

 **FREE TO BE...**
YOU AND ME 

Emotion Walk

Basically this exercise is designed to get the students thinking about moving their bodies, and about clearly understanding the ways their bodies can move, and the ways they do move in various situations. Usually I introduce movement of the whole body gradually, starting with something like "Sculpture Gallery" or with narrative pantomime activities. With younger children especially, constantly monitor the level of understanding, and tailor the lesson to it.

Getting Started:

Ways to Move in Space

Everyone finds their own personal space in the room. Have a defined "acting space" in the classroom--a large open area--and tell the students they must remain inside this area all the time. Students begin to move their bodies through space. Coach them to find every conceivable way to move their bodies through space. This can get noisy, and you have to watch to be sure they are not discovering ways like throwing their classmates, etc., but students love it. When they have explored different ways to move through space for five or ten minutes, sit and discuss. On the board, make a list of all the ways they have discovered to move our bodies though space. These often include:

Walking

Running (Discuss this one ahead of time. Running is a legitimate way to move, but not in the classroom.)

Crawling

Rolling

Hopping

Skipping

Jumping

Leaping

Tip-toeing

Tumbling

Walking backwards

Walking on hands

Galloping

Dragging lower body with arms

Spinning

Etc.

Once the list is "finished" get up again, and coach the whole group through each item on the list.

Ways to Walk

For this second part of the lesson confine only to walking. There are many different ways to walk. Introduce the idea that any movement (in this case, the walk) can be changed in a number of different specific ways. Listed below, but in the lesson introduce them one at a time, with time for discussion, etc. in between. Some of the categories below come from Rudolf Laban's movement technique. As the students walk--Don't stop! Keep walking!--through the space, coach them through each of these changes. ("Okay, everyone, now let's walk as HIGH, as tall, as we can! Now let's see how LOW to the ground we can be and still walk--don't cheat and crawl! Now everyone walk as WIDE as you can!" etc.)

Change the *size* of the movement. A movement can be made wider or narrower, higher or lower, deeper or shallower. One can make the walk wider or narrower by widening or narrowing the stance and swinging the arms further away or closer to the body. One can make the walk higher or lower by walking on tiptoe or slouching. One can make the walk deeper by taking larger steps or swinging the arms further forward and back.

Change the *time* of the movement. A movement can be made slower or faster. (When my students are sophisticated enough to grasp it, include time in the size category--as the "fourth" dimension.)

Change the *weight* of the movement. This is pure Laban. Demonstrate by walking how a movement can be light or heavy. (An angry schoolteacher may walk heavily; a ballet dancer may move lightly.)

Change the *direction* of the movement. Also from Laban. A movement can be direct--moving to a specific point without veering off the path--or indirect--wandering aimlessly.

Change the *tension* of the movement. The muscles can be loose and relaxed or tense and constricted.

Change the *focus* of the movement. Focus is basically the direction of the gaze, with usually a corresponding curve of the body. (Think of the difference between a downcast person walking about staring at the floor and a proud, happy person striding about with his chin up.)

What Does it Mean?

Once you have tried out all the different ways to change the walk, have the students sit around the edge of the space and work with one volunteer moving at a time. This part of the lesson is about body language, and how the way we move expresses our personality and our mood. A volunteer is chosen, and instructed to walk back and forth through the space as everyone watches. To begin with, say, "Be as HAPPY as you can! Show us in your walk!" As the

class watches the volunteer walking "happy," coach them with questions to look at how the walk is dealing with each of the categories above. "Is he walking high or low?" "Wide or narrow?" "Are his muscles tense or loose?" "Is he walking fast or slow?" Gradually we build up a sense of what "happy" looks like--at least for that person. (With older students, if the volunteer is not actually looking very happy, coach him, using the categories, to look happier. "Can you move your focus up? Can you relax your muscles a bit? Look, class, at how much happier he looks now!") You could write a brief description of "happy" on the board. (Fairly high, wide and deep walk, medium-fast, light, relaxed, direct movement, high or straight ahead focus.) It is important not to cheat, though. If a volunteer's version of "happy" doesn't conform to expectations, and if when you coach him to match them the group feels he no longer looks happy, then describe what he did, not what you think he should have done. Repeat this with other volunteers and other emotions--angry, proud, sad, afraid, etc. With sophisticated groups, talk about why certain emotions might have certain similarities or differences. (For example, in certain ways "proud" and "angry" tend in most groups to look a lot alike. Both tend to be tense, fairly deliberate movements that take up a lot of space, both in width and in depth. It can be fascinating to discuss theories as to why.) This is really a broad outline of the general approach to take when introducing the idea of movement with classes. You can vary the approach nearly every time you do it, carefully listening and watching so that you can respond to what the students are and are not connecting to.