

CLASSWORK &
TEACHING HELPS
FOR THE BALLET
TEACHER OF
CHILDREN
AGES 3 & 4

SAMPLE

FOR YOUNG
LEVEL

Ballet Arts

ONE
CHILDREN

RUTH H. BRINKERHOFF, B.A.

FORMER DIRECTOR, UTAH BALLET ACADEMY
REGISTERED TEACHER, ROYAL ACADEMY OF DANCE

2ND
EDITION
UPDATED &
EXPANDED

Contents

INDEX	2
I. PREPARING TO TEACH	3
Six Tools for Teaching Ballet.....	4
Threes are Easy to Teach, Right?.....	6
Anticipate and Plan For Success!.....	10
II. WHAT TO TEACH THEM?	13
Ballet Fundamentals for Threes.....	14
Level 1 Choreography for Class [SAMPLE].....	24
Music List.....	48
Suggested Outlines for Four Terms.....	49
III. MANAGING CHILDREN’S BEHAVIOR	53
Child Development Characteristics.....	54
Implications For Teaching In The Ballet Class.....	57
Thoughts on Teaching Threes.....	59
Letter from a Young Dancer To-Be.....	61
IV. THE DANCING NEEDS OF CHILDREN	62
Posture.....	63
Music and Memory.....	64
Choreographing For Little Ones.....	65
Coordination.....	67
V. TEACHING MATERIALS	68
Positions of the Feet for Level One.....	69
Positions of the Arms for Level One.....	70
Printable Resources.....	71

I. Preparing To Teach

SIX TOOLS FOR TEACHING BALLET.....	4
THREES ARE EASY TO TEACH, RIGHT?.....	6
ANTICIPATE AND PLAN FOR SUCCESS!.....	10

Six Tools for Teaching Ballet

1. A COURSE OF STUDY THAT HAS A PROVEN RECORD OF SUCCESS

DESIGNED FOR GRADUAL, CONTINUAL PROGRESS, & CORRECT FOR THE STUDENTS' AGES

The first tool a teacher of ballet needs is a dependable source of appropriate material to teach, arranged in levels of progress that make sense, and work. This is called a syllabus. If the material is also designed for the potential enjoyment of the students, so much the better. With a good syllabus to base the lessons on, teachers can draw on their own creativity to make the learning fun.

2. A BACKGROUND OF KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE IN BALLET

(INCLUDING THE HIGHEST LEVEL YOU PLAN TO TEACH)

It is preferable for the teacher to be well trained in ballet. Experience as a professional performer is not necessary, but a teacher does need to have learned ballet correctly through the “basic professional” level in order to prepare students for possible professional study. If your background is not this thorough, there are ways to make up the difference, even as you teach. Meanwhile, it makes sense to not try to teach above the level that you yourself have been correctly taught.

3. AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE MATERIAL TO BE TAUGHT

Ballet teachers need an understanding of the how's, why's, what's, and when's of ballet technique and artistry. Knowing which muscles are used in a demi plié is good. Knowing why is better. Knowing at what age the child is able to begin to feel and use these muscles correctly is better still. You need to know how to recognize incorrect muscle use, and how to pull the correct use out of the students.

When teaching young children, it helps to know why a movement is done, what details of execution are important, where it fits in the development of coordination and skill, and where it fits into ballet later on.

4. AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE STUDENTS TO BE TAUGHT

THEIR ABILITIES, CHARACTERISTICS, PERSONALITIES AND NEEDS

Lessons that fit are like clothes that fit: comfortable, and attractive. With a good understanding of the general characteristics of the students, teachers are able to obtain correct results without stress or strain on themselves or the students.

5. AN UNDERSTANDING OF TEACHING SKILLS & LEARNING SKILLS

WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO LEARNING AND WHAT DOES NOT.

Teaching skills and methods of today are far more refined than even a decade ago. Many students today will not put up with poor teaching in dance class when they are used to better during the day. They don't consciously know why they feel uneasy, but they may become inattentive, or quit dancing.

Some parents sense when the teacher is not really "teaching" a dance class, but is just demonstrating steps. Some parents will sit and take notes, and then teach the material to their kid at home!

The skills of effective teaching are just as important in dancing as in any other subject to be learned.

6. A LOVE OF BALLET, A LOVE OF YOUR STUDENTS, & A LOVE OF SEEING THEIR PROGRESS

Teaching ballet will be fun and rewarding for you and your students! The philosophy of this book will be that of "child benefit": that a teacher of children feels a responsibility to teach what is beneficial for the students in ordinary life as well as in dance.

Threes are Easy to Teach, Right?

Not necessarily! Threes are easy and fun to teach once you understand where they are coming from, and what their limited abilities really are.

Three and four year olds will have an emotional response to any new situation. Children are not adults. Recognize each as a separate person. Use their name and smile as you greet them.

THEY NEED SECURITY.

1. Some need a touch: light, friendly.
2. Give them a place in class that is theirs: a “spot” to sit and stand on, and to return to between exercises. New? Place them right in front of where mother is sitting.

Use tape, sunshine posters, or other markers for their spots (places) in class. Suggestion: they can take the spot marker home if they dance well in class. Condition them to return to their spots. Use a dance drum to move to, then find places and sit. Do this three or four times to teach them what is expected.

They must not be allowed to sit or stand on another child’s spot. This can cause deep feelings of insecurity. Gently remind them where their spot is. Take the child by the hand and lead him or her to where they should be.

3. The three year old doesn’t interact much

with peers. They relate to the teacher. They are not ready to work with a peer partner. Their dancing friend needs to be a teddy bear or a rag doll.

4. They need to feel safe in class. They need to know that:
 - Other kids won’t harm them;
 - Teacher won’t leave them;
 - Teacher won’t hurt them;
 - Mother or father will come back.

THEY NEED CONSISTENCY.

1. Keep a consistent feeling atmosphere in the dance room. Keep the feelings low-key, happy, calm, not “high.”
2. Have a consistent teaching mood. Be consistently in charge, gently. Never relinquish control to the kids, or to a parent, or to a situation that arises.
3. Build consistent learning skills.
 - Build progress step by step.
 - Recognize progress. Compliment them on strength and skill and on how hard their muscles are working.
 - Repeat main concepts week by week; much practice is still needed on all basic skills! Children love to “know” these things. They can if it is familiar.
4. Be consistent with discipline and rules. Keep order in the classroom.
 - Example: they may get drinks at the

end of class only. Practice it! Leave a few minutes for drinks; then walk them through it.

- It may seem “silly”, but the practice of rules and desired behaviors works. Young children don’t know what to do or not to do just by being “told”. Action helps them to understand and remember. This is one of the reasons they so frequently test rules.

TEACH WITH A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Use positive reinforcement whenever possible:

1. Praise by name the one that follows instructions immediately. Thank by name those that quickly follow.
2. Ignore wrong behavior unless it is dangerous or disruptive.
3. Thank the class for good behavior. Give attention and praise every so often.
4. Give tangible rewards sparingly. Stickers or pictures to color are good. Try to give them in a way that all of the children get one, such as for attendance, or for passing off a skill you know they can all do.
5. Avoid using “treats” for rewards. The treat will completely override the behavior you want to reward. Regardless of research, those of us who work with children notice that sugar and artificial sweeteners noticeably lower a child’s attention span, ability to think, ability to control feelings, coordination, and strength.

HANDLE BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS WITH COMMON SENSE AND FAIRNESS

1. Teach behavior, don’t punish. Stay calm, this helps you to be in control.
2. You cannot allow hitting or yelling. Remove offender from the activity for the sake of the others and for the lesson to continue; not to “punish” the offender.
3. Mild disruption? Have child sit in a designated place, and watch one exercise, then rejoin class.
4. Don’t threaten. Avoid saying no, can’t, don’t. Avoid using ifs, or asking questions of choice. State the positive “do” whenever possible. When “don’t” is unavoidable, apply it to the classroom situation, such as “Dancers don’t hang on the barre.” Rules must apply to all, not just to the one who is out of line, and they want to know that.
5. Odd or unusual behavior? Mention the incident to the parents.

TEACH WITH WISDOM AND FUN

1. Use big motor muscles. Make no specific demands on small muscles of hands and feet.
2. Ask the possible only: what they can do. They love to please, and feel bad if they can’t do something.

3. They learn through the five senses: seeing, hearing, touching, dancing, feeling, doing.
4. Relate presentations and explanations to their very limited real experiences. Try to see things from their viewpoint.
5. Keep everything simple, short, and concrete (very real).
6. Use concrete examples. Young children can't visualize the unknown or the unfamiliar. They cannot understand abstract ideas.

Examples:

- For and understanding of first position of the arms, hold a real beach ball.
- Smelling a real flower and touching it helps prepare them for picking imaginary ones.
 - Showing a picture and talking about it in simple terms, relating to things they know about, can serve where the real item is impractical.

UNDERSTAND HOW IMMATURE THEY ARE WITH FEELINGS & ATTITUDES

Remember that the emotions of your students are in embryo.

1. Young children do not usually get bored!
 - They may appear “bored” when actually they are frustrated or confused. The words may be beyond their understanding. The movement may look puzzling to them.
 - They may say they are “tired” when they feel frustrated or don't understand something.
2. They must be ready for what is presented:

physically, mentally and emotionally.

3. If they are not able to succeed or understand, confusion and frustration result.
4. If they feel a need for attention, or cannot see your presentation, they may feel rejected or left out.

BEHAVIOR IS LEARNED! FEELINGS ARE LEARNED! ATTITUDES ARE LEARNED!

1. These things can and must be taught. Take advantage of teaching moments. If you do not teach the correct behavior or attitude, the children will randomly learn what they perceive, which is usually incorrect.
2. Children reflect the feelings and attitudes of their parents, and others around them. They really don't have many feelings or attitudes that are uniquely their own. Quite often, they don't really know what they feel, and they really do want to know what they should feel.
3. Children by nature will trust adults to protect them, care for them, and teach them what they need to know. Dance teachers are adults. Take their trust seriously, and respond with your best efforts.

REALIZE YOU WON'T ALWAYS HIT IT PERFECTLY!

1. No one does. Making the effort is important. As you continue to try to empathize with the young ones, and to teach them proper behavior along with dancing skills, you will find it becomes easier. Your responses to them will become more effective.
2. Remember: **They don't know!** Not really. Not deep inside, not forever, not yet. You are there to help. Their being able to tell you a correct answer is not the same as being able to apply it to their behavior! The difference is like the depth of the Grand Canyon.
3. No one can ask more of you than your best, whatever it is at that moment. Your best may change from moment to moment, from day to day.
4. You are there to teach, not to punish. Treat each child with equal respect and consideration.

TYPICAL "ATTENTION GETTERS" TO WATCH OUT FOR:

1. Questions: These can be "bait with a hook inside". They can distract you from what you were about to teach the class.
2. "My other dance teacher did . . ." Another "bait and hook," intended to get you competing with the other teacher.
3. Poking the kid next to them, then looking to see if you noticed.
4. Need to go to the bathroom. Only one child should leave the room at a time. If you have an assistant take them, it avoids problems. If it looks like a habit is forming, mention it to the parent.
5. Messing with visual aids or other equipment.
6. Talking out inappropriately. Enforce your rules firmly, to the whole class. Give everyone attention as you discuss in simple terms that dancers don't do that. This keeps the offender from getting your undivided attention, and is a subtle negative reinforcement of the talking out.



Have fun! Dancers are a real challenge to teach, but you will enjoy the challenge!

Anticipate and Plan For Success!

Anticipating the feelings of your young charges, and the problems they may have, gives you the power to avoid most problems in class. Using these teaching and managing skills is fun because of the joy you feel in seeing it work with children!

Without behavior problems the teaching of the material is fun. It flows much easier and much faster. There is more time for creativity, artistry, and performing.

HAVE YOUR DANCE CLASSROOM READY AHEAD OF TIME.

1. Does it have a clean, neat, appearance? Is it well lit, with attractive furnishings, clean air, and correct temperature? Does it feel like a peaceful and safe environment?
2. Nothing should be out where children can get at it on the sly. Lock cupboards. All supplies and equipment are the “teacher’s property” and off limits to students.
3. Plan where the dancers will sit between exercises: staggered rows, semi-circle, etc., so that each child can see you and your presentations. Use place markers of some kind: colored masking tape, small stickers, or small individual posters. Have name tags on the children until you learn their names.
4. Once class starts, collect any distractions (toys, etc.) the children may have brought with them. (Return these after class.)
5. If they bring a doll or teddy to use in dance class, where do you want these toys resting while not actually being used? Sitting against the wall facing the children is a good place for the toys. The dolls and teddies can be a pretend audience.

GREETING THE STUDENTS

Your greeting of each child can set the mood for class, and create a positive learning atmosphere in the dance room. Sit them in a small circle with you for the first few minutes, so that all can see you, and feel included in your initial attention to the class.

1. Greet each child by name.
2. Smile at them.
3. Make a warm, friendly, brief statement of welcome to each child, such as, “Hi, Mary;” “We’re glad you came, Susie;” “What a pretty dress, Pamela;” etc.
4. If you are at ease, they will be at ease. Guide their attitudes and direct their thinking by having the attitude you want them to have.

They will sense this correct attitude from your:

 - Tone of voice.
 - Inner feelings and expectations.
 - Example (they will copy you).
 - Explanations of the feelings and attitudes that are appropriate.

HELPING THEIR SELF-ESTEEM

Care about each child as an individual, equally. Each child needs to feel loved and accepted.

Remember that children:

- Make many mistakes.
- Feel inadequate.
- Are not skillful.

If we ridicule or tease or otherwise draw attention to their inadequacies, it can damage their self-esteem.

You, as a teacher, can help them grow in maturity and self esteem by responding with:

- Consistency.
- Positive feedback; honest and sincere acceptance and encouragement for each child.

EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL NEEDS

1. Children need:

- To feel that they are an important part of the class.
- To feel they are successful.
- To feel accepted as they are.
- To feel understood and liked by the teacher.

2. You as the teacher can help by:

- Using their names.
- Expecting their best efforts, within their limitations of age and maturity.
- Building rapport with them, by using eye contact, etc.
- Teaching them to address you by a title implying respect, such as “Mrs. Green” or “Miss Katie”, rather than “Katie”.

LEARNING NEEDS

1. Children need limits to feel secure and safe, so they can be free to learn:

- Appropriate behavior.
- Appropriate language.
- How to take turns.
- How to wait for instructions.
- How to listen to the teacher.
- How to be nice to each other.
- How to get ready for and how to finish an activity.

2. It is the teacher’s job to structure the class and to provide a secure, safe learning environment.

3. It is the teacher’s job to help children learn appropriate behaviors for class along with the lesson material. He or she must realize that children don’t know all of the appropriate social behaviors. It will take years of practice, correct feedback from adults, and much growing for them to learn all they need to know about getting along with others.

These things can help:

- A few simple rules based on safety and courtesy.
- Adequate lesson preparation.
- Positive, friendly instruction in how to treat classmates, and equipment.
- Consistent procedures in starting and finishing the class.
- Consistent procedures in starting and finishing activities.

- Teaching with imagination and creativity; not just showing, but using a wide variety of approaches, involving as many of the children's learning senses as possible.

PREPARE! MAKE PLANS!

You have less than one hour per week with the class, so make it count:

1. Study the material. Select only a few props and visual aids to use.
2. Know what you want to accomplish with them.
3. Rehearse the activities and presentations ahead of time.
4. Have the music, props, etc., ready, and arranged in the order to be used.

TEACH TO THEIR LEVEL

Plan to reach the needs, abilities and understandings of the students through the dance activities; not just physically, but

mentally, socially, and emotionally. Their needs, abilities, understandings are very different from those of adults.

1. Conduct the class to their level of interest and understanding, not yours.
2. Make the challenges appropriate for their level of physical and mental development. What is challenging but not frustrating to young children may seem overly simple to an adult.
3. Structure each part of the class so as to limit potential problems. Free time or undirected activities are not a good idea for pre-school children.
4. Guide your own inner feelings so that you will radiate what you want your students to feel.

II. What To Teach Them?

BALLET FUNDAMENTALS FOR THREES.....	14
LEVEL 1 CHOREOGRAPHY FOR CLASS.....	24
MUSIC LIST.....	48
SUGGESTED OUTLINES FOR FOUR TERMS.....	49

Ballet Fundamentals for Threes

Skills Appropriate to Their Age Will Build a Strong Foundation For Ballet

I. STARTING THE CLASS

The children start dance class sitting in a small circle with the teacher, or sitting in their places for class. After you greet the children, practice some of the vocabulary used in dancing, or review one thing from last week.

1. LEARNING THE NAMES OF THE PARTS OF THE BODY THAT DANCE (NO MUSIC PROVIDED)

Children sit in circle with teacher, and learn to name parts of the body such as foot, toes, heels, ankle, leg, knees, head, arm, hand, eyes, nose, etc. When they know a few names, they can be asked what they can do in dancing. “Can your legs dance? Yes. What can they do?” This gives them vocabulary, and an understanding of some of the things their muscles can do in dancing.

2. POSITIONS OF THE FEET

They learn feet together or matching feet (parallel), a natural first with a very slight separation of toes, and natural second with feet apart, with toes turned out very slightly. Some knowledge of these positions is needed before they can understand activities that use them, such as “Jump Out, Jump In.”

3. ARM POSITIONS

They learn arms down at the sides, arms reaching front, arms reaching back, arms reaching up, hands on waist, arms make a circle for first, arms make a straight line for second, and using arms softly like bird wings. They should also practice swinging their arms, forward and back, or in circles crossing and going to the sides. Arm swings forward and back should be tried both in unison, and alternating.

Arm positions and movements are used in the mimes, and with some of the other activities. The arm positions and movements build an awareness of where and how their arms can move. This prepares them for the formal ballet positions and port de bras.

II. MOVING IN PLACE, FOR AWARENESS OF SELF, AND A SENSE OF BALANCE.

4. POINT TOGETHER

This involves balancing on one leg while the other one moves. This is more difficult than walking, or standing on two feet. The young child will not be able to follow musical beats, or count how many to do. The teacher should demonstrate the correct tempo, and encourage

towards this ability. Most cannot control their muscles and their balance very well. Teacher can take them by the hand and say, “Do it with me,” to get a more nearly correct speed. Important to note: toes are relaxed, not pointed, at this stage. It is really a relaxed quarter point of the foot, a basic build up to the battement tendu, but not technical, yet.

5. HEEL TOGETHER

This continues the awareness of the two parts of the foot: toes, and heels. Flexing the ankle gives important practice to the muscles used in demi pli , the opposing muscles to those which point the foot. This helps to maintain a balance of strength in the lower leg.

6. JUMP OUT (TO 2ND) AND IN (TO 1ST)

First, they must be able to jump in place on two feet. Opening one’s feet to the side as you jump is not easy at first. It may take a few weeks before they actually can do this one.

No turnout is used in jumping at age three.

7. DOWN AND UP

Bend knees and reach hands to the floor. Stand up and reach hands up to the sky. This is the beginning of using the entire body in a dance movement. It teaches an understanding of the movement vocabulary: down, and up. It prepares the muscles for the “Curling Up and Stretching Out” exercise.

III. EXERCISES FOR COORDINATION & SPATIAL AWARENESS

8. MAKING SHAPES

Making Shapes is a creative exercise. It is learned sitting in their places. They learn what the word “shape” means. Then they learn about the kinds of shapes we can make with our bodies, arms, legs, etc. This is the first creative exercise in the three-year-old class. Shapes can have geometric and spatial qualities, and can also show feelings such as sad, happy, funny, scary, etc.

9. THE DANCER’S CIRCLE, NO MUSIC.

This is the path dancers follow when doing movements around the room. They travel counterclockwise in a circle. This is an important piece of dance class protocol for them to learn. It allows them to move with considerable freedom of movement, without the class getting out of hand. They will not have much spatial awareness yet, and will need help making and following the circle for most of this first year.

10. MARCHING

This is done around the room, in the Dancer’s Circle. Marching is a special kind of walking. While threes have great difficulty controlling their muscles enough to stay on musical beats with most movements, they might be able to do it while marching! The dynamics of a natural march encourages the feet to go with the music.

Ask them to pick up their feet nice and high, and to swing their arms, and to march with lots of energy.

Arms must be allowed to swing in whatever pattern is natural to each child. Three general patterns are usually seen: (1) both arms swinging together, (2) arms swinging in unison with legs, or (3) arms swinging in opposition to the legs.

It is very normal for threes to change the way they use their arms during an exercise, during a class, and from week to week.

Arms should be relaxed, and should swing as a result of the body movement. Arms swing about waist high, or a little higher, but not above the shoulders.

11. WALKING

Walking to music is not easy. They will not be able to match the musical beats. They CAN learn the musical tempo that is suitable for walking. They can distinguish it from music at a running tempo. Walking is a connecting dance step that is used in dances for young dancers. Walking to music will be developed at each level, gradually becoming the ballet walk with pointed feet.

12. RUNNING

This is for practicing fundamentals, and for learning to recognize a running tempo in music. They learn that they walk to the slower music, and run to the faster tempo. Running is a connecting step used often in dances and creative sequences for young dancers. Imagery such as birds, airplanes, fairies, butterflies and short imaginative stories can be used to give purpose to the runs.

IV. FLOOR EXERCISES

*TO REST LEGS, FOR EXPRESSION,
MUSICAL AWARENESS, & SPECIFIC
USE OF LEGS & FEET*

13. ARM AND HAND MOVEMENTS

They learn that they can express a story or idea with their hands, arms, and faces. This is the beginning of artistic expression and acting skill. At first, the teacher tells the story as they act it out. Later, some of the children might have ideas of their own that can be used by the class.

Once a story is learned, the movement sections can be phrased with the music to help with music awareness in the children, and to give the exercise a finished appearance.

14. DANCING TOES AND DANCING HEELS

Sitting on the floor, legs out in front. Stretch and bend ankles, to show our toes and our heels. This builds an awareness of toes, and heels, and helps the lower leg and ankle muscles to strengthen and coordinate. These are the muscles that are used in jumping, running, etc.



15. KNEE BENDS, SITTING

Children sit on the floor, with legs straight out in front. Threes have a very limited understanding of what their muscles and joints can do. Learning to bend and straighten knees while sitting will make it easier to do knee bends when standing up. Knee bends, both sitting and standing, are a fundamental movement concept for jumping, changing levels, and for demi plié and fondu later on.

16. LEG LIFTS

Sitting, legs out in front, lift one leg about four inches off the floor, then lower it. Use alternate legs. The hands are on the floor near the dancer's hips for support. Do not hold the leg in the air. Dance is movement. Holding a position stresses young joints, and does not teach movement.

This movement prepares the leg muscles for the stretching of the knees, and for the beginnings of turning out. It will help them to use their legs exactly forward of their hips in the gallops. Three year olds will not be able to hold the knees perfectly straight. That is right for them. They need to lift the leg in its natural shape at this age. Do not require the knees to be perfectly straight this first year.

V. BALLET TECHNIQUE: A GENTLE INTRODUCTION FOR THREES

17. KNEE BENDS, STANDING

Start with feet together, hands on waist. The tempo is quicker than a true demi plié: down in one count, up in one count. This matches the muscular needs of the very young dancer.

Muscular development at this age does not provide for a sustained, slow speed.

These knee bends are a simulation of the jumping action of the knees, slowed down somewhat. Saying "Bend, and straight" gives about the right speed. Knee bends will help them to achieve the correct knee action in jumping. This exercise can sometimes be matched to the music.

18. FAST JUMPS, OR BOUNCES ON TWO FEET

This gives the repeated practice needed to get the leg muscles rebounding. Do not expect the feet to point. Much large muscle development and more time for small muscle maturation is needed before feet can be stretched during jumps.

Getting the correct knee action should be the goal for Level 1. Watch for children who use their knees in reverse: bending them in the air and straightening them when they hit the ground. This is not what is needed for ballet.

Sometimes young children get this wrong knee action from jumping on trampolines or mini-tramps. You may need to explain to parents how the knees are supposed to work for ballet, and suggest that they have the children jump on the floor at home, not on the tramp, until they get the knees working right.

19. BIG JUMPS

This encourages the legs to push the dancer higher into the air. It encourages correct use of the knees. It is a difficult skill for little ones. Let them use their arms and bodies, as they naturally will, in attempting to get higher off the floor. Do not expect them to jump on the music yet.

20. HOPS

Hops on one leg develop balance and leg strength. This skill is a very necessary background skill for learning to skip. Hops will be easier and stronger on one leg than the other. Be sure both legs are practiced.

Do not expect them to match musical beats with their hops. The music is background. Hearing the rhythm and feel of the music will encourage their response to the music later.

VI. FLOOR EXERCISES TO REST LEGS, FOR EXPRESSION, COORDINATION, USE OF BODY

21. CURLING UP AND STRETCHING OUT

An introduction to this curling and stretching of the body was given with the “down and up” exercise. It is the beginning of contraction and extension. Children learn that the whole body can learn to dance; that it can do different movements and shapes. The muscles are being prepared for more complex movements later on.

Since the movement is done slowly, and there is no balance problem, it can be done in time to the music. Several imagery ideas are possible. The **class notes** for Level 1 describe two ideas: a seahorse, and a starfish.

This exercise is also a good “quiet” activity to use for calming down a class that is getting too excited. Another idea: have them pretend they are taking a nap on a soft cloud. They change positions as they rest.

22. HEAD MOVEMENTS

Sit, legs folded, hands on knees. Using the head to say “yes” and “no” is already familiar to the children. Now we learn that these movements can be a part of dancing. We isolate the movements, and slow them down. Again, we can match phrases in the music. A new movement can also be introduced:

“maybe”, which is done by inclining the head from side to side. “Put your ear next to your shoulder. Now your other ear next to your other shoulder.”

23. RHYTHM STUDY

Children can learn the simple musical rhythms of 2/4 and 3/4 in isolation. They can clap with the teacher, follow a drum beat, etc.

24. CRAWLING ON HANDS AND KNEES

Although the more technical definition of this movement is “creeping”, children will know it as “crawling”, so use that term with them. They are on hands and knees. Knees should be picked up as they travel, and not dragged on the floor.

Getting the knees picked up uses the abdominal muscles. The crawling movement is one of the best exercises to encourage the child’s natural coordination, and to prepare them for coordinating their arms and legs in classical ballet technique. It also helps in the development of the abdominal muscles.

Pretend games can be used to make the crawling activity interesting. Pretending teaches expression. They are learning to tell a story with movement.

Many classical ballets, such as Swan Lake and Nutcracker tell stories. Do spend some time crawling in all three, four, and five year old classes.

“Pretending teaches expression. They are learning to tell a story with movement.”

VII. CREATIVITY AND EXPRESSION

Several imaginative story sequences are suggested in the classwork section. Others are possible. Remember that threes do not have much background. They need to be guided and led as they explore the movements and feelings used in creating.

VIII. DANCE STEPS

25. ROCKING

Rocking is the beginning of learning the Transfer of Weight, which leads to glissade, and other steps that move. It also prepares the three year old for learning the “Side Close” exercise.

26. STEP TO THE SIDE AND CLOSE YOUR FEET. (STEP TO 2ND, CLOSE TO 1ST)

Moving sideways is not natural to people. Many adults have difficulty with this skill. Young children’s muscles are often very clumsy at first, and they get their feet mixed up.

At three, children do not realize during movement that they have TWO feet, although intellectually they do know this. They are aware of “feet” as something they walk and run on, and on which they put socks and shoes. They still have trouble knowing which foot a shoe goes on. They are not ready to learn rights and lefts in a formal setting.

“Step to the Side and Close Your Feet” helps them to become kinesthetically aware of the fact that they have two feet, one on each side of the body. They discover that they can travel

sideways, to either direction.

“Side Close” is an important basic skill, a very necessary part of a strong foundation for technical ballet. Moving sideways is practiced in some way at each level of pre ballet. It is found in all grades of ballet in various forms and settings. Students need to progress gradually towards the more advanced ballet steps that move sideways: glissade, pas de bourrée, sissonne de côté, etc.

“Side Close” uses the leg muscles in a way that forward movement does not. It contributes to a more all around development of the big leg muscles.

A change of direction is also introduced with this exercise. When they can successfully change directions under the teacher’s guidance, the exercise can be used to help their response to music.

Consistently hearing the musical phrases match their change of direction helps them to become aware of how dancers are supposed to blend with the music.

27. GALLOPING FORWARD

Galloping is done around the Dancer’s Circle. You may notice that some children turn slightly sideways when they gallop forward. This usually means their quadriceps muscles are weaker than some of the auxiliary muscles. The Leg Lift exercise may, in time, help with this problem.

Gallops are like marches in several ways. First, they are builders of natural coordination.

Second, both activities can usually be done to the music by young children where many other movements cannot.

Third, both activities require a development of the big thigh muscles in front.

Fourth, most children find these activities a lot of fun to do, even without any story motivation.

Note that, for threes, we do not worry about which leg is in front, or about changing legs on gallops. Just get some good strong gallops on the stronger or dominant leg this first year of dancing. About half way through the year, you might try to get them to use the other leg part of the time. If they don’t respond, it is because their muscles aren’t ready to do that yet.

For threes, we do not worry about which leg is in front, or about changing legs on gallops.

IX. DANCE SEQUENCES

The Mountain Dance described in the classwork section gives an opportunity to start them on enchainements of only two items at a time. This takes some concentration for a young dancer. Staying on the mountain develops muscular control in the traveling movements. Waiting for turns is an important behavioral learning at this age.

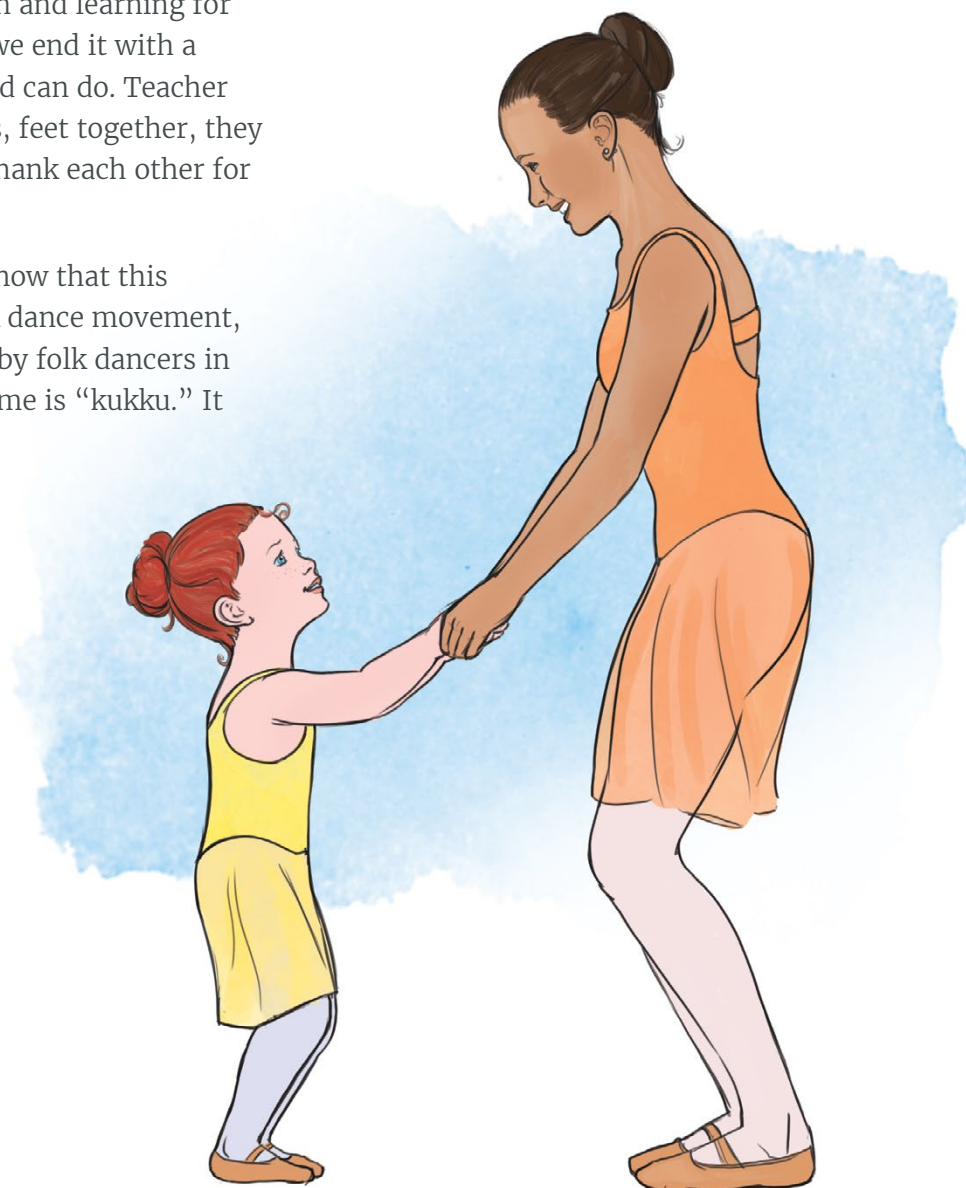
X. DANCES

Several short dances have been included for Level 1. The length is about right for their little memories and attention spans! Longer ones cannot be learned well enough to perform independently.

28. CURTSEY

Dance class is a preparation and learning for eventual performance. So we end it with a curtsey that a three year old can do. Teacher holds both of child's hands, feet together, they both do a knee bend, and thank each other for the class.

It might be of interest to know that this curtsey is a Hungarian folk dance movement, and is often used as a bow by folk dancers in Hungary. Its Hungarian name is "kukku." It isn't just a "baby curtsey!"



SUMMARY OF LEVEL 1

Level 1 contains a list of 28 skills, seven arm positions and movements, three feet positions, and a curtsey that we hope the three year old will successfully take away from their ballet class.

In addition to these skills, they will learn some simple creative story sequences, and some short dances to perform in class, or for a recital. That is a lot for a three year old to learn! Since most of the skills are a part of what nature intends them to learn, most of them should accomplish the class quite well in six to eight months.

MOVING UP TO LEVEL 2

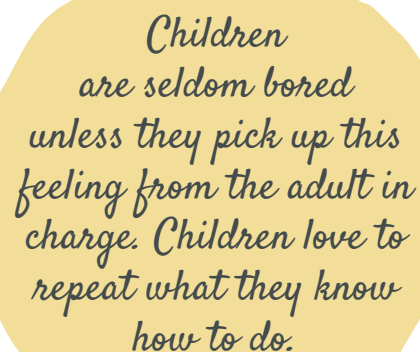
When the teacher feels the class is ready, some items from Level 2 can be introduced. During the first year it is best to not completely leave the Level 1 work, but to simply add the parts of Level 2 that they seem ready for.

Example: When they can do “Point Together” very well, every time, without you, they might be ready to “count to three with your foot,” as a preparation for the “Three Points and Close” in Level 2. When you add the Level 2 version, be sure to retain the Level 1 exercise so the ability to do it that way is not lost. The Level 1 skill needs to eventually match the music. To get this, it must not be completely dropped from the classwork.

Teachers must be careful to see things from the child’s point of view, and to not push them ahead simply because the teacher or parent is bored! Children are seldom bored

unless they pick up this feeling from the adult in charge.

Children LOVE to repeat what they know how to do. Adults become bored with so much repetition, and tend to think the children must feel the same way.



Children are seldom bored unless they pick up this feeling from the adult in charge. Children love to repeat what they know how to do.

Children are very much in tune with feelings and attitudes, and very anxious to please the adults and older siblings in their world. If they say, “That’s boring,” it is because they heard someone else say it. Otherwise, the idea would not have occurred to them. And, it is very unlikely that they have any understanding of what it means!

When making a choice about moving up to a few things from Level 2, look at how their muscles are doing. Do they still need more practice with this skill?

Take pleasure in seeing the small improvements in grace, balance, and musicality that occur from week to week. Put your attention on the CHILD, not on the exercise. The children are never boring!

A NOTE ABOUT SKIPPING

It is not likely that very many of your three year old students will be able to skip yet. It is not included as a part of the expected skills for this level because it is not usual for three year

olds to be ready for good skips. Threes need to work on the hops, jumps, marches, and gallops several months to a year before trying to skip.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF COORDINATION

Give marching and galloping as homework. Have parents help their children to learn to use their muscles. The quadriceps muscles

that learn to move the legs strongly, straight to the front, will produce dancers that can jump very well. Poor quadriceps same use leads to awkward jumps, and a lack of grace in almost all other dance movements as well.

Remind parents to have the children practice the marches and forward gallops. Suggest that they not try to teach the skipping until the marches, gallops, and hops on one leg are all fairly easy for the child to do smoothly and well, using both legs equally, or nearly so.

Level 1 Choreography for Class

This is a complete list of the activities and choreography suggested for Level 1.

It cannot all be done in any one class period. This gives the teacher freedom to arrange different **class plans** for each term. Young children need consistency and repetition. When a new term starts, change some material, but not all. Keep the general format of the class the same.

The musical counts are for the teacher's information. It is not realistic to expect the children to count music as they dance. Musical counts are approximate, because threes and fours lack the muscular control needed to stay

on the beats all of the time. Have them change steps on the phrases. For example, they may have done two or three or seven of a step or movement when four were intended, but if they change on the phrasing, they are learning to listen to and follow the music at their level of ability.

Some exercises are numbered in groups showing the teaching progressions for certain skills. The bold numbers in the left column are the music album tracks, to help in finding the correct music.

I. BEGINNING OF CLASS

Welcome the class and take roll. Greet each one by name. This can be done with children sitting in their individual places or spots in a small circle with the teacher. Sit with them, so you are at their physical level. This helps build rapport. It helps the children to feel secure.

1. Learning parts of the body we use in dancing (no music provided).

While sitting, with teacher's direction and guidance, child is to touch and name parts of their own body: foot, leg, arm, hand, knee, ankle, elbow, toes, heel, fingers, etc.

tr# 1 & 53
♩ 6/8, 2ct/m
1m intro, 8m

2. Positions for the Feet

Threes should use very little turnout for first and second positions. See the "Positions of the Feet" illustrations on [page 69](#). They show the proper amount of turnout for this level. There will be little difference in the placement of feet in "Feet Apart" and in Second Position at this age, so these are in the song as

the same position. They do need to learn, practice, and review:

1-4	Feet Together (parallel).	“Feet Together, hands on waist.
5-8	First Position.	“Toes apart makes 1st, that’s neat!
9-12	Second Position, or Feet Apart.	“Feet apart makes 2nd position,
13-16	Three claps.	“Clap, clap, clap, I can do my feet!”

tr# 2

♩ 6/8, 2cts/m,
2m intro, 16m

3. Arm Positions

They need to learn, practice and review the arm positions used in Level 1 (see p. 70):

	Movements:	Song:
1-4	Arms relaxed, down at sides.	“Arms down at our sides and waiting,
5-8	Lift arms to horizontal, forward.	“Arms in front reaching forward,
1-4	Lean slightly forward, arms reach back.	“Arms in back reaching backward,
5-8	Hands on waist with fingers forward.	“Hands on waist and we standup tall,
1-4	Arms in front, rounded to first position.	“First position’s a circle,
5-8	Open arms to natural 2nd, palms down.	“Arms open sideways for Second,
1-8	Wave arms slowly up and down.	“Arms move so pretty like birds that fly!”

II. EXERCISES FOR AWARENESS OF BODY PARTS, AND A SENSE OF BALANCE.

The children will not be able to control their muscles well enough to follow the musical beats. The teacher must not be concerned about this, but encourage them to follow her lead the best they can. Whichever foot a child uses first should be accepted. Some may not understand how to use both feet at first. Show them, gently place their foot, explain using simple terms at their level. Be patient. Improvement will come in a few weeks.

tr# 3

♩ 2/4, 1ct/m,
4 m intro, 16m

4. Point Together

Start in Feet Together position, arms relaxed at sides, or hands on waist. Use a natural, relaxed foot, with the ball of the foot and the toes resting on the floor.

1	Reach one foot forward, touch floor with toes.	“Point,
2	Bring this foot back to Feet Together position.	“To-ge-ther,
3-4	Repeat with other foot.	“Point, to-ge-ther,”
5-16	Continue through the music.	

tr# 4

♩ 2/4, 2cts/m,
2 m intro, 8m

5. Heel Together

Start in Feet Together position, arms relaxed. Hands can be on waist, if preferred.

1	Reach right foot forward, touch floor with heel.	“Heel,
2	Bring right foot back to Feet Together position.	“To-ge-ther,
3-4	Repeat with other foot.	“Heel, to-ge-ther.”
5-16	Continue through the music.	

tr# 5

♩ 2/4, 2cts/m,
2 m intro, 8m

6.a. Feet Apart, Feet Together

Start Feet Together or in First Position, arms relaxed. Move one foot out to 2nd, then move it back to Feet Together. The words “out” and “in” can be used instead of “apart” and “together.”

& 1-2	Move one foot apart (out to 2nd Position), stay.	“Feet Apart!”
& 3-4	Move foot back Together (to 1st Position), stay.	“Feet Together!”
& 5-16	Continue through the music.	

tr# 6

♩ 2/4, 2cts/m,
2 m intro, 16m

6.b. Jump Apart, Jump Together

The second beat of the measure is silent for the slow jumps. For all 3 exercises, move foot or jump into the air on the upbeats, and “arrive” on the main musical beats.

&1-2	Jump feet apart (or to Second Position), stay.	“Jump apart!”
&3-4	Jump Feet Together, stay.	“Jump Together!”
&5-16	Continue through the first half of the music.	

tr# 7

♩ 2/4, 2cts/m,
2 m intro, 16m

6.c. Jump Apart, Jump Together at 2 speeds

&1	Jump Apart Together 4 times, as in (6.b.).
&2	Jump Feet Together, stay.
&3-16	Continue through the music.

Thank You

Thanks for taking *Ballet Arts for Young Children: Level 1* for a test run!

PURCHASE

Has this complimentary sample helped you?

Save money and purchase the *Level 1 Curriculum Suite*, which includes the **curriculum**, time-saving **lesson plans**, and accompanying **music album**.

Of course, you can also purchase the *Level 1 Curriculum*, the *lesson plans*, and the *music album* individually.

At **The Ballet Source** we love to offer the best prices to our earliest customers! Thank you for your support.

FEEDBACK

We need your assistance in helping ballet instructors teach ballet well. Bring your ideas to us by filling out our [online form](#) or by emailing us at theballetsource@gmail.com

FREE CONTENT

As always, enjoy our free content at balletcurriculum.com/blog

