BARRY ORECK WORKSHOP

SOME STRUCTURES FOR EXPLORING CREATIVE DANCE[[1]](#footnote--1)

Tips from Jessica Nicoll:

REMEMBER:

* A clear structure encourages both freedom and self-control.
* Dance uses the BODY in SPACE with TIME and ENERGY; exploration of these
* elements leads naturally to physical expressiveness.
* Ask the questions that will lead your students to explore and discover

For Classroom Teachers:

* Beginnings and endings are important. If the students learn to begin and end in a shape, they will have much greater self-control (and, therefore, freedom) within the activity.
* Learn to count off or to have a student count off an introduction. This might be a rhythmic, counted phrase (e.g., “5-6-7-8”) or the sametype of rhythmic introduction expressed verbally (e.g., “Make a shape & ready, begin.”)
* Challenge the students to be clear and specific and to go to extremes in their movement explorations: “Is that as high as you can reach? Try to touch the ceiling. You’ve got the shape of that rock, but what about the weight? Can you imagine what kind of heavy steps it would take if it could move? Would its arms swing so easily? How do your muscles feel when you really do your work dance with effort?” Etc.
* Use contrast. Trying a movement as quickly as possible and then as slowly as possible is both fun and instructive.
* Make the space you’ve got work for you:
  + If there is a way to create an open space in one corner of your classroom, you won’t have to spend time moving tables and chairs every time you want to try a movement idea. You’ll be much more likely to jump up and try something out in movement (even if it wasn’t part of the original plan!).
  + A large gym can be divided in halves or quarters (use taped lines on the floor, an imaginary wall, traffic cones from the supply closet, or shoes and backpacks to define the space).
  + Arm dances can be done at tables; path dances can be done around the desks; silent hallway dances can be done moving from one classroom to another

QUALITIES (STRETCH & MELT):

This activity encourages to students to explore the elements of dance (the body in time and space with force). Students begin in a low-level shape and take eight slow counts to rise with a stretching quality while the instructor asks students to think of things that stretch -- rubber band, gak, elastic, etc. -- and to use those images as they move to their fullest height. They then take eight counts to return to a lower level with a melting quality assisted by images such as ice cream, candles, wicked witch, etc. The same process is followed to the count of four (rising) and four (lowering); then two and two; and finally one and one. This structure lends itself to many contrasting elements and qualities such as sharp and smooth, heavy and light, curved and angular, etc.

ISOLATIONS:

Students can take turns leading simple warm-up activities with various body parts: head side-to-side, shoulder circles, small knee-bends, stretching arms, balancing on one leg. . . whatever they come up with. The teacher should serve as a guide, setting rules (“No touching others; no cartwheels or forward rolls; careful with head movements; etc.”) and helping simplify.

NAME PASS / ENERGY PASS:

One student says his or her name while looking directly at the person to the right. That person turns his or her head to the next person, saying his or her own name at the same time, and so on around the circle. The names can also be passed to the left or switched back and forth around the circle. The same can be done with movement: students might try to (1) pass the same movement around the circle; (2) pass very different movements around; (3) pass movements that are different but share the same quality.

AWAY & BACK:

Each student has a spot in the room to which he or she will return after moving through the space. A period of time is established (e.g., 8 counts; 16 counts; 10 seconds by a stopwatch; the length of time to read a haiku; etc.) and specific students are chosen to travel away from their spots and back in that time frame. Methods of traveling depend on the idea being explored (e.g., qualities -- sharp, smooth, etc. -- or expression/character; different body parts leading; levels -- low, middle, or high; tempo -- fast, medium, slow/accelerating and decelerating; etc.). Students not traveling should hold their spots and observe the others to see if they meet the time, space, body, and force requirements. (This can also be done with students traveling to new spots, rather than returning to the same.)

QUALITIES EXPLORATIONS

Using word cards with verbs or adjectives (or both) pick a word to explore. As students move, carefully watch what they are doing. If they are using their arms a lot you might ask “what parts of your body can you show this quality with? Can you (push/pull/reach etc. without your arms?” Or if they are all moving only at a high level you might ask can you move in different levels, low, middle and high?” Give a minimum of 10 seconds between questions and keep the questions as open-ended as possible. Mary Joyce suggests using cross-over questions. If you have just asked one about space, make the next one about time or energy, etc.

DANCES FROM A HAT (Adapted from Mary Joyce)

Get into groups of 3 to 5 people. One person from each group draws a card with a word or phrase on it. The group looks at the card but does not show it to the other groups. Explain that the group will become one of these things. People may play different roles but they are all parts of the same thing – not different characters, people, or things in the surrounding environment. The structure for the dance is shape – movement – shape. The group starts in a still opening shape, moves like this thing and ends in a still closing shape. There are no sound effects or props in the first stage of explorations. Suggest that the group first discuss the qualities and characteristics – decide on the size, direction, energy, force, speed, where it starts and ends. Suggest that group members take turns stepping out to watch during the process. Give at least 10 minutes to prepare. When the dance is performed the audience is directed to describe what they see – not guess what the image is. After descriptions have been collected you may ask if any images come to mind.

1. Designed by and blatantly stolen (with permission) from Jessica Nicoll and Mary Joyce (where indicated) [↑](#footnote-ref--1)