

Resources

8 Strategies for English Learners in the Dance Classroom



On the next page, you'll find a list of strategies to use to support English Language Learners acquisition of language in the context of a dance classroom. These strategies can be used to help students develop their dance-specific vocabulary, as well as improve their ability to speak, write, and read about dance. Many strategies are common classroom strategies modified for dance. I also included some links and suggestions.

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1. Multi-Modal Approaches

Description: Teaching one concept using many different points of access, such as connecting a spoken or written word to a movement or gesture. Some teachers use “See-Say-Do,” in which the students see the word, say the word, and perform or embody the word. Songs can also be incorporated to help teach vocabulary.

Example: Students are learning about pathways through space, the teacher shows a vocabulary card that says “curved pathways,” students say “curved pathway!” aloud and make curved pathways through the space.

2. Word Wall

Description: A physical display that contains target vocabulary words related to the content being taught. These are especially helpful if the words are accompanied by images, instead of words by themselves. These can be created permanently in a dance classroom, or could be made on a portable poster board or vinyl tablecloth for teachers who do not have a permanent classroom.

Example: Mr. S, a dance teacher who travels to different schools to deliver dance enrichments, has a poster board with stick-on velcro dots on it. He chooses 10 dance words related to the elements of dance he wants to talk about in today’s dance lesson, where students are creating dances in response to poetry. Each word is laminated and has a stick-on dot on the back. He lays the cards out on the floor in class and asks the students, who have already learned some in a previous lesson, to watch his model phrase and identify different elements they notice. A student responds, “at the beginning you were on a low level,” and picks up the “level” card and sticks it on the poster.

3. Sentence Starters

Description: Either oral or written, sentence starters help students begin a thought.

Example: Ms. Spoker shows a clip of Flamenco dance on the smartboard. She asks the students to compare the dance style to ballet, which students had previously learned. On the

next slide, she projects a sentence starter, “Both Flamenco and Ballet are/have...” or “Flamenco is similar to ballet because they both...”

4. Language Objectives

Description: Designating a language goal related to the dance content goal for each lesson. These could refer to defining vocabulary words, like in the example below, but can also involve more complicated language patterns, such as language needed to compare and contrast dances.

Example: Mr. Gutierrez wants his students to work together to create a dance that links together three collaborative body shapes based on photographs. He wants to make sure that his students understand the concept of body shape in dance, as opposed to visual art or geometry. At the end of class, Mr. Gutierrez will ask students how they solved the challenge of translating their photographs into body shapes, and then he will ask them to state, in their own words, what dancers mean when they talk about “shape.” His content objective is “SWBAT create a dance linking together three body shapes based on photographs,” and the language objective is “SWBAT define “shape” in the context of dance choreography.”



5. Simple English

Description: Implementing conscious efforts to simplify the language you use to instruct by removing idioms, slang, cultural references, or stand-alone advanced vocabulary

Example: Ms. Pham makes sure she always follows advanced vocabulary with a simpler definition when teaching and talking about dance. She tells her students “When we inhale - when we breathe in (breathes in) , our lungs (gestures to lungs) fill up with oxygen - with air.” Ms. Pham used to always say that they could “kill two birds with one stone” when elevating students heart rate while simultaneously actively stretching muscles, but once a young student said, “I don’t want to kill birds,” so she tries not to use so many idioms in favor of more specific language.

6. Cultural Inclusion

Description: Integrating content that is related to the culture of ELs first language, or giving ELs opportunities to share their culture with the class.

Example: Ms. Tana recently created a unit for her 5th graders all about Mexican Baile Folklorico dance because many members of her school community are of Mexican heritage. Ms. Tana has never tried folklorico dance, so she sent out a letter to the parents of the students she teaches to see if any members of her school community knew a folklorico teacher. Together, Ms. Tana worked with some parent volunteers to co-create the unit. Through watching videos, hearing first hand stories, and giving students time to research the history of folklorico on their own and present it, Ms. Tana and the students created a short dance and performed it for the school. The result was enriching for the school community and Ms. Tana!

7. Graphic Organizers

Description: Visual aids that students can use to help them understand relationships between content knowledge. These could include Venn diagrams or guided note templates for students to use when watching videos. It is often a good idea to include vocabulary word banks on the organizer so that students can practice spelling and reading the words.

Example: Click [here to see 2 example note taking templates](#) for this excellent [Ted Ed video](#) with Camille A. Brown.

Click here to see a [note taking template](#) for teaching a fad dance, as well as a simple note taking template for use when viewing a live or recorded dance.

8. Modeling

Description: Modeling the genre of writing to be accomplished in dance class. If the class is writing personal reflections in a journal, this includes modeling how someone may write a personal reflection by co-constructing a sample journal entry with the class.

Example: Ms. Perez wants her 3rd grade students to write about their experiences dancing through the life cycle of the butterfly in their dance journals. She has students take out their journals and she puts an anchor chart at the front of the room. She models a think-aloud to demonstrate the process of writing a journal entry. She dates the top of her paper and says, “OK, I want to write about my experience, which means all the things I felt in my body and in my mind while I was dancing our butterfly dance today. So I should start by saying what we did today, so that when I look back on this a month from now, I can remember what we did. So I’m going to say “Today I” She looks at a student, who says, “did a butterfly dance!” Ms. Perez nods and says, “but did we only dance like butterflies? No, I was a caterpillar and a cocoon first. I’m going to look over at our word board for today...what word can I use to describe that?” A student raises their hand and says “life cycle.” That’s right, so I’ll write ‘Today I did a butterfly life cycle dance.’ Ms. Perez models writing 2-3 sentences of the journal entry, prompting students to look at the word board every time she can use specific vocabulary. Then, Ms. Perez lets the students write their own journal entry.

Other Links:

Here is a link to my thesis, in which I researched various aspects of instructing ELLs in the dance classroom: <https://digscholarship.unco.edu/theses/184/>

Teachers Pay Teachers has some resources for vocabulary cards and lesson plans, which could be used to support some of the multi-modal approaches or word wall making. [Teachers Pay Teachers Dance Studio Vocab](#), [Teachers Pay Teachers Movement Vocabulary](#).