Walking down the hallway of an elementary school, your ears pick up the resonating beat of music. You are hypnotically drawn to find the source and are surprised to discover that the captivating, rhythmic sound emanates from the school gymnasium. With anticipation and curiosity, you enter the gym and observe groups of sixth graders experimenting with creative movement elements and basketball skills to the song of “Sweet Georgia Brown.” You immediately notice that students are actively engaged in discovering, collaborating, and expressing ideas. You observe different movement concepts:

- body awareness—traveling using different locomotor skills, and shapes
- space awareness—directions, levels, pathways, formations, transitions
- use of personal and general space
- movement qualities—rhythm, speed, force, flow
- relationships to people

However, you notice that something is missing. There are no basketballs. Students manipulate imaginary balls. This allows them freedom to focus complete attention on expressing their movements rather than being preoccupied with control of an external object. Each participant, regardless of experience or ability, has the confidence of participating as an “expert” performer or “star” athlete. The imaginary balls clearly weave their way from one student to the next in a constant display of motion and changing formations. There is joy, excitement, and anticipation on faces as the ball passes to each participant and continues on a new movement adventure. Students are thoroughly involved in extending each other’s creative ideas while simultaneously moving their bodies to the inviting rhythm of the music.

### Value of Creative Dance

Physical education teachers enjoy the special privilege of guiding children to discover unique ways for expressing and communicating ideas, attitudes, thoughts, and emotions through movement. Creative dance lets children explore movement possibilities limited only by one’s imagination. Individually and collectively, creative dance encourages students to create, interpret, and apply multiple responses to movement questions posed by the teacher (Mosston & Ashworth, 2002). Sue Stinson (1988) refers to this form of expression by children as rediscovering the magic deep inside and using that magic to transform movement into dance.

As students gain experience with creative dance, they develop cognitive, physical, and affective skills; expand interpersonal awareness; learn to value individual differences; and bolster self-esteem (Landalf, 2001). Creative movement contributes to physical skills in terms of body awareness, flexibility, coordination, and spatial awareness (Graham, Holt/Hale, & Parker, 2001). Cohan (1986) sees “dance as a sign of life pressing itself out through the body, which is why it is so exciting to see and to do. It both stirs us with its energy, and satisfies us with its harmony” (p. 10).

It is vital that physical education teachers provide students with a variety of movement opportunities that exercise and bring expression to one’s whole being. Graham et al. (2001) suggest that educators who do not offer creative movement experiences for children are professionally irresponsible: “Depriving children of opportunities to experience creative movement is no more acceptable than eliminating all opportunities to practice throwing and catching” (p. 331-332).

### Creative Dance and Sports

An effective method for engaging intermediate grade students in initial creative dance lessons is to introduce themes related to their interests and experiences. Physical educators with limited dance background can easily capitalize on movement ideas presented in contexts of individual and team sports. Real and imaginary experiences are available to students through vicarious identification with sport participation and popular athletes. Sports-related movement ideas provide a common reference for both teacher and students. For example, figure skating, ice dance, gymnastics, and synchronized swimming all provide specific contexts for exploration of creative movement possibilities.

Preliminary movement activities essential for building a movement vocabulary can be introduced through the exploration of action words, progressing to action phrases, each utilizing locomotor skills, different body parts, and
body shapes. Follow these tasks with explorations of moving through space using different directions, levels, and pathways. Students may then be ready to consider the impact of effort: e.g., speed (quick, slow), force (strong, light), and flow (free, bound). Finally, movement ideas can be related through individual, partner, and group expression (Kirchner & Fishburne, 1998).

Sport-related teaching ideas include tasks in which students create sport action sequences, a sport tableau (individual living statues), or a group sport tableau dance (Rovegno & Bandhauer, 2000). Rovegno and Bandhauer describe a sport tableau as an expressionist painting that seeks to represent a moment in sport by capturing an important aspect of the event and feelings associated with that moment.

A demonstration of sport statues by the teacher is followed by students’ creative expressions. Examples may include shooting a basketball, hitting a baseball, completing an overhand tennis serve, kicking a soccer ball, shooting or saving a hockey puck, delivering a bowling ball, and performing track and field activities.

After the initial learning activities, students should be ready to apply creative dance elements to specific themes that pose a variety of movement challenges. Doing so achieves physical education goals:

- Students experience fun and fitness through quality, developmentally appropriate creative and rhythmic activities.

### Basketball—Harlem Globetrotters Theme

**Age Group**  
Grades 4–7, Groups of 4 – 6 students

**Sport Theme**  
Basketball: Harlem Globetrotters

**Music**  
“Sweet Georgia Brown,” Brother Bones and his Shadows, Tempo PTR-652 (1949)  
Adopted in 1952 as official theme song of the Harlem Globetrotters  
Rated as one of the top ten most listened to recordings in history (www.whistlingrecords.com/brother_bones)

**Step 1:** Choose an interesting topic/theme.
- The theme relates to events and experiences common to the learners.
- The Harlem Globetrotters are universally synonymous with fun, creativity, and skill.
- Students in grades 4 –7 are motivated to learn and practice the movement skills of basketball.

**Step 2:** Brainstorm movement ideas.
- The teacher “sets the stage” with enthusiasm, background information, and questioning techniques.
- A video clip of a Globetrotters’ performance assists with motivation.
- Questions: Has anyone seen the Globetrotters perform? What are the Globetrotters best known for? What makes their performances interesting and enjoyable?
- The teacher and students discuss possible movement ideas.
- Ideas are listed on chart paper and serve as a starting point for group decision-making. Examples of brainstorming topics include:
  - Trick routines – spins, turns, jumps, shapes
  - Drill sequences
  - Passing – chest pass, bounce pass, overhead pass
  - Dribbling at different levels
  - Dribbling around different areas of the body – under, over, through, around – legs, waist, chest, head
  - Shooting sequences—lay-up, jump shot, slam dunks

**Step 3:** Incorporate movement concepts/challenges.
- Movement concepts and challenges should provide structure for manipulating elements of the dance, structure for student decision making, criteria for the movement routine, framework for assessment, and valid interpretation of movement representing ideas from literal to abstract (Cone, 2000).
- The Globetrotters’ routine is to include a variety of movement concepts/challenges including individual, partner, and group actions; changes of formation (line, circle, square, star, wheel, scattered, etc.); a wide variety of movements exhibiting qualities of space, effort, and relationships (Graham et al., 2001; Kirchner & Fishburne, 1998); transitions (smooth and natural movements connecting one formation to the next).

**Step 4:** Sequence movement ideas.
- Provide class time for students to collaborate, experiment, and make decisions on movement concepts/challenges and how they will be sequenced.

**Step 5:** Establish an original opening.
- Ask students to collaborate on a unique beginning or introduction to the routine.
- Remind them the purpose is to engage the interest of the audience.

**Step 6:** Establish an original finale.
- Ask students to collaborate on a unique closing to the routine.
- Remind them this is the “grand finale” for the audience.

(continued)
Basketball—Harlem Globetrotters Theme, continued

Step 7: Phrase movement to music.
- Allow students time to coordinate their movement patterns to variations of tempo and rhythm. Students must make decisions on the timing of each movement segment so the length of the routine matches the length of the music.
- At this point, students should finalize their selection of individual and group movements.

Step 8: Practice and refine movement routine.
- Provide class time for students to practice, refine, memorize, and elaborate the movements they have selected.
- Elaboration relates to the amount and type of details students exhibit in their routines (Henkel, 2002). Students may initially need encouragement to move out of their comfort zone in order to exaggerate movements in ways that clearly convey ideas or feelings.
- With practice, students will improve their ability to represent ideas through the full range of movement and express their feelings in powerful ways.

Step 9: Visuals, props, and costumes
- Students really enjoy this aspect of the creative experience and are keen to plan ideas that add flair and originality to their presentation.
  Examples: Hats, scarves, streamers, uniforms, sunglasses, head and armbands, banners etc.
- Caution: props or costumes should not detract from the primary purpose of the dance experience. Expression of movement and rhythm is to be emphasized throughout the entire process.

Step 10: Presentation
- Presentations are the culminating activity. Students’ accountability to an audience is a valuable element of the process.
- The performance allows opportunity for formal assessment, encouragement, and praise. Students learn from observing each other and quickly come to identify and appreciate the application of different movement concepts.
- The presentation can be evaluated on predetermined, student-oriented criteria.
- While originality is typically part of assessment rubrics in dance, Rovegno and Bandhauer (2000) suggest that “originality means that the dance sequence has some shapes and movements that are varied, unusual, and interesting. There is no need for every movement to be unique or different.”
- Students can also be asked to respond to the highlights of each presentation. Rovegno and Bandhauer (2000) consider an aesthetic highlight as movement in a sequence that captures one’s attention and is special, distinctive, or exceptional.
- Video taping of performances is an option to consider for evaluative purposes.

- Students develop their abilities of self-expression, socialization, reasoning, and creative thinking.

The chart (p. 39-40) describes ten steps that guide students in developing creative movement sport themes. The example of the process uses a Harlem Globetrotters basketball theme.

Conclusion

Children naturally love to move, and creative dance allows children to use their bodies as avenues for self-expression. Creative dance fosters the expressive capacities of children. Combining sport themes with dance is one of many ways of having students think and move creatively. Sport provides a common and familiar starting point for children and can be used as a means of teaching the basic elements of dance.

Children come to learn and appreciate that movement conveys ideas and meaning. Connecting dance with sport and play provides students with a deeper appreciation and enjoyment of movement. Through dance, children discover a new world of sensory perception. Stinson (1988) maintains that “to dance is to discover a new world of sensory awareness. Awareness of movement is made possible by the kinesthetic sense, and it comes from the nerve endings in our joints and muscles. This sense tells us what our body is doing . . . some degree of kinesthetic awareness is essential if we are to master skills with our bodies; the better developed it is, the more complicated the motor skills we are able to learn and perform. If the kinesthetic sense is acute, it even allows us to feel motion we see others doing . . . we can actually feel a stretch in our own bodies as we watch a basketball player reach toward the basket” (p. 2-3).

References


© 2004 Human Kinetics