

Exercises for Creativity

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Do you often feel uninspired, at a loss for creativity, or just burned out? Well, the following activities can help both you and your students regain that creative edge and create new and innovative choreography.

First of all, it is necessary to mention that choreographing should be FUN, but in this competitive day and age the 'FUN' is often left out. Some of the most interesting and creative choreography has come from playing around. The modern dance company Philobolus creates unique body shapes and group designs just by experimenting in the studio. (If you've never seen them, it is a must!!!)

Secondly, do not be afraid to go out on a limb and create a work that seems bizarre and unique. Does it really matter that the judges do not like it or that you will be looked at as strange? NO...it actually means that you are a pioneer in dance choreography and are interested in providing new and innovative ideas for the field. You may just be ahead of the times! Remember all those initial modern dancers, which audiences stared at in appall? Well, they are praised today for their creativity. You also might be teaching your students to follow their ideas and dreams, and isn't that what teaching is all about??

So, allow your students time to play and experiment, but if you need a little structure on how to do that, below are listed a few ideas for creativity. If you try some of these, make sure to have an administrator visiting because many of them are multidisciplinary! Have fun!

Homonym Choreography

HOMONYM – Two words that sound the same but are spelled differently.

Examples:

ring / wring two / too no / know peace / piece

1. With a partner, make a list of ten pairs of words that sound the same but are spelled differently.
2. Choose the best five of these words and put them in 2 columns. Make sure that each partner agrees on the distinct meaning of each word.
3. Choose a movement/motion/gesture/body attitude for each *pair of words*. In other words, you will have 10 movements. Example: A movement for RING and a movement for WRING.
4. Imagine a place. Each person should be in the same 'place'. Example: A festival, the beach, a magical place!
5. Each person must now choose one column.
6. On a sheet of paper write the title "Homonym / Creative Movement Project"
7. Write the words of the column you chose. Keep the words in the same order. Write the place in which you chose.
8. Write a short story using all of the words in your column about the place that you chose. Keep the words in the order in which they were written down.
9. Memorize your text to where you can recite it!

10. Create transition movements, which will be added between the gestures you created with your partner for the homonyms.

11. Once you and your partner have created your movement phrases, practice them together so that when the 'shared' words come up they are timed to occur simultaneously. BE CREATIVE! You may have pauses, intertwine together, use contact or weight sharing to relay your homonyms at the same time.

Improvisation with Chairs

1. Set up 5 chairs in a horizontal line.
2. Assign tasks to each chair, for example:
 - Chair 1 – make an emotional outburst
 - Chair 2 – sit in chair, only make karate arm movements
 - Chair 3 – on the chair, but not sitting or standing
 - Chair 4 – move around the chair
 - Chair 5 – sit in the chair and only move your legs
3. Line up your students horizontally with the chairs and one person goes to each chair at a time.
4. Say 'change' when it is time to move to the next chair.
5. Do NOT let your students perform what the people in front of them performed.
6. Videotape! You may find out about some interesting movements to use in your next chair routine!

Choreography with Props

This is not about using a prop, but creating choreography from analyzing props.

1. Have your students find a prop in the room. Example: shoe, pencil, book bag, scarf, tape, etc.
2. Write down 25 descriptive words about the prop on a sheet of paper.
3. For each descriptive word have the students create movements/gestures for the word.
4. Have the students make transition movements between each gesture in order to have fluidity between the main movements. This helps to teach the necessity of smooth transitions.

I had my Dance I students elaborate on this project, adding space, time and weight elements and perform them as a skills test. One group had created the 'band-aid' dance, and part of it I stole and used in my team modern 2 years ago! Always be on the lookout for student creativity - they might surprise you!

Art for Inspiration

Study paintings and utilize the lines, colors, and continuity for creating dances. Picasso is GREAT for military with his cubism and sharp lines!

Specific Exercise: for small groups of 4-5

1. Find about 20 paintings that have a person sitting in a chair (see school art teachers).
2. Copy the paintings and give each student 5 of the paintings.
3. Have the students replicate the pose that is created in the painting.
4. Set up a chair in the middle of the floor and position the 4 students in each corner of the room.
5. Begin in one corner of the room and rotate around the room to each student having them find a way to get to the chair and create their pose #1. Continue around the room until each person has created all 5 of their poses.
6. Try to make it flow between students transitioning on and off the chair.

Choreography Manipulation Project

Space / Time / Effort

Teach a movement sequence to your students. I used my modern warm-up movements, which include rolling through the spine, contraction/release, drop swings, and other basic modern technique. You could do this for ballet, jazz, or even hip-hop. Once the students know the movements they will manipulate those specific movements and only use those that were given. This is a great introduction for choreography because the students are not having to create movements. They are only having to deal with the elements of Space / Time / Effort to create a dance! I passed out a checklist to make sure they included all the necessary movements. Below is a sample of the checklist.

Modern Warm-up Movements

Roll down – use all 4 parts of your spine

Plie stretch

Roll up

Dive to flat back and recover

Spiral from your hip sockets R and L

Release of your arms

Transfer weight to hands and back up

Swan

Down dog – pike

Roll to floor to second position

Butterfly rocking with arms to ceiling

Contraction spiral

Release to Z-sit

Reach with arms to stand

Second position with C-curve

Drop swings

Space / Time / Effort

The following are requirements in manipulating the above movements. Make sure you use all of them!

Space: How you move in the dance area!

Stay in place

Move around in the space

Dance together in the space

Dancers move in different spaces – can be all different or some of the same and some different

Time: How much time you spend on a movement – slow or fast.

You determine how many times you use each movement. Each movement must be used at least once.

Move slowly

Move quickly

Dancers move together at the same time

Pickup

Parts – dancers move at different times – all different or some different and some the same

Effort:

Lots of effort – make it happen

Little effort – let it happen