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STRATEGIES FOR MODIFYING DANCE: INSTRUCTION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

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In this paper the author investigates the problems of teaching children with the learning disabilities, attention-deficit disorder and hyperactivity disorder in the ballet classroom. We analyse the experience of the String Theory Charter Schools in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area. We begin with the analysis of the groups of the students having special needs and then offer the practical instructions for teaching classical dance for these special groups of students (preparatory level).

Key words: choreography, dance teaching, teaching methods, children with special needs, attention-deficit disorder, hyperactivity disorder.

String Theory Charter Schools serve over 2,500 students in four schools in the metropolitan Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area. Students who attend come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, bringing with them individual strengths and challenges to learning. The policy of the School is to educate each student according to age and development. Approximately 20 % of the students served are identified as having special needs, and based on Individualized Education Programs (IEP) for every student; each is provided with a program appropriate to her/his capabilities. There are students, who lack needed academic skills and socialization skills, which do not have the needed nonverbal academic readiness skills necessary to productively engage in learning activities; self-regulating strategies for calming themselves down, the ability to share space, and capability to interact with each other at age appropriate levels. Students who lack these skills may have challenges in concentration and self-control in the classroom, leading to behaviors such as jostling/pushing other students while in a line or sitting in down for instruction or following directions. Whether students are identified as having a learning challenge, each faces the possibility of frequent reprimands in class, ostracization by peers, and potential exclusion from group activities. Children facing learning challenges, and identified with disabilities, dance related activities can offer a productive entry point for addressing their growth as learners. In addition dance related activities gives them the opportunity to experience success in the school environment.

Dance educators have the unique opportunity to directly address and impact the movement behaviors and challenges faced by students with disabilities such as attention-deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). By providing organized, enjoyable dance and movement activities in a supportive school

environment, students gain better control over their bodies, develop non-verbal academic readiness skills, and necessary social interaction skills. It is important when developing, modifying dance/movement for students with disabilities to make certain each student has an Individual Education Program, and to incorporate this into the students' goals for the dance sessions. Working together as a team with school psychologists, special education teachers, and the child's classroom, academic instructors, is needed to ensure that teaching is consistent and appropriate to each child.

Teaching children with the learning disabilities attention-deficit disorder and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder in the dance classroom, specifically in the ballet classroom at the String Theory Charter School, has met with success using the following teaching strategies and methods.

1. Move in an area that is free of visual, auditory, and physical distractions.
2. Provide a home base, for example an X on the floor, for dancers to orient themselves to and to assist in self-monitoring their positions. The X should be large enough for all children to see.
3. Present creative activities and skill development in a non-competitive manner so that students focus on themselves and are not in competition with one another.
4. Give short, specific movement tasks rather than lengthy movement exercises. Use cue words rather than long explanations. A cue word for *chasse* for example could be chasing. Another appropriate cue word/phrase would be meow meow, when teaching students *pas de chat*.
5. Encourage students with ADD or ADHD to stand at either end of the front row. This will prevent the student from being crowded in and feeling overwhelmed, and allows for fewer distractions by having no classmates in front of the student.
6. Encourage students to count beats out loud along with the teacher, this will help them focus and build their confidence (it also helps all students).
7. Use a multi-sensory approach when presenting movement tasks or new movement skills. **Describe** the task, giving students an auditory clue, **demonstrate** the task providing a visual clue, **visual** clues by providing access to pictures and videos (YouTube is a wonderful way to include this in the classroom), and finally **practice**, the kinesthetic stimulation necessary.
8. Work first without music, as for some students it will be difficult from an auditory processing perspective/hearing, to process both your words and explanations the same time they are hearing the music. Using music with words, for example using the song *Happy Birthday*, would be confusing and the child would not know whether to focus on the words in the song, the words of the teacher, or the music itself.
9. Keep in mind and understand that the concept of "midline" is difficult, provide simple movements across the midline before adding combinations and patterns that require this more advanced skill. Marking the floor with tape of different colors allows students to visualize where center is and diagonals used in exercises across the floor.
10. The concept of "mirror effect" can be challenging for students with respect to right/left movement. Using colored wrist or ankle bracelets (or ribbons) for both the instructor and class enables the dancers to follow each other as well as the teacher. This technique can be useful when teaching *port de bras* and the teacher is standing in front of the class demonstrating what to do, or when teaching a step like *chasse*, or

with dancers who do not know their right hand from their left, to teach them what had to place on the *barre*.

11. Emphasize divergent thinking over convergent thinking to help eliminate the child's fear of making wrong or right choices. Break a step or combination into smaller segments. Breaking *pas de chat* into smaller segments: take a small step, *plie*, *passé* right foot *passé* left foot, the put the foot down, before putting the entire step together, repeating multiple times.

12. When teaching the required vocabulary, first read the text to the students. Make sure to use a variety of test questions: multiple choice questions, fill-in-the blank questions including a word bank with choices of words, and questions using visuals/pictures to teach concepts like the 5 basic positions. For some students it may be necessary to modify the size of the text, making it larger and less crowded.

13. Provide continuous encouragement, praise, and consistent practice or repetition of skills. Students need to feel confident; repetition and praise will help this take place.

Dance educators have a unique role in working with students identified by schools as having special needs. Students with special needs, whether ADHD, ADD, or some other disability often struggle with academic work, but succeed with their dance studies. By working with the capabilities these students have, encouraging them, students identified with special needs grow as learners and as confident members of the school community. All teachers need strategies for differentiating instruction, for reaching the diverse student population found in schools in the 21st century. A "one size fits all" approach no longer works with the students coming into classrooms.

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СТРАТЕГІЯ МОДИФІКАЦІЇ ТАНЦЮ: ІНСТРУКЦІЯ ДЛЯ СТУДЕНТІВ З ОБМЕЖЕНИМИ МОЖЛИВОСТЯМИ

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Розглянуто використання спеціальної методики викладання хореографії дітям з розладом уваги та гіперактивністю. Проаналізовано методику за результатами роботи викладачів Школи Виконавських мистецтв (Performing Art Charter School) міста Філадельфія (Пенсільванія, США). Подано конкретні рекомендації для занять з дітьми початкового рівня навчання.

Ключові слова: хореографія, навчання танцю, методика викладання, діти з обмеженими можливостями, синдром розладу уваги, гіперактивність.