

Lisa DeCato is a dance educator for the Saturday in the Studio program at CSU. The creative movement orientated classes are for Cleveland Public School students and their adult sponsors. As well as being co-founder of The Dance/Theater Collective Lisa is also on the Dance faculty at Lake Erie College and a member of The Ohio Arts Council Artists in Education Program. During this interview I asked Lisa questions about her teaching techniques and how she handles common classroom situations.

How do you handle discipline problems?

I rarely have discipline problems in this setting. I set up the environment so they can succeed. If they are having success, they are less likely to act out. But, if someone does act out:

1. I'll gently go be near them. I'll bring my presence and attention closer to them.
2. I'll ask them to sit down until they are ready to join. Usually they are quickly ready to join because it looks like so much fun. Kids usually only act out if they are afraid of something.

How do you keep the children interested?

Every age group is different. I really try to get them engaged in the warm-up. Older kids like the physical challenge. For younger kids, the physicality of the movement is exciting enough. It is important to get them to enjoy the movement because it comes from them, not because I tell them to do it. They enjoy the challenge. Also, because it is a no fail environment, it is OK if they just move an arm or just a leg. Let them make the movement their own. Kids love to move.

How do you decide what the children are capable of doing? Do you assess them somehow, or do you know their coordination by their age?

Are you speaking of creative movement? **Yes.** Well, from teaching experience I know what kids are capable of developmentally. But each group is different. I'll usually start by teaching a basic phrase. I'll find:

1. their strengths
2. what they have fun doing
3. where their developmental needs are

Then I go from there. I always come in with a plan! But often divert from the plan, because it doesn't go the way I imagined. The kid's energy level might be different that day, and they might need more of a boost or a calm. But I always have an idea of what I want to accomplish for that lesson. I'm always flexible and constantly accessing.

What is the largest class you'd suggest one person to teach?

25 - 30 students is manageable. It is easier with another person assisting. Like I said, because you are trying to set up for success, you're not just going to turn them loose. Set up, prepare beforehand, and do group stuff. The whole warm-up and preparation is crucial to the success of the exploration time.

Do children need a warm-up and cool-down?

Warm-up is part of the preparation for the creative activity. For the cool-down, it is important we learn how to look at the movement. Often when you're doing creative movement it is important to see each other. The kids should be able to say what they enjoyed, and how they were successful. Also cool-down is important just to re-gather and make the group feel as a whole. It is important for the kids to know and respect each other as challenges get harder and harder. The environment gets safer and safer as everyone gets closer.

Could you share with us some of your own ideas about teaching dance (something we haven't discussed)? What have you found to be most important?

Value each kid's ability and input. Remember that the thing you're striving for is to give them confidence in their own creative voice. Find ways for each child to be successful. Whether it be rhythm, word games, or partnering. -And when designing lessons, make sure you find a way for each child to be successful. Notice the progression of each individual and the group as a whole. Part of giving kids confidence is positive reinforcement. Show the kids how much you enjoy watching them dance. Show them how much you value their work. And when something is hard, they'll have the satisfaction of knowing they did it.