

Grade 6 creative dance class - "The class from Hell"

Mindy smiled as the grade six class stormed into the gym. The principal had described them as the 'class from hell'. The girls in the class were reasonably well behaved but the boys, well they were an unruly bunch, many were big for their age, some were even bigger than Mindy; they were typical 'jockey' boys.

As Mindy smiled she wondered if the children had remembered that they were going to do creative dance. When she had explained the idea in the previous lesson, Jason, the leader of the unruly bunch, had said with a resistant stare; "Oh yeah, going to get us to be clouds are you?" What was going to happen? The principal must have wondered as well because she had come to watch.

"We are going to do creative dance," Mindy started, "all I ask is that you give it a try. You might like it." As she spoke she caught every child's eye, their faces stared back blankly. Exuding enthusiasm Mindy, with the tape deck ready, launched into the lesson.

Initially the children treated the whole episode as a lark, Jason's expression was 'forget it lady'. Gradually and coaxingly Mindy introduced the movement ideas to the children. First a fast walk, then a pivot, then sleeping positions.

"The idea of the dance is that you are late," Mindy explained; "you have over slept, that is why you are in a rush. Now take up your sleep positions. Oh nice flop Shaun. Good Kirsty it really looks like you are leaning against something."

The infinite variety of sleep positions at different levels, using different combination of body parts signaled a personal quality to each shape.

"Now I will clap beats of eight. You do your fast, tense walks followed by a spin on the second phrase of eight...then whip off on the next walk and so on. CLAP!"

The children burst into action, in different directions, their bodies taut and stiff. "CLAP six, CLAP seven and pivot. Well done. That's it keep control...but fast!!" The children whizzed off into tense walks which were ready for another spin.

By focusing on the creative way in which children could drape and hang their bodies in sleeping positions, by stressing the dynamic effort quality of walking and pivoting with tension and urgency, by focusing movement in a direct path, the children, with Mindy's guidance, had discovered how to expressively move with their bodies.

The music was then added, broken into phrases of eight. This produced a possibly worrying challenge for the child that felt unable to keep a rhythm, but somehow the supportive atmosphere of playing with the musical challenge created an expectant buzz in the air. As the music played the children used their fingers to mime out their movements. The children were ready.

"Right into your sleep positions." Mindy ordered. The children rushed to take up their personal stance. Barely able to suppress the tension waiting to explode in their bodies the children flopped in unique shapes. The tape wined, there was an expectant hush, the music started and...the children were seriously late.

As Mindy watched the class she could see Jason, with a huge grin fixed from ear to ear, rushing earnestly around the gym within the phrasing of the music. He, among others during the lesson, had received well-earned praises for creativity and the display of a growing body awareness. The children's movements showed a sense of control, rhythm and purpose, their movements indicated focused, playful vitality.

The dance ran over two lessons, the children were completely focused on creating the dance, they were completely focused on Mindy's guidance, they existed in their own special community place created by the imagery and the music. At the end of both lessons the unruly class that normally had to be policed into a line to exit the gymnasium lined up automatically and quietly buzzed with excitement. The principal was amazed, so was Mindy.