

Lesson Title	AWAKEN SLEEP
Group	Mixed group
Target group	Adults with mixed disabilities (mainly intellectual disability and Down syndrome)
Number of participants	18-22
Duration	2 hours
Vocabulary	fall, relaxation, body weight release
Materials	Kandinsky's printed on A3 paper

Goal - Essential question:

"The workshop's main objective is to contribute in the creation of an artistic identity by the participants through dance improvisation.

The main goal is to develop the students' capacity for self-action and free expression, enhance their communication with others and lead them to understand some fundamental conventions defining dance exercises or scenes, while expanding their kinetic skills."

Objectives - Aims - Inquiry questions

The class' objective is to physically, psychologically and symbolically explore the conceptual vocabulary of dancing (falling, relaxation of muscle control, leaving our body weight to another dancer).

1. What does it mean for a part or our whole body to fall? What are the in-between levels between a standing and a lying position? How do we feel like when we're falling? Do we enjoy giving up ourselves to gravity or do we seek control?
2. How do we relax our muscles and let go off our body control, so that our body may be moved by someone else? How do we let our weight onto someone else's body; How easy is it to trust him/her?

PROCEDURE

Group warm-up following the educator's direction. (15 minutes)

The students create a circle, holding each other's hands. We begin by closing our eyes, while feeling the touch of those next to us. We inhale and exhale while making a sound with our voice, until we all breathe in sync. We focus our attention on our feet and on our relation to the floor, feeling as if we are rooted in the ground. We let our body swing gently, as if a breeze which gradually becomes stronger is blowing, while being aware of the movement of those standing next to us. Slowly, the wind calms down and stops.

We gradually lift up our holding hands together; then, we let them drop, while letting go of the hands of the students standing next to us. We feel a sudden change, as we lose muscle control and give up our arm's weight to gravity. With our eyes still closed, we seek to find the hands of those standing next to us. We hold each other's hands again and we repeat this process.

We open our eyes and let go of our hands. Next, we raise our hands high above our head and, as if someone is pulling us up from our fingertips, our heels rise off the floor. Then, we let each part of our body drop, as if we were marionettes and the strings attached to our arms, head, belly and knees are broken one by one, until we reach a squatted position with our knees bent. After that, we let ourselves "melt" to the floor (in any way one prefers: by falling backwards, sideward or forwards). Finally, we return to our standing position, as if we're springing up from the ground. Next, we repeat this process.

Transition (10 minutes)

We walk together across the room. We try not to walk in circles, but in every direction throughout the whole room, keeping eye contact with our fellow students. We adjust our speed to share a common pace, while maintaining awareness of the persons moving around us. Eventually we start to run and, at some point, a member of the group decides to fall down on the floor. As soon as someone falls, everybody falls; as soon as someone stands up, we all stand up. We repeat this exercise in different walking or running speeds, thus increasing or decreasing accordingly the speed of our falling motion. After our final fall, we stay down on the floor. Then, we spot our pair and roll towards him/her.

Demonstration

After we fall on the floor a couple of times, the educator demonstrates how we can fall in the same speed with which we are running. By gradually bending our knees while running, our body comes closer to the floor and our arms can assist us in the last stage before the fall. We particularly want to avoid bringing our body to a sudden halt and fall down on the spot.

Security

If there are people with considerable kinetic disabilities, instead of falling down to the floor, this transition can be performed by simply stopping our movement (everybody stops when someone stops, everybody moves when someone begins to move) or with a partial fall involving only the upper part of our body, so that an abrupt fall will be avoided. In any case, we encourage participants to fall gently and to take their time.

1st Activity | in pairs (15 minutes)

We spread throughout the room, divided in pairs. While maintaining eye contact with our partner, we simultaneously let our bodies be pulled by gravity, as if we are unable to resist its force pulling us towards the floor. Then, we return to our standing position through a continuous movement. Our objective is to move in sync as a pair, while falling and recovering. We try to begin our movement from different parts of our body, e.g., by bending our head or our knees, as if we faint. A fall can begin from any part of the body above the knees. Also, we may use words such as “sleepiness” or “slumber”, to reproduced the sense of gradually losing our body control.

Next, we try to repeat these falls but we separate the falling motion in 1-5 stages, trying to control our bodies as it moves towards the floor and stopping our motion between these different levels. This exercise can be performed by both students simultaneously; alternatively, one of them can perform the fall and the other can count or clap his/her hands to signify the beginning of each stage. Finally, we can try to fall while traveling. In this case, the body moves both vertically and horizontally.

2nd Activity | Groups of three (or four) (20 minutes)

The group decides which student will lie down on the floor first. The teacher explains to the student that he/she has to be relaxed, but not in completely passive physical state. Next, the two standing members of the group begin to simply move his/her body parts. For example, they may hold and raise the student's arms, in order to lift up his/her shoulders. Then, by choosing to move a different part of the student's body, they can change his/her whole-body position and slowly move the student across the room, making sure that he/she has let his/her weight to them. Through this exercise, the student's body may return to a standing position, or perhaps the standing members may lift him/her up off the floor. However, in order to reach this level, all three members need to build a relation of trust between them. Then, we change roles until all student have lied down and have been moved by their partners. Communication between the standing students moving the third should not be verbal, but should be achieved through their own actions and through eye contact. It is preferable not to have a specific pattern in your mind beforehand, but to follow the moving body's flow and the other "mover's" motions.

During the exercise, the educator may guide the "movers" by telling them, for example, to use other body parts of the lying student besides his/her arms, or to use certain body parts as levers. Moreover, it would be a good idea to take a pause every now and then; also, the "moving" students will be reminded to let their body weight under the control of their partners.

Discussion (10 minutes)

We sit down wherever we happen to be at the end of the exercise. The students are asked to close their eyes, to remember the way in which this exercise evolved, and how they reached this specific location within the room. A discussion on the previous exercise begins: How did it feel when someone else was moving their body? Did it feel different when different parts of their body were being moved (e.g. head, legs, etc.)? What made them feel uncomfortable? What made them laugh? Which moments were the most enjoyable? The discussion may also return to the topic of "falling". Students may be asked to remember funny or painful falls they experienced in their lives, compare them with the falls they performed in the class' controlled environment, and reflect on how they felt and what they thought.

3rd Activity | pair-exercise (20 minutes)

We walk towards the wall. We stand with our backs on the wall and we move our feet away from it, as much as we feel comfortable, in order to put our weight against the wall. We feel the wall solidly holding our back. If the wall is slippery enough, we make minor spinal wave movements while holding our feet steadily on the ground, in order to feel the motion of our spine and realize that the core of our body is not one-piece.

Once we've comprehended this position, we separate in pairs. We stand back-to-back with our partner and, by taking small steps, we move our feet forward. We make sure that we lean our weight on each other's back, to balance effortlessly. We try to walk together while maintaining this position – one walk forwards, the other works backwards. Both partners should be off their center of gravity, to such an extent that they would fall if they won't lean on each other.

Next, the pair stands still on a certain spot within the room and moves towards the floor. If their legs are in the correct position, then both partners would be able to squat down and rise up again without moving their toes. During this exercise, especially while moving upwards, the partners should not just lean their weight on each other, but they have to actually push with their backs to lift themselves up.

4th Activity | Group improvisation (25 minutes)

Free improvisation is a fundamental part of our class. The beginning of this class is a good opportunity to recapitulate what we've learned so far, so that the students may recall the exercises we performed and have them in their "arsenal" while they improvise. Often, aspects from previous exercises reemerge when one least expects them during improvisation. In this class, we will recall how we were falling like marionettes, in a continuous or discontinuous motion in pairs, and how we were moving as "sleeping" bodies. Often, we quote a word which can affect the student in various levels or even integrate discourse within dance improvisation. This class could be entitled "Awaken Sleep".

Music is not necessary for improvisation, although it can be helpful. However, to realize that music is not essential, it is preferable to try and improvise without any music playing on the background, at least in some parts of the exercise. Given that improvisation is free, the first introduction to this lesson is very important and it will be a good idea to repeat it frequently. For more information regarding our own suggestions, please refer to the "Lesson extension" section.

Warm down (5 minutes)

We form a circle (perhaps this is how an improvisation exercise will end). We all do the same thing, e.g. we hold our hand, we lift them up and drop them down, as we did in the beginning, or we walk towards the circle's center and back, with our eyes closed. Next, each student is asked to say a word that defines the previous improvisation, and then the lesson comes to an end.

END OF PRODECURE

Contextualizing - Revealing information

A useful source on this class' topic – i.e. falling and letting someone else control our body weight – is Mark Johnson's book *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*, University of Chicago press, 1990.

<https://www.amazon.com/Body-Mind-Bodily-Meaning-Imagination/dp/0226403181>

Lesson extension - Other possibilities/ Preparatory exercises for free improvisation

Free improvisation might sound easy – exactly because its free – but it requires special preparation to “open up” the student, or else it could bring the opposite result. As mentioned above, the first introduction is very important and it is a good idea to repeat it frequently.

In our opinion improvisation is a “performance”. We designate one side of the room as “the audience space” and the other side as our “stage”. Often, we turn off the light and use a sound to indicate that the performance begins – for example, a clap, a bell or some music. In general, during these improvisations, students can freely enter or leave the “stage” whenever they want, as long as they very carefully observe what takes place on stage and enter in order to complement or support, to oppose or bring something complete new to the composition that is being created.

Usually, in the first class we bring a Kandinsky painting – such as the one on the attachment – printed on an A3 paper. Then, we discuss which element could have been the first that was painted by the artist in this specific piece, and in what order and why he painted the rest of its figures. For example: “Perhaps he began by painting this big triangle and, to support this geometrical figure, he then created a series of small triangles on the opposite side of the painting. Next, in order to create some to balance between the top and the bottom of the painting/to create some depth/to bring an element of surprise, he painted...”

Next, we create an analogy between the two-dimensional parallelogram art-piece with the three-dimensional space, and we ask the students to see each dancer as an element of the painting and to perceive improvisation as a composition which is collectively created by themselves. This improvisation begins without defining the sequence according to which the students will enter the “stage”; instead, each student enters after he/she has carefully observed the composition that is being created.

I DANCE



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This exercise has numerous variations. We usually begin by asking a student to assume a standstill position when he/she enters the stage, thus becoming a “brush stroke on the canvas”. Next, we might proceed to a second round, during which each stroke changes its position or the painting becomes alive for five minute, and see where that could lead us. Alternatively, each student can enter by performing a repetitive move, thus creating a “mechanism” instead of a static picture. Each educator can come up with her own variation of this exercise, through experimentation.



Kandinsky's printed on A3 paper