

# Tinies

The Childcare Experts

## The Benefits of Dance for Young Children



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## Introduction

A graduate of the Royal Academy of Dance, Mandy Fouracre has been teaching dance for 30 years. Her main focus and particular area of interest has been the teaching of dance to younger children. In 1994 she founded the Mandy Fouracre Dance Academy in Accra, Ghana which is where the Prima Syllabus was conceived. In 2006 the Lafour Prima Dance Syllabus was published and has proved to be an invaluable resource for teachers of early years in the education sector and in private dance studios both in the UK and abroad.

In this short article she outlines the benefits of dance for young children, and issues which parents may wish to address when selecting an early years dance class.

## Dance for early years



Dance is a universal language and in an age where child obesity is increasing and the taking of exercise is decreasing it has never been more important to present dance to young children in an enjoyable format. In doing so it is more likely that in some form or other participation in dance as a form of exercise may continue into adult life.

It is generally agreed that movement to music is enjoyable for babies and young children irrespective of culture or ethnicity.

### What age to start

The average age for a child to start attending a dance class is around the age of 3yrs. As with most 'averages' there are exceptions to the rule and some children are confident enough to begin at 2.5yrs while others may benefit from starting later than 3yrs.

The 'readiness' of a child to start is based on the following criteria:

- An enjoyment of music and movement
- Confidence to attend a class without a parent or prime carer in attendance
- Familiarisation with a more formal group structure - is the child already attending nursery or playschool for instance
- Awareness of the need to listen and cooperate in a group learning situation
- Preferably no longer wearing nappies

### **Teacher qualifications**

The qualifications framework for dance teachers in the private sector at present is confusing to parents and dance teachers alike. There are a plethora of dance organisations.

The eight Registered Dance Awarding bodies recognised by the Council for Dance Education and training (CDET) are:

- British Ballet Organisation (BBO)
- British Theatre Dance Association (BTDA)
- Royal Academy of Dance (RAD)
- Imperial Society of Dance (ISTD)
- International Dance Teachers Association (IDTA)
- National Association of Teachers of Dancing (NATD)
- Spanish Dance Society (SDS)
- United Kingdom Alliance of Professional Teachers of Dancing and Kindred Arts (UKA)
- RockschooL (Performance Arts Award)



All of these organisations operate their own training courses for teachers and offer their own qualifications, some of which are validated in conjunction with external authorising bodies or are accredited by the Qualifications & Curriculum Association (QCA).

### **Teachers in the education sector**

Teachers in the education sector have Qualified Teacher status. In secondary schools dance teachers usually teach other related subjects as well as dance, for example drama, performing arts or physical education.

In primary schools, dance is usually taught by the class teacher.

### **Communication skills of teachers**

Qualifications alone do not guarantee that teachers are good communicators of their subject. It is essential that teachers of dance to early years communicate appropriately according to the particular stage of development of the child.

A dance class for young children should capture the imagination; provide enjoyment in movement and a basic technique which can be built on in the future.

## **Dance programme**

It is important that the programme is age appropriate and logical progression so that the interest and imagination of the children is engaged. There should be evaluation criteria with defined learning outcomes at the end of each year the results of which should be available to the parent or prime carer.

The structure, content and accompanying music of an early years dance programme is of key importance and should include the following elements:

- Variety
- Imagination
- Travelling movements - children like to move
- Song
- Music which complements and enhances the actions
- An understanding of basic principles of movement
- Fun games which have an intrinsic learning element
- Surprise!
- Solo, partner and group work
- Story telling



## **Finding an appropriate class – what to do**

1. Ask friends and other mums with children who already attend a class as recommendation can be a useful starting point
2. Visit two classes so that you have a reference point of comparison
3. Teacher qualifications - discover what they are
4. Communication skills of the teacher and the response of the children in the class should be noted when visiting
5. Dance programme - which syllabus is being used and how does it progress
6. Evaluation - what is the evaluation criteria
7. Annual assessment report - is this provided for parents?
8. A trial lesson for your child is recommended before a final decision is made

Parents may also wish to investigate the following administrative issues:

- Health and safety
- Medical conditions
- Insurance
- Safe dance practice
- Emergency procedures
- Criminal Record Bureau enhanced disclosure checks
- Terms of notice
- Fees
- Open days for parents to observe
- Changing room facilities
- Toileting
- Arrival and collection of children
- Uniform - if applicable



### **Early years education sector**

Teachers in early years education generally have more experience of teaching and communicating with the age group than teachers in the private dance sector.

Nursery schools using an age appropriate dance programme can deliver an excellent early years dance experience to boys and girls. This is increasingly becoming recognized as a valuable addition to an early years curriculum.

The advantages are:

- Parents and prime carers do not have to spend time out of school hours taking their child to an extra curricular dance class
- An early years dance experience would be available to more children
- Boys would benefit from participating
- All children would be taking more exercise



### **The benefits of an early years dance experience**

#### **Physical Development**

- Moving safely, imaginatively and with confidence
- Moving with bodily control, co-ordination, flexibility and balance
- The development of spatial awareness
- Dancing with props; developing manipulative skills
- Experiencing a range of gross motor movements and fine motor movements
- Keeping healthy - dance as part of a healthy lifestyle

#### **Creative Development**

- Communicating ideas, thoughts and feelings non-verbally through movement
- Using the imagination to create ideas, characters and narratives
- Making movement responses

#### **Personal, Social and Emotional Development**

- Having an enjoyable, exciting and motivating time
- Working individually, with a partner and as part of a group
- Developing trust and co-operation
- Selecting and using movement ideas independently and with others
- Exploring feelings and views of self and others - including other cultures and beliefs
- Accepting the moral code on which discipline and courtesy within the group is based
- Interacting with a new social group

## Communication, Language and Literacy Development

- The use of sounds, music, words, poems, rhymes, texts and stories as stimuli for, and accompaniment to dance
- The use of language to imagine and recreate roles and ideas in the dance
- Interaction - negotiating plans and activities and developing conversational skills
- Appreciation - talking about personal dance performance
- Observation - talking about the dance performance of others
- Developing a vocabulary of movement

## Lafour Prima Dance Syllabus

For further information regarding the Lafour Prima 1 & 2 Syllabus and/or the teacher training option please visit [www.lafourprimadance.com](http://www.lafourprimadance.com) or contact Mandy Fouracre B Phil (Hons) creator of the syllabus via email [info@lafourprimadance.com](mailto:info@lafourprimadance.com).



Teacher comments: I started incorporating your work this year, and just love the progression and age appropriate ideas you have given and have found it to be an amazing tool for teaching children to focus and differentiate between different kinds of music. At the moment I run the different characters in the music medley one after the other, and switch the order every week - some children can identify the music immediately; others never do so without help. This also allows me to identify and work with focus/sensory issues long before they would be evident otherwise.

All information and advice contained in this resource are meant as guidance only.

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