage all of their senses to make connections to the world around them.

Where students are exposed to creative dance, their test scores are higher. It is a known fact that dance actively engages both hemispheres of your brain. The latest study from 2013 tells us that physical learning through dance increases cognition and recollection; it fires lots of neurons in your brain which makes you smarter, and there is also a link of all of this to empathy in humans. Perhaps this explains why there are many evidences that where dance flourishes, we see not only the higher test scores but better attendance and lower drop-out rate, and an enhanced sense of community. As a result, teachers are more satisfied.

## **Developing 21st Century Skills**

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving  
Collaboration across Networks and Leading by Influence  
Agility and Adaptability  
Initiative and Entrepreneurialism  
Effective Oral and Written Communication  
Accessing and Analyzing Information  
Curiosity and Imagination

Dance taught as an artistic discipline in creative dance classes definitely develops these important skills required for their future – the ability to focus, be persistent and engaged in their work; cooperation and collaboration; to solve big and small problems and exercise critical thinking; and above all, to be creative, imaginative and innovative - through the one and the only artistic instrument in the world; your body.

### **Creative Dance/Creative Movement in the classroom encourages:**

- Living in the moment
- Wholeness in a child - reaches all aspects of the child ----“multiple intelligences”
- The unique, authentic voice and expression “find your own way”
- Respect for diversity ---- many solutions to one problem
- Enjoyment of the process as well as the product ---- creative journey
- Curiosity, exploration, and problem solving
- Observation and immediate feedback ---- building communication skills
- Engagement, attention, concentration
- Collective or individual decision making ---- empowerment and ownership
- Transformation!

Dance as a tool:

Physicalizes learning: reinforces curriculum; allows for exploration and investigation of ideas/ things/situations/concepts that might be impossible to understand in any other way (examples: Can you make your body hard as stone? Show me the energy it takes to carve petroglyphs or pain pictographs. How might the wind/rain erode the rock shape of your body? Can you show the energy and motion in your body of an earthquake?)

## **Lesson Plans/ Easy "Scaffolding"**

Establishing rules for a movement class:

Children are a tough audience because they are honest; if they are bored they will tell you—either by saying it or by showing it. Their behavior is a mirror of how they are feeling.

Establish rules at the onset and **STICK TO THEM!** Some will look for any sign of inconsistency and weakness and take advantage. Make the rules simple; you don't need many.

**Respect ♦ Control ♦ Best Effort ♦ Fun:**

**Discuss their importance in context of a movement class; why are they needed?**

Respect and control will help keep the students safe and engaged. Expect their best effort; they can tell right away what your expectations are for them. If you settle for their first try, they will realize they don't have to work hard. Make sure you **REALLY SEE THEM**. One of the hardest things for an inexperienced movement teacher is to watch and honestly evaluate students. It's easy to get too worried about the next thing you want to do. And make sure what you are doing is fun. Duh.

### **Warm Up**

- Follow the leader/silent warm-up (always helpful to get the whole group focused)
- Brain Dance (by Anne Green Gilbert)  
Breath / Tactile / Core-Distal / Head-Tail / Upper-Lower / Body Side / Cross Lateral Vestibular
- Locomotion- (walk, run, skip, gallop, hop, jump, slide, leap) travel through the space with simple sequencing (i.e., walk for 8, freeze for 8, bounce for 8)

**Task sequence - give a series of tasks (as many as they are old) to develop memory and ability to sequence**

### **Individual tasks**

- Introduce a visual aid and/or imagery (i.e., July 4th celebration)
- Ask students for descriptive words — the more detailed the better
- Draw the shape in space - everywhere - with imaginary paint on different part of your body
- Put some words in the movement — try with different part of the body, different energy, different direction in space (abstraction)
- Make high shape and low shape. (Try making each one in 8 counts, hold for 8, then bounce for 8.)
- Create a sequence they can repeat

When digging for movement ideas —— you always have to do a little bit of analyzing, describing, and encouraging deeper understanding of the subject, before you put them in movement.

- i.e. What is a chocolate? What does it do, when it's hot/cold (get some verbs), and how (adverbs)? In what shapes do they come? How does eating chocolate make you feel?

### **Group task/composition**

- Brainstorm some ideas about the theme (i.e. July 4th celebration) - try these ideas with your movement
- In groups, create a sequence putting together three movement ideas (approximately 8 counts each)
- The dance has to have a very good beginning and ending (and of course, the middle!)
- Rehearse!
- Share with an audience!

Note: When it's not working, or when you want to make something better/more interesting, you can always remember and use the four elements of dance to make the dance more interesting and exciting to perform/watch!

### **Space ♦ Time ♦ Energy ♦ Shape**

Try abstracting an idea/concept, i.e., putting the idea on different part of the body, changing sizes of the movement, "spatializing", exaggerating, changing speed of the movement, etc. This way you can avoid miming or gesture that is too literal.

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Resources:

Teaching supplies used in this workshop: CD, construction paper, dry erase board

[www.ririe-woodbury.com](http://www.ririe-woodbury.com)

Evidence: A Report on the Impact of Dance in the K-12 Setting

Studies reveal that dance classes can have a positive impact on student achievement, teacher satisfaction, and school culture.

[http://www.ndeo.org/content.aspx?page\\_id=22&club\\_id=893257&module\\_id=153248](http://www.ndeo.org/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=893257&module_id=153248)

On Brain Dance:

<http://creativetdance.org/about/braindance/>