

Choosing to Continue:

The Benefits of Staying in a Creative Dance Program

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Among the many questions that parents ask about Creative Dance, one that arises periodically is “should Creative Dance just be taken for one session as a fun activity, or would my child benefit by continuing classes? Are there new things to be learned each session, or are the same activities repeated each time?”

At Creative Dance Center, classes focus on basic concepts called the Elements of Dance. These concepts include *Speed*, *Levels*, *Directions*, *Energy*, and about eleven others. During each session the concepts are explored. (Occasionally we will combine two concepts to explore in a single class.) The following session, the same concepts are repeated, in a different order and in new combinations. By the end of two sessions all the elements have been taught twice; and many have been introduced three or four times.

So, once a child has learned about *Levels* or *Directions*, what’s the point of repeating the concept again? Each time a concept is introduced, the students are guided to explore it in a new way. In a class for three and four year olds, *Levels* might be explored using a prop one session, and the following session by playing a body part game. Older students might explore the concept individually, then with partners or in a small group. As children explore the same concept in different ways, their understanding of it expands.

With time, a layering effect happens. A child who understands both *Speed* and *Levels* will begin spontaneously to combine the two – moving slowly on a low level, quickly on a high level, for example. Add the concept *Directions*, and you may begin to see quick, backward movement that changes level. This is one of the things that makes Creative Dance so exciting!

All this is not to say that activities from previous sessions are never repeated. Children love to do their favorite activities again and again, giving them a sense of familiarity and success. And each time they repeat an activity, they bring to it a new depth of understanding. Familiar activities combined with

new challenges make a class both safe and stimulating.

Along with creatively exploring the Elements of Dance, students at Creative Dance Center work to develop dance skills and technique. For three and four year olds, this may be as simple as doing warm-ups to rhymes and songs, and practicing basic locomotor skills like galloping or sliding. For older students, it means practicing technical exercises which increase strength, flexibility, stamina, and control, as well as combining dance steps into rhythmic sequences across the floor. And always, the skills of group cooperation and collaboration are being reinforced.

Once a child has a grasp of the basic concepts and skills as taught to the three to four year old age group, he or she is ready to move on to a class for 4-5 or 5-6 year olds. In these age groups, the same concepts are explored in more complex ways – using partners, developing more advanced skills, learning simple dance combinations, and creating their own dances through beginning choreography. Six to eight year olds do all of the above, as well as working in trios and quartets, learning more complex skills and combinations and expanding their choreographic experience. As students mature, they explore dance concepts and develop skills in ever-increasing subtlety and depth. For each age group, there is repetition and challenge.

Some people tend to think of Creative Dance as merely a stepping-stone to ballet or gymnastics. It can be, just as it can be a stepping-stone to modern dance, jazz, athletics – or life! But it can also be a form of expression in its own right, that doesn’t necessarily lead to anything more than the joy of movement, and the appreciation of dance as an art form.

We at the Creative Dance Center certainly encourage students to move in new directions when they feel the need. But we hope that many of our students will choose to stay with us, and allow their creativity and skills to come to full bloom.