

Two Dance Skill-Building Tools for the Classroom

Abstract: Together these two activities, the kinesphere and mirroring, provide students with opportunities to gain greater control and awareness of their personal space, movement choices, and ability to focus and concentrate.

Each activity requires approximately **30-45 minutes** for the introductory lesson. You and your class can then review and extend the lessons in as little as 5-15 minutes per session.

Grade level: K-12 and above: Can be adapted for use with any age / community group

National Standards in Dance (grades K-12):

- Identifying and demonstrating movement elements and skills in performing dance
- National Standards in Physical Education:
- Uses a variety of basic and advanced movement forms
- Uses movement concepts and principles in the development of motor skills

National Life Skills Standards:

- Working with Others: Works well with diverse individuals and in diverse situations
- Self-Regulation: Demonstrates perseverance — Concentrates mental and physical energies

Instructional Objectives

Students will:

- Gain increased self-control, both of their bodies and of their verbal responses, through practice of these activity skills over time
- Explore movements generated by themselves and others
- Learn to practice silent concentration while in motion and to control their own movements within a safe personal space or “space bubble” (the kinesphere)

Curriculum Integration Links:

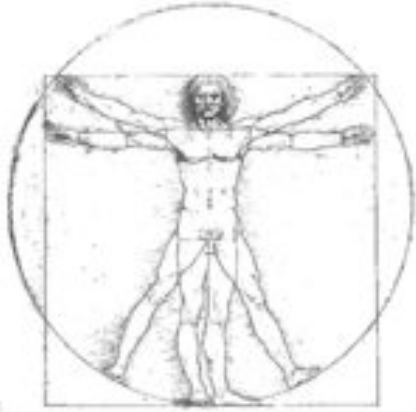
Teachers can apply these activities to many curriculum areas, or simply to general classroom behavior and skills. I know of one teacher who used **mirroring** to teach cursive handwriting to a class of “BD/LD” labeled boys, ages 10-13. They loved doing the mirroring, the slow, contemplative music, and the graceful curves of the movements. The **kinesphere** activity could accompany a math unit (geometry), among many other possibilities.

Teacher Preparation:

Teachers should begin to develop a “culture of movement” in the classroom, so that getting up and moving is not strange or unusual. These activities can be introduced fairly early in such a process. Teachers might look at resources on dance and creative movement to become familiar with some of the terminology as well as the elements of dance (Body, Energy, Space and Time).

Student Preparation: How will you ensure that students are ready for this activity? Students are ready for these activities “right out of the box,” but teachers may find it helpful to preface the kinesphere activity by inviting students to think about three kinds of space: personal space, shared space, and “outer” space. **(see next page)**

Three Kinds of Space



Personal Space

Each dancer is at the center of her or his own three-dimensional “**kinesphere**,” also known as a “space bubble.” Only three things can “pop” this bubble:

1. Running into **things** (including the floor)
2. Running into **other people** (pops them too!)
3. Using your **voice** when moving creatively / dancing

Shared Space

We may create space in the classroom by moving furniture out of the way, or we may use a larger space. All of the space that is available for movement is the **shared** space, also known as the **general** space.



“Outer” Space

In every shared space, there are places we would **not** want to put our kinespheres, because there would not be room to move, or we might not be visible to each other, or that lie outside the boundaries in some way. We want to be at least a kinesphere’s distance away from **any** of those places.

Skill-Building Activity 1: The Kinesphere

The Kinesphere activity underscores the vital concept of personal space and helps students develop the control to safely move about in the classroom and outside of it.

Everyone stand in a comfortable “ready” position, feet about hip-width apart. Pretend that your feet are “glued” to the floor, and that you have invisible paint on the palms of your hands. Without moving your feet, “paint” every part of the space around you that you can reach with your arms outstretched. When you are finished, clean the “paint” off your hands and stand quietly with eyes closed, picturing the shape you have painted around yourself. What shape is it? (Answers will vary widely - rectangle, circle, oval, box... This is a good chance to talk about two dimensions vs. three, curved shapes, etc.)

This shape is a sphere - a ball, a bubble, a balloon. It is your kinesphere - your space bubble. Keep your feet glued to the floor while I unglue mine and begin to move through the space. Can you see my kinesphere rolling along with me? It’s very elastic, and as I pass between you can you imagine it shrinking and stretching? Yours are doing the same!

Now “unglue” your feet, and in slow motion begin to travel through the space. Be ready to freeze at any time I call one out. Let your spheres shrink and grow as they need to so that you never touch anyone else (and no part of the room), no matter how close you are to them. Now let’s walk a little faster. Anyone who crashes into someone and “pops” their bubble has to sit out. Let’s try a little faster yet. Always be ready to freeze at any moment! Now let’s go a little more slowly. Finally, slow down to a stop.

Checklist for Assessment – the student:

1. Is able to move freely without colliding with or touching other students.
2. Listens to directions, stopping and starting on verbal cues from teacher.
3. Is able to stop when directed without falling to the floor or using furniture or walls.
4. Demonstrates awareness of and respect for others’ personal space.

This activity can be a warm-up for a longer session, or a self-contained lesson in personal space. You can extend the activity by having two groups try it, watching each other in turn, or by reminding the students that their kinesphere is still there when they are in line, on the playground, at lunch...

You can also have students bring in models such as a clear balloon or ball and explore other visualizations and demonstrations ... Enjoy!

Skill-Building Activity 2: Mirroring

Rationale: After an active movement session, students are sometimes hard to bring back “down” for regular classroom work or to move on to the next class. Besides being an effective activity in itself, mirroring can help to re-focus the classroom energy, especially after the students have become familiar with the rules. Use calm, ethereal music without a definite pulse at first. Later you may wish to experiment with different music or try mirroring in silence or with natural sounds.

Ground Rules:

1. Voices silent: all communication is in movement & shape
2. Stay separated by at least one-half inch (we cannot touch our reflections)
3. Remain on your own side of the “mirror”

1) **Modeling.** The first time, you can model the activity with the entire class, leading all of them at once, and then with an individual student as your partner. Later you can take volunteers to demonstrate their mastery of the activity while reviewing Mirroring for the class. Go slowly, and point out possible difficult spots (such as changing levels, or turning around, or crossing limbs) after the modeling, checking for understanding.

2) **Directed Pairs.** Each student finds a partner. One is “A” and the other is “B”. Partner A is the first leader, moving slowly and trying to keep Partner B as a mirror image. At some point (after about two minutes) you should call “Freeze” and the pairs must hold their shapes. Partner B then has to take the lead, from that point (without returning to normal shape), at your signal. You can have them change several times. At some point have Partner B find an ending for the duet. Let the students talk with each other for a minute or so, then get comments from pairs for the benefit of the entire class. Be sure that the adventuresome pairs don’t monopolize the conversation!

3) **Independent Practice.** Partner A begins to lead as before, but now the pairs have to exchange the lead without talking or overt signaling. Hints: leader can stop, letting follower take over, or follower can take a moment when leader is watching closely to take over the lead. Again allow time for discussion in pairs and with whole class listening and participating. Split the class into two groups and let one watch the other. Tell the class the **goal** is to find pairs that are moving so much alike that no one can tell who is leading and who is following.

Notes: When the class is well-practiced, this can be done in very brief fashion. You could say, “Let’s do some mirroring” and put on the music. The class can then proceed in slow motion to whatever is next on the day’s schedule. You might choose to include curriculum concepts in your movement choices (flower shapes, water cycle, atomic structure, systems of the body, etc.).

It is also possible to change the tone of a class by simply standing and beginning slow motion movement, facing the class, and letting the students catch on and join in slowly.

Checklist for Assessment:

1. Follows all ground rules.
2. Is a careful and observant leader, making sure to keep focus on partner.
3. Is a respectful and attentive follower, demonstrating best effort to stay with the leader.
4. Improves leading and following skills over time.