

Making a Move: Top Tips

In January 2021 The Mighty Creatives hosted a Dance CPD event, *Making a Move*, led by dance practitioners Claire Pring and Louise Jaggard. The session shared ideas and solutions on how teachers can deliver dance within current COVID-19 restrictions, as well as providing some advice and tools on how to develop dance at school (both during and beyond lockdown).

In this document, Claire and Louise have responded with some ideas, advice and 'top tips' around some of the key areas identified in the discussion groups as common barriers/challenges to delivering and developing dance in schools.

The areas of challenge included:

- Supporting less confident children whilst stretching the more experienced
- Engaging boys and keeping their interest
- Making cross curricular links
- Using limited space
- Staff confidence and CPD
- Enabling full engagement for children with additional needs

Supporting less confident children whilst stretching the more experienced

Open tasks: if you start activities with the instruction "*Can you find a way of...*" the children will be able to respond at their own level. So, if it's *Jack & the Beanstalk* and your first task is guiding the cow to market, I always get them to imagine they are travelling through a forest – weaving their way under low branches. Once they are underway, I include a description of what it's like to travel through, for example, "*it's muddy in places; getting caught by brambles; the cow is being stubborn and doesn't want to go,*" etc. This 'painting the picture' is usually interpreted by the more experienced dancers as additional material to draw upon – thus stretching and engaging them, whilst the less experienced dancers may select and apply some (typically they don't sustain the new ideas).

When setting a more directed task, for example, building a sequence, it works well to give children a minimum requirement. An example might be: "*so your sequence must involve at least 1 jump, 1 turn and 1 balance...*" That's clear and specified for the less experienced. "*But you can have more than 1 jump if you're feeling energetic today... or more than 1 turn... or more than 1 balance...*" – giving them space to develop this and create an extended sequence. "*If so, then see if you can create different shapes in the air each time when jumping... you might think about turning in different directions or using different levels... and it would be great to see some unusual balances – maybe involving some unexpected body parts*".

Claire mentioned in the webinar that she 'commentates' during the lessons. This is useful in many ways, but it is particularly helpful for the less confident dancer; it's that "catch them when they're doing well" thing. So say stuff like "*Nice stretch Harold – really going to the tips of your fingers there*" the moment that they engage – praise – this isn't revolutionary stuff, but it works. And if you have a child that is just standing still... wait until there's a moment in your work where stillness is important and... "*Excellent Hayley – great control*"... and move on swiftly so that the focus of the lesson doesn't land on them.

Engaging boys & keeping their interest

This is more typically an upper KS2 issue – so we'll focus on that age group.

Start the lesson with something simple and high energy; for example, run for 8 counts, stand still for 8 counts. That way they're not intimidated by anything 'dancey' and they get to expel some of that energy.

Then gradually build in more action/challenge. "*When you're travelling include a jump anywhere in the 8 counts*", then add, "*at some point in the travelling touch the floor*". Like Louise mentioned during the webinar, it's like layers of an onion! Build up complexity slowly and in clear steps.

The **music always helps:** something strong will help. There are lots of pieces on the Spotify playlist to help, but we really recommend creating your own playlist of music for dance, and every time you hear a great piece add it to your playlist (at some point you'll be glad you did). Having the music collated together in one place makes it much easier to access and can be stored on a shared drive which the whole teaching cohort can use.

Themes that might be useful to 'hook' their interest include:

- The Water Cycle – precipitation represented through body percussion (eg. Stomp)
- Space – aliens and astronauts
- Vikings / Romans – question and answer duets

Once you've got their interest, boys are then generally much more open to dance content – content that you may even be surprised about! And they are extremely creative, able to think outside the box, and push themselves physically.

Then keeping them engaged: choreography – boys love it, particularly group work. Try something like... "*In your groups of 3, 4 or 5, find a way of making the shape of a castle – I want to be able to see the strength of the building – maybe the moat – maybe the drawbridge, you might even think of adding a flag.*" Then time frame it: "*And you have 47 seconds to do it – go!!!*"

Typically, boys work quickly, but their work is often rough and dynamic, whereas girls tend to work more slowly and create more 'set' phrases. Don't panic about this, it's a stylistic thing; if they're moving and on task then you're doing a great job!

But teacher expectations are critical here. If you think the boys aren't going to engage, then they probably won't. Assume they will; hurl enthusiasm at them – think about all the recent winners of things such as *Britain's Got Talent* – mostly male dancers. It's cool to dance these days – and what kid doesn't want to be cool? It can be helpful to share examples of professional dancing with the class as it helps to give context to what they're about to do (so they can see it's not as scary/naff/worrying as they were anticipating). For example, show them the *Britain's Got Talent* final with Diversity in 2009.

One big thing – do not get tempted to turn the music up really loud to 'get them going'...

Making cross curricular links

The following is from the copious dance inset notes Claire uses when working with a school. We hope it makes sense as a standalone document – please get in touch if you need more information.

A Simple Guide to Planning for Dance

Since dance is a non-linear subject it can make planning it difficult as it doesn't have a logical progression route. However, once you start feeling more confident with it as a subject you will find that it is very flexible & allows a great deal of freedom.

If you follow the steps below they should help you to plan an effective dance session quite simply and speedily.

Step 1: Whatever your theme is then do the usual spider diagram of ideas that you think you will cover.

Step 2: For each of the threads within your spider diagram ask yourself the following questions

WHAT DOES IT DO?

or

WHAT SHAPE DOES IT MAKE?

At this point, the main skill is to state the obvious, for example, if you are covering water and are talking about tides, what does it do? A tide comes in and goes out... so this will be a travelling action, and the direction will be forwards and back.

But it is important to note that not everything will easily be described in this way – if the answer doesn't come to you quickly and easily... let it go! Don't spend ages trying to force an answer. Not everything works well in dance.

Each of these will form the basis of a lesson. Try to put a mix of shape-based tasks (what shape does it make?) with some action tasks (what does it do?). Shape based tasks work well as starting or finishing positions; action-based tasks work well as the middle point of the lesson.

Step 3: Now you need to put the ideas into an order that is logical to you, this may reflect the work you are covering in other subject areas, if it is linked to a story or poem then this will probably follow the order of the narrative.

Using limited space

Hopefully this won't be an issue forever, but in the meantime...

Using the hall

Just before Christmas Claire worked in a school and they approached this differently; they employed her to do a 'Day of Dance' with each class – so each class had a full day in the hall – even reception! (Then it was cleaned). This might not be feasible in every school – but it's worth considering.

Adapting for the classroom

If you are staying in the classroom space, think of using the vertical more than the horizontal – so travelling up and down will work well. Consider using the furniture in the room as part of the dance, so if they have a chair how can they move on it, under it, around it, etc. There have been some amazing dance pieces made recently that focus on making geometric shapes (mostly with arms) https://youtu.be/U26jnb3kd_Y

These require very little space and will link brilliantly to maths. A 'Dance for the camera' type of idea will be great; they can try creating movement material in unusual spaces (corridors are often fabulous), then try shooting it from different angles, zoom in/out, slow motion etc.. then edit their film afterwards...

There are several lesson plans in *Making a Move* (such as 'Scrunch' and 'Fold') which only require the space around a desk – the only prop is a plain piece of paper!

Go outside

Alternatively, take the class outside. Either use the outdoors as an additional space or even as a stimulus for creating movement. For example, the weather / seasons are ideal topics to explore both outside and via the medium of dance. Could they imitate the shapes of the flowers starting to emerge? Could they mirror a cloud shape and replicate its journey across the sky? And if it's a sunny day, then shadow dancing can be great fun (and take the focus away from them which is helpful for the self-conscious child).

Staff confidence & CPD

Confidence grows from success – so it is a matter of getting stuck in.

If you have downloaded the *Making a Move* plans then you'll see that they are in a really clear and easy to follow format where the teacher simply asks the questions. Once you've had the courage to give the children the opportunity to engage with the ideas (and it will look chaotic, messy and a little out of control at the start, then they'll start coming back with more ideas – Magpie them!!! That's your next lesson. How proud will those children be when you say "And last week Sam's group did [...] which was excellent, so I thought we might all take that idea and see if you can find your own way of..."

After that the steps to building confidence could include –

- Attend more training – either get a dance artist into your school to deliver some CPD or demonstration lessons or something offered by a local provider such as The Mighty Creatives, Deda, Dance 4, the School Sport Partnerships.

- Invest in some resources –
 - both of us have lesson plans on the TES website
 - Claire has written a book a few years ago; visit <https://www.millgatehouse.co.uk/product/simple-steps-dance/>
 - Louise has a membership area on her website with access to videos and plans; visit <https://primaryschooldance.co.uk>

Enabling full engagement for children with additional needs

This is a big one because additional needs covers such a broad spectrum – so this is a whole inset in itself.

However, because dance is inherently creative and open-ended; it lends itself really well to inclusivity.

Definitely use the ‘find a way of...’ task-setting method, as this can be interpreted in a wide number of ways therefore being inclusive and accessible.

Talk about travelling rather than walking/running.

The use of props can inspire or enhance movement & can be a great way of connecting dancers. They also take the focus away from the body so are useful for those who are self-conscious. Props Louise has used with great success include...

- Emergency blankets - fantastic sensory exploration and great for exploring over / under
- Lycra squares – stretch them, bounce teddies on top of them, be pulled along with them
- Sponges – throw, stack, squish, create pathways
- Feathers – make them flutter and fly. Great for calming activities
- Using a stimulus other than sound and music – the texture of material and how it moves... the smell of lemons... the sensation of an ice cube... we’ll have an instinctive reaction to many textures and temperatures – great starting points!

For children who struggle with imagination, closed questions can really help. For example, *“Are you going to do a jump or turn? Do you want to stretch up or forwards?”*

Come prepared with a range of tasks and props so that your participants can choose which resources they would like to explore, ensuring preference, consent and choice.

We hope that some of that is useful to you.

We are both really keen to support you – so please get in touch – if we can’t help you then we probably know someone who can.

Claire Pring and Louise Jaggard

The Making a Move resource is available to buy as a download from

<https://doodledance.org.uk/making-a-move-book/>

For more information, please contact the Artsmark team via artsmark@themightycreatives.com.