

Let's make a circle!

“Holding the form” is a term from marching band and drum corps circles. But, the circles for classroom work is the same concept of spatial orientation. Why do children struggle? You haven't taught them the concept. Drawing a circle on the floor gives the students a target, but doesn't teach them how to apply this in their lives. Here are two activities to help you out.

First the shape. Doubling is one of the four strategies for addition. Use a stretch band, a circle of clothesline, or just hold hands. First, stretch the band to its longest line with one student. Then double the points with each of you selecting another student to join the shape. Now stretch to the largest rhombus—any four-sided shape—you can make. Double again for the largest octagon you can make. Once past a decagon, the shape is “the number of points”-agon; 16-agon, 32-agon... Soon the shape resembles a circle. The primary element of this exercise is to GENTLY pull away from the center and “look out” away from the center. I ask, “What makes a good circle?” The answer; “it's round and even.”

Now the spacing. Have the students create a circle using only their eyes. Draw their attention to your space in the circle between two students. “Is it even?” Then, move close to the child on one side and make the space obviously un-even. Ask the children to tell you when to stop as you “fix the space.” Quickly shuffle your feet as you slowly move back to the middle of the space. “Stop!” Repeat from the other side. “Stop!” Now have the children fix their own space. Check their understanding with “Bowling for Children!”

Once you're all in the circle, swing your arm back and “bowl” yourself across to take out two children from the other side. The remaining students have to repair the spacing. They may shrink the size of the circle, or make the spaces bigger. “Bowl” two more “spares,” and then add everyone back to the circle. Practice repairing the spacing in other shapes.

Move on to a circle dance that rotates the circle. Put your hands in with “thumbs up,” and join your hands pointing all the thumbs in the line of direction you will start moving. This is where the students collapse the circle because they instinctively want to walk side-by-side. To hold the shape, remind them to “look out” and GENTLY pull away from the center.

Repeat these lessons K-3 each year to review the concepts. They transfer to high school marching band, choral risers positions, and even when staging high-school musicals. Students check their own spacing and check for audience sight lines from the stage. Who knows? Someday, people may be able to park their cars *between* the yellow lines and leave room for the rest of us.

Progress from individual work to pairs in unison or exact copy. Once you form small groups of four, six or eight, the students can explore formations: circles, squares, longways sets and contradance. Consider changes in body facing and line of direction to develop more complex movement.

Introduce parallel versus contrary motion when patterns are secure. Add canonic movement to develop an awareness of the other. This is more successful after audiation begins around the age of seven.

Zigeunerpolka-Novelty mixer, Weikart Teaching Movement & Dance

Music: “Rhythmically Moving #2”

Random spacing face counterclockwise. Review movement patterns from a work wall and direction and pathway for variations.

Walk forward 4 steps, turn and walk backward 4 steps, repeat clockwise for an A section. Students create B sections of four four-beat movement patterns to demonstrate elemental form showing repetition and contrast. “*They can’t be all the same, and they can’t be everything different.*” Students check for elemental forms, direction, pathway, and movement patterns.

Folk Dances from Chimes of Dunkirk, New England Dancing Masters

Blayton Races – single circle with partners

Music: “La Bastrinque” This is a great preparation for the Sicilian Circle form.

Forward and back facing inward all hands joined or not. (8), repeat (8).

Face partner and join hands, side-close-side-touch, moving in; side-close-side-touch, moving out (8); repeat (8). This is the same pathway with a new body facing.

Move forward, past your partner—passing right shoulders—perform a right hand swing with the next person (8). Change hands for a left hand/elbow swing (8). Promenade (16) counterclockwise with your new partner. Turn to face in, swinging the outside person forward to complete the dance. To avoid hand holds, the outside person touches the partner’s shoulder.

Black Joke – double circle, partners side-to-side facing another couple

–Music “Black Joke” **Sicilian Circle formation**

Begin with the last phrase performing “snap, clap, pat,” with the text “Hey, ho, diddley, dum.” (4) Then add “clap, right, clap left,” first with your partner and next with the person behind you. Change the formation to a double circle side-to-side with partner, facing another couple (front-to-front) to form a set of four.

Circle left (8) then perform body percussion while singing, “Hey, ho, diddley, dum.” (4) Repeat to circle right (8) followed by, “Hey, ho, diddley, dum.” (4)

Face partner and “clap, right, clap, left,” face your opposite and “clap, right, clap, left.” (8) Do-si-do your opposite (8) and then pass thru, passing right shoulders to the next couple while performing text “Hey, ho, diddley, dum.” (4) Repeat the dance with a new square.

Teach the movement patterns in random space before creating the formation.

