

Teaching a Travelling Circle Song to Pre-Kindergarten

Methodology

Here are a quick 5 of my favourite tricks when teaching dance. These make a big difference to me when I teach movement games like the ones above.

1. Part-Part-Whole

Unlike the normal process for teaching musical ideas, you don't want to try and throw the whole dance at kids at one time. Breaking it up from the beginning will make it easier.

Start with one move at a time. Teach the first two moves, and then put them together.

Teach the next two moves, and then put those two together. Now, put all four they've learned so far. Continue in this manner until they've learned all the moves.

2. No Music First

This one may seem obvious, but it's essential that you don't play the music while learning it.

For one, you'll have to split your attention between teaching the kids and managing the music. If the students mess up or slow down, then the music would be way off. In my experience, playing music while learning just makes everyone feel rushed and anxious.

3. Say the Moves 2-4 Beats Before It Starts

Not a lot of people think to do this one, but if you've ever been part of a good folk dance or contra dance, you'll notice the caller always lets you know what's coming before the move starts. For example, if the next move is a right-hand turn, I would say this 4 beats before the move starts:

“Right hand turn, here you go.”

Or if I only wanted to call 2 beats before I could say:

“And right-hand turn.”

Either way the kids (and adults) find it helpful to get a hint ahead of time.

4. Give Specific Feedback

The importance of specific feedback is one of the best tools for fostering student success. Hattie, the world-respected education researcher, concluded the effect size of feedback is 0.70 in his book, *Visible Learning* in 2009. This is the equivalent of almost two years of learning.

Fortunately, in music, we already do this naturally. Tell students exactly what it is they're doing well and what they could do better.

For example:

Instead of: “Good job!”

Tell them: “Good job moving your feet to the beat of the music! This time, think about the moves ahead of time, so the transition is smooth.”

Instead of: “Awesome!”

Tell them: “The way you all showed focus by not talking was awesome! The next time you go, see if you can do your right arm swing with your elbows interlocking and hands pointed down instead of up.”

5. Make It a Competition

We live in a hyper-competitive society. It’s true, but we may be able to harness this energy to encourage better performance. But we can avoid the negative aspects of competition by:

Making the reward for doing a good job

Encourage the success of all rather than a few

Establish clear rules of behaviour and fairness

Make the learning process itself rewarding rather than the end result

Prekindergarten Music and Movement Lesson Plan

Growing song (good for spring)

Objective:

Perform a travelling circle song, learn the words, and maintain a steady beat.

Materials:

Oats and Beans and Barley Grow

Procedure:

1. Students watch a school group (I prefer to use school kids dancing as the example, rather than using professionals) perform Oats, and Beans, and Barley Grow
2. As the video plays, point out the key points you want the children to know in order to succeed at the dance (arms loose – not tight, walking slowly – not running, the farmer growing the seed section – teach it and then ask for an echo back, ask the students to teach you the farmer section, show the children how to do an arm swing.
3. Intentionally break the dance into 4 parts. 1) Walking Walking Walking and Ready to Stop. That is 14 beats and allows 2 beats to stop. 2) Farmer section. Sowing the seeds (4 beats), standing back with ease (4 beats), stomp the foot (2 beats), clap the hands (2

- beats), turn around and see the land (4 beats) 3) Partner section (Looking for a partner 16 beats) and lastly 4) arm swing to Tra la la la la for 16 beats.
4. Demonstrate for the students at the conclusion of each part. (4 demonstrations).
 5. Practice the dance on the mat before moving to the circle. Practice each section until you're happy with the level of understanding.
 6. Move to the circle. Make a circle emphasizing loose hands. Show them to step in a little if they're too tight.
 7. Teach each segment of the dance; remediate as needed.
 8. Students and teacher perform entire dance with music; repeat until the end of the music!

Assessment:

Teacher observes students; were they able to perform the various steps, sing the song, and maintain a steady beat?

Reflection

On the mat, I forgot to teach the arm swings with each student facing in a different direction. Once we got to the circle, I realised I had done that, so I corrected it as each student chose a partner.

I couldn't pick up the tempo to the same pace as the dance, so before we do the dance to the music, I'll need to review it at the slow speed, and then deliberately pick up the tempo, before adding the music.

I should have given more specific feedback. I got a bit negative with how to not do things, rather than positive with 'Joya is doing the walking so well! Look at Joya! Good job!'.

My learning objective, for the students to perform the various steps and maintain a slow, but steady, beat was met.

Next step: move the dance up in tempo.