

AGES

3-4

DEVELOPMENTAL EXPECTATIONS FOR CREATIVE DANCE

Concepts/Issues

Practicing self-control
Forming a sense of self
Concrete learners
Egocentric
Separating from parents

Skills integrated

Identifies body parts
Stops self
Holds shape still

Ideas that work at this age / Skills to practice

Exploration as main focus
Explorations that define space
Relationship explorations using toward/away, in/out, on/off
Extremes of high/low, big/little, open/closed, fast/slow
Intentional manipulation of body parts
Locomotor skills and maintaining shape while traveling
Control of falls
Response to breath rhythms, percussive and vibratory qualities
Beginning, middle, end

Unrealistic teacher expectations*

Can handle more than one or two directions at a time
Can understand another's perspective
Can maintain boundaries easily between self and other
Can take turns easily
Can watch without fiddling
Can find middle range
Can make gradual changes in size or speed

Things to remember

Intention is everything
Easily influenced by peers, parents, teacher comments (both praise and criticism), and by the power and joy of their own ideas
The social group is as important as the dance
They will be led by music, not the rhythm of their own movement idea

* "Nearly impossible expectations" does not mean that some children cannot understand or master these skills; rather, the column refers to concepts that often frustrate teachers when they expect children to have these skills and they don't. Instead of spending a lot of time "teaching" these skills, teachers should focus on the skills that are developmentally appropriate, knowing that the other skills will come with experience and maturity.

DEVELOPMENTAL EXPECTATIONS
FOR CREATIVE DANCE

AGES

4-5

Concepts/Issues

Power and autonomy
Imagination
Lots of energy
Gender identification
Still concrete

Skills integrated

All of the age 3-4 group plus:
Masters some locomotion skills
Controls falls
Responds to various qualities
Can identify various aspects of movement using verbal language

Ideas that work at this age / Skills to practice

Physical boundaries
Improvisation main focus
Learning how to cooperate to problem-solve—work in pairs
Humor (comedy, problem-solving that might seem ridiculous—e.g., find a way to jump when your belly is on the ground, pratfalls, etc.)
Learning to respect one another's space, bodies, and ideas
Progression and in-between stages; e.g., going from the fastest to the slowest (gradually)
Combining two or more elements at a time

Unrealistic teacher expectations*

They can keep their bodies off one another
Already understand respect and cooperation
Can take on another's perspective
Can master and differentiate locomotor skills such as skip, assemblé, leap, sissone

Things to remember

Lots of high-energy activity—keep them moving
Just beginning to be part of larger social group
Concerned with gender identification. Boys love to dance and can be encouraged a great deal at this age. Both boys and girls are learning to categorize in school and may make rigid definitions of boy or girl. It is tricky to respect that gender identification is a normal aspect of development while making sure stereotypes and gender bias are not condoned.

AGES
5-6

DEVELOPMENTAL EXPECTATIONS
FOR CREATIVE DANCE

Concepts/Issues

Skill development
Teachers important
Interested in forming
Can be rigid
Concerned with inadequacy and inferiority
Want to be useful

Skills integrated

All of the previous age groups skills, plus:
Most locomotor skills
Basic group socialization
Working in groups
Making conscious combinations of elements

Ideas that work at this age / Skills to practice

Mirror, shadow, and other partner games
Working as a team
Rhythmic patterns, meter, accent
Observation skills—watch and move, watch and describe without judgment
Identification of what they are doing and observing—using language of dance
Extending explorations beyond the first clever solution
Designing phrases in rhythm and movement

Unrealistic teacher expectations

They can name what they see without judgment
They won't get frustrated and want to know what exactly is the "right" answer
the teacher seeks
That all children can skip
Skills as a rigid set of achievements

Things to remember

Experimentation—needs to be encouraged
Beware of children's frustration with their work; watch for rigidity, judgment,
or feeling inadequate or inferior
Their seeming lack of interest in creativity is not permanent

DEVELOPMENTAL EXPECTATIONS
FOR CREATIVE DANCE

AGES

7-9

Concepts/Issues

Conscientious application of knowledge

Higher-level intellectual processes

Understanding of the principles of creativity and elements of dance

Literal

Skills integrated

With experience, is comfortable and skilled in exploring all of the elements of dance

Can usually read and write; has experience processing knowledge in multiple symbolic modalities

Ideas that work at this age/ Skills to practice

Technical skills in the service of creative expression

Learning to reflect and edit their work

Movement analysis

Conscious application of elements of dance toward moving from literal to abstract

Creating movement and rhythm phrases and teaching them to one another

Combining media

Unrealistic teacher expectations

They can grasp both that all solutions are valued and that there is a higher standard to achieve for each individual. Yet, this is the journey.

Things to remember

How to individualize challenges and standards for each child in accordance with their own creative goals

Most important: that the teacher recognize her own bias and unconscious reinforcement of certain aesthetics

<p>AGES 9-12</p>

DEVELOPMENTAL EXPECTATIONS FOR CREATIVE DANCE

Concepts/Issues

Likes to synthesize and analyze
 Curious about how the world works; asks "What if . . . ?"
 Form is important
 Want to show what they know
 Wide range of maturity levels
 Changing from egocentric to peer-centered
 Developing formal operations and abstract thought

Skills integrated

Can make hypothesis and develop theories
 Has knowledge base and life experience to draw on for theory-making
 Has reading, writing, communication skills
 Can create form
 Can listen, observe, contribute
 Has motor coordination

Ideas that work at this age/ Skills to practice

Provide children with lots of opportunities to explore, work with props, work with each other
 Problem solving and posing
 Provide children with opportunities to create form and manipulate it; let them ask, "What if we tried . . . ?" and try it
 Using choreographic tools to manipulate form
 Group Composition
 Fantasy
 Performance skills
 Group performing compositions for other peer groups

Unrealistic teacher expectations

They are all the same
 They don't need praise because they are so competent
 Teacher can ignore their emotional needs

Things to remember

Provide opportunities to show what they know
 Curiosity does not mean that they are open—they can be into "defining" interests

DEVELOPMENTAL EXPECTATIONS
FOR CREATIVE DANCE

TEENS

Concepts/Issues

Bodies changing
Threshold between childhood/adulthood
Societal roles and expectations
Seeking meaning
Seeking identity
Navigating relationships with adults, peers, friends, and romantic interests

Skills integrated

Ability to think in abstract
Fluent in formal operations
Uses more complex verbal and writing skills

Ideas that work at this age/ Skills to practice

Improvisation games
Articulation of meaning through many media
Controlling changing bodies
Role playing
Exploration of community and questioning of norms
Exploration of culture—their own and others'
Expressing personal meaning
Letting students take leadership role
Props and costumes

Unrealistic teacher expectations

They'll behave consistently from one day to another
Are as confident as they might appear
Can do without your support, help, interest

Things to remember

In a very short time, they will be our future; meanwhile, they need our support
They are grappling with identity within a world of stereotypes and fears and need opportunities to play with all possibilities without "boxing" themselves in
They still want to have fun
They are multidimensional