

By Laura Moir

Joyce, M. (1994). The lessons – Ch 4. In *First steps in teaching creative dance to children* (3rd ed., pp.). London: Mayfield.

In this excerpt taken from “First Steps in Teaching Creative Dance to Children” Mary Joyce takes the reader through seven lesson plans. Beginning with feelings, and moving through with gestures, textures, sights, images, sounds, and finally qualities, Joyce focuses on the importance of showing children how to speak without voice. In learning to express themselves without speaking with their voices students are connecting with their bodies and the world around them. Their senses are heightened.

The ability to create movement based on feelings, sights, images etc. requires much of the student and the teacher. Students must be able to describe and interpret these various feelings, sights, and images in order to accurately convey meaning. In doing so they are creating a world that is richer in words and thought. The teacher must provide the opportunity to move the children into this world that is richer in words and thought. In a lesson on gestures Joyce asks students to show her how they are in pain. Her instruction challenges students to convey their emotion in the best way possible. The following is a small example of dialogue used in this lesson;

Make sure I see where the pain is. Now make that gestures and change your level. Go. Turn it. Move it through space. Show me pain with a stretch. Bend. Twist. Sway. Swing. Jump. Hop. Make it bigger. Make it slower. Faster. Do it with the other side of your body. Make it small. I will play ten beats on the drum. While I’m playing those beats, dance that pain in as many ways as you can (Joyce, 165).

This is a small example of the ways in which Joyce uses dialogue to push students into belief in their movement. In discussing a dance using animal characteristics Joyce explains that “a dancer uses all the elements while portraying the animal, thus giving the feeling or essence of the animal rather than pretending to “be” the animal. The goal is to communicate a quality” (Joyce, 181).

Joyce is using her lessons to show the value of connecting students to words and thought. As students learn to express and interpret, they are connecting more with themselves and their world.

I found the reading to be very eye-opening in terms of the many ways a teacher can get students to express themselves more fully. There seems to be an inexhaustible resource in the use of words.

