



Fostering Creativity in Dance Technique Class

By Anne Green Gilbert for Human Kinetics 2020

When we foster creativity in dance technique classes we help develop the next generation of innovative choreographers, fluent dance writers and curious dance audience members. Creativity requires flexibility, imagination, problem-solving, and risk taking. Creative people form original ideas through exploration and discovery. They imagine things that do not exist and come up with new ideas. Dance classes traditionally focus on honing skills such as the mastery of steps, memorization of combinations of movement, and replication of positions and forms. However, with a few simple tools, teachers can foster creativity while developing skilled dancers.

Start class with a neurodevelopmental warm-up such as the BrainDance. Knowledge and understanding of the developmental patterns help dancers become more articulate and expressive both physically and verbally as these patterns are an integral part of every dance style. The patterns also provide a new entry point for teaching the mechanics of steps and movement. Embodying the patterns strengthens technique. *Varying* the developmental warm-up fosters creativity. Explore the patterns on different levels; use a variety of spatial directions; do the movements in place and through space; vary the rhythm and speed; change the accompaniment by exploring verbal cues, music cues, rhymes, and silence; imagination and risk-taking are strengthened when partners take turns leading the warm-up for each other. To increase fluency, ask your students for ideas.

As you continue class, allow the dancers to recuperate from long combinations of steps through a 32 count structured improvisation. Cue them to move away from the barre (or their place on the floor) with strong movements and return with light movements; move away in curved pathways and return in zigzag pathways; explore movements that rise and sink and grow and shrink; move in a backwards direction away and return in a sideways direction; let one body part lead away and a different part bring them back; shadow a partner's movement through space, changing leaders on the return. Focusing on different elements of Space, Time, Force and Body in each class provides support for the dancers' improvisation. Layering on new vocabulary each week develops creative complexity.

Over the course of a year as you choreograph routines for the dancers, use different choreographic forms and devices and explain them to your students. By modeling creative thinking you encourage creativity in your students.

Asking dancers to reflect on their feelings, knowledge base and development of skills through various modes encourages curiosity and self-awareness. Reflection can take the form of a movement or shape following an improvisation, brief verbal sharing with a peer, journaling, or drawing.

Fostering creativity in dance classes strengthens social and emotional skills and develops imagination, flexibility and risk taking. The world needs creative problem-solvers. Dance educators can be part of the solution!

BrainDance variations, dance concepts, choreographic forms and devices, and reflection tools are described in *Creative Dance for All Ages 2nd edition* and *Brain-Compatible Dance Education 2nd edition*.