

Heidi Seltz is a full time dancer and education outreach coordinator for the Repertory Project. She holds a BS in Education with Dance emphasis from Bowling Green University. She is also Currently teaching with Schools in Motion; an educational program committed to integrating dance in the curriculum. Classroom teachers and dance educators come together in Schools in Motion to create integrated lesson plans in any subject. Heidi has created lessons for dance and language arts, habitat, time, and other curriculum themes. The following interview was conducted by fellow Schools in Motion Teacher Erin Butcheck.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

For eight weeks, I meet with students twice a week for one hour. These contact hours occur in the classroom with the classroom teacher not only present, but also actively involved. In each eight-week session, the students create 2 to 3 studies in groups of 3 to 4 students. These studies average eight to thirty-two counts, although we often improvise and create movement without counting. First, I try to build a model with the class in order for students to understand the assignment and how to organize the smaller groups. Together, the classroom teacher and I clean the studies and add elements to them such as level changes, facings, or cannons. By the end of the eight week period, the students have created enough material to perform in an informal showing.

CLASS STRUCTURE

When I teach a new group, I usually start with the name game (each student says their name and creates a gesture and the rest of the class echoes.) This way, I immediately start to learn everyone's name. I give a basic warm-up with timing changes. A warm-up gets the students moving, but it also serves to teach the students about the structure of a dance class and how to prepare the body to be ready to dance. At the end of class, I always use some kind of cool down. Sometimes we lay our hands on our chests and whisper counting to five. I need to calm the students so they can transition out of the dance class and return to the classroom.

TEACHING TIPS

- If the class get out of control, I whisper.
- Establish boundaries immediately. Let them know where the dance space is and where dancing is acceptable, for example in the halls and under desks!
- Assume they can do more and pull back from there. We underestimate their ability. Often, the classroom teacher will ask more from the students than I would.

DISCIPLINE

First, I use a time out. If the behavior is repeatedly inappropriate, I follow the schools guidelines such as sending the student out of the room or gibing a writing assignment. If I notice I'm spending more time on discipline than creative process, then I won't divide the students into smaller groups. I can keep their interest and focus by using rhythm and tempo changes in a unison pattern. Sometimes, too much creative freedom, either in a pattern or in their group work, destroys the classes ability to stay focused.

LET THEM WORK IT OUT

I see myself getting less and less involved in the creative dynamics of the students. There was one group that included four girls and one boy. The boy was not there very often, and to make matters worse, he had behavioral problems whereas the four girls were really well behaved. For the first couple of work sessions, this group was a mess. The girls didn't want to work with the boy so the boy would cry or become disruptive. Despite all their wasted time, I refused to intervene. I wouldn't let them show their work without him dancing with them in the study. After three one-hour sessions, they finished a study and sometimes the boy danced with one girl and then another. The girls had learned to work with him and he lost his bossiness, his need to control. It brought tears to my eyes. They had to get over not liking each other because in the end they had to dance with each other.

SEEK HELP FROM THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

I was in a situation where I was alone with the kids for three weeks. Immediately I was seeing behavior problems that I thought were subdued in the beginning of the year. To add to my frustrations, these kids were creating a final project to be performed. I went to the principal for advice and she was extremely helpful. She suggested that I establish myself as an authority in the room and not as a peer. She also suggested that I pull out the disruptive kids. Finally, never underestimate the power of a "surprise visit" by the principal.

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER WAYS TO BE INVOLVED IN THE SCHOOL?

- Like a library book, teachers could use you as a resource tool in which to create movement lessons either you or the teacher could teach.
- Be available to teach smaller segments such as a specific lesson a unit.
- Arrange contact time within the gym period to teach more traditional dance classes.

HOW HAS TEACHING CHANGED YOU?

On a professional level, teaching makes me more aware of connection. I can sense bigger concepts in the piece I am performing. I have transferred ideas from the classroom into my studio teaching. For instance, I allow time for improvisation and start the class in a circle. The work I do in the classroom supports me not only financially, but artistically as well.