

THE INS AND OUTS OF THE “ALL, MOST AND SOME” OF TEACHING DANCE IN SCHOOLS

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DANCE PRACTICE AND COVID-19

Current circumstances have challenged the way in which we work as dance teachers or practitioners delivering physical activity. The way in which social distancing affects the art world is especially important and the way dance is taught will need to be considered carefully. Two-dimensional virtual teaching, interaction-less connections and technology-based group choreography are magically manifested into byte-size electronic collaborations and transmissions. With so many opportunities to be involved in physical activity through technology, is this the way it will be?

TEACHING DANCE

By my reckoning, there are basically three ways of teaching dance. The easy way, which I've often seen: “I'll put the music on and you go and move” – while other jobs are completed. Another way, which I have also seen and heard on many occasions: “You do what I tell you to do and that will be okay” – and the beat goes on. Alternatively, it could be the way in which the teacher says: “What about this? Can you think of a movement which represents...?” Is there a way to teach dance? Is there a right or wrong way? What is the right way if there is one? Where does it start?

All of what is articulated above represents ways in which teaching may be differentiated over time, depending on the skill and abilities of the participants. The National Curriculum Programmes of Study and Key Stage statements provide the pathway for young people's achievement and attainment. The bridge between *how* participants achieve to their empowered attainment is significant to their realisation of creative resilience, a careful stepping-stone to success.

CONFIDENCE

I have heard, so many times, from teachers and student teachers: “I can't dance and I'm certainly not going to teach it.” But dance is not necessarily about being the best dancer or knowing everything there is to know about dance; it is about the willingness to have a go and inspiring, motivating and including participants in every way. It starts by considering what you want participants to achieve and recognising that *how* they achieve it underpins their success.

ALL, MOST AND SOME

When considering what students will achieve, there has been a tendency to talk about all, most and some. This comes from a summative assessment approach where “all participants will...”, “most participants will...” and “some participants will...”. I have a problem with this. I remember one of the times when I had written ‘all, most, some’ on the board and a boy turned to me and asked, “Why are only some of us going to do what is written, sir?”

This made me think about what the boy was perceiving. He may have been thinking about what participants would achieve, but the opposite was the fact that some would not achieve. The impact of differentiation on a participant who is not so confident or who possesses low self-efficacy is something we really need to consider. In this case, it is the notion of *not achieving* which raises questions about the negativity of such statements. Before we write ‘all, most, some’ on the board, do we consider the significant psychological harm to participants who may see the potential for failure?

So, where do we begin? I suggest it might be more appropriate to begin with what we want the participants to achieve and attain? This aim can be broken into objectives – the all, most and some – to help us to plan. For example:

Aim: participants will choreograph their

own small group performance of their selected sculpture.

Objectives:

- All participants will be able to perform their choreography using levels with awareness of different body parts and talk about their work.
- Most participants will be able to perform their choreography with the use of levels, body parts leading movements with dynamic variation and be able to talk and write about their work.
- Some participants will be able to perform their choreography demonstrating variations in level, use of different body parts with dynamic variations, including a variety of basic body actions as well as talking and writing about their work using subject specific vocabulary.

WHERE DO YOU GO ‘SHOPPING’ FOR DANCE?

If we know what we want participants to achieve then it is possible to plan to meet those aims and objectives. These statements recognise that participants can achieve in different ways. They are based on an awareness of the fundamentals of dance: the **actions, space, dynamics and relationships (ASDR)** of movement. What are these fundamentals? Essentially, they are the beginnings of a journey that empowers and encourages creativity through the exploration of different ways to become involved with movement. They are the what, where, how and who of dance.

- **What** movements will be performed and all the variations of travel, jump, turn, gesture and stillness (actions).
- **Where** in the space do movements occur, with the use of levels – high, medium and deep – and the utilisation of the whole or personal space (space).
- **How** the movements are performed, the contrasting qualities in the use of weight, time space and flow (dynamics).

- **Who** to perform the movements with? Solo, duo, trio, quartet and so on (relationships).

The following weblink and QR code take you to my guide on these fundamentals in *The Elements of Dance* (Connell, 2020).



<https://drive.google.com/file/d/16tnr6l1Ro13kf-O8l6rawKCMP7P9Yl2V/view?usp=sharing>

THE COMPOSITE ELEMENTS OF DANCE THEATRE

Together with the fundamentals, and to consider the performance of dance (i.e. what we see), it is useful to think about the elements of theatre which are important to how dance is structured.

What do you first see or hear when a performance is about to begin? Imagine, the auditorium lights are dimmed until they go out. Then we hear the **accompaniment** play before the performance begins. Next, the **lighting** shows us what the technicians and choreographer want us to see. You can imagine the curtains opening so you can see the **set** (the scenery and props). On the stage you may see **performers**, in this case the dancers. The performers may have specific costumes, make-up and hairstyles. Finally, there is the **movement** which consists of a variation of actions, space, dynamics and relationships, synchronised in a carefully structured choreographic way (**ALSPM**). These composite elements of dance theatre make the artistic and aesthetic experience of dance complete. But do we really think about the artistic and aesthetic? Is there a need to? For some teachers and participants, most definitely, as there can be varying levels of appreciation of the choreography and performance to inform artistic and aesthetic understanding.

CHOREOGRAPHY, PERFORMANCE AND APPRECIATION

So, where do we begin? Within everything identified above – aims, objectives, ASDR and ALSPM – it is important to develop something that young people can aim for. This could be a statement which reflects the artistic and aesthetic nuances of the three areas of dance practice, i.e. choreography, performance and appreciation. It all reads a little grand, but I have provided, for interpretation, a series of statements which young people can progressively and developmentally realise through Years 1-9 in preparation for the study of dance at examination level. An example of the two ends of the spectrum of statements is provided here:

CHOREOGRAPHY

- **Red:** I can... create movement phrases with beginnings, middles and ends. My choreographies include choreographic devices that enable me to explore the use of actions (travel, jump, turn, gesture and stillness) and space (levels, directions and pathways), allowing me to portray work using ideas, moods, themes or feelings.
- **Platinum:** I can... choreograph original material with imagination and sensitivity to the intended idea, using complementary choreographic devices to articulate this intention and using ASDR with consideration for the elements of dance theatre. I have highly refined responses to demonstrate considerable understanding of choreographic form, devices and accompaniment and their application to the proficient selection and inter-relationship of the composite elements of dance.

All of the statements can be viewed at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gDJ_YML-pnzTd7Khlr5QsWSdOYAKXLEQ/view?usp=sharing



These links take you to a comprehensive series of statements related to choreography, performance and appreciation of dance which can be used with any theme to enhance the learning and teaching experience for those involved. As can be seen above, each of the statements is written as if the participant is writing what they can achieve. Each of the statements is progressive and developmental, enabling the participant to attain each colour and record what they have achieved in the three aspects of choreography, performance and appreciation. It may be that some participants achieve different colours in the different areas of choreography, performance and appreciation, but this is where differentiation occurs. Some participants may be more skilled at choreography or performance and others may prefer the element of appreciation and therefore develop dance skills in a different way.

The interpretation of the statements relies on the knowledge, skill and understanding of the teacher with responsibility for dance to facilitate the participants' progressive, differentiated and developmental attainment and achievement. Once again, just to confirm, no matter what the theme might be, it is about *how* the participants progress and develop their individual understanding that is important.

A GUIDE TO PARTICIPANTS' ACHIEVEMENT

Included in participants' achievements for choreography, performance and appreciation are examples of the knowledge, skills and understanding the teacher may draw upon to

facilitate the exploration of a specific theme. As the teacher, you choose any theme and progressively develop the idea and skills for the age of the participants. The idea articulated at the outset, with reference to the teaching approaches to be adopted, now becomes more pronounced in relation to what is required from the National Curriculum. The variety of teaching styles which are available to the teacher can be utilised to enhance, encourage and develop participants' experience. For example, a teacher-directed approach is sometimes especially effective with beginner participants. As their dance experience develops, responsibility can be transferred to the participants and becomes self-initiated. However, there is still a need for constant feedback, encouragement and support from the teacher to further participants' attainment of choreography, performance and appreciation.

A brief synopsis of the teaching styles can be viewed at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Hi61Y9lGJxr7LOMG62Ayp9WYeSdtiw8K/view?usp=sharing>



DANCE CHOREOGRAPHY

My guide to dance choreography (see the link below) provides the structure and form of a dance that can be used as a template for the further development of different themes; it can be refined for specific age groups. An idea is used as a stimulus for movement, but it is how the idea is developed, used and replicated that is important. The theme could be transport, the war years, any National Curriculum subject or even films such as *Grease*, *Hairspray*, *West Side Story* and so on.

View the choreography guide at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mWl283QXTOO3oYHw_l3WleEtpJU-daml/view?usp=sharing



Any theme can be taught in a progressive, developmental and differentiated way based upon the statements. The related colours (red to platinum) are used in our partnership work with primary and secondary schools where participants receive certificated recognition for their engagement in dance practice, related to the variety of themes. The most recent package of work is based on a selection of art works and highlights participants' creativity and cross-curricular engagement in dance practice. If you would like more information on this work and the possibility of a 'virtual' field trip to Yorkshire, get in touch. ■

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