

Teaching Dance

Length: 30 minutes

Featured Schools

School:	Lusher Alternative Elementary School
Location:	New Orleans, Louisiana
In this program:	Kathy DeJean, dance teacher
School:	P.S. 156, The Waverly School of the Arts
Location:	Brooklyn, New York
In this program:	Scott Pivnik, dance and movement teacher

About This Program

This program features two teachers with contrasting training and teaching approaches who bring rich dance experiences to students at their arts-based schools.

At **Lusher Alternative Elementary School** in New Orleans, Louisiana, Kathy DeJean is a dancer with training in classical ballet, musical theatre, and modern dance. Also trained as a teacher, she was hired to integrate dance into the academic curriculum, using movement to teach subjects such as math and science. She expanded her role to teach dance as an art form as well.

In the program, DeJean works with an auditioned troupe of second- to fifth-graders, who perform for audiences in the community and elsewhere in the state. She starts the group with a full-body warm-up of stretches and in-place movement. Then the class begins the process of creating a “journey” in dance—brainstorming where they will travel, why they are going, and what they are feeling. The group explores how to use shape, space, and time to express these ideas with their bodies.

At Lusher, DeJean has observed the benefits of dance education:

- “Dance for children is much needed in a school curriculum along with physical education because it explores their potential in movement...on any size, shape, or color of body.”
- “I get a lot of feedback from classroom teachers who say, ‘I can tell these children have been with you and had dance because they are more assertive—not aggressive, but more assertive in their thinking and being able to share their thoughts.’”
- “Dance is a good experience for children who have a hard time sitting down. Once they come to movement and burn off some of that energy, they can focus on more sequential, factual information.”
- “Boys do like to dance. I start them off using the word ‘movement.’ Some boys are beautiful at movement. They get to explore that. Girls widen their perspective. They see that it is not just one style—dance is about what you think, what you feel, what you see.”

At **P.S. 156, The Waverly School of the Arts** in Brooklyn, New York, Scott Pivnik, a former physical education teacher, now teaches dance and movement as part of the school’s arts-based curriculum. “Over the past five to six years, the program has evolved from very basic dance to very, very multicultural,” Pivnik says. He is enthusiastic about the program and works closely with visiting artists such as African dance artist Caren Plummer and her husband, musician Kojo Plummer.

In the program, Pivnik teaches a second-grade class a traditional “welcome” dance from West Africa. Before the children study the movements, they locate the dance’s country of origin on a map, discuss the cultural context of the dance and its rhythms, and write about what they learn. “The motivation to write is built in because the students get to do what they’re writing about,” notes Pivnik.

After the class learns about the dance, students explore the movement, first with their feet and then with their arms and upper bodies.

“The nice thing about dance is that it is nonconfrontational and completely cooperative. You learn how to work together as a group to make a final product, and everybody has to participate in order for it to look good,” Pivnik observes. “Some people are going to look at this whole thing and say, ‘How do you know this is working?’ You just have to come in and look at it. There’s a level of self-confidence that develops, a level of poise that comes from this. Deep down inside it’s: ‘Wow, I can do this.’”

About This Program, cont'd.

Arts Education Standards Addressed in This Program

Dance

- **Content Standard 1**—Identifying and demonstrating movement elements and skills in performing dance
Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:
 - Accurately demonstrate nonlocomotor/axial movements (such as bend, twist, stretch, swing)
 - Accurately demonstrate eight basic locomotor movements (such as walk, run, hop, jump, leap, gallop, slide, and skip), traveling forward, backward, sideward, diagonally, and turning
 - Demonstrate accuracy in moving to a musical beat and responding to changes in tempo
 - Create shapes at low, middle, and high levels
 - Demonstrate the ability to define and maintain personal space
 - Demonstrate movements in straight and curved pathways
- **Content Standard 2**—Understanding choreographic principles, processes, and structures
Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:
 - Create a sequence with a beginning, middle, and end, both with and without a rhythmic accompaniment
 - Use improvisation to discover and invent movement and to solve movement problems
 - Create a dance phrase, accurately repeat it, and then vary it (making change in the time, space, and/or force/energy)
- **Content Standard 5**—Demonstrating and understanding dance in various cultures and historical periods
Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:
 - Perform folk dances from various cultures with competence and confidence

Music

- **Content Standard 2**—Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music
Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:
 - Perform on pitch, in rhythm, with appropriate dynamics and timbre, and maintain a steady tempo

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Viewing Suggestions

Who Should Watch This Program

“Teaching Dance” offers good examples of how teachers can adapt their training and practices to teach dance, either with other subjects or as an art form. The program is a useful introduction for new teachers and can be a thought-provoking inservice training piece for classroom or dance specialist teachers exploring arts integration.

Other audiences for this program might include:

- curriculum or arts project planners, to expand their ideas about how dance contributes to learning, and
- mixed groups of teachers and dance resources from the community, to explore ideas for collaboration.

Before Watching

This program explores two contrasting approaches to teaching dance:

- At Lusher Alternative Elementary School, Kathy DeJean uses an inquiry-based approach in which children create their own movement. She encourages students to use the dance elements of shape, space, and time to explore their feelings and ideas about a subject.
- At P.S. 156, The Waverly School of the Arts, Scott Pivnik uses existing dances from many cultures. As children learn the traditional choreography and rhythms, they also explore the geography, history, and social context of the dances.

As you watch the program, consider the benefits of each approach:

- In what circumstances would each be effective?
- How would you incorporate each into an integrated curriculum unit?

Watching the Program

Watch “Teaching Dance” (30 minutes).

Viewing Suggestions, cont'd.

Suggested Activities and Discussion

Consider the following questions for reflection:

- In your school, how can dance be incorporated into studies of other subjects, such as social studies, math, and science?
- How might you incorporate the natural movements that children do every day into classroom learning?
- How could you collaborate with your school's dance or physical education department to integrate dance into your classes?

Below are some additional ways you can build on the ideas in this program in a variety of school and community settings.

Professional Development Sessions for Teachers

- Consider the practical aspects of incorporating dance-based lessons in your class. How would you plan the material? What resources would you use?
- Think of ways that dance and movement could make your teaching more effective, for example, by bridging language barriers or developmental gaps.
- Consider how dance and movement impact learning and behavior in your students' daily lives. For example, children are able to master complex movement patterns in sports. Can the same skills be extended to classroom learning?
- Visit a performance of a local dance troupe or attend a session of a tap, ballet, or other dance class. Reflect on how the experience affected you. Would you like to try it again?

Curriculum-Planning Sessions

- Include a dance specialist teacher in your planning session. Invite the specialist to help develop a themed unit that includes dance.
- Invite a dancer or choreographer to a session. Together, identify places where dance and movement would make the curriculum stronger.
- Explore educational outreach opportunities offered by a local performing dance group or dance studio. Do they provide special programs to schools or have resident artists who may offer a residency in your school?

School Board, Parent-Teacher, or Local Government Meetings

- Invite a dance specialist teacher to comment on the work in this program, and identify opportunities to teach dance in your school.
- Invite a representative of a dance organization that provides outreach programs to explain how dance and movement can enhance learning at your school.
- Invite community members to attend a performance by students.
- Present reflections by students on how working with dance has enhanced their readiness to learn or their academic achievement.

Additional Resources

Related Video Library Programs

Watch these programs for more information on ideas explored in “Teaching Dance”:

- Expanding the Role of the Arts Specialist
- Teaching Music
- Teaching Theatre
- Teaching Visual Art
- Working With Local Artists
- Students Create a Multi-Arts Performance

Web Resources

The Arts in Every Classroom video library Web site: www.learner.org/channel/libraries/artsineveryclassroom

The Arts in Every Classroom workshop Web site: www.learner.org/channel/workshops/artsineveryclassroom

Standards for the Arts

National Standards in Dance: <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org>

State Standards for the Arts: www.ncsl.org/programs/arts/artsed/artedhom.htm

Related Organizations and Resources

National Dance Association: www.aahperd.org/nda/template.cfm

American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance: www.aahperd.org

Information on African Dance: www.artslynx.org/dance/afro.htm

Information on African Drumming: www.djembe.dk/djembe.html

Recommended by Scott Pivnik

The University of Texas at Austin Library Online: www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa.html

Africa-Related Music, Dance, and Cultural Resources: www.cnmat.berkeley.edu/~ladzekpo/AfricaBookmarksTx.html

Yahoo! Groups: African Music: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/AfricanMusic>