



Greater Good in Education  
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

## WE ARE BETTER (DANCING) TOGETHER

*"We dance to fall in love with the spirit in all things"*

—Gabrielle Roth

### OVERVIEW

Students watch a brief dance sequence or flash mob and then mimic or collectively create a dance sequence, experiencing collective effervescence through movement.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To build community and cultivate prosocial behavior
- As a brain break, stress-reduction, or well-being exercise
- As an emotion regulation activity

#### TIME REQUIRED

- < 30 minutes

#### LEVEL

- Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School

#### MATERIALS

- *A short video of a flash mob or collective dance, such as:*
  - [Grease Flashmob](#)
  - [Kids Flashmob \(Netherlands\)](#)
  - [Amazing youth hip hop number \(America's Got Talent\):](#)
  - [Ballet number](#)
  - [Bollywood number](#)
- *Optional: A step-by-step dance video, such as: (note: there are many on YouTube or GoNoodle)*
  - [Go Noodle: Minnie & Mickey Railway Dance](#)

- [Go Noodle: Bye Bye Bye Dance](#)
- [Among Us Dance \(YouTube\)](#)
- [Bollywood dance moves](#)

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Explore the experience of awe through collective dance
- Take turns leading dance moves or collectively create a dance sequence
- Move their bodies!

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

## CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Appreciation of beauty and excellence
- Transcendence
- Teamwork
- Kindness

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness

## MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Open awareness

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Have you ever joined in a group dance, like Bhangra, the YMCA, the Horah, or electric slide on a dance floor; or been part of a wave at a sporting event; or witnessed a stunningly synchronized group ballet or hip-hop number?

- Can you recall the sensations you felt? Maybe goosebumps, a sense of awe, or even of connection with the people around you? This is collective effervescence—that feeling of being energetically connected to other humans.
- Take a moment to watch one of the dance or flash mob videos in the Materials List and reflect if you feel any of these similar sensations or emotions while watching.
- As this activity is about movement and dance, consider how you might make this inclusive for students who have physical limitations—to ensure they can still participate. For example, if you have students with mobility challenges, consider doing a seated dance challenge—where students can only come up with dance moves with their upper bodies.
- Consider preparing a few very simple dance moves (for example, clap, hop, spin) beforehand in case students are feeling shy to lead the movements.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### INTRODUCE THE CONCEPT

- Tell students:
  - *Today we are going to explore something called “collective effervescence” and how that can lead to feelings of awe and well-being—through a little bit of dance and movement!*
  - *The word **effervescence** means being positive, energetic, and enthusiastic. It also refers to the bubbles in a carbonated drink—like pop or bubbly water.*
  - *Ask students: What have you noticed about bubbles in a carbonated drink? (Give them a moment to share some ideas)*
  - *The bubbles move and rise to the surface together!*
  - *Collective effervescence is the feeling of connection and energy moving together among humans—especially when you physically move with people (or [watch people move together](#))—like when watching a flash mob, when everyone is doing the same moves on a dance floor, or when everyone does the wave at a sporting event.*
  - *You might feel a rush of goosebumps or just a sense of happiness and amazement that you are all moving as one. Dance and collective movement can have this effect on us—sometimes triggering feelings of awe and connectedness.*

### WATCH AND DISCUSS A VIDEO

- Tell students:
  - *We are going to watch a video of a flash mob/short dance number. [See the Materials list for suggested videos.]*
  - *As you watch the video, notice whether any emotions arise in you.*
- After watching the video, ask students:
  - *How did watching this make you feel? Can you share any emotions or feelings you noticed, either in yourself or in the people in the video?*
  - *Have you ever been part of a flash mob/dance number like this? Can you share about it?*

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## CREATE COLLECTIVE MOVEMENT

### Option #1: "Follow the leader"

- Pick a song that will resonate with your students' age (or some oldie classics that always get people dancing!) and culture. (Note: you might invite students to put some suggestions for songs ahead of time into a box—then draw for the song of the day!)
- One teacher or student leads a dance sequence, with the class copying the leader's dance moves. Keep it simple initially. For younger students, do just a few moves at a time. You can get more complex as you go or for older students.
- Rotate through leaders, with every person bringing their own dance sequences for people to copy together.
- **Optional modification:** With everyone standing in a circle, have each student add a move to the sequence, one by one, slowly creating a collective dance sequence.

### Option #2: "Follow along with the video"

- Show a video that demonstrates dance steps. Invite students to follow the dance steps together. [See the Materials list for suggested videos.]

**Optional modification:** Follow along with a Tai Chi/[Qi Gong sequence](#) for more down regulation in the classroom

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## DISCUSS

Tell students:

- *Let's take a moment to reflect how it felt to move/dance together!*
- *How did that feel to move together?*
- *Can you think of other things that feel great or better when we do them together or work together as a team?*

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Were there any barriers for students to participate? If you were to try this again, what might you modify or try differently next time?
- What was the energy/mood after this practice? Did it "up-regulate" (increase energy) or "down-regulate" (calm down) the room?
- Can you think of a time in the school day that this practice might be helpful to revisit to shift the classroom energy?
- Did you notice any shifts in student interactions after this practice (for example, more bonded, cooperation, or prosocial behaviors)?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

In a [study](#) of 264 high school students in Brazil, researchers found that both the physical exertion and the synchrony that comes from dancing as a group led to increased endorphins, as well as connectedness and prosociality among the students.

Dancing together is also inherently good for our brains and bodies. In [a 2022 review](#) of the physiological and psychological benefits of dance for children and adolescents, researchers found evidence that dance is associated with improvements in physical health, reduction in anxiety and depression, and increases in competence, for both universal and clinical populations.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Many major celebrations—like weddings, coming-of-age celebrations (for example, bat/bar mitzvahs, quinceañeras), or graduations—involve an aspect of collective movement or synchrony, like dancing, processions, or throwing hats in the air together. Dance and movement are time-honored ways that humans have connected with one another, with good reason: It really does seem to bond us.

Thus, making time for [movement breaks](#) and incorporating group [dance](#) into the school day not only benefits students' physical and mental well-being, but it can also have profound effects on students' sense of connection and [belonging](#) in the classroom.

## SOURCE

Practice inspired by works of [Dr. Keltner and colleagues](#)