

Swing & Social Dancing for Fun, Exercise, and Social Connection

By Cynthia Hively

The goal in teaching social dancing in schools is to help students build confidence, develop self-esteem and learn social connection through the practice of partnership dancing.

The Dance Connection: Social dance in schools is a fun and interactive way to explore multiple areas of education while learning to dance with a partner!

Dance incorporates both **music education** and **physical education** while at the same time incorporate social etiquette, communication, respect and basic manners.

Dance demonstrates visible proof of **science** concepts like force, balance, gravity and momentum,

Dance utilizes **math** concepts with the application of shapes, angles and fractions.

Dance can be applied to **social studies** as students learn the history, geography, world origin and culture of each dance.

Dance can improve **reading** and **writing skills** as students keep journals and explore stories of dance.

BASIC SOCIAL DANCING CAN BE VERY SIMPLE

**THE KEY IS TO KEEP STUDENTS ENGAGED BY HAVING FUN
AND NOT GETTING STUCK ON DANCING PERFECTLY!**

TEACHING MODEL:

Learn the footwork– Practice with a partner – Make it fun – Improve

I have taught this program for various age levels from 3rd grade through high school. Crucial to making the program work, besides making it fun, is to give them a goal to work towards. Typically we hold a dance competition between participating classes, or at least have a performance at the end of the program.

LEARN THE FOOTWORK

In partner dancing we have a **LEAD** and a **FOLLOW**. Traditionally we have boys dance with girls or men dance with women. Typically the men lead and the women follow. But not always. It is rare that you will have a situation where you have the exact same number of boys and girls in the room to learn to dance. Be conscientious of the terms you use. Boys *can* follow and girls *can* lead. If you have an uneven number of boys and girls in a room, *someone* is going to have to do the other part. I always point out to students that I know how to do both parts, and *they* will be better dancers if they learn how to do both parts.

Have the LEADS line up on one side of the room, and the FOLLOWS on the other. Demonstrate the footwork for each side and then have them practice it.

PRACTICE WITH A PARTNER

Once students have learned their footwork, have them dance it with a partner. *Always* start in a two hand hold. Then, if the dance requires, you can move to a closed hold position. It helps to dance with a variety of partners, so have them switch partners frequently.

MAKE IT FUN!

I use games like “freeze dance” to keep the kids moving and having fun. Every time I stop the music, the follows move to the next partner. This is especially useful for learning the basic to the dance.

Once they’ve learned how to dance a few moves, having mini-dance offs can be a fun way to get the kids to work harder at learning to really dance.

IMPROVE

It takes time to learn all the subtle nuances that go along with learning to lead and follow. Let the students learn the footwork and fake their way through it for a while before you start working on precision and leading and following perfectly. Practice always makes better.

FOUR SIMPLE STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL DANCE PROGRAM

STEP ONE: GET MOVING!

All students, no matter what age, are nervous about dancing with a partner. Your best bet to help ease into the idea of dancing is to start with a simple **line dance**. Get them used to the idea of moving to music by themselves before you ask them to dance with a partner.

STEP TWO: GET INTO THE SWING OF THINGS!

Swing is a timeless dance that can be danced to a variety of different music. It will work for the standard big band music adults typically think of when you say swing, it also works for rock and roll, and can be adapted with a simple rhythm change so that it works to a lot of the pop music played on the radio.

I always start with swing for the first partner dance because most of it is danced in a two hand hold, so students are not immediately intimidated by having to dance in the traditional frame nearly face-to-face hold that is typically used in most social dances. This is crucial to easing students into the idea of dancing with a partner.

STEP THREE: ADD SOME DRAMA!

Kids love being overly dramatic. About everything. So if you give them the opportunity to do so while learning to dance, they tend not to notice so much that they are suddenly dancing in that closed hold position. **Tango** is all about drama, and kids tend to love it. Focus on the style and flair of the dance and keep them distracted by the fact that they are now dancing nearly nose to nose.

STEP FOUR: FUN AND CREATIVITY!

Merengue is an easy dance that is literally just marching your feet in place to the rhythm. Though it seems like starting with the easiest dance would be a good idea, I've learned that if I save it till the latter part of the program, the students have developed enough confidence and skill from dancing swing and tango, they can easily adapt their knowledge to learn merengue almost instantly. It lends itself to allowing the kids to be creative and make up their own moves while working with their partner.

THEN IT'S SHOWTIME:

I strongly encourage having a dance competition between the classes, or at least a performance for the parents. This gives students a goal to work towards and an opportunity to dress up and show their dancing skills. All classes are awarded some type of award: Best Boogie Woogie, Snappiest Attitude, Most Sophisticated and Suave, Best Wiggle... The point is to recognize and award each class, regardless of whether you choose to award an overall winner.

The Tigard Times did a story about a program I did last year for Mary Woodward, and how excited the students were. Please take a few minutes to check out the story at <http://www.pamplinmedia.com/ttt/89-news/298173-175200-mary-woodward-students-get-their-dance-on>

Dance4Educators

I teach dance programs at schools as an artist in residence. The biggest challenge is often finding the funding and time for the programs. My sincerest wish is to be able to bring dancing to schools by training teachers to be able to teach dance in the classrooms themselves.

Currently I am putting together a website for educators to be able to access tutorials to learn basic dance and how to teach in the classroom, as well as be able to offer the on-line program to their students and families. I am also putting together training workshops for teachers so they can learn, hands on, how to teach and incorporate dancing programs into the schools.

Please feel free to contact me about bringing a program to your school, or for educator training opportunities, or to be updated about various programs, and resources I have available for dance.

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