

**Folk Dancing Through the Grades:  
A Developmental Approach**

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## Abstract

This action research project asked the question, “What would a developmentally appropriate folk dance curriculum for grades one through eight look like?” My goal is to offer a folk dance curriculum that is age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate based on Rudolf Steiner’s Waldorf educational understanding of child development. To this end, background research included an overview of Steiner’s view of human development and a grade-by-grade discussion of developmental considerations based on this view. My research methods included evaluating many folk dances, surveying teachers (mostly Waldorf) who bring folk dancing to their classrooms, and creating a curriculum and taking it into a grade school (non Waldorf) to teach a folk dance unit to each of the grades. Some results from the teacher survey were identifying important benefits of teaching folk dancing in grade school. These included physical fitness and coordination benefits, multi-cultural awareness and appreciation, and opportunity for improving socialization skills. Areas to help teachers bring a good folk dancing curriculum to their classroom were identified: music choices, choice of steps, and sequencing steps, keeping in mind the idea of shingling or scaffolding, which means to start with very basic steps and sequences and then slowly increase complexity as the basics are mastered. Then I put together the two elements of this thesis, “folk dance in the classroom for grades one through eight,” and “developmentally appropriate,” based on child development indications of Rudolf Steiner, and also informed with suggestions from the experienced Waldorf teachers who took my survey. I include a short section on some basic dance definitions for words used in the Suggested Curriculum Discussion. Then I present a Classroom Folk Dance Guide based on grade-by-grade Waldorf developmental elements. References at the end include folk dance resources that contain many of the specific dances named in these sections and in the Classroom Folk Dance Guide.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

What would a developmentally appropriate folk dance curriculum for grades one through eight look like? As a lifelong dancer and also a Waldorf teacher who brought folk dancing to my own classroom for grades one through four, this question was of great interest to me.

### WHY FOLK DANCE IN THE CLASSROOM?

I have been a dancer of varying styles for most of my life and so carry my own experiences of joy connected to this type of movement that I wished to pass along to my students. As a Waldorf teacher, I know movement activities facilitate learning (von Heider, 1995, p. vii), and are of vital importance to the well being of the students, spiritually, physically and academically (Steiner, 2003, p. 263). Waldorf education recognizes the human being as spirit incarnating into physical body, which is not particularly an easy task, and so takes time and ought to be viewed with patience and reverence (Spock, 1985, p. 6, and Steiner, 1982, p. 28). Modern brain research indicates the importance of movement to the growth and development of the brain (Jensen, 1998, p.83, Pearce, 1992, p. 9, and Healy, 1990, p. 51). Even dramatic results between physical activity and brain response have been researched: in one study, when physical education time was increased to one-third of the school day, academic scores went up (Jensen, 1998, p. 87). This integration of the human soul and spirit with the physical body and brain is considered of great importance to a Waldorf teacher, and activities in the classroom or school day include movements that promote this integration. Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925),

creator of Waldorf education, said it this way in his first lecture to the first Waldorf teachers in 1919:

“The task of education, understood in a spiritual sense, is to bring the soul-spirit into harmony with the temporal body. They must be brought into harmony and they must be tuned to one another because when the child is born into the physical world they do not yet properly fit each other. The task of the teacher is to harmonize these two parts to one another,” (Steiner, 1996, p. 39).

Steiner said in another of these lectures that, “the first real attribute of education (is) the human limbs and chest have the task of awakening the head,” (Steiner, 1996, p. 174). Waldorf teachers see that the choice of movement activities can promote the development of the brain and the “awakening (of) the head,” and, especially in the earlier years, lay a very important foundation for better academic learning as they grow and mature. Folk dancing is a movement activity that brings joy but also is comprised of movements that would meet the above criteria of promoting body-soul-spirit integration and assisting in brain development that promotes healthy academic learning. But as in all movement activities, a Waldorf teacher has concerns over these activities being developmentally appropriate.

### **WHY “DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE?”**

As a Waldorf trained teacher, bringing activities that are developmentally appropriate is very important to me. There seems to be a tendency in this fast-paced day and age to keep “pushing down” academics and other activities to younger and younger ages. While this paper is not a debate on other academics and activities, my own awareness of this mainstream trend is part of my overall research

question about what to bring children in the realm of folk dancing that would meet their needs developmentally, in an age-appropriate way.

My own personal background allows me to speak directly to age-appropriate dance. I was put into ballet class at age three because, like most children at that age, I loved to dance around the house. While I loved many aspects of ballet class, such as the movement to music, the costumes and performances, I have a tape-recorded conversation my grandfather made when I was about five asking me about taking ballet (my grandfather enjoyed taping these conversations with his grandchildren, knowing we would probably get a kick out of them when we were older). After having taken ballet for a couple of years at the time of this recording, I answered that I did not like it so much, and when he asked why, I said, with a very big sigh, “because you have to stand there a long time,” with the word “long” vocally dragged out for emphasis! So I quit taking ballet lessons.

Then at age nine I had an awakening that Waldorf teachers understand and refer to as the “nine-year change,” in which the child starts to awaken to her own sense of self, as an individual amongst many other individuals in the world. Before this age, the child tends to view herself as “one with the world” rather than as a separate individual, or as Steiner put it: “the child up to its ninth or tenth year...does not yet see himself as separate from this external nature,” (Steiner, 1982, p. 67). As part of my own personal awakening, I realized I had a great desire to take ballet again. I was ready to apply myself in learning the intellectual rules of ballet, in learning to stand still before each exercise, in intellectually learning the

terminology, and holding in my head techniques and sequences while executing the movements with my body. My brain and sense of self were now ready for this kind of activity. I have been a happy dancer ever since.

Although my own experience may be anecdotal, Waldorf teachers worldwide have observed this critical developmental change in children for decades (Koepke, 1989). The nine-year change is a major developmental milestone, but Steiner also recognized many more and developed Waldorf education based on the child's changing consciousness through the grades (Steiner, 1996). He emphasized it was important that teachers understand how the child is changing and therefore how to meet their needs in each grade.

Today's mainstream trend of bringing academics and activities from a previously higher age- or grade-level down to lower grades and younger ages does not ultimately serve the children (Healy, 1990, p. 67). Despite a few children who may do well in this context, many children are experiencing stress and anxiety that was not really heard of a few generations ago. There is a modern expectation for children to grow up faster (Elkind, 2001). In the realm of folk dance, one could bring a polka or waltz or Irish dance to a first grader and work and work to get them to learn it (maybe), but if they are not really developmentally ready for complex rhythms or steps, or to carry multiple types of steps and sequences in their heads while executing the movements, what is the point? A teacher should want to inculcate a love of learning, and bringing activities and academics at

developmentally appropriate times will do just that. Bringing things too soon tends to only engender frustration and turn-off.

My goal is to bring a folk dance curriculum that is age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate based on Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf educational understanding of child development. There are myriad dances out there, and many more one, with a little experience, can make up, so why not try and choose or create dances that meet the children where they are developmentally? Children love to move and dance, and as they get older the awakening self can dampen their enthusiasm with feelings of self-consciousness (i.e., "looking stupid"). Couple this with bringing them dances that are too hard is a recipe for creating or reinforcing feelings of "I can't dance," or "I don't like to dance." Bringing folk dance in a consciousness of meeting the children developmentally, I believe, will help the teacher be successful in engendering a fun physical movement activity that will benefit them in many ways, as we shall see.

## **CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND**

### **STEINER'S VIEW OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

In Waldorf training, much time is spent reading and discussing Rudolf Steiner's indications for human development. Rudolf Steiner was, among many things, an Austrian-born scientist, philosopher, educator, artist and spiritual researcher. He was considered a maverick in many realms, but for this paper I will refer to his contributions to education, namely the creation of Waldorf education. With numerous books and over 6000 lectures (many transcribed and published) to his

credit, one could easily spend plenty of time getting to know the ideas and indications of Dr. Steiner on a wide variety of subjects. I will summarize some key ideas that are pertinent to my own research and creation of a folk dance curriculum. Books of Steiner lectures from which these ideas come include: *The Education of the Child* (Steiner, 1996), *Soul Economy* (Steiner, 2003), *Foundations of Human Experience* (Steiner, 1996) and *The Educational Tasks and Content of the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum* (Rawson and Richter, 2003).

Steiner indicated that each human being is comprised of a physical body, an etheric or life body, a soul and a spirit. The physical body is what we inherit through ancestral lineage and through which we each experience the physical material world. This physical body is brought to life with a life force, what he termed the etheric body or life body. Without the etheric body the physical body belongs to the mineral world and as such would decompose as it does at death when the etheric body vacates the physical body. In the soul, “the human being builds in inner world of personal experience which relates the individual to the outer world and which expresses itself in the form of thinking, feeling and willing,” (Rawson and Richter, 2003, p.14). Thinking, feeling and willing are known in Waldorf-speak as the three soul aspects of the human being, the aspects Waldorf education aims to address through its educational approach. Through the spirit, or “I” or “Ego,” which are all terms Steiner used interchangeably, the world reveals itself and its nature to the individual. The human being is seen as being on a quest of spiritual evolution, needing a physical body and experience in the material world in order to achieve this. Marjorie Spock, who studied with Dr. Steiner and became a Waldorf teacher,

said it like this: that Steiner “saw in man’s material embodiment evidence that the spirit required the enriching and developing experience possible in the realm of matter,” (Spock, 2006, p. 6). Steiner recognized that through the activity of thinking, one of the three soul aspects, “we have access to higher meaning, to laws and principles that are inherent in the world beyond our personal lives,” (Rawson and Richter, 2003, p. 15). So it is through our soul work of thinking while in a physical body that we can aspire to evolve spiritually, which indicates the link between the soul and spirit and the body. “Where the human soul is ennobled or enlightened by eternal truth, spiritual reality comes to expression. Only at this level is the soul freed from biological determination,” (Rawson and Richter, 2003, p. 15). And it is the “I” through which the soul and spirit are linked, through this consciousness of self as an individual.

The “I” of a human being is active in different bodies at different stages of development. In early childhood (ages 0-7), it is active primarily in the physical body, in middle childhood (ages 7-14) it is primarily active in the etheric body, in adolescence (ages 14-21) it is primarily active in the soul, and finally at around age 21 the “I” is considered to be “born” or fully developed in the human being. There are several notable developmental milestones for the emerging “I,” such as the child beginning to call himself “I” around age 3, the major awakening at the “nine-year-change,” and the search for truth including truth about Self during adolescence. The long years of childhood are necessary for this development of the “I,” and the activities the human is engaged in during these years are quite critical for the full and healthy development of a human being’s individuality, of his or her “I.”

As just mentioned Steiner recognized the human being as developing through three distinct stages of childhood – early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence - and that the child is not just a physical body and we teachers are not to merely educate a physical brain by filling it with information. The teacher is seen as a helper in the child’s development in growing a healthy physical body, in learning to master one’s emotional life, and in developing a thinking life that is free and independent, all leading toward the healthy individuation of the adult. These three areas – willing, feeling and thinking – are the qualities of soul that the human being, according to Steiner, are here on earth to develop in order to allow the person the greatest opportunity to reach their own personal potential as a spiritual human being, i.e., to individuate in the healthiest possible way. A Waldorf teacher scrutinizes academics and other activities brought to children in light of this human development view.

For this project, I will focus on the Waldorf understanding of the second phase of childhood, middle childhood (ages 7-14), as these are the years of grade school (grades 1-8) and the time period for which my project was aimed. But a brief overview of all three stages of childhood will be helpful in understanding my focus. In addition to the Steiner books already mentioned, much of the following is also based on information found in *The Recovery of Man in Childhood* (Harwood, 2001).

The early childhood years are about helping the physical body (including the brain!) grow in a healthy way through movement activities. These are the years, remember, when the “I” of the human being is primarily active in the physical body.

The head of a newborn baby is already quite large relative to its overall size (with a head to body ratio of 1:4 at birth, compared to 1:8 at age 21 years), so the rest of the body is working on “catching up” to the head. This is best done through movement activities and anyone who has observed the young child can see that nature confirms this by the blur the young child becomes in its whirlwind of movement activities. Indeed, the brain is calling for all varieties of physical bodily movement for its own development. It is not, however, calling for intellectual development at this point, which is the trend in modern education now: to sit the young child down and try and get them to intellectually learn things. While the willing (also called “doing”) aspect of the soul for the young child is obviously wide awake, the other two soul faculties of feeling and thinking are not fully awake, even asleep during these years. For this reason, it is important to understand that the child will not have control over emotions yet as the feeling aspect of the soul is considered to be in a dreamy state, and that they best learn emotional control by watching and imitating the adults around them, which of course means ideally there are emotionally strong and healthy adults around to imitate. Thinking for the young child is considered asleep and so intellectual teaching is considered not only counterproductive but actually harmful to the growth and development of what really needs the focus now: the physical body. The young child learns primarily through imitation and so a worthy role model is imperative for the child to imitate: an adult who is working purposefully, actively and exuding a calm, joyful demeanor in executing her work.

What the young child deeply wants and needs to know is that the world is a good place; that his spirit has incarnated into a world that is good. For this reason, a

Waldorf early childhood classroom is beautifully decorated with soft colors, natural light, neatly arranged toys made from natural materials and that invoke creative, imaginative free play for the children. A rhythmic day that is infused with the singing human voice and a loving energy by the teacher(s) also reinforces this need of the young child to feel safe in the world into which she has been born. There is much free playtime in which the child can move her body, explore the world and develop her creativity through imaginative play. There is no teaching, in the traditional sense, of academics during this time. However, all the activities that are present in a Waldorf early childhood classroom the Waldorf teacher recognizes as the extremely important foundation of the academic learning that comes in the next stage of middle childhood.

The beginning of the grade school years is marked by the completion of a major development stage, outwardly physically notable by the losing of the baby teeth. There are many other indicators a Waldorf teacher looks for, physical as well as emotional, in recommending a child to embark on the next stage of grade school in which academics are introduced. While the early childhood stage was predominantly about educating the will, now the emotional life (the feeling aspect of soul) is really beginning its awakening and therefore all that is brought to the grade school child is informed with meeting this developmental need. The primary need of the emotionally developing grade school child is to know the world is beautiful.

Beauty is to middle childhood as goodness was to early childhood, and beauty is best conveyed through artistic endeavors. For this reason, most all academics and activities in a Waldorf grade school are introduced or presented with

some artistic aspect. Teaching itself is considered an artistic endeavor (Spock, 2006). Creative storytelling that helps to create vivid pictures in the child's imagination is a major artistic teaching vehicle. Because the child, according to Steiner, thinks in pictures, finding ways to bring subjects to life to stimulate the child's imagination greatly facilitates the child's understanding of subjects. Academics are brought to life through artistic activities and renderings, most notably seen in the student's main lesson book, a "text book" that the child himself has created from the lessons he has had in school. It is filled with pictures, both crayon drawn and watercolor painted, and with writings to convey the material that he has been learning, whether science, math, literature, geography or history. Great myths and legends of various cultures are springboards for these other academic activities. The infusion of these carefully selected stories of heroes and explorers and their struggles helps to deeply affect the children's feeling life, and a moral basis to their learning is laid.

The Waldorf school child's day is filled with singing, learning instruments, and movement activities too. Emphasis is given to creating everything, whether writing or artistic rendering, with great care and making it as beautiful as possible. Learning academics through these artistic activities nurtures the deep need for the grade school student's immature emotional soul to know and see and *feel* the world as beautiful. It is a tonic for the soul, especially the awakening feeling aspect of the soul.

The adolescent years (ages 14-21) are the high school and college years. Steiner did not see the child as fully developed until around the age of 21. While early childhood found the willing (or doing) aspect of soul fully awakening and needing tending too, and middle childhood found the feeling aspect of soul awakening and needing tending too, this stage of adolescence is marked by the full awakening of the thinking faculty of the soul. While academics are introduced and taught in grade school years, it is done so by the child viewing the teacher as the authority and wanting to look to that authority for guidance. The grade school child deeply wants to know of his teacher: Do you know who I am? Can you help me encounter the world? At the time of intellectual awakening, the adolescent is now seeing the teacher more as an expert, and someone to hopefully help her in developing her independent judgment, about herself and the world. What her soul most deeply wants to know now about the world is: What is truth? Can I find truth in the world? What is the truth of my being as an individual? Truth becomes an imperative aspect of teaching for the adolescent and a Waldorf teacher understands the care that must be taken in cultivating the student's search for truth in a healthy way, emotionally, intellectually, physically and spiritually.

Analytical skills start to blossom during this stage and the teacher needs to be ready to meet this challenge of providing creative, stimulating ways for the student to analyze the world. Assuming the student's grade school years were supported with lots of artistic nourishment for his soul development, he will have a caring, moral foundation from which to study the world with critical thinking, rather than a cold, unfeeling analytical view.

It is the goal of Waldorf schools to successfully nurture the willing stage of early childhood through lots of physical movement and creative free play, the feeling stage of middle childhood through art-informed pursuits of basic academics, and the thinking stage of adolescence through allowing the youth's intellectual powers to stretch and grow, taking care to avoid dogma and apathy. If such a goal is well met, the child is well on his way to an adulthood in which he has a secure sense of self, of what he can do (willing), of how he can care about and contribute to the world (feeling), and in using his own thinking to understand the world and find creative solutions to problems. It is about nurturing the development of the spirit of the individual human being. It is the goal of Waldorf education to help produce, "well-rounded, well-educated individuals who have an ability to think independently and function in all the different spheres of adult life," (Simmons, 2004). As Marie Steiner, wife of Rudolf, wrote in her foreword to his 1923 lecture series simply entitled *Education* (Steiner, 1923), "Our highest endeavor must be to develop free human beings who are able of themselves to impart purpose and direction to their lives."

With a general understanding of the three phases of childhood development according to Steiner, I will turn to focus on the middle childhood grade school years, the years for which this folk dance curriculum is designed.

### **MIDDLE CHILDHOOD FOCUS – GRADES ONE through EIGHT**

I have chosen to create a folk dancing curriculum for grade school, grades one through eight. Folk dancing involves being aware of those around you, working

with them cooperatively, stepping with them, and also being able to understand intellectual instructions to learn the steps and sequences. Because of these elements that draw on the feeling and thinking aspects of soul, in addition to the physical, most folk dancing is best not to be introduced to early childhood classes (preschool and kindergarten). Now having said that, there are many movement activities and games that involve singing and music that are wonderful for the kindergarten/preschool classes, as these children learn primarily through imitation and, as already discussed, they want to move. Steiner said in a lecture on the inner nature of music that, "everything that lives in the limbs as potential for movement...has tremendous significance for the musical experience, since dance movements are linked with the musical experience," (Steiner, 1983, p.50).

For these younger children, it is important to keep movements simple and repetitive, and also the amount of time short for being in a formal circle dance or movement activity, five to ten minutes depending on the age of the children. It is helpful to introduce gradually group movement that is structured and rhythmic. This slowly allows the young child to move toward form without overtaxing them with a lot intellectual instruction and practicing of steps. Waldorf early childhood teachers are very experienced at creatively calling children to a circle with a special song, using movements the children want to imitate, and to not expect them to hold the circle for too long. The rhythmic life of the young child is not particularly rhythmic yet and while gentle helping with this is done through things such as creating a rhythmic day and week, asking a young child to move to a very rhythmic musical beat for a longer period of time is too much yet. Yes, their limb system is

the focus of development but this is best nurtured through creating a beautiful, safe and natural environment, indoors and outdoors, through which the young child freely and imaginatively explores the world. Early childhood music and movement is gentle and repetitive, and the teacher uses softer instruments such as the human voice, the lyre and wood recorder/flute in any circle movement activities, but mostly the voice only. Most activity in the Waldorf early childhood classroom is free, allowing the child to creatively and imaginatively explore the world through play.

However, middle childhood is the perfect time to rhythmically work with the child more strongly. The “I” is at work in the etheric body, which supports the emergence of the inner soul life, and in particular is working “to enable the process of mental picturing and the formation of memory, two processes essential for learning,” (Rawson and Richter, 2003, p. 15). The etheric body, also called the habit body by Steiner, “comprises all those forces which enable the physical body to function as an organism and which regulate the life rhythms,” (Rawson and Richter, 2003, p. 14). The focus of physical development during these middle childhood years, therefore, is the rhythmic systems of blood circulation and respiration as they reach the heart to breath ratio of an adult (1breath for every 4 heartbeats). But the Waldorf way is to approach these things gradually and gently, like the growth of the child. Simple rhythms and music are used at first, gradually increasing complexity with each grade level. Likewise, the intellectual ability needed to understand and execute movements and sequences of movements is also gradually increased through the grades.

To understand my folk dance curriculum through the grades, it is important to understand the grade-by-grade development of the child according to the Waldorf view of the developing child (see Rawson and Richter's *Educational Tasks and Content of the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum*, and also Harwood's *The Recovery of Man in Childhood*).

### **Grades One and Two**

The child entering grade school still, for the most part, lives in the dreamy world of early childhood, but is beginning to awaken. This is considered something to carefully and gently assist by the Waldorf grades teacher during grades one and, since it is considered a continuation of grade one, grade two. Etheric, or life, forces needed and hopefully used during early childhood to help the body grow in a healthy way are now freed up at around the change of teeth and can be utilized for the introduction of basic academics - literacy, numeracy and other disciplines (Rawson and Richter, 2003, p.36). The first grade child is considered ready to bring broad awareness to these learning tasks rather than focused attention, and therefore activities for learning include rhythmical movement and games, stories from which to create pictures of what they are learning such as letters, and other musical and artistic formats to help them create these broad pictures in their imaginations. Form drawing is a unique subject in Waldorf schools and considered highly important to assist the middle childhood student in bringing form to not only their physical life but also their burgeoning emotional and thinking life. The first lesson of the first day of first grade in Waldorf is a lesson on the line and the curve,

using the children's bodies to create them, walk them, see them in the things around them and finally to use their hands to draw them. These forms are the building blocks of writing. The teacher, a beloved authority figure whom the grade one child does not question but readily accepts, capitalizes on the child learning by imitation, the main way a child in the early childhood phase learns and, to a large extent still, also the grade one and to a lesser degree the grade two student. Fairy tales (first grade) and animal fables and stories of strong moral figures such as the saints (second grade) bring nourishing archetypal images for soul development as well as provide pictorial means for learning letters and numbers.

Grade one children still rest much in the feeling of wholeness and dreaminess, whereas by grade two the dreaminess is noticeably starting to fade and feelings of contrast and polarization begin to emerge (Rawson and Richter, 2003, p. 37). Until the nine-year change (around grade three), grade one and two students still feel a part of a whole and so activities as a group work well. Also, the Waldorf teacher from the first day of first grade brings awareness to the hands, rather than the brain, as being the important tools for learning. Hands are for working, drawing, writing, painting, helping and creating things of beauty with great care, all the stuff of what being human and the work of a human is all about. In this way, moral foundations are laid with regard to what we can choose to do with our hands.

So elements to consider for folk dance in the these grades would be: steps and movements easily imitated and so do not require a lot of intellectual instruction, contraction and expansion (moving in and out of the dreamy world of early

childhood), utilizing line and curve forms, working as a group or circle, utilizing hand clapping, learning right and left, images or music that evoke the magical fairy tale world, animals, and polarization or contrasting movements (in/out, up/down, fast/slow, etc.).

### **Grades Three and Four**

These years are the peak of the transition between early and middle childhood. As mentioned, Steiner recognized this as the “nine-year-change,” when a child has a spiritual awakening to his own “selfhood,” i.e., that he is a separate individual in a world of individuals, therefore losing that early childhood feeling of being connected to the whole. This is a startling realization that is felt differently by each child. This change in the child’s consciousness is illustrated very well in the Hebrew story of the fall from Paradise. The nine-year-old child is leaving “Paradise,” or the safe, contented feeling of being connected to the whole, much like Adam and Eve’s Garden of Eden where every need was met, and life was ease-filled, beautiful and, well, paradise! The awakening to one’s knowledge of individual selfhood, or of falling into the “real” world, can be likened to Adam and Eve’s fall. Upon eating from the Tree of Knowledge, they were “kicked out” of Paradise, where they now became conscious of being naked individuals and so needed to make their clothes, and also to find their own food and build their own shelter. These grades in a Waldorf school are permeated with the mythologies of the Hebrews (third grade) and of the Norse (fourth grade) in which they learn that they must work and be productive members of society, and also reckon with their newfound power as conscious, questioning

individuals, a power which is not always wielded very successfully as the stories of the Norse gods so wonderfully illustrate. These stories as the backdrops to these school years so fulfill the soul needs of the consciousness of third and fourth grade students. Form drawing also increases in complexity including working with more complex weaving patterns by Grade Four.

Brain development is another area to consider for grades three and four. Despite the brain reaching almost adult size by age six, much recent research indicates amazing continued neurological growth and development throughout middle childhood and early adolescence, in particular the corpus callosum. This part that connects the two halves of the brain is still growing during these years. It is not considered “fully matured” until around age 11- 13 (Jensen, 1998, p. 35). Laterality and cross-brain communication are growing and developing, but again over a period of years. Movements to help facilitate this development again, in the Waldorf view, should be gradual and build upon itself year to year. In Waldorf classrooms, teachers begin with helping the children learning right and left in many of their movement and circle activities in grade one and two, and building on this to working with cross body movements by grades three and four.

The complexity of the individual making decisions that affect the group (a la Hebrew and Norse mythology stories) make this a good time to start increasing the complexity of the steps and movements, and sequences of steps. So after mastering the basics mentioned in the grades one and two section, elements from these grades to consider for folk dances can include crossing the midline movements, more

complex weaving patterns and movements, more complex handclapping, more moves that involve exchanging places, and more partner contra dancing.

### **Grades Five and Six**

Grade five students tend to display the peak of childhood physicality – the brief and beautiful moment between the discomfort of a spirit incarnating into a new, fast-growing physical body in early childhood and the awkward sensation of the body embarking on the growth and development of puberty. Often termed by Waldorf teachers as the “golden age” of childhood, the grade five student tends to feel at home in her body and has a physical grace, balance and beauty that has not been seen before and will not be seen again in a child’s body. This is comparable to the golden age of the ancient Greek people who displayed a similar ease, grace and beauty in their physicality. The Olympics manifested in this time period, and the Greeks even competed unclothed in order to exhibit these perfect and beautiful physical bodies in the execution of the various physical Olympic challenges.

Waldorf fifth grade children hear the Greek myths and also prepare for their own Pentathlon in which awards go to not only the best in a particular event, but also to those who exhibit the most grace in the movements of each event. Studying Greek myths also makes way for moving from mythologies into studying history such as studying the Trojan War and other historical events of this time period.

Grade six may still find perfect physicality in some students, but others will be on their way toward puberty, with growth spurts that emphasize gangly limbs which now begin to trip them up and contribute to a consciousness of change.

Consciousness changes during this time include a more conscious awareness of polarities (as opposed to the more dreamy version of noticing them in second grade) and therefore an interest in lawfulness. Studying ancient Rome meets these needs. Studying biographies of notable and heroic men and women are also part of this grade. During these years that the students really begin distancing themselves from their surroundings (that began with the nine-year-change) it is important that school activities help to strengthen their sense of individuality and also their connection to the world around them, i.e., to prevent them from distancing themselves from the world too much as they become more aware of their individuality. Waldorf school activities seek to help them to see how the moral development of Self is important to the health and development of the world. This is a very important foundation: helping to instill within (i.e. at a soul level) an appreciation for working in service for the sake of the world, and facilitating a love for the world in an active, productive way; to see that their individual efforts are important and do make a difference to creating a beautiful and good world (Rawson and Richter, 2003, p. 45).

Elements from these grades to consider in selecting folk dances include taking advantage of this golden age of childhood by continuing to increase the complexity of the dance steps and sequences, finding music from the cultures they are studying such as ancient Indian, Greek and Roman, and to utilize more partner contra dances.

## **Grades Seven and Eight**

By seventh and eighth grade most of the students are into the changes of puberty and so their consciousness too is going to be affected by these changes. Puberty signals the end of middle childhood and the beginning of adolescence, the heightened time of the awakening sense of self that began with the nine-year-change, and also the time that the intellect really begins to awaken as well. The brain is now beginning to call for critical thinking and analyzing, so moving into deeper science and mathematics, plus moral evaluation of historical events, are part of these grades. These are the years of transitioning from grade school to high school. Folk dances should also reflect the changing consciousness of these years by increasing complexity, including more complex rhythms that require more intellectual thinking to master, and more partner social dancing.

With this general overview of how the Waldorf teacher views the child's changing consciousness and physical and emotional development through the grades, I will now turn to methods used to help me create this grade school curriculum for folk dancing.

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

In order to create a developmentally appropriate curriculum, I used three methods of investigation. First, I researched a number of folk dance books, CDs and DVDs, most of which are mainstream (i.e., not created by Waldorf trained teachers). I looked through, read about, and tried myriad dances myself, to see what the musical elements were involved (complexity of rhythms), what the movements involved,

and also the cultural aspects of the dances (from what countries did they originate). With my own Waldorf experience and education, I worked to categorize dances based on developmental needs of each grade, which are based on child development indications of Rudolf Steiner, creator of Waldorf education, and already outlined and discussed in the above background information section.

Second, I surveyed teachers, mostly Waldorf, who have brought folk dancing into their classrooms, asking them about their experiences, as well as about whether or not they considered developmental aspects in choosing the dances for the grades to which they taught the dances, and, if so, what were those developmental aspects.

And third, I created a curriculum for grades one through eight, based on my own classroom and dance experience, my research and my teacher survey, and took it to a local school (not Waldorf) and taught a folk dancing unit to grades one through seven, making notes about the experience – what worked, what didn't, my own observations of the children, etc. I will note here, that originally I was to also teach eighth grade but at the last minute the PE teacher withdrew this class from the unit for her own reasons. From this experience, I hopefully have revised my initial curriculum into something that may be useful for teachers wishing to bring folk dance to the classroom in a developmentally appropriate way.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR: SURVEY FINDINGS**

In my teacher survey, I had 61 respondents, mostly from the U.S. (three from Canada and one from the Philippines) and the majority were Waldorf certified teachers or in the process of getting certified (79%). The majority had six or more

years teaching experience (65%) and nearly 90% had been teaching for at least two or more years. Nearly half have been teaching folk dancing in the classroom for more than 6 years, and an overwhelming majority (86%) said they do consider developmental aspects when choosing dances for the different grades. I have included many of their comments regarding developmental considerations in each grade of the curriculum recommendation that follows. Most all of the survey takers agreed that there were three main benefits to teaching folk dancing to grade school students, which I will address next.

### **PHYSICAL BENEFITS: COORDINATION and EXERCISE**

All survey respondents agreed that folk dancing benefits physical coordination of the children. To not belabor this point, movement activities of all kind help in the development of physical coordination so it is not surprising that these teachers agree that folk dancing as a movement activity would provide this benefit. As mentioned before, a Waldorf teacher has an understanding of the importance of movement activities for the integration of the child's body, soul and spirit, or helping the child's soul-spirit to incarnate into her physical body, and also on brain development, which is crucial for academic learning.

People, including children, are surprised if they have never folk danced before to discover the level of physical activity it entails. During my folk dance unit, many children and the PE teacher who assisted me commented on how tired they were at the end of a session - but one could tell they were tired in a good, physically active way. The movements in a folk dance include jumping, skipping, hopping on

one leg, as well as running steps in faster dances and quick twirls and swings with partners in some dances. Getting warm, and feeling the heart beat faster and the breath work harder are all part of physical fitness and folk dance offers just as much physical fitness opportunities as other PE activities.

### **MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS and APPRECIATION**

This was considered by most all survey takers to be another important benefit to folk dancing. While other movement activities have similar physical coordination benefits as folk dancing, folk dancing is unique in that dances originate from many cultures and countries around the world. Some games and other movement activities also have this benefit, but folk dancing is comprised of movement and music and sometimes lyrics from different cultures. This is a great opportunity to integrate folk dance with other subjects the students are studying, such as particular countries in social studies or history, or a foreign language. All the grades at the school where I taught the dance unit for this thesis took Spanish, so I made sure I selected a couple of Mexican dances to include in the unit. One of them they even learned the words to (Cielito Lindo).

In our current political climate of seeing the world becoming a “smaller” place and therefore seeing the great importance of reaching across cultural lines to understand and appreciate the many cultures of the world, folk dancing certainly promotes a fun way of appreciating other cultures. The combination of music and moving together as a group provides a unique opportunity to experience another culture in such a joyful way. The folk dance unit I taught for this thesis became a

springboard for interest in creating a bigger school-wide multicultural festival, of which folk dancing will be a part of, later in the school year.

### **SOCIALIZATION SKILLS**

Another reason for looking at a folk dancing curriculum through the grades is to help children to develop socialization skills, or “social hygiene,” as several of the survey responders called it. I have taught children beginning in first grade and then worked with them for another three years, bringing some folk dancing each year. By fourth grade their experience was such that it was no longer a self-conscious activity one might expect after the nine-year change of self awareness, or at least not to the degree that it could be if it was being introduced for the first time in third or fourth grade, as I experienced at the school I taught the folk dance unit for my thesis. Going into classrooms with kids over nine years old who have never had any dancing, I observed a very different reaction to folk dancing. Many were shy, some groaned upon hearing the activity for the day – just an overall reaction of feeling self-conscious doing something new.

Starting folk dance in grade one is what I advocate, to help in the children’s overall social development. Many survey respondents agreed learning to be together as a group is one of the most important things in grade one. Circle dances would certainly offer this, and some of the survey respondents said they would only do circle dances (i.e., no long set/contra dances) in first grade, maybe even second grade. Circle dancing means the group becomes a whole, requires holding hands,

and looking across the circle at others looking back at you. These are social skills to learn.

Practicing these skills is a daily occurrence at a Waldorf school starting in first grade when the teacher greets each student every morning with a handshake and looking each other in the eye as they smile and say good morning and exchange a few words. Most children at non-Waldorf schools do not get this practice. The unit I taught for this thesis was at a non-Waldorf school. I shook hands with the children in all the grades I taught (grades 1 – 7) before class began, and while most took my hand, they often felt quite shy and most would not make eye contact, and this was true for all the ages and grades. This shy, uncomfortable response is normal for a first grader at a Waldorf school at first, but over time the teacher notes how each student grows into this “meeting the other” with more and more confidence. The Waldorf teacher uses this connection with each of her students each morning to check in with how they are doing today, by the feel of the grip, the temperature of the hand, the look on the face and in the eyes. One can see that starting in first grade with working together to dance a circle dance, which involves holding hands and looking at each other face to face, would go a long way toward helping children who are going through or have gone through the self-conscious awakening of the nine-year-change feel so much more at ease with folk dancing and even shaking others’ hands and coming face-to-face with another.

In my folk dance unit for this thesis, as mentioned earlier, none of the children in all of the grades I taught had prior folk dance experience. The grade one

and two classes were clearly the most accepting in going along with me on this new adventure without self-consciousness. They were eager, joyous and at the end of class I would get lots of hugs. These were the only two grades in which this happened! While other grades had fun, it was quite a different thing working with them compared with working with grades one and two.

Steiner recognized grades one and two children as transitioning from dreamy, imitative early childhood to gradually awakening middle childhood where the child begins to look to the parent or teacher not just to imitate, although he still does that a great deal in grades one and two, but now as a trusting, loving authority figure. The grade one and two teacher has a great advantage in introducing folk dance to children at this age as they are looking completely and willingly to her as someone to follow. If the teacher introduces folk dance with confidence and joy, and sings along with confidence and joy, the children will too. This lays a wonderful foundation for continuing to dance in future grades and really for life, and so goes a long way in bringing the socialization benefit to their students. If a teacher is lucky to be able to start with children in grade one or even two, and then continue to work with them every year to some extent on folk dances, then when they get to the more “squirrely” ages of 9 and 10 (remember discussion about the nine-year-change) they won’t be as likely to balk at hand holding or moving into more partner oriented dances like contra dances and square dancing, and more couple social dancing (swing, ballroom, polka) in upper grades. Good social hygiene early on makes for a fun and healthy dancing experience later when the students are really becoming

more interested in partner/couple dancing, but not yet mature enough to really know it!

I believe if children are presented with regular folk dancing activity from first grade on, we do them such a great service in the realm of socialization when they reach pre-adolescence and adolescence. For millennia, humans have enjoyed interacting with their community, especially the opposite sex, through community dancing. It is a fun, healthy way to interact with the opposite sex and goodness knows teens today can use that. With the dying art of social and partner dancing in the 60's came the era of individual free form dance, where everybody dances alone.

Social or folk dancing can provide a way young people can begin the journey to learning how to be with and get to know the opposite sex in a safe, healthy and fun way. In today's deluge of concerns for teens – pregnancy, internet pornography, STDs and more – it seems that there is a large, gaping hole that the demise of social dancing has left in the realm of healthy ways for young people to learn about each other and interact. It is not that I would attempt to proclaim that bringing the teaching of folk dancing to children and teens would go a long way toward curbing the unpleasant results of teen problems nowadays. Life is certainly more complex than that. However one study in Greece with 13-year-olds being introduced to traditional dances for the first time had a very positive result in students' experiences and perceptions of folk dance (Stivaktaki, C., Mountakis, C. and Bournelli, P., 2010).

Age 13, or around 8<sup>th</sup> grade, is about the time that students become interested in holding the first dance. If they have been learning folk dancing all along, they would come together formally for the first time with some skills on how to have fun interacting, rather than standing around in clumps, feeling awkward in not knowing what to do, and finally resorting to goofy movements or flailing dancing that makes everyone feel inept and self-conscious. If the first bars of the Virginia Reel begin and it's a dance everyone has done many times over the years, they can form dance lines and begin to dance. It lends itself well to allowing them to interact in a fun and healthy way without carrying the burden of self-consciousness of doing something they have never done before.

Socialization is a big benefit of folk dancing, so I am hopefully encouraging teachers to start young in first grade and make it a regular activity through the grades.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: PRACTICAL RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **ELEMENTS TO HELP TEACHERS CREATE A FOLK DANCE UNIT**

I am presenting my findings for the situation of a teacher presenting folk dance to a class for the first time (or perhaps, trying it again with a new view of developmentally appropriateness). I'll say a word or two for the experienced class too at times, but for the most part, what I present is for a class of children hitherto fore not exposed to folk dance (and therefore most likely, from my informal in-class survey of the children, not any other form of dance either).

When choosing or creating dances for a particular grade, the things I found most important to consider, along with the developmental elements mentioned above in the discussion about the child's changing consciousness through the grades, are the music, the complexity of the step, and the sequencing of steps.

### **Music**

For a group of students new to folk dance, music will be an important consideration, especially for older students. While a teacher needs to begin with very basic steps and sequences (more on that next) no matter what the age of the student, the music choice will be important. There are many very basic dances set to music that may have a "young child" sound to them, which could be a turn off to older students. Here is where I have found it important to substitute music for teaching basic steps to older students, and also take more sophisticated traditional folk dances and simplify the steps at first. Listen to the music you think you may be using for a dance with the age of the children in mind. There are some dances in the Classroom Folk Dance Guide below listed for first and second grade that I would not do with third and up because of the music. I might, however, take the simple steps to that dance and find other music that the older grades student might like, still trying to stay in the same culture for the music, or at least just in the folk music genre. I would avoid, in teaching folk dance, using popular or rock music. They get enough of this in their life, so staying with exposure to cultural folk music is best. Also, I would not use sophisticated rhythmic music or a lot of faster beat music with the younger students.

## **Complexity of Steps**

As stated previously, a beginner is a beginner no matter what age and every student new to folk dancing needs to start with very basic steps. The choice of movement also needs to fit the developmental profile of the grade you are teaching. I observed many first and second grade students who were unable to skip well, or to step on one foot and then hop on that same foot (step-hop, or schottische step). These two steps, the skip and the step-hop, are almost the same, except the skip has a different rhythm, sort of a long-short, long-short rhythm, so more of a step-shuffle on one foot then step-shuffle on the other. The step-hop, or schottische, has an even rhythm, so is more deliberate in execution and with the knee up higher. Even older students often had trouble with the step-hop on the same foot (wanting instead to step on one foot then hop onto the other). These types of steps should be mastered first, before introducing harder, cross-body movements such as the grapevine step.

Several respondents to the survey stated they would not introduce cross body movements until at least second grade, and third grade might be even better. This is probably a good guideline. A wise teacher notices the abilities of the class before her and uses movements she thinks will help them gain better physical coordination rather than frustrate them. As one survey respondent said: complexity of movement should match their physical ability. Evaluate your class, especially if it is a first, second or third grade class, to see if they have mastered some of the basic non-cross body steps – skipping, step-hop, side kick step (sashay), ability to kick out to the side ala the Bunny Hop or Wishy Washy, and knowing right and left well. Also

movements like contracting - expanding in a circle, ability to circle to the left and then change directions smoothly to circle back to the right, are important initial movements to master, as well as keeping a good circle, stepping on the beat together to a simple, basic beat, and using the correct starting foot (usually the right foot in these simple, basic dances). Incidentally, these kinds of movements are all typically used in Waldorf schools to evaluate grade school readiness for children, and then they continue to work with the children on them for mastery in the first couple of grades to facilitate brain development and learning.

Obviously older students, even starting out as beginners, will be able to master the basics faster than the younger. The dances used with the younger will best be repeated a lot so they get lots of practice learning these basics, and the younger students love the repetition of a mastered dance anyway. Once a small repertoire of half a dozen dances are learned, just rotating them may be all that is needed in first and second grade since they love revisiting them over and over. A teacher uses her intuition to know when the class needs a new dance introduced.

Older students (third and up) will be glad to move on to harder movements as they master the basics. They enjoy this challenge. One survey respondent called it "shingling" the movements, a term that I liked, which means building on basic steps and adding more challenge. I've also seen it termed "scaffolding," but they are talking about the same idea of slowly increasing the complexity of movement, such as grapevine steps, more complex spiraling in and out, do-si-do, grand right and left, turns, changing up the starting foot from right to left more often, more complex arm

movements with the foot movements, etc. Another aspect of shingling is not just increasing complexity of the steps but also the sequencing of steps.

### **Sequencing of Steps**

A dance consists of linking steps together in time to the music. The steps can be very basic or more complex or both. But how steps (whether basic or complex) are linked, as well as how many steps are linked in a sequence, can add to the challenge. Most basic dances have two sequencing parts, an A part for 32 counts and a B part for 32 counts, each with its own steps and sequencing of those steps. In a beginning class, it is best to take simple steps and repeat them for a while for each part. For example, in a circle dance a part A could be circling (walking) to the left for 16 counts, then circle to the right for 16 counts. The B part could be contracting (stepping) into the center for 4 counts and expanding back out for 4 counts and keep repeating this for a total of 32 counts. This is a very basic circle dance that has both very basic steps and very basic sequencing. This allows for a beginning group, no matter what age, to start getting used to dance movements and gain confidence.

To increase complexity of sequencing one can change steps or directions faster, and also increasing the number of different types of steps to execute in a sequence. For example, instead of circling to the left for 16 counts then back to the right for 16 counts, a next level of complexity would be to change directions faster, so circle left for 8, then right for 8, then left again for 8, then right again for 8. After that, one could add a turn or stomps or some other sequence of steps at the end of a circling sequence, and so on.

Another example of shingling sequences of steps was the first folk dance class I had with grades 5, 6 and 7. I taught the basic Virginia Reel, but started by leaving out a more complex sequence called “reel the set.” I could see that grades 6 and 7 were all able to learn the basic dance fairly quickly, so the next time we met, after dancing what we had already learned the class before to reinforce it, I then taught them the “reel the set” sequence and then we added it to the dance, which they greatly enjoyed. I could tell the 5<sup>th</sup> grade class, however, was not ready to learn this next sequence yet, and so we just danced the basic dance again. If we were able to have another class, I might have then taught the 5<sup>th</sup> graders the “reel the set.” Similarly, I taught a handclapping German dance to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes, using a basic version the first day. Again, I could see that the 5<sup>th</sup> grade class was ready for the challenge of the more complex version of the dance on the second day we met, while 4<sup>th</sup> grade was not yet so we stayed with the basic version.

These are a couple of examples of shingling sequences of steps, something to utilize to allow the class to successfully master the basics first and then increase the complexity as the teacher discerns they are ready for and needing the challenge.

## **CHAPTER SIX: A SUGGESTED CURRICULUM DISCUSSION**

Now I wish to put together the two elements of this thesis, “folk dance in the classroom for grades one through eight,” and “developmentally appropriate,” based on child development indications of Rudolf Steiner, creator of Waldorf education, and also informed with suggestions from the experienced Waldorf teachers who took my survey. First, I will start off with a short section on some basic dance

definitions for words used in this Curriculum Discussion section and in the Classroom Folk Dance Guide. Then I will present dance suggestions based on developmental elements and use the same two-year grade groupings as in the background section on grade-by-grade Waldorf child development since I believe this works well for folk dance curriculum suggestions. Following this there is a Classroom Folk Dance Guide I have created from dances I have taught for teaching beginners for each two-grade grouping. References at the end include folk dance resources that contain many of the specific dances named in these sections and in the Classroom Folk Dance Guide.

### **Dance Definitions: Basic Types of Dance Formations**

A **circle dance** is probably obvious: standing in a circle usually holding hands but sometimes not if there are some moves with a neighbor such as hand clapping, or arm swings. There are also **broken circle dances**, and this is where everyone is standing in a circle holding hands except for two people, which is the place where the circle is broken. Some Greek, Israeli and other dances utilize broken circle formations. Some of these have the broken circle moving in and out of **spirals**. There are also several variations of standing in a circle, such as with partners side by side, or facing each other.

A **long set** formation is having two lines facing each other, each person in one line facing a partner in the other line. This formation is also called "**contra**," since one line is contrary to the other. So a long set dance or contra dance are the same thing. For simplicity sake, I will mostly use "contra" to mean this kind of formation.

Usually there are six to eight people (or three to four couples) in a contra set formation, so there are several contra sets in a large group. Often in contra dances there is a caller, who is the person giving the dance cues, like “bow to your partner,” “right arm swing,” etc. So in your classroom, the teacher is the caller. The people in each contra line closest to the band (or other music source) and the caller are the “head couple.” When I taught, I used the term “head partners” to minimize the emphasis on people being “couples” in the romantic sense. The top of the set is where the head partners are and the other end of the set is the bottom of the set.

### **Dance Definitions: Some Dance Step Terms**

**Walking** and **skipping** are probably obvious.

**Sashay** is a side-kick traveling step, where one steps out to the side then with a little hop the other foot “kicks” it out of its place. It has a skipping feel to it, but one is traveling sideways.

**Do-si-do** is passing one’s partner, usually done in a contra dance but also can be in a circle dance, and also in square dancing although I did not teach any square dancing in this beginner’s unit. Partners step forward and pass each other’s right shoulders, then one step sideways to the right, and then step backward and pass each other’s left shoulders to return to their starting positions.

**Schottische** is distinguished by the use of the step-hop: step on one foot then hop on that same foot, then step on the other foot and hop on that foot, back and forth. This may seem like skipping, and indeed it really is for the footing, but the rhythm,

as explained earlier, is different from a skipping rhythm. The schottische step-hop can be done in place, which is what I recommend in teaching it to beginners until they get it, and then try it as a traveling step. There are many variations of the schottische, such as combining it with a grapevine step or other steps and hops, like in the Bunny Hop.

**Grapevine** is a crossover traveling step, for example crossing right foot over the left, then side stepping out to the left, and crossing right over left again and stepping out left again, over and over. Usually the crossing foot alternates crossing over in front and then in back.

**Rock step** places one foot, usually the right, a little ahead of the other and then rocking forward on right, back on left, forward on right, back on left, back and forth.

**Triple step** is a quick-quick-slow step in 4/4 time and has the rhythm: step right-left-right-hold, then left-right-left-hold. There are line dances that use this step (Cotton eyed Joe) and it is also used in the polka where instead of the hold you would hop. In  $\frac{3}{4}$  time music, it is the waltz step.

**Swings** are usually referring to elbow swings, so two people, or partners, hook the same arm at the elbows and swing. The caller says: right arm swing or left arm swing, to indicate which elbows to hook.

**Allemandes** are similar to swings only instead of hooking elbows and turning, partners are turning palm-to-palm (same arm again, meaning right palm to right palm, or left palm to left palm).

**Two hand swings** have partners turning by joining both hands, with either uncrossed arms (meaning right hands joined to left hands) or crossed arms (meaning right hand to right hand and left hand to left hand).

**Turn singles** are individuals turning around once in their place.

**Cast Off and Archway** are moves used in contra dances. I often used the term “banana peel” for the cast off to give a visual image. For this move, the two contra lines turn toward the top of the set and each head partner leads their line, peeling off away from the other line. It looks a bit like peeling a banana: the right hand line peeling off to the right, and the left hand line peeling off to the left, and heading down toward the bottom of the set where they meet. There the head partners join hands and make an archway for the rest of their lines to go under. The next set of partners in line pass under the archway and head up to the top of the set, with their respective lines following, and they become the new head partners. The first head partners are now at the bottom of the set. The most common mistake I see is when someone in the right hand line turns back to the left instead of the right to follow the person in front of them (or someone in the left hand line turns in to the right instead of peeling out to the left). This would confuse the people following behind. The other thing that took a little practice was, after the head partners made the archway, getting the rest of their contra lines to then go through the arch and in the correct order, and get the first partners going through it to go all the way up to the top of the set to be the next head partners (some wanted to stop and get in line as soon as they went through the archway near the bottom of the set).

**Grand right and left** is a more advanced cross over move that may be best to wait until at least third grade. When they do master it, it is a great hit and a great way to keep changing partners in circle dances. To do it, every other person in a circle is facing the opposite way, so every one is facing a partner while standing in the circle. Partners reach out and take each other's right hands as if going to shake hands, but continue moving toward and then past each other (passing right shoulders) and then reach out left hand to the next person who is coming up behind your first partner. You take their left hand and pass left shoulders, then get the right hand ready for the next person and on and on for however many counts.

### **GRADES ONE and TWO**

I will look at the elements and specific dances that contain such elements that can meet the specific developmental needs of these grades.

### **Simple to Imitate and Slower Beat Music**

Teaching simple steps and movements that are easily imitated are ideal for these lower grades. There are many, many ways to accomplish this if one keeps in mind that simple means most of the time no more than a part A movement and a part B movement. An example was given earlier for this: circling left and then back to the right as the part A movement, and then for part B forward stepping in toward the circle center (contracting) and then backward stepping out again (expansion). Any slower beat, 32-count based folk song would work for this, but to emphasize the two parts, having a 2-part folk song (with each part being 16 or 32 counts) is ideal, and luckily that is a very common form for folk dance music. For these grades I used Old

Brass Wagon as one of the first dances to practice basic steps. In this song the words tell you what to do so sing along: “circle to the left in my old brass wagon, into the center in my old brass wagon, back on out,” etc.

Another example of a simple dance with a simple part A and part B is the Bunny Hop. I actually used this as the first dance for most of the grades for the folk dance unit I taught for this thesis. At this (non-Waldorf) school, most of the children, no matter what grade, had little or no experience with any kind of dance. The Bunny Hop is a fun “train” dance, where everyone lines up and places hands on the shoulders of the person in front of you (technically, it’s a broken circle). The part A is a version of the schottische – step right, left, right then hop on the right while kicking the left out to the side, then step left, right, left and kick the right out to the side. The part B is hopping on two feet forward, then hop backward, then three quick hops forward. That’s it, that’s the whole dance. The count goes step-step-step-kick, step-step-step-kick, hop forward (rest), hop back (rest), hop-hop-hop (rest), with part A and part B each getting 8 counts. There is a traditional Bunny Hop song one could use (which I did), but it is also fun to find other songs that fit this count and speed to show how the same dance steps can be used for other music. The kids loved learning the Bunny Hop and it was a great icebreaker – lots of smiles and joyful laughter. It is also a good dance to know because it still is sometimes danced at weddings and other social dances that still occur in our culture – and perhaps now even a future school dance you organize!

Also, use dances with a slower beat or find music with a slower beat, or just sing. Many of these basic beginning dances are set to easy-to-sing songs that everyone will love to learn, and you can then control the beat. These lower two grades need slower beats for the most part in order to master the basic steps and to learn to step together on a beat. There are some folk dance CDs mentioned in the references that have slower beat music. For each song they have a version with vocal instructions and a version of just the instrumental. If you use recorded music, be sure to not use the version with the vocal instructions – only use this for yourself to learn the dance and the cues. The children benefit hearing your human voice rather than an electronic voice. Mostly in these grades I sang the songs with no accompaniment, teaching the children the songs too. We had a great time singing and dancing together, and I could control the beat by how fast or slow I sang.

Remember: keep it simple. For each dance work on only a couple of types of steps at a time, and repeat them a lot. It is also best at first to only do leg movements while keeping arms still by holding hands in a circle or have hands on hips or at side. Likewise, when doing arm movements (like clapping) keep legs still. If a dance calls for arms and legs to move at the same time, build up to it (shingling) by starting with just the legs.

### **Basic Coordination Steps**

As just mentioned, the ability to step on one foot then hop on that same foot, the step-hop or schottische, is a good coordination movement for grades one and two to master. It was surprising to see so few in the first and second grade class I worked

with for this thesis to have the ability to do this simple step-hop movement. As also mentioned earlier, it was even more surprising to see that many of the kids in the older grades could not do it either. We had to spend time just practicing this step in place (no traveling): step on right – hop on right, step on left- hop on left, back and forth. The tendency was to step on the right then hop back on the left, or to just hop back and forth, or skip. With some practice most of the kids were able to master it in place and eventually do it as a traveling step, but it did surprise me to see so many older children (up to grades 5 and 6 and a few even in grade 7) struggle with this movement even in place. Simple dances besides the Bunny Hop using the step-hop include Old Brass Wagon, Danish Dance of Greeting, and the Mexican Hat Dance.

Besides the step-hop movement, other basic coordination steps to help children master through simple dances, some names of which are included in the parentheses, include: circling right and left (Sally Go Round the Sun, Shoo Fly, Floating Down the River, Old Brass Wagon, O'Sullivan's March, Cielito Lindo), contraction and expansion (more on that below), hopping on one foot and also on both (Bunny Hop, Old Brass Wagon, Mexican Hat Dance), stepping or skipping forward and also backward (Follow My Leader, Old Brass Wagon, Danish Dance of Greeting, I Can Whistle), rock step (Cielito Lindo, Draw Me a Bucket), kicking out side to side (Wishy Washy, Bunny Hop), sashay or side-kick step (Alabama Gal, Danish Dance of Greeting, O'Sullivan's March), arm (elbow) swings and two hand swings with a partner (Alabama Gal, Bow Down Oh Belinda, Brother Come and Dance), changing places (Bow Wow Wow, Jump Jim Joe), and do-si-do (Bow Down Oh Belinda).

One more word on basic steps to master, and that is “together.” Here I mean that part of mastering basic steps is stepping on the beat together. This usually takes awareness, listening to the music, and practice. At first, a new group will have only a few students stepping correctly on the beat, and the rest either shuffling to no particular beat, or running, so of course not everyone is on the same foot and the circle suffers from being pulled in different directions from the too fast or too slow steppers. This is important to get them to master in your basic learning time – to learn to listen to the rhythm of the song and to step to it with everyone else, working as a whole. They can see how folk dancing requires everyone to work together for it to work well (social hygiene). Everyone stepping together on the beat, and stepping out on the correct foot, both help to make it work well.

### **Contraction and Expansion**

Because the first and second grade child is moving in and out of the dreamy consciousness of early childhood, one can see how contraction and expansion movements would be beneficial developmentally for this age. Contraction is moving into toward the circle center, or two contra lines moving in toward each other, and expansion is moving backward out from circle center or the two contra lines moving backward again. Dances like Sally Go Round the Sun, I Can Whistle, Old King Glory, Shoo Fly, Old Brass Wagon, and more utilize contraction and expansion in a circle, and Brother Come and Dance With Me and Alabama Gal are great beginning contra dances that also do this.

## **Forms**

Another developmental element in these lower grades is utilizing line and curve forms, the building blocks of writing. Most dances are in a circle and or in the contra form (two lines facing each other) so this is easily accomplished. There are also dances in one long line or broken circle (like the Bunny Hop). Another form, the spiral, is great to introduce in a very simple dance. Wind Up the Apple Tree is a simple spiral that has children slowly winding up a broken circle and then unwinding as they sing. Old King Glory starts in a circle, creates a long curved line (or broken circle) circling around the original circle, which shrinks each verse, and then finally ends in another big circle.

## **Hand Clapping**

Utilizing hand clapping in some dances is also fun and great developmentally for these grades, just keeping in mind to always start simple. It is also best to keep the feet still while doing the hand clapping part, so only the hands are moving. It is more complex to move feet and arms at the same time. John Kenakanaka has some simple hand clapping, as do I Can Whistle, Danish Dance of Greeting and Mexican Hat Dance. Once a teacher works a little with basic dances, he can start to make up his own, coming up with a hand clapping sequence for one of the parts (A or B) and a stepping sequence for the other.

**Right and Left**

In grade one especially, but also grade two for reinforcement, it is good to use dances that help in learning right and left. I noticed both the first and second grade classes I worked with for this thesis needed help with this. Brother Come and Dance With Me is a good one where one puts out the right foot and then the left foot while singing “right foot” and “left foot.” Other dances where one needs to pay attention to right and left include Alabama Gal, Draw Me a Bucket, I Can Whistle, Cielito Lindo and Mexican Hat Dance (alternating right and left heels).

**Pictorial Images**

Dances that provide pictures, especially images from fairy tales and animal fables, support the grades one and two work of helping children learn through using their picture imagination. Folk dances can bring images to life, such as Blow Wind Blow, in which one child in the center creates a windmill that moves in the blowing wind that turns a grindstone, which is the rest of the children in a circle slowly turning. Some other good ones that evoke picture images include Blue Bird Through My Window (this one is also a good simple weaving in and out movement), Old Roger, Old Brass Wagon, Swinging on a Swing, Three Wandering Travelers, and Draw Me a Bucket.

**Numbers**

Since grade one and two students are learning basic numeracy, dances that utilize numbers are a good choice too, such as We’re Floating Down the River (also known

as Can't Jump Josie). I did this one in my own second grade class and also for the folk dance unit I taught for this thesis, and asked the children to figure out how many would be going into the middle each time (practicing doubling, or the two's times table). Other dances that use numbers are Old King Glory and Draw Me a Bucket, and of course you can make up your own.

### **Polarization**

It is good to bring in polarization by using dances that include contrasting movements such as Follow My Leader to London Town. This one can alternate between such contrasting movements as giant stepping/ baby stepping; running or skipping/ creeping; hopping/ shuffling; walking forwards/ backwards, etc. Also, Draw Me a Bucket uses polarity nicely with its two sections, the slower gentle rocking back and forth part to create the bucket and the faster spinning part.

### **Singing**

I would like to add a few words regarding singing while dancing with first and second graders (and also third and fourth graders). Very simply: do it! Start in first grade and then keep singing with them as they move up in grade. Singing at a Waldorf school is as common as breathing. Steiner said, "when man dwells within the musical element, he lives in a reflection of his spiritual home," (Steiner, 1983, p. 8). Dwelling in musical elements such as singing and dancing are natural experiences for the young child who is so newly arrived from the spiritual world. It does not matter to her how well anyone can sing, it just feels as natural as breathing.

For most of the dances I taught to the first and second grade classes, we sang the songs that we danced to. One great advantage was that some of the lyrics to these dances give the dancing movements, so they would sing what they were supposed to be doing with their bodies. Bow Down Oh Belinda and Brother Come and Dance with Me are two examples. But some are just fun to sing. They loved going under the archway in Alabama Gal singing, "Ain't I rock candy!" over and over.

For my thesis unit, I did put on music for some dances, but we still sang along with the music. I had no electricity or a piano player in my own grade one classroom (in a solar powered yurt) and so every dance we did was to our own singing, and they had a ball. In addition to it being something they naturally want to do, singing while dancing gets the children used to singing too. It is good to get them used to singing and dancing before going through the nine-year change where they can get very self-conscious about doing something "new."

For my thesis unit I also sang some of the songs in the third and fourth grade classes (by fifth, the dances are less singing-oriented, more instrumental). When I was teaching the fourth grade the Hora, one of our first dances after the dance of basics, and I started singing an Israeli tune with simple nonsense words (kind of like singing "la la la") - "Hi-da, hi-da, hi-diddy-di-da, hi-da, hi-da, hi-da" - you could have heard a pin drop in the gymnasium. It was the quietest this somewhat rowdy group of children had been. They really were captivated hearing a singing human voice to dance to. They danced the Hora so wonderfully - indeed it was the best dance they did - because, I believe, they were amazingly attentive to my singing. I got some of

them to sing along eventually, and feel sure that given a little more time they would be singing with the best of them.

So if you are lucky enough to be starting with a first grade or second grade class, sing sing sing as you dance dance dance!

### **GRADES THREE and FOUR**

I am writing this for teachers who have students who mostly have not danced before. As mentioned earlier, any beginner no matter what age should master the basics first, and so much of what was presented in the Grades One and Two section can be applied to teaching these grades to start with. However, the teacher must keep in mind the different consciousness that grades three and four students will have compared to first and second, and that means keep in mind the music you are using.

Many of the children in the grade one and two classes I taught for this thesis voluntarily came up and gave me hugs at the end of our folk dance classes. These were the only classes that did that. This has pretty much disappeared by grades three and four (and on). While imitation is still the most common way to learn a movement art, the consciousness of the third and fourth grade student will not be such that they will be as willing to automatically imitate and follow the teacher, especially if they perceive that they might look dumb - remember the self-conscious awakening of the nine-year-change? That is what is at play here (and in the grades hereafter). To try and ensure that they will ease into accepting folk dance as

something they do indeed want to learn, and that they will discover they do enjoy it, pay careful attention to the music used.

While the basic steps still need to be mastered and the sequences of steps need to be simple at first, a wise teacher will make sure the music is appealing as well. For this reason, for example, I would not teach Bow Wow Wow above second grade, or the Danish Dance of Greeting, as the music and lyrics could seem too babyish to third graders and above. Here are some ideas for teaching the basics to third and fourth grade students.

For an opening icebreaker, I used the Bunny Hop, and to be honest I had not planned this. It came to me the morning of teaching this group for the first time. It was a big hit. This dance seems to have a universal appeal and is non-threatening since you don't have to hold hands with anyone and you don't have to look into someone else's face because everyone lines up one behind the other in one long line and holds onto the shoulders of the person in front of them (so staring into the back of the head of the person in front of you). And the steps are very simple, as I detailed a few sections earlier. All ages seem to have great fun with this one.

After an icebreaker, moving on to other dances needs some thought and intuition of your group. If you are concerned about the handholding, I might suggest doing first a hand shaking song, like Yonder They Come. I did this one and they had great fun shaking everyone's hand. Then at the end I said something like, "O.K., now we've held each other's hands so we're past any concern over that," and then asked

everyone to take hands to learn some basic steps in a circle. It did seem to help them ease into holding hands better.

For learning circling right and left, and contracting/expanding and other basic steps, I would suggest a nice Irish tune like O'Sullivan's March (instead of Old Brass Wagon from first and second grade) which has a good even 32-count to which the circle can practice circling left then back right, contract in and expand back out, and repeat these over and over (I downloaded from iTunes a version of O'Sullivan's March by the Chieftans from their album *Essential Chieftans*). When those things are mastered (including stepping to the beat together, and stepping out on the correct foot), the teacher can bring in some other circling steps besides just walking, such as skipping to the left and then back to the right, sashay to the left then back to right, to finally a step-hop (or practice first the step-hop in place, then circle left and right using the step-hop). For the contraction/expansion part, you can add a knee lift on count four of the contraction in (step-step-step-knee lift) and a tap on count four of expanding out (step-step-step-tap). This move will be part of a Hebrew dance, Dayenu, and others too. Now let's look at some additional steps I would introduce in these grades.

### **Grapevine**

Grade three is the grade that I, and also most survey respondents who mentioned it, would introduce the grapevine step. Since Waldorf third grade stories are Hebrew stories, using Hebrew dances is perfect. I made up my own dance to Dayenu using the grapevine step, plus in the contraction part they had great fun with a loud,

rousing “hey!” on the knee lift. Other Hebrew music works well too to create a simple dance that uses grapevine circling steps and contraction/expansion, such as Hava Nagilah. The third and fourth graders (and fifth and up for that matter) eat up these types of dances! Once they have mastered the basic grapevine, they can then learn the Hora, another Israeli dance but is thought to have roots in Greece, so many Greek dances use this form too. For the Hora you step on left foot and kick right leg across the left then bring it back and step on right and kick left leg across the right (that’s part A, step L kick across, step R kick across), then Part B is the grapevine by stepping out left, cross right foot in front, step left, cross right foot behind and that’s the whole dance. Easy and very fun! First learn it in a circle to master the steps together. Then use a broken circle and let the line snake around the room. Then finally with teacher as the leader (on the left end of the broken circle) move into a spiral and back out again. A group can dance for quite a long time like this! Hava Nagilah is a good song for this, but also the Zorba the Greek song. I actually used Zorba the Greek with the seventh grade because they were my “squirrelly-est” group. This song starts extremely slow and stays slow for most of the dance, which was very helpful with this very self-conscious group. Then ever so slightly the song begins to speed up, which they loved. Then suddenly for the last minute of the song it kicks into high gear, which they also loved. But this is a great dance to teach starting in third and fourth grade. It’s also another one of those dances to do at a community dance, one that everyone can easily jump into and learn.

### **More Complex Hand Clapping**

There is a great German dance to step up the hand clapping complexity for these grades (and I also used this dance with higher grades too). It is called D'Hammerschmiedsgselin, which means (roughly) the Blacksmith. The part A is the hand clapping part (the blacksmith hammering). I first taught this in a big circle and had people turn to face their a for the handclapping part. It is a challenging but fun hand clapping sequence. Then for the B part everyone joins hands in the big circle and does the step-hop (schottische) traveling left for eight counts then back to the right for eight counts. After mastering it in a large circle, this dance can progress to forming little groups of four (two sets of handclapping partners) and staggering the timing of the handclapping sequence so the two sets of partners are clapping crossing over each other. It's a bit like a "round" in singing, where one group starts and after a few measures another group starts. I did not have enough time in my dance unit for this thesis to progress with the third and fourth graders, but I did with the fifth graders and they absolutely loved this challenge. With a bit more time, the third and fourth graders can progress in this dance too.

### **Contra Moves**

A couple of survey respondents said they would not do anything but circle dances in the lower two grades. In my own first and second grade classes I found that with only a little extra time (meaning more than just the two sessions I had with the classes I worked with for my thesis) the lower grades learned well a simple contra dance, Alabama Gal, and absolutely loved it. The steps themselves are not complex,

but there are more than just two basic sequences, but not much more. The third and fourth graders in my folk dance unit for this thesis easily learned Alabama Gal; in fact many came up to me later and told me it was their favorite dance (my son, who was in my first and second grade classes and learned it then, always said that too). It uses very basic contra steps – sashay, allemande swings and the castoff and archway. The cast off (or “banana peel” as I called it) and archway are really what take a little time for them to catch on, but not really much. The other thing that took a little practice was, after the head partners made the archway, getting the rest of their contra lines to then go through the arch and in the correct order, and get the first partners to go through it to go all the way up to the top of the set to be the next head partners (some wanted to stop and get in line as soon as they went through the archway). But practicing the “banana peel” and archway a few times first went a long way to correcting these potential mistakes and helped them dance the dance smoothly and successfully. They really loved this one!

### **GRADES FIVE and SIX**

Teaching these two classes were by far my favorite for this thesis. Despite being just as new to folk dance as all the other grades, the students in these grades are joyfully in the midst of that “golden age of childhood,” and it showed in folk dance class. They are happily between the turmoil of the nine-year-awakening to self and the onset of the hormonal rollercoaster of puberty that magnifies the self-consciousness awakened in third grade. Anything I brought to these grades, they took in and just did it with aplomb! They were fun and joyous in moving their bodies – you could

just see the ease with which they moved and the ease with which they were in their bodies and selves.

I opened with the Bunny Hop again and they loved it no less than any other grade to which I taught it. We did a simple circle dance to learn basic steps and I could easily see that they were learning these quickly so went on with other dances. With the fifth graders I went on with the German handclapping dance, which they mastered both the basic version (in a large circle) and the full cross clapping version. The sixth graders I would have also taught this to, but because of time constraints, I chose instead to bring some other dances that were more challenging, such as the French Canadian dance Les Saluts and a very fun Russian dance, Troika. Les Saluts is more complex, utilizing double concentric circles that move in different directions, then come together with a fun basket weave hand hold that took a little work for them to get, but once they got it, they danced this dance like nobody's business. Because the fifth graders were so agreeable, I taught them this dance too on my second day with them, and got lots of "that was cool!" responses (from the boys, no less). Troika has groups of three arranged as wheel spokes, moves very fast, has lots of twirling under archways, and changes the middle partner of each spoke each time through the dance. Lots going on! But the sixth graders learned it quickly. I would have taught this one to fifth graders too, but again I only had so much time and had to select carefully what I would do with each class.

I also taught the Maple Leaf Stomp but put it to a fun Irish tune I loved and it worked very well (Boffyflow and Spike by the Chieftans from *A Chieftans*

*Celebration*). This one had partners in double concentric circles, again each circle eventually moving different directions and doing different things, but finally meeting up again with your partner. If we had one more day together I would have added the complexity (shingling, remember) of moving past your partner in the circling part of the dance and meet a new partner each time through the dance.

These two grades, fifth and sixth, were the lowest grades to whom I taught the Virginia Reel. For grades three and four I stuck with Alabama Gal as it is a simpler contra dance and so a better introduction for them, but with more time I would have eventually taught the fourth graders the Virginia Reel. The fifth, sixth, and seventh grade classes all were able to learn the basic Virginia Reel fairly quickly and the sixth and seventh were able to learn the more complex sequence of “reel the set.” This is where the head partners reel (swing) each other, then swing the next person in their partner’s line, then meet back in the middle of the set to swing each other again, then move on to the next person in their partner’s line, meet back to swing each other again, and on and on until the head partners have reeled the entire set. It is a very fun sequence to learn after they have mastered the basic dance. Fifth grade would have been able to learn “reel the set” if we’d had one more day together. Again, you shingle the steps and progress with the group as you see they are getting the basics well.

For these grades, the survey respondents had a wide variety of dances they taught, but the commonality was the increase in complexity of steps, rhythms, and sequences of steps. Because in Waldorf schools the fifth grade class studies ancient

Indian, Persian and Greek cultures, there were many mentions of doing dances from these cultures. The Hora was mentioned, which is typically thought of as an Israeli dance, but it is believed to have roots in Greece and so it is a common dance in Greece as well. I used the Hora with both Israeli music and with Greek music. Many respondents mentioned teaching more English contras and American folk dances, which have more partner-changing going on. Gathering Peascods is an English country circle dance I would have wanted to bring if I had more days with the fifth and sixth (and seventh) grade kids. One survey respondent mentioned a favorite dance of her fifth grade class was the Filipino dance Tinikling, which involves using two long poles of bamboo to create a tapping rhythm and that also provide the challenge of dancing in and out of the tapping bamboo poles. I remember this one from my own childhood and would love to bring it to a class that was studying the Philippines or other Asian countries.

Many respondents also mentioned for sixth grade teaching Morris dancing, which are English dances using sticks and knee bells. These are very fun and I even taught a very simple version to my lower grades class so we could “wake up the earth” during our spring festival (my class was the oldest class in our little school). We made our own knee bells and cut and sanded our clashing sticks. They loved this dance, which is quite physical with all of its hopping steps (lots of schottische) and of course the clashing of the sticks. If we still had our school, I would have had them progress to the harder version by grade six.

There is also a wonderful sword dance that would be great for fifth or sixth graders. Groups of six dancers dance with swords (painted yardsticks) and use them in a variety of moves and forms, including weaving them all into one large six-pointed star (it can also be a group of eight, weaving an eight-pointed star). As I complete writing this thesis, I am currently teaching it to the fifth graders at the school where I taught the dance unit for this thesis. It will be performed at the school Christmas program. I can say that the fifth graders are extremely enthusiastic doing this dance, love dancing with the swords (which they are told at the beginning are ceremonial swords only, not for play, i.e. swordfighting!), and are absolutely enthralled with how the star gets woven by all their swords (a wonderful cooperative learning opportunity).

So elements to add to grades five and six, after they have mastered the basics mentioned in grades one and two and the additional steps mentioned in grades three and four, include: more partner dances, like the Virginia Reel and Maple Leaf Stomp, more complex sequences like Troika and Virginia Reel, more complex steps or moves like the basket weave hold in Les Saluts and the partner mirror stepping in Maple Leaf Stomp, and the more complex handclapping version of D'Hammerschmiedsgselin. Other dances to look into and consider include Morris dances, Tinikling, the Sword Dance, and dances from countries your students may be studying.

**GRADES SEVEN and EIGHT**

There is another touchy phase to pass through in childhood, similar to the nine-year-change of third and fourth grade, and of course that is the onset of puberty. This is not just a physical change, but a change in consciousness, and the activities the students engage in need to meet the needs of this changing consciousness. The awakening that began in third and fourth grade to one's sense of being a separate individual, which is often a scary and lonely sort of feeling, comes to a new self-conscious head at puberty with the additional elements of hormonal imbalances, gangly limbs and physical awkwardness (a rather rude awakening after the blessing of the "golden age" of physicality during fifth and perhaps sixth grade). This challenging phase was quite apparent in the seventh grade class I taught for this unit; they were, as mentioned earlier, my "squirrely-est" group. I had to even more carefully choose what I brought to them because, of all the groups, I could tell they felt the self-consciousness of "looking stupid" the most. This was the only group from which I heard comments like, "I can't dance," delivered with such finality, and before we had even started! Here again, I will emphasize the importance (and blessing) of starting in first grade.

I listened to my intuition and started with the Bunny Hop with them (without telling them the name of it so as to not bias them with the somewhat silly sounding name). I just had them line up and quickly taught them the two simple sequences of the dance and then let them have at it, and they loved it! Again, being very simple and not having to hold hands and stare into another's face is what I think this dance

offers as an antidote to self-consciousness. After a short practice in a circle with the basics to O'Sullivan's March, I had them dive right into the Virginia Reel, since it doesn't involve much hand holding and I could tell that was an issue with them. This was a good move as they could concentrate on learning the order of the steps (which is pretty easy for a seventh grader) – bow twice, do right and left arm swings, do-si-do, sashay down the set and back (with hands on hips) and castoff and make the archway. They did great with this and had a lot of fun. I knew the next time we met I would teach them the “reel the set” sequence to this dance, and they did indeed learn this well.

The second day that I met with them I also taught them the Hora and used the Zorba the Greek music. It goes extremely slow at first, which allowed them to see that, yes, they could learn these steps. Like many eastern European and middle eastern dances, the Hora is repetitive and therefore meditative, so adding the slow element allowed them to relax more into the meditative effect. They seemed to really like it, and this particular song wakes one up again with a sudden change in tempo for the last minute or so of the dance, which was fun too.

The last day I was with them I taught them a variation of the contra dance Virginia Reel called Blobs which had a group of four, instead of two, doing contra moves together including sashaying down the set as a group, which required them to hold hands. But they did fine with holding hands with a group of four, which is not nearly as intimate as holding hands and sashaying as a couple (which is why I had them put hands on hips for partner sashaying). They liked the contra dances,

and there are many variations, so a teacher could keep them dancing contras quite a while. All contras use the same dance steps, just ordered differently, so confidence grows and squirrely self-consciousness diminishes. This is how I suggest approaching such a self-conscious group as I had. Do lots of contra dance variations for a good while until you feel them starting to really feel more at ease. Then try introducing some other types of dances, like Morris dances, English and Canadian circle dances which require more hand-holding, and even ease them into a little bit of partner dancing like polka, waltz and swing when you see they are ready.

Survey respondents also used lots more contra dances in these grades and also introduced line dances. I taught the seventh graders the Cotton Eyed Joe, a Texas country line dance that is fairly easy for a seventh grader to learn and this group enjoyed it. There are no partners, but there are several spokes of lines (about 5 or 6 in a line) that all face one direction, so again no looking into another's face, and everyone holds shoulders instead of hands.

Seventh graders in Waldorf schools study the Renaissance so many respondents said they look for dances of the Renaissance. I have not taught a Waldorf seventh grade and so do not know any to recommend here, and the survey respondents who mentioned teaching dances of the Renaissance didn't mention any specific dances. I would imagine with a little googling and research, a source of these types of dances can be found.

A couple of respondents who probably had the benefit of more years of working with their classes said they would introduce some social dancing like waltz,

rumba, foxtrot and swing in seventh grade, but most respondents mentioned eighth grade as the year to bring them. These are very close dances with another person of the opposite sex so it would take knowing your group well to know when to bring these types of dances in. As mentioned before I did not get to teach the eighth graders at the school I taught my thesis folk dance unit. The PE teacher said they were not ready for it, and I took it to mean they were having some issues being a cohesive group. I did however teach the previous year's eighth grade class for one day last spring, and it just goes to show that every class has its own personality because that class was very attentive and interested in learning to dance. We had a lot of fun learning some of the same dances that I brought to the seventh graders during my thesis unit. We only had one day together, but I believe that particular group would have progressed to social partner dancing at some point.

So elements to progress to with these grades, after they have mastered the basics of course, include more complex sequences from English, Canadian and other European country dances (both circle and contra), American folk dances and line dances now too, more complex rhythms from eastern Europe and middle eastern dances, such as the 7/8 rhythm found in many Slavic and Greek dances, and introducing social partner dances. All of these, of course, should be brought with shingling in mind – progressing little by little as the teacher sees they are getting the basics before adding more complex steps and sequences. Also, the teacher should be keeping a close eye on the students' comfort level – if they are feeling more at ease socially, with dancing with each other, holding hands and doing more partner dances.

I'll also note here that even a group that has progressed quite far in learning dances loves easy group dances like the Bunny Hop and the Hora, so weave these in too. These make for fun activities at all-school festivals and folk dances, where all ages and grades get the chance to dance together sometimes.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: CLASSROOM FOLK DANCE GUIDE**

Here are now lists of dances, by grade, that I have taught with success, plus a few others I have tried myself and liked and, given more time with a class, would try with the students. This list is meant as a suggestion to teachers who would like to begin teaching folk dancing to their students but don't know where to start. This is certainly not a comprehensive list, as there are so many dances! But because there are so many dances, I hope presenting them this way would be useful.

A code is next to each to find the source(s) from which I got each dance, with those particular sources listed in their own reference section at the end of this chapter. I will say here that the workhorse books/cds that I used are Anna Rainville's *Singing Games* and Marian Rose's series (*Step Lively 1, 2 and 3*). I would recommend both as excellent references for teaching folk dance to your class. Marian's books have a wonderful glossary and charts showing dance formations, and both Marian's and Anna's have good written instructions and music. Anna's CDs have short versions of each song, enough for one to learn to sing the songs oneself, which I highly recommend for the lower grades. Marian's has the full songs. I have also taken a workshop with Anna and learned many dances that way. She is a terrific teacher, and I have heard the same about Marian and her workshops.

The Multicultural Folk Dance set includes a DVD which is very helpful to see the dancers dancing, however the package is rather on the expensive side, and I thought there were too few good dances, as many of them I thought too difficult, to really recommend. It might be worth googling those dances I mention from that source to see if you can find descriptions online, maybe even a YouTube video of them, which I have found for some dances I wanted to learn. For example, I found instructions for the German handclapping dance I (and the kids) really liked here: <http://www.lloydshaw.org/Catalogue/CueSheets/Childrens/D%92Hammerschmiedsgselln.htm>. I also found the song on iTunes for 99 cents, or the album it was a part of was \$9.99 and included the music to Tinikling (the Filipino bamboo dance), the Virginia Reel, Les Saluts, Gathering Peascods, Hava Nagilah and more. This album is called *The Complete Multicultural Party, Vol 18* by Bobby Morganstein. I mention this because there are just so many books, CDs and DVDs out there and teachers in general have limited time and resources. These are merely my own recommendations based on what I have used and looked at myself.

For the dances I modified or entirely choreographed, I put an asterisk next to the original source code, and have included written modifications/choreography in the appendix. For the rest of the dances that I did not modify, I refer you to the source books, or try googling them.

## **GRADES ONE and TWO**

### **CIRCLE DANCES**

Old Brass Wagon (A\*)

Danish Dance of Greeting (B3\*)

Shoo Fly (C)  
Wishy Washy (B3)  
Cielito Lindo (\*)  
Bow Wow Wow (B3)  
Mexican Hat Dance (\*)  
I Can Whistle (C)  
Old King Glory (B3 and C)  
We're Floating Down the River (C and B1 – called Can't Jump Josie in B1)  
Wind Up the Apple Tree (C)  
Old Roger (C)  
Blow Wind Blow (C)  
Follow My Leader (C)  
Draw Me A Bucket (small circles) (A and C (although the best music is from A)  
John Kenakanaka (B2 and C both have good versions, or make up your own – a good dance for handclapping)

**Other Circle Dances I would try with these grades:**

Swinging On a Swing (B3)  
Bluebird, Bluebird (B3)  
Jump Jim Joe (B3)

**CONTRA DANCES**

Brother Come and Dance With Me (C\*)  
Alabama Gal (C)  
Bow Down Oh Belinda (C)  
Sandgate (C)

**GRADES THREE and FOUR**

**ICEBREAKER**

Bunny Hop (B2)

**Another Icebreaker I Would Try:**

Butterfly (B2)

**CIRCLE DANCES**

O'Sullivan's March (\*)  
Cielito Lindo (\*)  
Mexican Hat Dance (\*)  
Dayenu (C\*)  
Hora (\*) to Hava Nagilah  
D'Hammerschmiedsgselin (D)  
Shake, Shake, Shake (B3)  
Shehan's Reel (\*)  
Yonder They Come (C)

**CONTRA**

Alabama Gal (C)  
Virginia Reel (B and D)

**Another dance I would try:**

Tinikling (D)

**GRADES FIVE and SIX**

**CIRCLE DANCES**

O'Sullivan's March (\*)  
Mexican Hat Dance (\*)  
Dayenu (C\*)  
Hora to Hava Nagilah and Zorba the Greek (\*)  
D'Hammerschmiedsgselin (D)  
Shake, Shake, Shake (B3)  
Shehan's Reel (\*)  
Yonder They Come (C)  
Maple Leaf Stomp (B2\*)  
Les Saluts (B2 and D)

**LINE or CONTRA DANCES**

Bunny Hop (B2 also described in above thesis)  
Troika (\*)  
Virginia Reel (B1 and D)

**Another dance I would try:**

Tinikling (D)

**GRADES SEVEN and EIGHT**

**CIRCLE DANCES**

Hora (\*) to Zorba the Greek and Hava Nagilah  
Mexican Hat (\*)  
Les Saluts (B2 and D)  
Maple Leaf Stomp (B2\*)  
Shake, Shake, Shake (B3)  
Shehan's Reel (\*)  
Yonder They Come (C)  
Maple Leaf Stomp (B2\*)

**LINE or CONTRA DANCES**

Bunny Hop (B2, also described in above thesis)

Cotton Eyed Joe (\*)  
Troika (\*)  
Virginia Reel (B1 and D)  
Blobs (B1 – more variations in same resource book)

**Others I would try:**

More line dances, Waltz, Polka, Foxtrot, Latin (Cha Cha, Mambo, Rumba), Swing

**DANCE CODES and REFERENCES**

- \* My own choreography, or modifications I made to others' choreography, or dances I learned at a workshop or dance and wrote down (see Appendix)
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Trautman, S. (2006). *Swing Dancing for Beginners Volume 1*. Florida: Dance Videos Direct.

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Pittman, A., Waller, M. and Dark, C. (2006). *Dance Awhile: A Handbook for Folk, Square, Contra, and Social Dance*. (10<sup>th</sup> ed). New York: Pearson Benjamin Cummings. (Note: purchase of this comprehensive textbook includes access to website with MP3 downloads for 48 common folk dances and other information)

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## APPENDIX

### Modifications and Personal Choreography for \* Dances

Below are modifications, or my own choreography, or dances I learned at a dance or workshop and have no source to reference.

#### Old Brass Wagon

This is a good dance to start off with in first and second grade and with which to practice basic dance steps. It is one you can sing (and I highly recommend this) and teach them to sing, as it is easy and repetitive and gives dance directions in the lyrics. If you have everyone line up first (maybe do the Bunny Hop first!), then you can grab one end of the line with your right hand and lead it around during the first verse to form a circle singing:

Follow me, to my old brass wagon, Follow me to my old brass wagon,  
Follow me to my old brass wagon, You're the one my darlin'.

Now in a circle the next verses can go:

(2<sup>nd</sup> verse) Circle to the left...

(3<sup>rd</sup> verse) Circle to the right....

(4<sup>th</sup> verse) Into the center....back on out....into the center...you're the one  
(backing back out again) my darlin'

And then depending on the grade level and ability level, you can add verses like sashay left, sashay right, skip left, skip right, step-hop in, step-hop out, etc. The music I used I got from iTunes by Denise Gagne from an album called *Musicplay Grade 3 Greatest Hits (part 1)*. I liked it because there were no words so I could decide how to do the dance. There is also a nice sung version (so you can't change the movements) on the Dancing Masters *Jump Jim Joe* CD (see Dance References).

#### Danish Dance of Greeting

I had us in one large circle.

Part A:

Clap, clap, bow, (pause). Clap, clap, bow, (pause). (8)

Stomp (pause) Stomp other foot (pause), turn single. (8)

And then repeat this part again. (16)

## Part B:

Join hands and circle left, starting with stepping (on the beat), and then back to the right. (32)

After they master stepping on the beat for this part, you can vary what they do left and right, such as skipping to the left, and then back to the right, step-hop left and right.

I used the music from Marian Rose's *Step Lively 3* (see Dance References).

**Cielito Lindo**

This is a very slow dance so may be a good one to start with. The challenge is, since it is so slow, that the kids step on the slow beat together and not rush. Since this is in 6/8 time, one could bring in a waltz step (see Verse 2) with older students as they master the basics.

This is the Ay-yi-yi-yi song (made famous by the Frito Bandito in the 70s), so Spanish students can learn the lyrics, at least the chorus if not the whole piece. It is much more challenging to sing and dance at the same time, so use shingling, i.e., learn the dance well first before adding singing, except for the Ay-yi-yi-yi part which is easy and they love to sing!

The music I used I got from iTunes for 99 cents: artist Los Copacabana from the album *Mexico's Greatest Hits*.

Everyone in a big circle.

Boys: Hands clasped behind backs

Girls: Hold pretend or real skirt out or hands on hips

Intro: Turn single slowly 8, Rock step -R foot forward (8), then step feet back together and join hands to get ready to circle left (extra 2 beats)

Verse 1: Circle (slow walk – step to the beat!) to Left (8), then Right (8)

Repeat Verse 1 steps (16)

(you can simplify by circling to the left for 16, then back to the right for 16)

Chorus: Face center

Rock step-R foot forward (8) (here is where you sing with gusto Ay-yi-yi-yi!  
Canta y no llores! which means Sing, don't cry!)

Step-heel-heel (Step on R foot then do 2 Heel Taps with L heel, then step on L foot and do the two heel taps with R heel, back and forth) (8)

Repeat Chorus sequence (16)

Repeat Intro moves (16 + 2)

Verse 2 – see notes below

Repeat Chorus sequence (16) then All Bow

For Verse 2:

Younger grades - just repeat circling R & L (16 + 16)

Older grades - every other person stands in place and does the step-heel-heels, while the others weave around them with triplet (waltz) step for 8 counts, then switch roles for 8 (still moving L), then repeat it all moving R

### Mexican Hat Dance

There are many versions on iTunes to check out, and I did pick one that I liked for the Faster Version for the older grades (by Jack Grunsky). For the slower version I used the music from Georgiana Stewart's CD *Folk Dance Fun* (see Bibliography) – using the instrumental version.

Everyone in a big circle in partners. Mexican hat placed in center. Know who your partner is before you begin.

Part A Clap Verse:

Hands in front ready to clap:	Heel R and L and R Clap-Clap	4
	Heel L and R and L Clap-Clap	4
	Heel R and L and R Clap-Clap	4
	Heel L and R and L Clap -Clap	4

REPEAT 16

(can later add moving into center and back again while doing the heels and claps)

Part B Step-Hop Chorus:

Boys: hands clasped behind back

Girls: hands holding pretend or real skirt out or on hips

(Circling to the Left): Step R – hop, Step L – hop, Step R- hop, Step L-hop 8

(Circling to the Right): repeat Step-hops 8

Part A Repeat Clap Verse

Part B Repeat Step-Hop Chorus

Part C Bridge: Right and left arm swings with neighboring partner 16

Part B Repeat Step-Hop Chorus

More challenging option for older grades after they master the basic version:

On second Chorus,

every other person step-hops in 8 then step-hops in right hand star 8

Then star group step-hops back out while others step-hop in 8 and they step-hop in star 8

Then during Bridge, star group step-hops back to outer circle 8 then swing with partner 8

**Brother Come and Dance With Me**

The only modification I made from Anna Rainville's (see Dance References) was on the tra-la-las I had the partners to right and left arm swings. I did not play music - we sang this song.

**Dayenu**

Anna Rainville has a good version plus several suggestions for variations. I was inspired to do something a bit different that I thought would help these kids, new to dancing, warm up to dancing (this was third grade remember), so the stomps and the knee lift with a big "hey!" became part of my modification. I downloaded a good version of the tune from iTunes: artist Klezmers from the album *World Music Volume 33: The Sound of Israel*. This song is also fun to sing, especially if you are studying Moses.

**Part A Verse - Grapevine**

Grapevine L starting with crossover step, so cross R over L in front -step L, cross R over L in back - step L, repeating for total of 12 counts, then for the last 4 counts stomp R-L-R-pause, then do it going to the right: crossing L over R in front - step R - Cross L over R in back - step R, repeating for total of 12 counts, then for last 4 counts stomp L-R-L-pause.

**Part B Chorus (Dayenu)**

Step R-L-R into center (that's 3 counts), lift L knee on 4 with a rousing "hey!", step back out L-R-L (3 counts) and tap on 4.  
Repeat this sequence three more times.

**Hora**

This is a simple Israeli dance that other European countries claim too, like Greece. It is very easy and a great way to do simple spiraling.

Stand in a circle that is broken (two people not holding hands). The person with their left hand free is the leader, so this is a good place for the teacher!

**Part A Kick across**

Step on L, kick R foot across then step back on R, kick L foot across

**Part B Grapevine**

Step on L, cross R foot in front, step on L, cross R foot in back

Repeat over and over, moving in a circle at first, then leader can snake the line around room and also spiral in then out again.

I sang a simple tune I wish I could sing for you, but I don't know it's name or source. You can also use the tune Hava Nagilah (from previously mentioned *The Complete Multicultural Party, Vol 18* by Bobby Morganstein), and also Zorba's Dance from *Zorba the Greek* by Mikis Theodorakis, both tunes I downloaded from iTunes.

**Shehan's Reel**

After learning and practicing Marian Rose's Shake Shake Shake, I wanted to do a more lively but still simple dance using grand right and left, so I made up this dance. I used Sheehan's Reel, an Irish tune by Mel Bedard from the album *24 Golden Fiddle Greats* which I downloaded from iTunes.

In a circle with partners, partners facing each other and partners holding hands in crossed position (right hand holding right hand of partner, left holding left).

Part A: sashay in 4, sashay out 4, rpt in and out (16)

Two hand swing both directions (16)

Part B: Grand R & L (16)

Two hand swing with new partner both ways (16)

**O'Sullivan's March**

A good song to do some basic moves for grades three and up. Here is one idea (the numbers are the counts):

Intro: 16 + 16 Form circle (w/ my R hand grab someone's L hand and make a broken circle, lead them into a circle)

Part A Circling L 16 counts, then back R 16 counts

Part B Contract into center (step 3 and tap 1) 8 counts

Expand back out (step three tap 1) 8 counts

Repeat contract/expand 16 counts

Can repeat this until everyone gets it and is on the same beat, then add variations.

Variations: Skip R and L instead of walking in Part A

Lift knee on 4 in contracting in of Part B (step 3 & lift knee on 4)

Sashay L and R in Part A

Hands on hips & Step R-hop In 4x, walk back out 8 for Part B

Grapevine R (cross L over R in front then back) 12, step-step-step for Part A

And any combinations of these, just repeat one over and over until they get it and then change either Part A or Part B and repeat over and over again.

### **Maple Leaf Stomp**

The one in Marian Rose's book is great, but I wanted to use a specific Irish piece of music (Boffyflow and Spike by the Chieftans from their album *A Chieftan's Celebration*, which can be downloaded from iTunes), so I changed the choreography a bit to fit this piece of music, but not much. Bofflyflow has three distinct musical parts. For the part A, which repeats, I used Marian's Part A1 and A2. For part B, I used Marian's Part B1, and then repeated it a second time to fit the music. For part C, I used Marian's part B2.

### **Troika**

I learned this at a community dance and wrote it down.

Form: Lines consisting of three people in spokes around the dance floor, lines all facing the same direction (counterclockwise), so the lines look like spokes of a wheel.

Part A: everyone takes quick running steps, 16 counts

Part B: stop and then outside person of spoke goes under an arch made by middle person and inside person of spoke, 8 counts

then inside person goes under arch made by middle person and outside person, 8 counts

Part C: the three join hands to form a little circle and circle left for 12 counts then stomp three times, 16 counts

Then circle the other way for 12 counts and for the last 4 count send the middle person ahead to join the spoke in front of them and greet the middle person from spoke behind them coming up to join them, 16 counts

Then do the whole dance over again with new middle person. This repeats about 6 or 8 times in the dance. The music fits with this dance and can be downloaded from iTunes: Troika by Kauriga Balalaika Ensemble from an album called *Russian Dances*.