

HOW TO MANAGE DIFFICULT SITUATIONS DURING A DANCE WORKSHOP

CONTEXT

Within the framework of the TDC - Territoires Dansés en Commun training, the French and Swiss participants were led to report problematic situations encountered on several occasions, during dance practice workshops in the presence of the audience within an educative, socio-cultural or medico educational structure. It is worth noting that these difficulties are similar to those faced by teachers/educators and artists in other types of projects with the general public.

These situations are presented in the form of questions as follows.

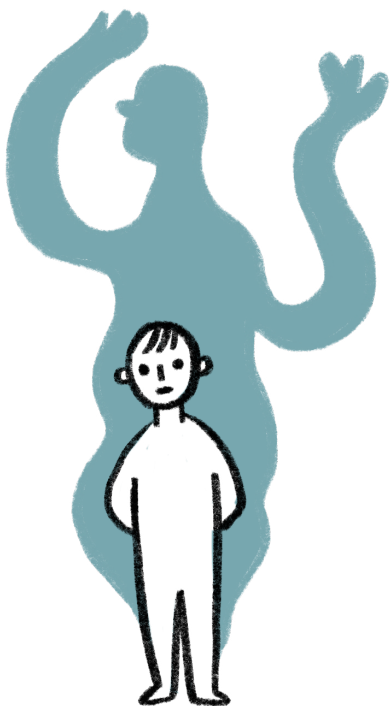
HOW TO ENGAGE 4-6 YEAR OLDS DURING A DANCE SESSION ?

- ♦ Set the duration of the sessions to no more than 45 minutes and plan an adequate sequence.
- ♦ Design and implement initiation and termination routines that define the time and space of the dance.
- ♦ Use a medium (*cf.* the Oscyls, sculptures designed for the work *OSCYL* by Héra Fattoumi and Éric Lamoureux, directors of VIADANSE), have the students work with or around an object.
- ♦ Develop the ludic aspect of the activity.



WHAT TO DO WHEN STUDENTS CHATTER DURING THE PRACTICE ?

- ◆ Students who chatter while dancing are no different than those who chatter in the classroom : hence it is the teacher's role, both in and out of the workshop, to deal with this problem. Persistence often pays off.
- ◆ Differentiate between chatter that shows rejection or lack of commitment and that of « interest » where the child is discussing what they are actually doing.
- ◆ Some artists have developed techniques for dealing with this type of behaviour which can be shared with the teacher.
- ◆ The issue can be raised during an appointment between the artist and the teacher, in order to set an approach.
- ◆ Plan instances for discussion with the children so that they can express their feelings : give them the floor at set times to avoid unwanted chatter.

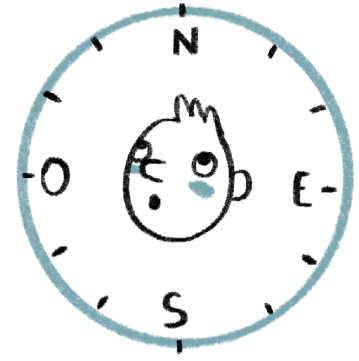


HOW TO ASSIST YOUNG STUDENTS WHO HAVE DIFFICULTY GETTING INTO CHARACTER ?

- ◆ Expect that young children may have difficulty representing or imitating what they do not know (e.g : a tiger).
- ◆ Prepare together with the teacher to know what may or may not be addressed and what can be done in class to prepare. In fact, this joint preparation guarantees that the project will run smoothly. The teacher has incorporated the project into his or her work plan and makes the connection between each of the artists' interventions, reiterating, explaining and building on what has been observed during the workshop.
- ◆ Use a medium, work with or around a material object or image.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUNG STUDENTS HAVE A PROBLEM WITH ORIENTATION (WHERE TO POSITION THEMSELVES) ?

- ♦ Get to know the spatial abilities of the age group; give precise markers for positioning (colour-coded blocks, ground markings, etc.)
- ♦ During the activity, work on listening and interpersonal skills.



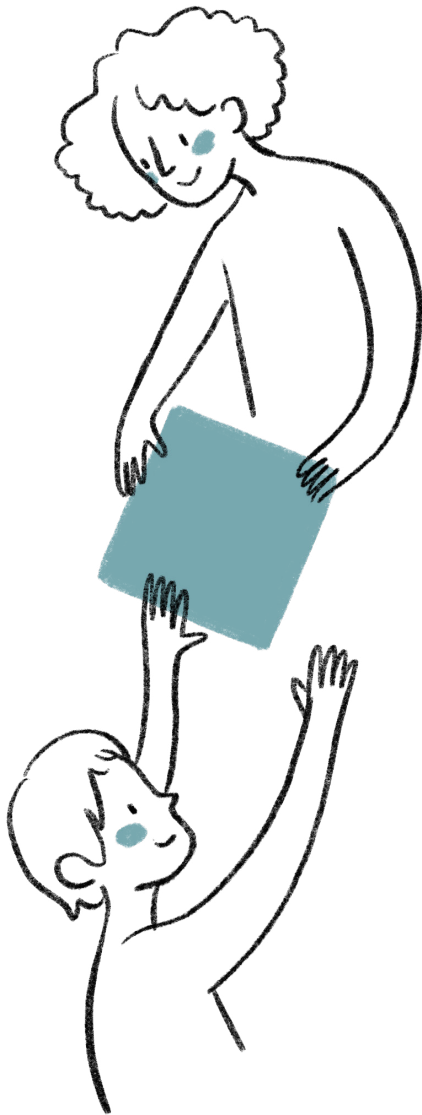
WHAT ADJUSTMENTS SHOULD BE MADE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH MENTAL DISABILITIES ?

These young people have some difficulties in finding their bearings in time and space, difficulty in concentrating and problems in retaining instructions.

- ♦ The educators and teachers will inform the facilitator what can be expected from them.
- ♦ Mark up the space, use simple coding (geometric cardboard shapes : circles, squares, and triangles to represent the patterns of movement needed as well as blocks and other indicators as is done in physical education).

If the project is a joint project with an « ordinary » class (e.g. a group of young people from a medico educational Institute mixed with schoolchildren) : the mentor counts on the collective aspect, the guidance and benevolence of the schoolchildren who share the dance project :

- ♦ Give the schoolchildren a « mission » to accompany their fellow students from the medico educational Institute.
- ♦ Encourage dialogue and exchange so that each group is ready to cooperate and share.



HOW TO DEAL WITH GENDER ISSUES AND STEREOTYPES ?

This is an important issue that is central to the dance project.

In parallel, the team - the school itself - must engage in transversal work on this theme (physical education, moral and civic education (in France) / coexistence and democratic practice (in Switzerland), French language, life and earth sciences (in France) / natural sciences (in Switzerland), English language, ... etc).

Use a medium, have students work with and around an object and make them feel at ease with themselves before engaging in other activities.

Note : in the classroom, the same problem may arise: the teacher determines the pairs or groups with attention to balance and diversity; he/she explains that the learning process is indifferent to personal preference or gender.



HOW TO DEAL WITH UNCOOPERATIVE GROUPS ?



- ♦ Mockery, bullying or even harassment : the project can amplify an already existing problem, the solution of which must be developed before and independently of the project, with the team of teachers, in a transversal manner. This can be through moral and civic education (in France)/coexistence and democratic practice (in Switzerland), young people's literature on this theme, during physical education, an intervention of an association (such as the Health and Citizenship Education Committee in secondary schools (in France)/citizenship or cross-curricular skills (in Switzerland).
- ♦ However, the artistic project also enables perceptions and behaviours to change : a student may ameliorate their behaviour with time.

WHAT TO DO WHEN A STUDENT HAS DIFFICULTY INTERNALIZING AND DETACHING THEMSELVES FROM THE GAZE OF OTHERS ?

- ◆ Once again, intervention must begin beforehand and independently of the project because such a problem is already present within the classroom (during oral activities, group activities, blackboard sessions, physical education class, etc.).
- ◆ As always, the teachers will, on the one hand, reframe any hurtful remarks or attitudes and, on the other, offer encouragement through positive discourse. These behavioural patterns can be the topic of a real « philosophical » debate. Books and films approved in the curriculum can be used as a reference.
- ◆ The teacher and the artist can work together to find the most appropriate method of support for each case.

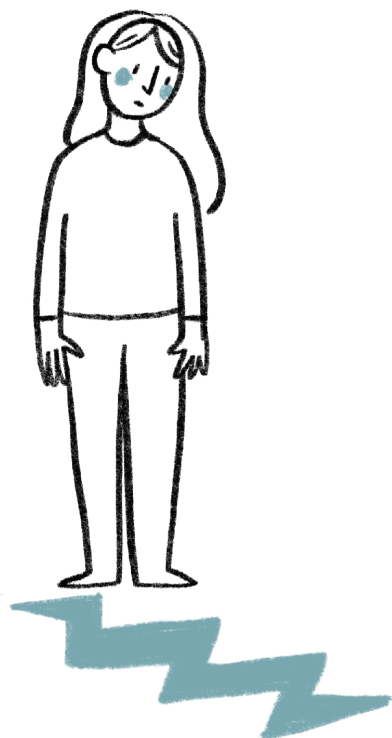


HOW TO GET STUDENTS TO « GET INTO THE DANCE » ?

- ◆ Getting into the dance is essential to the project. The students (with the exception of workshops conducted with the help of volunteers) did not ask for anything. For dance, as for any artistic practice, the way to bring the project to life or even to create the desire, needs to be thought through and adapted to the group concerned. This is both the teacher's and the artist's job. This is established in before the start of the workshops.
- ◆ By way of anecdote, we can mention the example of a dancer who, during a visit before the start of the sessions, performed a few complicated figures (a bit of hip hop), which impressed the students.
- ◆ In fact, the artist has to demonstrate his or her own work, creativity and professionalism as is agreed on beforehand.

HOW TO REACT WHEN A STUDENT EXPRESSES REJECTION AND CLAIMS THAT THE ARTIST'S WORK IS POINTLESS ?

- ♦ The teacher's reaction is crucial : they must avoid tension between the artist and the young people. More often than not, the student in question will have previously expressed his or her refusal of certain other activities.
- ♦ Anticipate individual and collective refusal and consider the arguments.
- ♦ Adapt the starting points for introducing the dance to the audience.
- ♦ It is important for the teacher to prepare before the arrival of the artist : refusal, preconceived notion of futility must be dealt with prior to the workshops. Prepare representations beforehand to better define the dance.
- ♦ Even if not recommended, a student who questions everything can be excluded, but it is important to take the time to explain the reasons and to have them express/justify their grounds. Likewise, the student should be given the opportunity to re-join the group whenever possible.



WHAT TO DO WHEN SOME STUDENTS « SABOTAGE » THE DANCE WORKSHOPS ?

- ♦ The conduct of certain students is a concern that exists with and without the dance project. In this case, the « standard » tools are used (contract/monitoring form, exclusion, parents' meeting).
- ♦ If the behavioural problem is an individual one and only arises during the project : create a dialogue with the student to get them to explain the reasons for their unwillingness; adapt their role (become the project reporter who drafts a brief article at each session, which can be used as a reminder at the beginning of the following session - encourage a sense of responsibility/value).

- If the problem is collective: in addition to possible sanctions, initiate a debate, show examples of successful projects, break the resistance front by considering adaptations (divide the class into groups, propose complementary activities: documentary research, setting up an exhibition, video report, designed for students who do not wish to dance but who are likely to participate in the project in other ways).

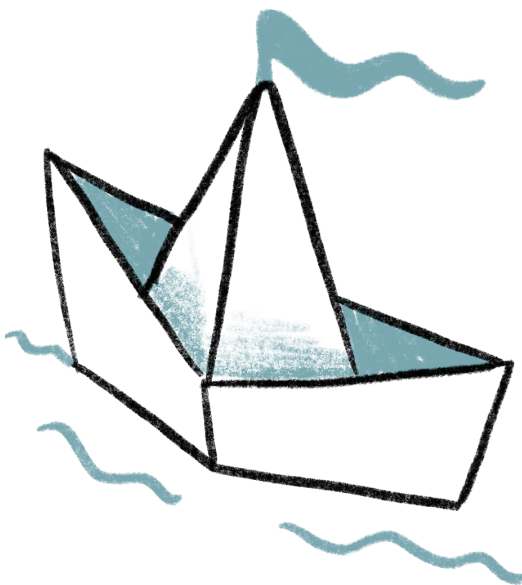


HOW TO MANAGE COLLECTIVE REJECTION OF THE DANCE PROJECT ?

- Have the group engage in a more conventional cultural project in advance (e.g. visual arts, music) and incorporate the dance project as a logical progression. Depending on the audience, solicit artists who are familiar with two complementary artforms (e.g. graffiti and hip hop).
- Before starting the project: establish the notions of dance, create dance videos that counteract these notions.
- Engage in reflection with the artist to have a common approach.
- « Play collectively » : if it is a secondary school class, try to involve teachers of other disciplines, and possibly also parents.

HOW TO RAISE PARENTS' AWARENESS ?

- ◆ Inform families in advance and do advocacy work.
- ◆ Use the official curricula and guidelines as a basis.
- ◆ Consider setting up a workshop or even an awareness-raising session for parents or child/parent, outside of school hours.
- ◆ It can be worthwhile to include the projects in the report card and note the student's progress.
- ◆ Assessment with students during and after the end of the projects can be handy.
- ◆ Depending on the case, research projects will help to assess more precisely the concrete benefits of the actions.



HOW TO « ENGAGE » EVERYONE IN THE ADVENTURE ?

- ◆ Co-construct the project.
- ◆ Prepare the students for the project (but also the parents, other teachers, management, etc.).
- ◆ Ensure continuity between the artist's interventions.
- ◆ Organise a feedback model (logbook, workshop report, etc.).
- ◆ Plan the project visibility and promotion.

