

# Dancing Water: 5 Part Brain-Compatible Lesson Plan on Flow & Water

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Lesson plan ideas and activities inspired by and adapted from *Brain-Compatible Dance Education* by Anne Green Gilbert, published 2006 by AAHPERD/NDA.

## 1. Warming-Up

**BrainDance:** Standing BrainDance introducing the concept of Flow (free flow, bound flow, and stillness) responding to the music.

**Suggested Music:** *Music for Creative Dance, Volume 2, #21, Potpourri*

**Introduce the Concept:** Introduce the concept of flow (where do we see flow in nature? in our bodies?) and the basic properties of water (liquid, gas, solid) using the “hear, see, say, do” technique.

## 2. Exploring the Concept

**Concept Exploration:** Water and Ice; begin in a bound flow shape - an iceberg. The dancer’s solid, bound form starts to melt into a liquid form and they move their bodies with free-flow through general space. At the change in the music dancers begin to freeze and their movement becomes more controlled until they are creating bound shapes. Dancers can make shapes alone, connect in pairs and trios to represent small icebergs, or join together in a large group to represent a glacier, before melting back into free-flow movements. Images of rivers, oceans, waterfalls, snowflakes, ice, etc. are fun to play with during this exploration.

**Suggested Music:** *Music for Creative Dance, Volume 1, #4, Lucky Stiff*

**Reflection:** “If you enjoyed dancing like water best, move your arms with free flow. If you liked freezing and moving with bound flow, make a frozen shape. Look around and see who is the same as you.”

**Shaping:** Erosion Sculptor and Clay; dancers take turns being the mountain (clay) and the wind and rain (sculptor). One dancer forms a mountain shape, the other dances around the mountain once with free flow as the wind and rain erode the mountain. The dancer stops in front of the mountain and moves one body part to make the mountain smaller and lower (erosion). The sculptor copies the shape of the mountain; the statue comes to life and flows once around the around the new mountain. Continue to alternate being the mountain and the wind and rain until both dancers are small rocks on the ground. They stand up and repeat the erosion together, mirroring each other as they recreate the shapes they made during the erosion process until both dancers finish in small shapes on a low level.

**Suggested Music:** *Music for Creative Dance, Volume 1, #10, Jammin’ On the Porch*

**Reflection:** “Which was your favorite - eroding/changing the mountain with your touch when you were the wind and rain or being eroded/changed by the sculptor when you were the mountain?”

## 3. Developing Skills

**Combining Movements:** Choose 2 locomotor words, one that can be danced with free flow and one that can be danced with bound flow. Choose 2 nonlocomotor words, one free flow and one bound flow. Ask the students which skill they want to start with and end with. Ask them which should be second and third. Perform each movement for 8 counts (or 16, 6, 12- whatever seems appropriate for the movements and the music that accompanies the phrase). Fun words to choose from might be: march, fly, freeze, stretch, swirl, melt, dodge, grow, burst, etc.

**Suggested Music:** *Music for Creative Dance, Volume 1, #5, Echo Lady Who*

#### 4. Creating

**Choreography/Structured Improvisation:** Water Cycle Cinquain; either as one big group or in smaller groups choreograph a dance or create a structured improvisation based on the water cycle using the poetry form of cinquain.

Water  
Free Bound  
Evaporating, Condensing, Precipitating  
Water gives us life  
Cycle

**Suggested Music:** Read the poem using a dramatic voice. You can repeat some words multiple times to support the dancers and their movements.

#### 5. Cooling Down

**Performing and Responding:** Dancers share their dance/s with each other. Depending on class size, divide it in half or in smaller groups. Audience/observers practice the four A's of audience behavior: attend, allow, applaud, and appreciate. Audience offers feedback to the dancers by sharing their responses to questions such as, "What was the one part you remember most?" or "Did you see more free flow or bound flow in the dance?" or "What was your favorite part of the water cycle - evaporating, condensing, or precipitating?"

## BRAIN-COMPATIBLE DANCE EDUCATION

Material adapted from *Brain-Compatible Dance Education*, Anne Green Gilbert. AAHPERD/NDA, 2006.

### Principles of Brain-Compatible Dance Education

As dance educators, we may use the research on brain development to plan dance classes that are brain-compatible. Knowing how our brains function, we may now create the most beneficial learning environment for our students through these simple principles:

- **Present Meaningful Curriculum**

The brain is built for learning. It wants to make meaning out of experiences. Conceptual content is more meaningful than random facts, so using a conceptual approach in dance class (rather than a rote, steps-only approach) creates a curriculum rich with novelty and meaning. My curriculum is based on fifteen dance concepts (adapted from Rudolf Laban's movement vocabulary) that relate to the other arts, subject areas, and even to many aspects of living. Using creative and critical thinking skills to fully understand **relevant** concepts stimulates the brain and creates powerful learning. When class content is meaningful and connects to a student's life, the brain is motivated to learn and stimulated to remember.

- **Provide an Enriched Environment**

An enriched environment promotes the development of brain cells that are larger, have more dendrites, and therefore communicate better with one another. An enriched environment is created through a multi-sensory and challenging curriculum. This curriculum encompasses problem solving, relevant projects, complex activities, and critical thinking. An enriched environment also includes meaningful feedback.

- **Give Meaningful Feedback**

To learn from an experience, the brain needs to receive feedback. Without interactive feedback students are unable to learn, grow, and develop. Meaningful feedback is timely (in the moment rather than later), frequent, specific and descriptive rather than general, learner-controlled, and **positive**. Feedback should be multi-modal to reach all learning styles. For example, feedback might come from verbal cues from a teacher or peer; visual cues from posters, charts, and diagrams placed on the walls of the classroom, or even from smiles and direct eye contact; and tactile cues from appropriate touch and contact with teacher or peers. External rewards such as treats or trophies are not as meaningful in the long run as are intrinsic rewards, such as a sense of achievement or of feeling appreciated by a teacher or classmates.

- **Include Opportunities for Emotional Engagement**

In the brain, emotions, thinking, and learning are linked. Our experiences generate emotions, which generate thoughts and decisions, which generate responses, both good and bad. Because of this, dance classes need to be positive and joyful as well as meaningful and challenging. Joyful movement can result in the secretion of serotonin, a feel-good chemical that boosts self-esteem. When students are emotionally engaged they not only want to return to dance class, they learn more and remember longer. Negative and overly stressful experiences are not beneficial in the long run. These experiences may result in the secretion of the chemical cortisol, an excess of which can damage brain cells. Giving students the time to reflect on their feelings, thoughts, and experiences is extremely important and provides another opportunity for emotional engagement.

- **Allow for Social Interaction**

Because social interaction enhances brain development, the brain seeks relationships. Students learn best through collaboration and peer coaching. Not only does solving problems together bring more ideas and choices to the table, but working with others breaks down boundaries between genders, cultures, and learning styles. Using a variety of groupings throughout the class, such as pairs, trios, and small and large groups, will allow students to learn from each other in a variety of ways. Collaboration is more brain-compatible than competition because solving problems together can reduce stress and increase positive emotions.

- **Present Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum**

Understanding developmental stages and providing appropriate curriculum makes teaching easier and learning more attainable. I feel many teachers unintentionally dumb-down the curriculum, especially with children. Young dancers are capable of learning more complex ideas than we think they can. Inappropriate

classroom behavior is often the result of developmentally inappropriate curriculum. The curriculum must be genuinely challenging to get the brain's attention, but achievable so students are not frustrated.

If you are having class management problems, one element to consider is your students' level of development and experience. Having a wide range of ages or levels of experience in a dance class can be problematic because the students' needs may be too varied for you to accommodate successfully. Content that is too simple will bore students and cause the brain to find something else to attend to. Bored students will engage in inappropriate behavior just to feel stimulated. Content that is too difficult will frustrate students and cause the brain to shut down. Frustrated students may stop participating altogether. However, I prefer to provide challenges for my students and then modify activities if necessary.

- **Allow Students to Take Charge of their Learning**

Students who construct and re-create their own learning are more engaged and retain information longer than students who are "fed" information. The best way to learn is to work out solutions for yourself and/or to teach another person because your brain has to understand the material before you can explain it to someone else. Giving students the opportunity to take charge of their own learning through choices, peer coaching, and problem solving increases motivation, responsibility, and emotional engagement. Using an approach that alternates directed teaching with student exploration and creation leads to greater involvement and, therefore, greater learning on the part of the student. Teachers need to allow students of all ages to be responsible for more of their learning. We need to let go of our control issues and wholeheartedly accept the role of facilitator.

- **Provide Both Novel and Repetitious Experiences**

In the brain, synaptic connections are created through novelty. These new connections are then hard-wired through repetition. Too much novelty leads to confusion and frustration. Too much repetition leads to boredom and disengagement. Find the balance between novelty and repetition for optimum learning.

The five-part lesson plan described in "Planning the Lesson" will help you create novel *and* repetitious activities. To capture your students' attention offer a variety of concepts, skills, and music. Provide contrasts by alternating directed teaching with student choices, grouping students in a variety of ways, and using different teaching styles. The two lesson plan sections labeled "Exploring the Concept" and "Creating" offer many opportunities for contrast and choice. The introduction of a new dance concept each lesson provides novelty and excitement.

The other two lesson plan areas, "Warming Up" and "Developing Skills," provide the repetition necessary for developing dance skills and technique. The sequence of the lesson plan itself provides a repetitive structure that creates a sense of ritual, which leads to lower levels of stress.

- **Offer a Curriculum that is Holistic and Sequential**

Students learn better through studying whole ideas in context than through studying sub-parts isolated from actual use. This is why learning dance through concepts is more meaningful than just learning isolated steps. In each lesson, try to integrate skills with improvisations and learning dances with creating dances, rather than practicing skills in one lesson and creating in another. Bringing dance history into the classroom/studio and having it come alive through the concepts and movement instead of just reading about dance history outside of class would be another example of learning through context.

Students also learn best when the curriculum is sequential rather than random. Exploring the dance concepts sequentially by focusing on one to two different dance concepts in each lesson is more beneficial than a hit-and-miss approach. Also, building on the knowledge and skills gained in previous lessons rather than introducing new material in each class helps students learn more efficiently.

- **Provide Information about Proper Nutrition**

Without good nutrition, water, and oxygen our brains and bodies do not function properly. It is hard for students to learn if their bodies are filled with excess sugar, fueled by empty carbohydrates, or as is the case with many dancers, starving. When dancing, it is important that your students stay hydrated and have the fresh oxygen that proper ventilation provides. Educate your students about the importance of a balanced diet. Provide a healthy environment physically, emotionally, and mentally so that all your students' brains can fully function.

## PLANNING YOUR FIVE-PART BRAIN-COMPATIBLE LESSON

Plan your creative dance lesson using the following steps:

Choose a dance concept for your weekly lesson focus from the list of dance concepts. It is easiest, in the beginning, to start at the top of the list and progress down: Week 1 - Place, Week 2 - Size, Week 3 - Level, Week 4 - Direction, Week 5 - Pathway, Week 6 - Focus, Week 7 - Speed, Week 8 Rhythm, etc. However, if you are teaching a short course (3-6 weeks for instance), include a few concepts from each main area of Space, Time, Force and Body.

There are five lesson plan areas that should be addressed in each lesson. For a 30-minute lesson do one five-minute activity from each area. For a longer lesson do 2-3 activities for Exploring the Concept and Developing Skills or spend more time on technique and/or choreography.

**1. Warming-up:** this can be a 5-15 minute activity that aerobically explores the week's concept. The BrainDance is perfect! This could also include 15-20 minutes of dance technique/ if you are a dance specialist with a dance background and time permits. During the warm-up you will introduce the lesson concept for the day (moving on different LEVELS - high, middle, low) through the "hear, see, say and do" method. Dancers need to say and do the concept while seeing the words visually written and displayed.

**2. Exploring the Concept:** this is a 5-15 minute activity (depending on the length of your lesson) in which the concept is explored through a problem-solving approach. This is the time when the dancers become familiar with the concept kinesthetically. They are allowed time to explore the concept in a number of ways individually, in pairs and trios. The movement problems should be well structured so that the dancers are encouraged to find new ways of using the concept and to increase thinking and moving skills. Focus on exploring the concept in self and general space, using isolated body parts and the whole body, working alone and with others, and combining the lesson concept with other dance concepts. Take a minute to allow the dancers to reflect on their feelings about the concept and the exploration. They may share their feelings with a partner or the class and/or write in a journal.

**3. Developing Skills:** this is a 10-30 minute activity (depending on the length of the lesson) in which locomotor and non-locomotor skills (dance technique) are learned and practiced. The skills learned should be practiced through the lesson concept. For example: turns should be practiced on different levels (when the concept is LEVEL); skips may be practiced for several weeks in different directions, with changes in size, level, speed and energy - each week the skip is explored through the lesson concept. Combinations of movements should also be practiced, focusing on the flow or transitions between movements. Leaps and turns are particularly enjoyed by school-aged dancers. Partnering skills may also be practiced.

**4. Creating:** this is a 5-20 minute activity that includes improvisation and choreography. This is a time when the dancers utilize all they have learned earlier in the lesson. They put together their developing movement skills with their developing creative skills to create dances, either improvised or choreographed. The teacher gives the dancers a movement problem to solve such as dancing low when the music is soft and high when the music is loud, then doing the opposite. This problem is solved on the spot without practice - improvised. A similar movement problem may be given to dancers who then create a set study (choreographed) to show to the class: do an ABA dance that is low/high/low or high/low/high.

**5. Cooling-Down:** this is a 3-10 minute activity that can take several different forms. Dancers can stretch muscles as they review the lesson concept. Visualization can be utilized to review skills learned in class. Dancers may do deep breathing and relaxation exercises. When choreography is done earlier, this is a time to show dances and discuss and evaluate them. Remember and review the 4 A's of audience behavior: Attend, Allow, Applaud, and Appreciate.

Start slowly. Choose one concept for each lesson. Explore that concept by doing it in relation to the other concepts. For example, explore moving on low levels in different directions, self and general space, with different speed and changes in force. Each week you will layer on another concept and by the end of ten weeks your students will be creating wonderful dances. Be patient, be positive. Plan your lessons carefully, alternating high and low energy activities. Use demonstrations rather than a lot of verbal directions. Cue the dancers as they move by suggesting different concepts from the movement charts hanging in your room. Be a facilitator rather than a controller. Have fun, smile, laugh and enjoy!

## DANCE VOCABULARY - Creative Dance Center

### DANCE CONCEPTS

#### Space

1. Place self space (personal space), general space (room space)
2. Size big (far reach), medium (mid-reach), small (near reach)
3. Level high, middle, low
4. Direction forward, backward, right, left, up, down
5. Pathway curved, straight, zigzag
6. Focus single focus, multi-focus

#### Time

7. Speed fast, medium, slow
8. Rhythm pulse, pattern, grouping, breath

#### Force

9. Energy sharp (sudden), smooth (sustained)
10. Weight strong, light
11. Flow free (continuous, off-balance), bound (controlled, on-balance)

#### Body

12. Parts head, neck, shoulders, arm, wrists, elbows, hands, fingers, hips, pelvis, trunk, spine, stomach, sternum, legs, knees, feet, toes, heels, etc.
13. Relationships over, under, around, through, above, below, beside, between, near, far, in, out, on, off, together, apart, alone, connected, mirror, shadow
14. Shapes curved, straight, angular, twisted, symmetrical, asymmetrical
15. Balance off balance, on balance

### MOVEMENT SKILLS

- Locomotor crawl, creep, roll, walk, run, leap, jump, hop, gallop, slide, skip, prance, fly, slither, tip-toe, dash, waltz run, step-hop, schottische, grapevine, polka, etc.
- Nonlocomotor bend, twist, stretch, swing, push, pull, fall, melt, sway, turn, spin, dodge, kick, poke, lift, carve, curl, lunge, wiggle, slash, punch, flick, dab, float, glide, press, wring, etc.

### Resources

Anne Gilbert's books and DVDs are available at [www.creativedance.org](http://www.creativedance.org)

#### Dance Books:

- Brain-Compatible Dance Education.* Anne Green Gilbert. Reston, VA: NDA/AAHPERD, 2006.  
*Creative Dance for All Ages.* Anne Green Gilbert. Reston, VA: NDA/AAHPERD, 1992.  
*Teaching The Three Rs Through Movement.* Anne Green Gilbert. NDEO, 1977/2002.  
*Partnering Dance and Education.* Judith Lynne Hanna. Human Kinetics, 800-747-4457.

#### Brain Books:

- Kids Learn from the Inside Out.* Shirley Randolph and Margot Heiniger (541-575-2413), 1998.  
*Smart Moves.* Carla Hannaford. Arlington, VA: Great Ocean Publishers, 1995.  
*The Art of Changing the Brain.* James E. Zull. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, Styluspub.com  
*Teaching With The Brain in Mind.* Eric Jensen. ASCD, Alexandria, VA, 1998. [www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org)  
*Brain Matters: Translating Research into Classroom Practice.* Patricia Wolfe, ASCD, 2001. [www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org)  
*Amazing Babies.* Beverly Stokes. [www.amazingbaby.com](http://www.amazingbaby.com)  
*What's Going on in There?* Lise Eliot. New York: Bantam Books, 1999.

#### Videos/DVDs:

- Teaching Creative Dance.* Anne Green Gilbert, [www.creativedance.org](http://www.creativedance.org), 2002.  
*BrainDance.* Anne Green Gilbert, [www.creativedance.org](http://www.creativedance.org), 2003

#### Music:

- Music for Creative Dance Volumes 1-4,* Eric Chappelle. [www.ravennaventures.com](http://www.ravennaventures.com)  
*BrainDance Music,* Eric Chappelle. [www.ravennaventures.com](http://www.ravennaventures.com)

## Some Benefits of the BrainDance Patterns

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A few specific benefits of each pattern are listed below. For more detail, refer to Peggy Hackney's *Making Connections: Total Body Integration through Bartenieff Fundamentals (1998)*.

**Breath:** Deep breathing is essential for a fully functioning brain and body. The brain consumes one fifth of the body's oxygen. All movements and rhythms are based on breath. "Oneness – cellular breathing, flowing in and flowing out."

**Tactile:** A variety of touch leads to bonding, sensory integration, proprioception (knowing where the body is in space), and appropriate behavior. "Tension masks sensation -tight muscles can't feel."

**Core-Distal:** Reaching out with distal ends (fingers, toes, head, and tail) connects us to the world beyond ourselves (interpersonal intelligence) and creates full body extension, establishing our kinesphere. Curling back to the core (pelvis and trunk) returns us to our own self (intrapersonal intelligence) and creates an awareness of core support for correct alignment and a sense of aliveness. "Twoness – self and others."

**Head-Tail:** Being aware of the interactive relationship between the head and tail (pelvis) leads to a full use of both ends of our spine for propelling us through space with ease, both on and off balance. Release of the head and tail creates an open path for our central nervous system to fully function. This pattern also strengthens back, neck, and shoulder muscles used in sitting, writing, and focusing on book, screen, or blackboard. "Lively Spine – body attitude is determined at a spinal level."

**Upper-Lower:** Grounding the lower half, by yielding the weight of the body into the earth, allows the upper one to reach into space and relate with other people. Grounding the upper half allows the lower to shift weight and travel through space toward someone or away from danger. Grounding and articulating body halves lead to emotional stability. We learn to reach for goals and set boundaries. "Mobility/Stability – function and expression work together."

**Body-Side:** Grounding the right side allows the left side to be fully expressive, and vice versa. Development and musculature become balanced on both sides of the body. Right or left dominance is felt and left and right brain hemispheres are strengthened. Body-side movements develop horizontal eye tracking necessary for reading. "Polarities – clarifying issues and making choices."

**Cross-Lateral:** Connecting body parts from opposite quadrants creates complex, three-dimensional movements such as spirals. Crossing the midline of the body connects both sides of the brain through the corpus collosum and is necessary for reading and writing. Cross-lateral movements develop vertical eye tracking necessary for reading. "Robust Thinking."

**Vestibular:** Moving off balance develops our balance (vestibular) system, providing us with necessary information about motion and gravity. Stimulating the vestibular system strengthens eye-tracking, hearing, proprioception, balance, and coordination. "The First Sense."