

Dance in the Elementary Classroom

Dance is a universal art form that allows individuals to express emotions and tell stories through movement. In the classroom, dance serves as a dynamic tool for holistic development, integrating physical, social-emotional, and cognitive learning experiences.

What is Dance?

Dance is an art form born out of the human experience. It's an art form in which the body is the instrument. Very few supplies are needed. Dance is one way humans express, tell stories, and connect to themselves, others and the world around them, through the body.

Dance has played many roles and served various purposes throughout history in each unique culture and geographical setting. Everyone has a different perspective, relationship, and experience with movement and the body.

Brief video introduction to dance as an art form.



What is your personal background with dance? What is dance to you? [Answer here.](#)

What is Dance for Children?

Creative dance is a form and style of dance pedagogy focused on supporting the social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development of people through movement exploration and creative expression. Prioritizing developmentally appropriate and significant movement challenges, creative dance pedagogy provides opportunities for students to practice physical skills, make independent and collaborative choices, express divergent solutions, and develop confidence while building healthy habits and strong bodies.

Significant movement challenges within creative dance could include invitations to explore or improvise to an open-ended movement prompt, assignments to create or choreograph a dance based on a theme, or tasks to replicate a sequence or pattern of movement that challenges their focus, collaboration, coordination, strength, agility, endurance, or balance.

The opportunity to experiment with and express creative choices is paramount in creative dance pedagogy and learning. Whether replicating a set sequence, improvising, or choreographing, developing the student's aesthetic awareness and artistic voice is key.



Why Dance in the Classroom?

Dance in the classroom involves students using their bodies to experience, explore, and collaborate toward a deeper understanding of themselves, others and the world around them. Movement can help students prepare to learn (supporting self-regulation, self-awareness, and intention setting), movement can help engage students in challenging tasks or difficult material, and movement can be used to experience, observe, and investigate a topic or phenomenon under study.

Dance provides students with the aesthetic opportunity to engage all the senses, bringing their whole selves to the learning experience. Other reasons to include movement in the classroom include the following:

- Dancing supports physical development and a healthy lifestyle.
- Dance promotes social-emotional health and maturity.
- Movement integrates kinesthetic learning with conceptual understanding.
- Dance explorations provide children with multiple perspectives.
- Dancing nurtures cognitive development and academic engagement.
- Movement helps children develop literacy.
- Dance encourages social interaction and cooperation.
- Movement and dance foster critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills.



What Do I Need to Know About Dance?

Elements of Dance or Basic Elements of Dance



The basic elements and skills of dance include understanding the interactions of the elements of the body, motion, energy, space, and time along with skills in movement composition and improvisation. BODY is the art of dance that takes place in and through the human body. MOTION is the movement included in the act of dancing. SPACE is the personal, general, and performance area used by the dancer. TIME is the duration that describes when a body moves or holds still. ENERGY is the quality that describes how the dancer moves.

"The BODY moves through SPACE with varying TIME and ENERGY"

Watch this video to learn more: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGuD9Geeb2k>

Body

Body is the art of dance that takes place in and through the human body.

- Upper body, lower body, whole body, head, shoulder, back, tail, arm, leg, foot, hand, torso, hip, elbow, neck, wrist, knee, spine, ankle, right side, left side, waist, ear, heel, toe, nose, chin

Body Activity

Watch the video and follow along. What did you feel while following the body part warm-up? How could you use this in your classroom? What did you connect to or think about in this activity?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6aTBE28e64&t=5s>

Motion

Motion is the movement included in the act of dancing.

- LOCOMOTOR (MOVES THROUGH SPACE): walk, run, leap, jump, hop, gallop, prance, skip, slide, roll, crawl, skitter, scoot, cartwheel, somersault
- AXIAL (STAYS IN ONE PLACE): stretch, bend, shake, sink, push, pull, poke, bounce, twist, slash, kick, jab, freeze, spin, turn, carve, spoke, collapse, swing, sway, clap, squeeze, swipe, slice

Motion Activity

Choose a dance video (at least two minutes long) from YouTube that you would like to analyze through the lens of axial and locomotor movement. As you watch the clip (or rewatch the clip) identify all the axial and locomotor movements in the film that you can. Don't worry about whether or not the terms you choose are technically "dance terms." Any verb is a dance term.

Space

Space is the personal, general, and performance area used by the dancer.

- SHAPE: straight, bent, angular, crooked, twisted, curved, symmetrical, asymmetrical
- LEVEL: high, low, middle
- SIZE: huge, tiny, narrow, wide
- PATHWAYS: straight, curved, zigzag
- FOCUS: direct, indirect
- DIRECTION & RELATIONSHIP: up, down, side, forward, backward, diagonal, toward, away, out, in, around, over, under, through, above, below, beside, in front, behind

Space Activity

Follow the video below to create a "space map." A space map is one way to explore the elements of space (or a few) and can be used as a map for choreography.

<https://youtu.be/nFVdzdcumH0>

Time

Time is the duration that describes when a body moves or holds still.

- METRIC RHYTHM: beat, no beat, meter, accent, tempo (fast speed, medium speed, slow speed), note value, rhythm, syncopation, acceleration, deceleration, 3/4 time, 4/4 time, 6/8 time
- RHAPSODIC RHYTHM: non-metric, breath rhythm, wind, water
- DANCE CAN BE PERFORMED: to the beat, in silence, with music playing, with musical instruments, with singing or speaking

Time Activity

Watch two of the three videos below. Take notes. Compare and contrast how each dance work utilizes the elements of time. How are they different? How are they similar? What do you believe is expressed because of the choices made in relation to time?

- [IT Dansa 'Sechs tänze' Jiri Kylián](#)
- [H.A.V.I.C. SQUARED "Stepping on Sesame Steet!!"](#)
- [AMA - a short film by Julie Gautier](#)

Energy

Energy is the quality that describes how the dancer moves.

- DEGREES OF ENERGY (FORCE): strong, weak, heavy, light, bound, free, active, passive
- ENERGY QUALITIES: smooth, sustained, loose, collapse, weightless, suspend, shudder, vibrate, sharp, percussive, explode, swing
- CONTRASTING ENERGIES: prickly, airy, lazy, timid, tired, proud, angry, sluggish, excited, droopy, floppy, rough, jagged

Energy Activity

Watch the following video which gives definitions, demonstration, and examples of the six basic energy qualities. Where do you see these six energy qualities in daily life?

<https://youtu.be/5GP8sfITEZw>



[Click here to download this poster for your classroom.](#)

How Do I Use Dance in My Classroom?

Use dance to reinforce core concepts, introduce new ideas, or as a classroom routine for transitioning to a new activity.

Create a Dance Lesson Plan

If you can think it, you can dance it! Below are two blog posts that can help build your use of dance in the classroom or get you started with easy ways to integrate movement into your teaching.

[How to Create a Dance Lesson Plan](#)

[Dance Warm-Ups](#)



Integrate Dance with Other Subjects

Dance can be easily integrated into core subjects like math, social studies, literacy, science, and health. The blog post below uses a science lesson about planetary movements to illustrate ways to apply dance concepts across the curriculum.

[How to Integrate Dance into Core Curriculum](#)

Support Self-Regulation and Social Cohesion

Dancing supports the connection between the body and the brain. During stressful times, students can learn to use movement and mindfulness as a coping strategy to return to a grounded, engaged state of mind. The blog post below includes a lesson plan from Jessica Jensen, a dance educator in the Jordan School District, sharing movement explorations about different kinds of stress, identifying them, and creating healthy coping strategies.

[Read about a lesson plan using dance for teaching stress and coping strategies.](#)

The Brain Dance

Anne Green Gilbert's Brain Dance is a movement-based practice that aims to stimulate brain development and enhance overall physical and cognitive function. It incorporates a series of movement patterns and exercises designed to activate different areas of the brain and promote integration and coordination.

The Brain Dance consists of eight movements that follow a specific pattern, starting from the head and moving down to the feet. Each movement is performed mindfully and intentionally, focusing on engaging different body parts and activating various neural pathways in the brain.

The eight movements of the Brain Dance include:

1. Breath - Focusing on deep breathing to increase oxygen flow to the brain and energize the body.
2. Tactile - Engaging the sense of touch by exploring different textures and sensations with the hands and feet.
3. Core-Distal - Activating the core muscles and then extending movement to the extremities, promoting stability and efficient movement.
4. Head-Tail - Cultivating alignment and mobility by connecting the movement between the head and tailbone.
5. Upper-Lower - Coordinating movement between the upper and lower body, strengthening the connection between the two.
6. Body-Side - Encouraging movement from side to side to enhance bilateral integration and coordination.
7. Cross-Lateral - Engaging movements that cross the midline of the body, promoting integration between the brain hemispheres.
8. Vestibular - Incorporating movements that stimulate the vestibular system, such as spinning or rolling, to enhance balance and spatial awareness.

By practicing the Brain Dance, individuals can experience improved body awareness, enhanced coordination, increased focus, and a sense of calmness and well-being. People of all ages can use this sequence and its benefits extend beyond the classroom to daily life activities.

Anne Green Gilbert's Brain Dance offers a holistic approach to movement and brain development, emphasizing the interconnectedness of mind and body. It provides a valuable tool for educators, therapists, and individuals seeking to



promote optimal brain function and overall well-being through intentional movement.

BRAIN DANCE

BrainDance developed by Anne Green Gilbert.

BREATH

Nourish and relax.

TACTILE

Squeeze, tap, pat, scratch, brush all body parts.

CORE/DISTAL

Stretch arms, legs, and fingers to open wide then curl up small.

HEAD/TAIL

Move head and tail front-to-back and side-to-side separately and together.

UPPER/LOWER

Move and twist the upper body and then the lower half of body.

BODY/SIDE

Move the right side of the body, then the left side of the body in various ways.

CROSS/LATERAL

Move across midline, march, skip, walk etc.

VESTIBULAR

Move off balance with swings, spins, tips and rolls. Jump or focus the eyes on hands to recover.



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[Click here to download the Brain Dance poster for your classroom.](#)

Brain Dance Resources

Here are a few variations of the Brain Dance on YouTube:

- [Warm up your class with the Brain Dance](#)
- [Fit hop Brain Dance for kids](#)
- [Hokey Pokey variation: ages 3-8](#)

Here is where you can [get more information](#) on the brain benefits of the Brain Dance.

Additional Resources

- [Arts Toolbox](#) - This ebook includes 16 dance activities and video links for the classroom.
- [Arts Playbook](#) - This ebook includes movement activities that support learning readiness and child development.
- [Danceable Ideas](#) - An exploration of the plethora of topics that can be explored through movement.
- [Dance Lesson Plans](#) - Find 44 lesson plans integrating dance with literacy, science, math, and social studies
- Dancing Children's Books - This blog post describes how to use a children's book to facilitate movement in the classroom.
- [Using Dance to Teach the Plant Life Cycle](#) - Here's an example of how one teacher used dance to teach the plant life cycle.
- [Blogs on Dance](#) - Find 16 blogs focused on dance on our website.



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