

Chapter 1

Why Is It Important to Teach Children Dance?

Imagine a class of young children running as fast as they can, waving red streamers over their heads, then spinning around and slowly descending to the floor with the streamers floating down beside them. Through these dance movements, children might be expressing their interpretations of a fast-burning flame that slowly flickers out. Now imagine yourself as the teacher who presented this challenge to the class. The children responded with great enthusiasm, and you feel successful in bringing this experience to them.

At this point you may feel that there is no way you could design such a dance experience, especially one you could be sure would be well received. Many teachers feel just this way about teaching dance. You may have asked yourself questions like these in the past:

- How can I be expected to design a meaningful dance experience for my students when I do not have a dance background?
- How can I as a “nondancer” teach dance to other “nondancers”?
- What will my students be missing if they do not have dance as part of their program?
- Even if I am interested, where do I begin?
- Why does teaching dance seem so overwhelming?
- How do I know that what I am teaching is really dance and not just creative movement?

I believe that all educators can learn to teach dance, even those who continue to identify them-

selves as “nondancers.” Teaching dance does not require being an accomplished dancer or knowing everything about every form of dance. It does require teachers who are dedicated to delivering quality physical education programs to their students—and dance is essential to a comprehensive quality program.

Even if you agree that dance is integral to physical education, you may feel unable to attempt teaching it. But I ask you to consider the knowledge and skills you already have that will help you take your first or next steps to teach dance.

You have chosen your profession because you enjoy moving and have found success in your pursuit of physical activity. You may also like to create new possibilities for movement—developing a new game strategy, a new gymnastics floor exercise, or a new way to shoot a basketball. Ideas for new sport movements are created every day by people who say, “What if I did this? Can I? Is there another way?” Those who dance or teach dance also enjoy moving. They welcome the challenges of learning and creating movements. Dance and games share a common goal—they have a purpose and meaning. One purpose may be to score a point, the other may be to communicate through movement the sadness of a broken friendship.

You can rely on your experience teaching children to provide the necessary knowledge for selecting the types of dance activities that are appropriate for your students. You already know that children

like to move and enjoy attending physical education classes. You are familiar with their past learning experiences in dance, and you can anticipate their attitude of acceptance toward future experiences. Your experience has taught you that all children enjoy creating new games and new ways to move, that they want to share their accomplishments and to be successful. You acknowledge that each of your students needs to learn in a caring and nonthreatening atmosphere and does not want to feel vulnerable. You are aware of what topics for a dance learning experience would be interesting and relevant for different ages. You have already planned and implemented successful movement experiences, and your teaching experiences have taught you to try another approach if a lesson does not go well the first time. This knowledge of children and experience teaching them applies easily to teaching dance. You already have a wealth of teaching strategies; now you can learn the content needed to present a dance experience.

Consider changing the “nondancer” label you have given yourself to “beginning dancer.” It may be appropriate to tell students that this is a new experience for you as well as for them—together you and your students will share in this new learning experience. Be confident that when you allow students to become more involved in the learning experience they will be helpful and full of ideas. Learning to teach dance begins with being willing to try something new, to take a risk, and to persist so you can improve. It will not be easy—you will run into reluctant students and nonsupportive

peers. But why not make your teaching career full and exciting?

What Is Dance?

Dance appears in the elementary physical education curriculum in many forms: folk, creative, square, social, creative movement, rhythm, or line dances. Many teachers are familiar with these forms and may already include some or all of them in their programs. Including dance as part of the curriculum will ensure that children have the opportunity to participate in developmentally appropriate dance experiences.

Dance is a way of moving different from other types of movement taught in the physical education curriculum. It is the only form of moving that meets the child’s innate need to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas through movement. All other types of movement in the curriculum are functional—students learn them to perform a specific skill, such as throwing a ball upward to get it through the basketball net or distributing the body weight on the hands in an inverted position to perform a handstand (see Figure 1.1a and b), efficiently and deliberately. Students can use these same movements in dance; however, they use them to support and illustrate an idea, thought, or feeling (see Figure 1.2). Both types of movement experiences are necessary for children to develop their full potential. Dance is more than exploring different ways to make a shape or learning a series of steps to music;

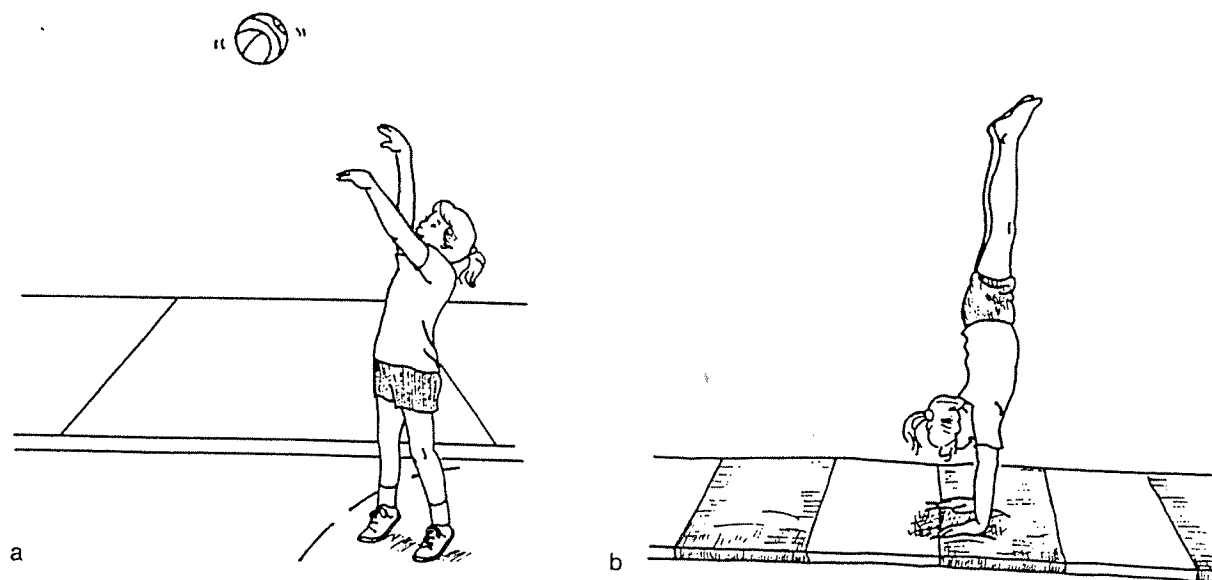


Figure 1.1 (a) Functional movement, shooting a basket. (b) Functional movement, students supporting their weight in a handstand.



Figure 1.2 Example of expressive movement. Children are in a stretched shape expressing the feeling of reaching toward the sky.

it is a way of moving that uses the body as the instrument for expression and communication. The child as a dancer can be compared to the paintbrush of a visual artist. Dance movements are like the colors, lines, shapes, and textures a painter uses to express ideas. The empty space where dancing occurs can be compared to the artist's blank piece of paper. Every painter interprets a sunset, a flower, or the feeling of anger differently, and through dance movement children express their own interpretation of an idea.

As the New Jersey Literacy in the Arts Task Force Report (1989) states,

Since the dawn of time, dance has been used to express joy and sorrow. In no other activity do human beings, in a very fundamental way, become their own creations. The experience of self-creation is one that must be nurtured in all our children, and it can be achieved most powerfully, perhaps, through the language we call dance. (p. 20)

Awakening of New Perceptions

Each time children experience dance, whether as dancers, viewers, or creators, they gain new perceptions about themselves and their world. They learn more about who they are, how they move, what they think, how they feel, and how they relate to others. For example, after participating in a dance about the shapes and movements of clouds, children may look into the sky and see clouds in a new way. They experienced how it feels to move slowly and lightly, as clouds move. They learned to observe different cloud shapes more closely and to represent

those shapes with their own bodies. They moved together to demonstrate their view of small clouds combining to form a larger cloud. Through the dance experience, their perceptions of clouds have changed.

This awakening to new perceptions and understandings is an aesthetic experience formed through applying knowledge of how to use common elements of movement as the vocabulary to express and communicate an idea. For example, the teacher would use the following ideas to lead the cloud dance: "Find a way to use your arms to create a long cloud shape. What pathway will you use to travel across the room in your cloud shape? Change your speed to demonstrate how slow and how fast the clouds move. How can you and another person connect your cloud shapes and move together?" (See Figure 1.3.)

All dance movement is the result of a series of qualitative decisions about how the elements of movement will be used to make a statement. The way the dance movement uses space, time, energy, and the dancers' relations to each other is the result of purposeful decision making. This is true for both traditional folk dance and creative dance. Traditional folk dances were designed in a specific way to reflect a particular aspect of a culture. Creative dances are also based on a series of individual or group decisions about the best way to use movement to express an idea. The dance can express the events experienced at a birthday party or differences in how the body can move in straight and curved lines.

Dance in the elementary school curriculum gives students a variety of dance experiences that allow them both to create their own dance movements and to learn dances that were previously created by others. In both types of dance students may dance

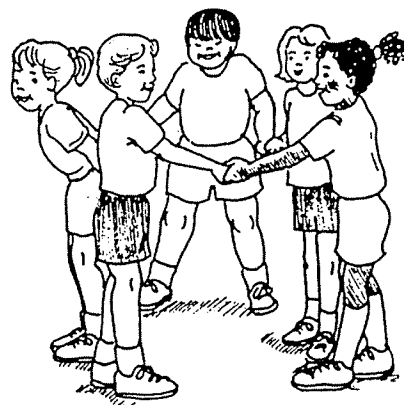


Figure 1.3 Young children holding hands in a circle to demonstrate the shape of a cloud.

individually, with a partner, or in small and large groups.

' Creative Dance

The term *creative dance* will be used to describe dance movement created by the students. The initial idea for the dance may be generated by the teacher or the students. Examples of creative dance can include the following:

- A third-grade class is studying a science unit on bubbles. They form a list of vocabulary words that describe how bubbles move. Then they create dance movements to illustrate the vocabulary words. The students develop a three-word sequence, such as *pop*, *float*, *burst*, and create a dance that reflects the word sequence.
- A sixth-grade class has recently studied poetry and learned to write their own poems. They select three poems that can be expressed through dance. The class forms three groups and each group creates a dance to represent the selected poem.
- A fourth-grade class creates a large group dance to demonstrate three different shapes: straight, twisted, and curved. They focus on how to change from one shape to another using different tempos (see Figure 1.4).
- The kindergarten classes create a dance about the animals and people they recently saw at the circus. They choose lions jumping through hoops; elephants balancing on one, two, three, and four feet; high-wire walkers; people swinging on the trapeze; and clowns with giant feet who fall and roll.

- A fifth-grade class in groups of three creates a dance that uses movements from everyday life such as brushing teeth, riding a bicycle, petting a dog, eating a sandwich, or reading a book. They perform the dances to different types of music and discuss how the movements changed to fit the music.
- A class studying China creates a dance about the different ways people greet each other in that country.
- The opening of baseball season hits the front page of the newspaper. A class creates a dance that reflects the movements that occur in a baseball game. They use running, catching, batting, pitching, and the "wave" movement of the fans.

Dances Created by Others

Traditional folk, square, and social dances were previously created by others, as are dances choreographed by a professional choreographer, the teacher, or another student. The following are some examples:

- A creative dance about bubbles designed by one student or group of students with designated movements and a repeatable sequence and taught to a partner or another small group of students
- A traditional folk dance such as the Mexican Hat Dance, Troika, or Virginia Reel
- A popular dance from a particular time period, such as the twist or the lindy
- A social dance, such as the Hokey Pokey, Alley Cat, cha-cha, or polka
- A square dance, such as the Texas Star or Oh Johnny

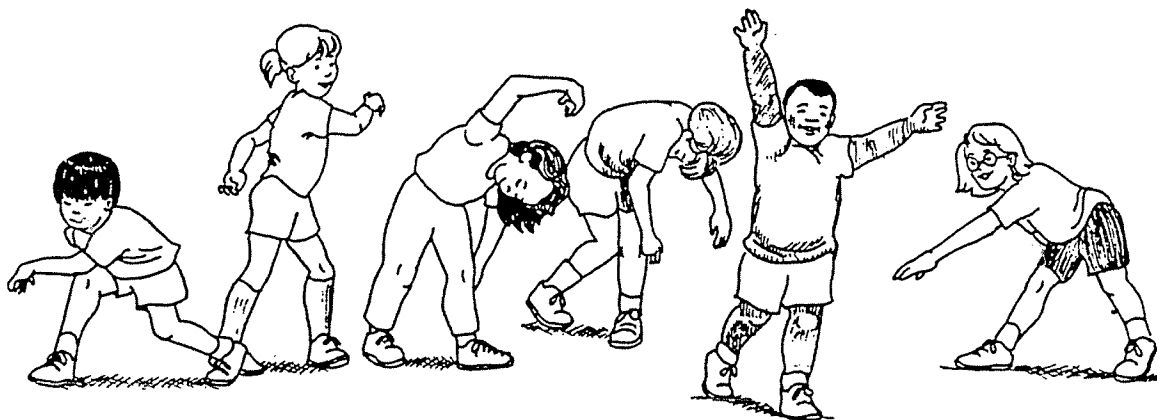


Figure 1.4 In a creative dance learning experience, children explore different ways to make straight, twisted, and curved shapes.

- A popular line dance from the 1990s such as the Electric Slide
- A dance by a professional choreographer in the school as an artist in residence
- A dance created by the teacher about occupations of the 1990s for the fourth-grade classes studying about careers (see Figure 1.5)

Why Teach Dance?

Dance is an essential element of a high-quality, comprehensive physical education program. It provides necessary balance in a curriculum that primarily focuses on functional movement. Children need to have the opportunity to develop their abilities to use movement for both functional and expressive purposes. They should participate in a full range of experiences to learn the many possibilities for movement.

Dance addresses the needs of children to express and communicate their ideas, to understand and know themselves and their world, and to master their own movement abilities.

Children Need to Express and Communicate Their Ideas

Dance addresses children's need for expression and communication in the following ways. It

- allows children to use their natural creative instincts to make a statement about their world;
- encourages children to reach beyond the conventional response to a movement task and discover new ways to move, feel, perceive, and understand themselves and others in their environment;

- teaches children another avenue of expression and communication in addition to writing, speaking, the visual arts, music, and theater (literacy in all these areas is important to provide options for increasing the quality of interaction with others);
- develops imagination, creativity, and the ability to make decisions through creating new dance movement;
- provides opportunities for children to share in the experience of creating together; and
- increases opportunities for children to create, perform, observe, and discuss movement.

Children Need to Know and Understand Themselves and Their World

Dance enables children to gain understanding of themselves and the world around them. It

- reinforces learning about the basic movement elements of space, time, force, flow, and relationships, which are common to all movement activities in the physical education curriculum;
- recognizes the contributions of all cultures to the fabric of the American society through learning traditional folk dances and creating new folk dances;
- increases understanding of how dance represents the traditions, beliefs, and values of a culture;
- enhances the skills of perception, observation, and concentration;
- defines and clarifies one's ideas, thoughts, or feelings;

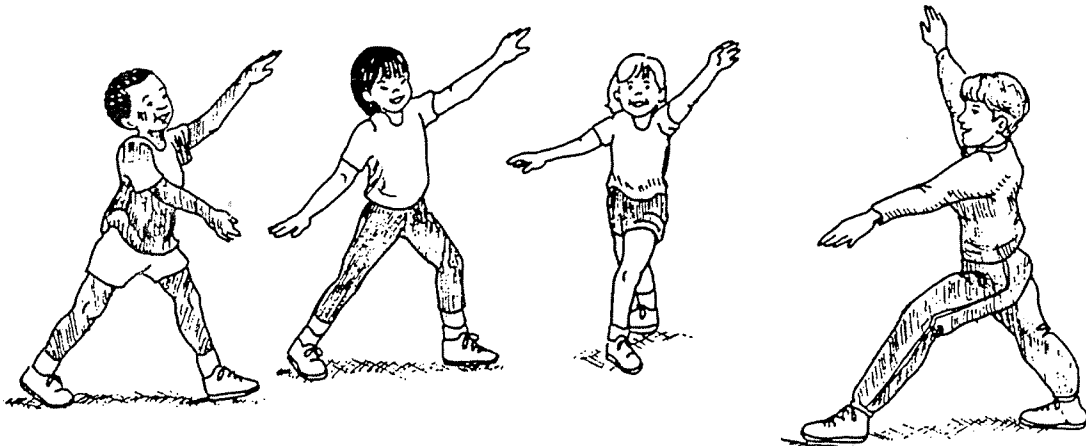


Figure 1.5 Learning dances created by others expands a child's movement vocabulary.

- plays a significant role in total education by integrating cognitive, motor, and affective development within each learning experience;
- increases knowledge about the different ways to move;
- develops a self-concept—who you are and where you belong;
- helps children recognize similarities and differences among people; and
- changes the way children perceive their world.

Children Need to Master Their Own Movement Abilities

Dance helps children master their movement abilities by

- expanding the basic vocabulary of motor skills,
- increasing experiences that provide learning about the infinite ways the body is capable of moving, and
- enhancing motor learning through repetition and practice of dance movements.

Children who participate in a variety of dance experiences have the opportunity to discover how to use their bodies as instruments of expression and communication. They will find the joy of moving to a rhythm, running across a space and leaping into the air, spinning around and collapsing to the floor, and freezing in a shape. All children have a right to experience the joy of dancing—it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that they have the opportunity.

What Are the Outcomes of Dance?

Appropriate dance experiences for children will reflect the unique characteristics of different age levels in their content and presentation. Every child comes to school with a different set of life experiences and needs. A dance curriculum that encourages and celebrates what each individual brings to the learning experience recognizes these differences.

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education's Outcomes Committee (Franck et al., 1991) has defined the outcomes of quality physical education programs that develop a "physically educated" child (see Figure 1.6). The outcomes are divided into three domains: psychomotor (Has, Is, and Does), cognitive (Knows), and affective (Values). Dance, as a component of the curriculum that contributes to the goal of physically educating children,

fully integrates learning in all three of these domains.

"Benchmarks," or sample grade-specific competencies, have also been developed by the Outcomes Committee (Franck et al., 1991) to accompany and further define the outcomes statements (see Figure 1.7). These benchmarks can be used as indicators of whether or not students are moving toward becoming physically educated. Learning experiences in dance will help students to achieve benchmarks in each of the three domains.

Psychomotor Development

The dance component in a physical education curriculum provides a variety of experiences to help children achieve psychomotor benchmarks (refer to Figure 1.7). In this domain, skills related to the areas of body awareness, space awareness, effort, and relationships can be found. These skills are basic to the dance curriculum and are integrated into every task in it. The list also includes traveling and locomotor movements, including chasing, fleeing, dodging, jumping, landing, rolling, balancing, and weight transfer. These skills are the vehicles children use for expression and communication. The way they use the skills depends on what a specific dance is about.

The book on motor skills in this series (Buschner, 1994) describes the essential skills necessary for motor development and provides examples of learning activities. Dance learning experiences will provide children opportunities to continue to develop motor skills and to expand the use of these skills in their lives. Teaching a child to skip, for example, involves the motor pattern of combining a step and hop, alternating the right and left feet. In addition, rhythm, direction, force, position of the body in space, and the relationship of one foot to the other must be considered in skipping. After the basic skip is developed the child can then perform it in a variety of different ways—as part of a folk dance that describes how a group travels, for instance, or as a way of expressing excitement.

Cognitive Development

This area of development refers to knowing about one's body and how it moves and relates to others and the environment. Children gain information about themselves and their world through active

A Physically Educated Person

- **Has** learned skills necessary to perform a variety of physical activities:
 1. Moves using concepts of body awareness, space awareness, effort, and relationships
 2. Demonstrates competence in a variety of manipulative, locomotor, and nonlocomotor skills
 3. Demonstrates competence in combinations of manipulative, locomotor, and nonlocomotor skills performed individually and with others
 4. Demonstrates competence in many different forms of physical activity
 5. Demonstrates proficiency in a few forms of physical activity
 6. Has learned how to learn new skills
- **Is** physically fit:
 7. Assesses, achieves, and maintains physical fitness
 8. Designs safe, personal fitness programs in accordance with principles of training and conditioning
- **Does** participate regularly in physical activity:
 9. Participates in health enhancing physical activity at least three times a week
 10. Selects and regularly participates in lifetime physical activities
- **Knows** the implications of and the benefits from involvement in physical activities:
 11. Identifies the benefits, costs, and obligations associated with regular participation in physical activity
 12. Recognizes the risk and safety factors associated with regular participation in physical activity
 13. Applies concepts and principles to the development of motor skills
 14. Understands that wellness involves more than being physically fit
 15. Knows the rules, strategies, and appropriate behaviors for selected physical activities
 16. Recognizes that participation in physical activity can lead to multicultural and international understanding
 17. Understands that physical activity provides the opportunity for enjoyment, self-expression, and communication
- **Values** physical activity and its contribution to a healthful lifestyle:
 18. Appreciates the relationships with others that result from participation in physical activity
 19. Respects the role that regular physical activity plays in the pursuit of lifelong health and well-being
 20. Cherishes the feelings that result from regular participation in physical activity

Figure 1.6 Outcomes of quality physical education programs. *Note.* The “Physically Educated Person” document containing these outcomes and accompanying benchmarks (see Figure 1.7) can be obtained by contacting NASPE at 1900 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091-1599 or by calling 1-800-321-0789. *Note.* From *Physical Education Outcomes: A Project of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education* by M. Franck, G. Graham, H. Lawson, T. Loughrey, R. Ritson, M. Sanborn, and V. Seefeldt (the Outcomes Committee of NASPE), 1991. Reprinted by permission of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, Reston, VA.

interaction—they learn best through doing. Children comprehend the concepts of distance, pathways, speed, shape, and levels by repeatedly moving in many different ways.

Dance integrates development of the cognitive abilities within each task in a learning experience. For example, in the task “Using your hand and arm, draw a curved line in the air in front of your body,” children need knowledge of the arm as a body part, of the meaning of the word *curved*, of the location of the air space in front of the body, and of how to physically make the movement. If the child does not demonstrate the anticipated response, knowledge of one of the components of the task may be

missing. The teacher will need to take the task apart and investigate what knowledge is missing, then develop tasks that help children learn the appropriate information. Dance experiences increase a child’s knowledge of the body and its infinite possibilities of movement. Children will go beyond the basic cognitive abilities of recognition, recall, and familiarity to manipulate factual knowledge to a new level of comprehension (New Jersey Literacy in the Arts Task Force, 1989).

Another cognitive ability frequently used in dance is evaluation, making a judgment, either objective or subjective, about the movement. An objective evaluation is clearly observed and reported in

As a result of participating in a quality physical education program, it is reasonable to expect that the student will be able to do the following:

Psychomotor Domain (Has, Is, Does)

- Demonstrate clear contrasts between slow and fast speeds as they travel (K, #3)
- Distinguish between straight, curved, and zigzag pathways while traveling in various ways (K, #4)
- Make both large and small body shapes as they travel (K, #5)
- Place a variety of body parts into high, middle, and low levels (K, #7)
- Form round, narrow, wide, and twisted body shapes alone and with a partner (K, #14)
- Walk and run using a mature motor pattern (K, #15)
- Travel, changing speeds and directions, in response to a variety of rhythms (1-2, #2)
- Combine various traveling patterns in time to the music (1-2, #3)
- Combine shapes, levels, and pathways into simple sequences (1-2, #17)
- Skip, hop, gallop, and slide using mature motor patterns (1-2, #18)
- Develop patterns and combinations of movements into repeatable sequences (3-4, #8)
- Design and perform dance sequences that combine traveling, rolling, balancing, and weight transfer into smooth, flowing sequences with intentional changes in direction, speed, and flow (5-6, #4)

Cognitive Domain (Knows)

- Identify selected body parts, skills, and movement concepts (K, #18)
- Recognize similar movement concepts in a variety of skills (1-2, #23)
- Identify ways movement concepts can be used to refine movement skills (3-4, #21)
- Design dance sequences that are personally interesting (3-4, #26)
- Recognize the role of dance in getting to know and understand others of like and different cultures (5-6, #19)
- Detect, analyze, and correct errors in personal movement patterns (5-6, #24)
- Describe ways to use the body and movement activities to communicate ideas and feelings (5-6, #25)

Affective Domain (Values)

- Respect persons from different backgrounds and the cultural significance they attribute to various dances and physical activities (3-4, #28)
- Enjoy feelings resulting from involvement in physical activity (3-4, #29)
- Seek out, participate with, and show respect for persons of like and different skill levels (5-6, #27)

Figure 1.7 Sample benchmarks relevant for dance. The first number in parentheses following each benchmark relates to the grade level that benchmark can be found under in the NASPE document; the second number gives the specific benchmark for that grade level. These will be referenced to objectives for learning experiences in Part II of this text, when appropriate. See page 53 for further information.

Note. From *Physical Education Outcomes: A Project of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education* by M. Franck, G. Graham, H. Lawson, T. Loughrey, R. Ritson, M. Sanborn, and V. Seefeldt (the Outcomes Committee of NASPE), 1991. Adapted by permission of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, Reston, VA.

a factual manner. For example, you may ask students to observe their partners holding their bodies in a balanced shape and count how many body parts are touching the floor. Asking questions that require personal reflections, opinions, or ideas as part of the response will elicit subjective evaluations. You may ask "What do you think was the theme of the dance?" or "What was the most exciting part of the dance for you?"

You can evaluate a student's cognitive abilities—knowledge, comprehension, application, and evaluation—by asking for verbal, written, or movement responses. After a dance learning experience, ask the students to verbally describe a sequence of movements used in a folk dance, to draw the

shapes used in a partner body sculpture, or to demonstrate a movement from the lesson that used strong energy.

Affective Development

Children need to feel successful in what they pursue and accomplish. They also have a need to express their joy, fear, anger, frustration, and excitement and communicate about their world. Dance recognizes and fulfills both needs.

Through dance children discover who they are, how they move, where they can move, how it feels to move in different ways, what movements they like to do, and how those movements are different

from and similar to others. They learn to make decisions, develop their imaginations, express ideas and feelings, and share with others. All this discovering and learning becomes part of a child's self-concept and produces self-esteem. Dancing can make children feel proud of the way they move or it can make them feel vulnerable. "I can't do it" or "I don't know how" are said by children who are unsure of themselves. Children are immediately aware of what they can and cannot do as they begin to move, and they know that others are also aware of how they are moving. Pioneer modern dancer Martha Graham states "Movement is the one speech that cannot lie. In movement, all that is false or too obviously learned becomes glaringly apparent" (DeMille, 1991, p. 22).

The body is the instrument that reveals how a child feels inside. The way children move through space, use time and force, and relate to others and their environment reveals these feelings. For example, children express feelings of anger by stomping their feet and pounding their hands. These movements can become the inspiration for creating a dance about anger. Dance provides children with the means to express and communicate what they feel and know about themselves and their world.

The teacher plays an important role in ensuring that the dance experience is positive and successful for all children. Each learning experience must be designed to match the appropriate developmental level of the children. Dance learning experiences for a 5-year-old child are very different in content and presentation than experiences designed for a 9-year-old child. All children need frequent positive reinforcement from the teacher and from peers. Most children want the teacher to watch them and respond with a positive comment. Young children frequently say "Watch me," "Watch how I can do it," "Look at me." They depend upon the teacher for approval, and positive attention helps motivate them to stay focused in the learning experience. Positive comments followed by a specific description of what the teacher observed reinforces that the child's effort is acceptable and has value. For example, a teacher commenting on a turn begins by saying "That was wonderful," then follows with "That turn was very high off the floor, your head stayed up, and you landed with control." The

teacher can go on to question the child, asking "What did you do that made the landing so smooth?" In a situation in which two children have designed a repetitive movement to reflect the movement of a machine part, the teacher may comment "Your movements are very clear and both of you can keep the rhythm going at the same time. That's great the way you both work together."

Teachers can make the difference in the attitudes that children develop about dance. Commitment to preparing and presenting a dance experience that is exciting, relevant, and developmentally appropriate is essential for effective and meaningful teaching. The reason to teach dance must go beyond meeting the requirements of a curriculum. The teacher should believe in the value of teaching dance, be enthusiastic, and be willing to persevere despite the reluctance of students to dance. These teachers will feel both personally and professionally successful and their positive attitude will affect their students' success in learning.

Summary

All children need to express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings. Dance can fulfill this need for children when presented in developmentally appropriate learning experiences. These experiences should include movement that is natural for children, yet allows them to develop their individual movement vocabularies. A comprehensive dance program will provide opportunities to create dances, learn dances created by others, observe dance, and talk about dance.

Dance should hold a strong place in the physical education curriculum. By teaching movement for expression and communication, dance complements the acquisition of motor skills to perform a function. Movement in dance is initiated by intent—there is a reason for the movement and it has meaning. Participation in dance can promote self-discovery in the many possibilities of movement. The teacher and student must enter the learning experience together with enthusiasm, a positive attitude, and the willingness to allow the joy of dancing to envelop them.