About AXIS Dance Company

AXIS Dance Company’s mission is to create and perform high quality contemporary dance developed through the collaboration of dancers with and without disabilities. AXIS teaches dance and educates about collaboration and disability through its Dance Access community outreach and education programs. AXIS is committed to promoting and supporting physically integrated dance locally, nationally and internationally.

History

AXIS Dance Company was founded in 1987, became a non-profit in 1990, and has been producing award winning performances and exemplary programs for 20 years. Based at the Malonga Casquelord Center in Oakland, CA, AXIS is one of the nations pre-eminent pioneers of the emerging field of physically integrated dance—dance created through the collaboration of dancers with and without disabilities. AXIS provides education on dance, disability and creative collaboration through community education and outreach programs. We perform and teach throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, nationally and internationally. Some of our performance and residency highlights include the 2002 Olympic Arts Festival in Salt Lake City; Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis; Cal Performances in Berkeley; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco; Central Park Summer Stage in New York; Florida Dance Festival in Miami; Paralympics in Atlanta, Bates Dance Festival in Lewiston , ME and the International Festival of Wheelchair Dance in Boston, which we co-curated. International engagements include Novosibirsk, Siberia and Cologne, Germany. AXIS serves as a widely known resource in the emerging field of physically integrated dance and sets exemplary artistic and educational standards.

Dance Access/KIDS! Education Program

Our Dance Access/KIDS! program’s embody our belief that to provide arts opportunities to all people, regardless of social, economic or physical barriers, is to enrich the entire community. The programs we bring to the schools demonstrate our philosophy that anyone can dance. Among our activities are In-School Residencies, Master Classes & Intensives, School Assemblies, Youth Performances, and Classroom Visits.

Words That Empower

Positive language empowers. When speaking about people with disabilities, it is important to put people first. Catch-all phrases like ‘the blind,’ ‘the deaf,’ or ‘the disabled,’ do not reflect the individuality, equality, or dignity of people with disabilities. Here are some examples of positive and negative phrases. Note that the positive puts the person first:

Affirmative Phrases:
- person with a disability
- person who has muscular dystrophy
- person with a spinal cord injury
- person who uses a wheelchair
- person without disabilities

Negative Phrases:
- the disabled, the handicapped
- afflicted by (stricken by, victim of, suffers from) muscular dystrophy
- injured, lame, deformed
- confined to (restricted to) a wheelchair, wheelchair bound
- normal person
Identifying Disability

In order to adapt or modify your lesson plans it’s important to understand the disabilities of your student(s). There are numerous types of disabilities but below are 11 of the most common disabilities that affect dance most directly:

**Autism** - monotonous repetition of motor activities (rocking etc), resistance to change in a daily routine, withdrawn behavior. May have delay in verbal communication and little or no interest in friendship and social play.

**Deaf or hard of hearing** - partial or total hearing loss, unable to process language through hearing. Able to learn sign language. Being deaf is being a member of a subculture of society. Generally deaf children have equivalent motor skills of non-deaf peers, unless semicircular canals of the inner ear are damaged causing balance problems.

**Emotional Disability** - hyperactive, distractible, or impulsive. May be aggressive or withdrawn or act immaturity. They are characterized by inability to learn, to maintain satisfactory relationships, inappropriate feelings or behaviors, unhappiness, depression, tendency to develop physical symptoms or fear.

**Learning Disability & ADHD** - learning Disability: problems understanding or using verbal communication or the written word. ADHS: Hyperactive, inattentive and impulsive behavior.

**Intellectual Disability** - below average intellectual function and limitations in social skills. Score lower on measures of strength, endurance, agility, balance and reaction time. But they might exhibit greater than normal body flexibility.

**Multiple Disabilities** - mental disability with sensory and/or motor impairments

**Orthopedic Impairment** – people with motor disorders, unable to fully control their motor functions. Cerebral Palsy, Multiple Sclerosis, stroke, spinal cord injury.

**Other health impairments** – asthma, heart condition, obesity, etc.

**Speech and language impairment** – communication is unintelligible or difficult to understand.

**Traumatic brain injury** – may include impairment in cognition, language, memory, attention, reasoning, abstract thinking, judgment and problem solving as well as sensory, perceptual, or motor disabilities.

**Visual impairments** – partial sight to total blindness
Identifying Dance Abilities
When the students' ability is discovered often new talents arise. As a teacher you need to identify and facilitate, talent and skills in each student.

There are 5 basic dance abilities:
1) **Body Awareness**
2) **Spatial Awareness** (accommodate wheelchair users, give reminders about maintaining personal space and remembering where they are in space)
3) **Listening to Movement Cues and Music** (assist students with hearing loss, auditory processing problems, (learning da?) students that are inattentive, daydream or fail to listen)
4) **Watching Movement Cues** (assist visually impaired students and students with visual processing problems by increasing attention to verbal instructions and other physical cues and adaptations.)
5) **Visualization Skills and Recall** (help students to make a connection between an image (concrete or imaginary) and a movement.

**Identify Students Skills and Level:**

Basic- minimal awareness
Developing- sometimes displays awareness
Emerging_ most of the time and usually
Accomplished- all the time and always

**Choosing Modification Techniques**
Creativity, common sense, expect success. It's important to believe that all students can learn.
Goals need to be realistic and achievable.
Goals need to be clear; all people are more likely to achieve their potential when a clear and defined expectation for growth is set.

**Modifications need to be made. Think about**
Instructional Modifications: physical demonstration, verbal description, visual diagrams, tactile processes, tempo alterations, changes in expectations about what a student does, or the ways in which a student performs.

Assistive technology can be both high tech and low tech(eg. amplification devices, or a chair to sit on).

**Peer and teacher support**

By selecting a modification you have to think about the way in which the students receive sensory information Make modifications accordingly:
- Visual perception
- Auditory perception
- Kinesthetic perception (position, location, weight, balance, direction, and speed)
- Tactile perception (manipulate students body)
Creative Dance Activities for Teachers & Specialists

The following activities are a great way to introduce the elements of dance 'space', 'time', and 'energy' to your class. All activities are suitable for K-12 and can be adjusted accordingly.

Body Part Painting:
Beginning in a circle, try using different body parts to "paint" your name in the space. This can begin as a stationary activity and build into moving through the space. With younger children you may want to ask them what colors they are using and always elicit body part ideas from the students. You can also incorporate ideas about size into the name painting & also change the orientation ex: paint your name as big as you can on the ceiling.

Name Circle:
In a fairly close circle each dancer turns their head to the right and says their own name one at a time. This creates a flow within the group and gets going at a pretty fast pace. After establishing a flow, the teacher may change the direction that the names travel. Let students know that if they cannot say their own name then it is fine to say somebody else’s. Next send a movement and a sound in the same manner that the names were sent. Encourage student not to think to hard about what to do or say, just let it happen. Again this pattern may change direction. Lastly, try it with no sound and just movement.

Milling with the Elements:
Music is always optional for this activity and a drum is a good idea as well. Have students begin to move in a pedestrian way through the designated space. They will be listening for the teachers’ directives on ways to think about their movement. Have a list of words related to space, time, force that you can yell out and have students explore. You may coordinate the words with curriculum that is being focused on or any other theme that makes sense for your students. In more advanced situations consider combining ideas. Ex: "try moving at a low level on a curvy pathway"

Movement Conversation:
Assign or have students choose partners (usually better to assign!) This is an exercise about taking turns and is non-verbal. One dancer begins the conversation by moving in place and when that dancer freezes, the other responds with their own movement reply. This goes back and forth while reminding students to wait for their partner to freeze completely before responding. An advanced version would be to have students explore using different amounts of space between them and their partner such as near, far, above, below, etc. There is no right way to respond.

Movement Conversation w/ Vocab. Cards:
Create vocabulary cards that contain words related to spacial concepts, actions, and qualities. You might use a color system for tracking cards. In partners, students have a movement conversation using only the three cards. They do not share their words with their partners only with movement. After some exploration, they guess each other’s words. By combining and arranging the cards, the duos create a dance with a beginning, middle and end using the chosen words and then share the dances with the class.

Mirroring:
There are many levels of mirroring that can be used depending on who the students are. Some ways to approach the ideas of mirroring are:
Chose one student to lead as an example of how it works. Ex: Max moves to the front of the group facing the students and models how to be a good leader. It is not about tricking each other but working to keep your partner with you.
Stand in two lines facing partners with an imaginary mirror down the center.
One person begins to move while the other tries to mirror the movement as accurately as possible, making any necessary adaptations. They switch roles. The next step is for the leaders to have the option in their movement to move anywhere on their side of the line. Switch roles. Finally, the side leading no longer pays attention to their partner but begins to interact with only the dancers on their side of the line. This last part is not recommended for young children.