

# Dancing Under a Water Umbrella: An Arts Integration Curriculum Model

By Karen McShane-Hellenbrand

---

## Design Goals

1. Integration of arts into other curriculum using the theme of water and waterways. Dance is embodied as an innovative teaching methodology, as well as a unifying force.
2. Create a model for cooperation and collaboration between classroom teachers, specialists, dance artists, and community partners.
3. Students will showcase their use of dance as a vehicle to integrate academic standards with dance standards; the water theme provides commonality among the standards and across disciplines.
4. Dance pedagogy is used as a teaching tool for dance objectives and grade-level (age or participant group) curricular objectives.
5. Through dance individuals will participate in social activism through engagement with community partners; students will raise awareness in others through their own education, performance, and action.

**Process:** Integrate specific content standards by drawing individual thematic connections for the theme of Water at each grade level or for a specific group. Identify content-specific standards; often this is the grade level classroom teacher and the specialist teachers. This could also be a university or college faculty/staff/instructor or a studio teacher. General Academic Content Standard: Students will use findings from environmental issue investigations to develop decision-making skills, and to gain experience in citizen action skills.

**General Rationale:** Students need decision-making and action skills to contribute toward environmental sustainability. In addition, these skills enable them to analyze the effectiveness of individual versus group action, develop issue-resolution plans that incorporate one or more citizen participation skills, and consider these plans in terms of social, cultural, and ecological consequences and implications.

**Identify dance standards:** Often this is the dance artist/specialist. State and National Standards accessible to all educators, community representative, and artists.

[Advancing Dance Education in the Arts Standards](#)

- The lead teacher/dancer takes on the task of implementing the dance pedagogy framework, integrating the academic and dance standards, and orchestrating a final performance.
- Teachers, staff, community, and students collaborate with the lead teacher/dancer taking on the function of facilitator.
- Students embody the artistic experience through personal creations and thematic connections.

### **Developing a Lesson**

In the classroom draw connections between academic content standards and dance content standards. Use dance concepts to illustrate, explore, and teach academic content. Create lesson plans that mandate problem solving skills to synthesize concepts together.

# Sample Lessons

## #1 Rock River Timeline Excerpt

*by Leah Mae Hellenbrand, Karen McShane-Hellenbrand, and Allison Levin*

### **Lessons for Dance: shapes**

1. Explore concepts of shape: shapes are "frozen," shapes communicate, shapes express ideas and feelings, shapes include focus, shapes occur on high, medium, and low levels
2. Students explore bold shapes (bold is a vocabulary word from water movement poem)
3. Students create their own rock shapes at a low level (symbolic of the Rock River)
4. Create class turtle shape
5. Students begin creating partner shapes, at a medium level, to represent letters of the alphabet (E-F-F-I-G-Y)

### **Lessons for Social Studies: study effigy mounds**

1. Explore with students Native cultures along the Rock River, including effigy mounds

### **Lessons for Math: measurement and comparisons**

1. Students take measurements of themselves (head, torso, legs, etc.) and create a scale to represent their measurements

### **Lessons for Art: sculpture and design**

1. Students use their models to design the layout and organization for a class effigy mound shape (a "water panther," or turtle, shape will be used due to the strong connection to turtle effigies in nearby Beloit, WI)
2. Students create a 3-D scale- model Maquette using pipe cleaners

## #2 College level Exploration

### **Lessons for Dance: Flow of Energy (free flow/bound flow)/Effort Shadings**

1. Breath work
2. Tension/Release

### **Lessons for Environmental Education**

1. Water conservation: Low-flush toilets, replace showerheads that have greater than 2.5 gallons per minute (current national energy policy act standard)
2. Dance focus: Space/Pathway and Specific Movement Qualities
  - a. Body efforts in relation to environmental attributes of riverways

- b. Prepositions: through, around, under, beside, over, near, etc.
  - c. Locomotor and non-locomotor pathways
3. Geography: Riverways and current speeds/power/flow in relation to spatial parameters
  - a. River size and geography
  - b. River pathway and behavior
  - c. River usage and relation to ecosystem

### **SAMPLE #3 Brainstorming ideas**

[This link](#) provides many 12 distinct water curriculum ideas that can be linked to dance extensions.

- Water & Hydrodynamics (Equations of fluid dynamics, wind generated waves/surface waves)
- Water = Important component of personal health, hygiene, body composition, physical performance
- Water = Roles that water has played in history and culture
- Water = Artists that used a theme or subject of water: Katsushika Hokusai's *The Great Wave* and Emily Dickinson's "I taste a liquor never brewed"
- Water = Identifying bodies of water throughout the world
- Water = Ecosystems, water cycle, weather

# Advocacy

1. Students become CHOREOGRAPHERS! Imagination. Innovation. Exploration. Expression. Creativity.
2. The end result = critical thinking, synthesis, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration
3. Boosts achievement and targets diverse learners
4. Students engage in environmental education linking multiple disciplines together in and integrative scaffolding of concepts.
5. Dance elements and concepts are taught, thus, exposing and introducing the art of dance to a wide range of students; dancers and non-dancers alike learn about dance.
6. Young artists utilize dance as a vehicle to inspire social change.
7. The "...goal is to initiate a national "water ethic" that can inform and inspire both participants and audience members to take responsibility for conserving and protecting the water that they use and enjoy."

## Next Steps

Curriculum model will be presented at the National Dance Education Organization Conference in October, 2013 by Karen-McShane-Hellenbrand (Faculty Associate, UW-Madison Dance Department), Leah Hellenbrand (Teacher, Kennedy Elementary School), and Allison Levin (UW-Madison Teacher Education Student)

Third grade students at Kennedy Elementary School (KES) were the recipients of this featured curriculum during the 2012-2013 year. The focus of their Phase ONE work centered on Janesville's largest waterway: the Rock River. Students explored a timeline beginning with Native Americans' early use of the river to modern-day use. Students acquired knowledge across disciplines. Dance standards were taught alongside all academic content areas. Phase TWO will be implemented in the 2013-14 academic year, in conjunction with preparing for the 2014 National Water Dance Project. The same students, who are looping with their teacher, will expand their original knowledge and movement explorations to promote social change-advocating for clean waterways across the country as a part of the National Water Dance Project. Phase TWO's year-long curriculum will culminate in a site-specific dance performance by KES students near a local waterway in their community, building awareness of the importance of water health through movement.

The curricular designs used at KES have been implemented successfully in multiple whole-school residencies and in classroom settings. Through observation and assessment, they have proven successful in boosting achievement and targeting diverse learners. The use of an umbrella theme provides coherency and continuity, creating connections across disciplines; the use of a theme provides a lens to focus on specific curricular standards, leading to ongoing, in-depth investigations; the use of a theme provides relevancy and a focal point from which students can synthesize material and draw conclusions; the use of a theme

also creates a link between academic disciplines: students can make connections and engage in critical-thinking skills. The Phase ONE and Phase TWO curriculum models provide opportunities for students to experience dance and showcase their use of dance as a vehicle to integrate academic standards with arts standards.

---

**Developed by Karen McShane-Hellenbrand**

Karen McShane-Hellenbrand is a Faculty Associate at the University of Wisconsin—Madison Dance Department.

kmhellen@education.wisc.edu  
(608) 262-3679