

Teaching with Kinect: An Inside Look from a Novice

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Members of Kinect 2005

Kinect is a dance educational outreach group from Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. As members of this nine-person undergraduate student company we travel to elementary schools performing and teaching. Since March 2005 we have visited over fifteen schools and thousands of children. A typical residency at an elementary school consists of a lively interactive performance followed by dance classes taught in multiple spaces throughout the school. Each Kinect member not only performs, but teaches at each school we visit.

We wanted to be in this group because it provides actual teaching experiences before we set foot into the real world of teaching professionally. This year the theme we carry into the schools is, "Dance is Diverse." We want to share with the students that dance is about people who come together to share their individuality, not copy and act like everybody else.

We carry this theme of diversity into both our performing and teaching. As we share our love of dance with the children, they share their ideas and creations with us. Because each child in each school is different we have had a wide range of experiences. It seems that someone always has a story to share about something that happened in the class they taught. They usually consist of silly mishaps, unexpected comments and sensitive insights that no one expected to hear from a child.

This year each of us has taught hundreds of students who love to move, and for them, Kinect is their first experience with dance. In one class the Kinect teacher recognized a natural mover and asked if she had ever taken dance before. The girl responded, "I dance everyday in my room after school." One little boy as he hurriedly put on his shoes after class leaned over and whispered to his teacher, "This was the best day ever." Another little boy asked to keep a chart that was created during a class because he wanted to hang it up in his room so he could always remember his day of dance with his Kinect teacher. There have been many children who at the end of class ask, "Are you coming back to teach us dance tomorrow?" Many teachers from the elementary schools we visit tell us how their classes wait in anticipation all day after the performance to come and dance. These spontaneous elementary student and teacher comments reaffirm that what we are doing is necessary and joyous for the children. It is so wonderful to share something we love with students who eat it up.

There are also times when the class does not go the way we planned. When the children are distracted, not listening, and overly excited, questions begin to arise. It is at this moment of realization that we are the ones who have to do something about it. After one of these classes ends we are left wondering where did it go wrong, and what could or should have been done differently?

It is at times like this when we come to realize that we have the support of the other members of Kinnect to help answer these questions. Being a part of this unique group provides us with the opportunity to share our failures with others who have experienced the same thing. It allows us to talk about what went wrong in the class and what we can do better the next time. We have the opportunity to teach, assess and then teach again. Kinnect is not only beneficial to the children but also to us as teachers in training.

These teaching experiences that we have had seem to fit into two general categories: dance lessons that succeed and those that fall short of success. However, there is a third category. Every so often we are lucky enough to teach a class and have experiences with children that are life changing for us as teachers. One such experience began with one member of Kinnect and carried to others. While at Copperview Elementary in Midvale Utah we found a ballad that was written by Mrs. Johansen's class of students 4th through 6th grades. In tender and insightful words, emotion and understanding was expressed about the Tsunami of 2004. We have used this ballad a few times in our dance lesson plans and it always brings the same result, an amazing unfolding of children showing their understanding of real life emotions and issues through dance. The children work together, respect each other, and create genuine new movement, as they uncover the danceable ideas in the words from the ballad. These are the moments when we realize that as the teachers, we are the ones being taught.

Being members of Kinnect this past year has introduced us into the vast world of authentic teaching. We have learned the value of preparation, management, and a good night's sleep the night before we perform and teach. We have come to see that each school is unique, every class is diverse and each child is a treasure.