

WONDERDANCE EARLY CHILDHOOD DANCE CURRICULUM EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENTAL BENCHMARKS

Toddlers and preschoolers are in constant motion. They are transitioning to different levels and degrees of mobility and an expanded range of motion. Exploration, discovery, play and imagination abound during these important early years. Exposure to new experiences full of sensory exploration is at the heart of early childhood play and learning and is critical for healthy development of the whole child. Young children are innate movers and shakers and begin to know their bodies, feel their souls and discover their aesthetic voices through early dance experiences. This is a time of wonder, dance and play!

The framework for the WonderDance early childhood benchmarks in dance is adapted in part from the NDEO Early Childhood Dance Standards, NYC Dance Blueprint model, DEL Model of Early Childhood Dance concepts, 92 St Y Nursery School curriculum, Wonderplay Handbook, the Stories in Motion® early childhood curriculum model, plus contributions from the WonderDance advisory team and extensive research in the field of early childhood development.

These benchmarks are not intended to be rigid or linear, but demonstrate a possible range of expected behaviors and characteristics of these specific ages. The range of developmental stages is quite broad in early childhood; with each child reaching different developmental milestones in their own unique timing. The WonderDance curriculum understands these benchmarks as indicators for teachers, parents, students and faculty to use as guidelines in designing, planning and adapting activities. These benchmarks/milestones are useful for teachers (especially new) to better plan meaningful and engaging age-appropriate lesson plans in dance, knowing that variations abound and individual differences are quite extensive.

The WonderDance curriculum also respects the dynamic developmental range that is typical of these early years, from week to week and from month to month, which may frequently and legitimately challenge these indicators. Moreover, WonderDance honors and promotes the diversity of learning and movement capacities among all humans, especially young children, *all* of whom have the profound potential to grow, learn and make beautiful, wonderful dances.

BENCHMARKS

The WonderDance Benchmarks are organized by age and selected domains, or areas of a child's experience that have the capacity to communicate, create-meaning and synthesize understanding. These domains are not mutually exclusive, especially to a young child, who perceives the world as a whole. For example, the benchmarks for Dance (Graph 1) are connected to those for Physical/Kinesthetic and Aesthetic/Musical (Graph 2). But an awareness of these capacities provide an impression of a child's myriad possibilities for developing awareness, understanding and artistry.

The Domains (areas of communication, meaning-making and understanding)

Dance: ability to move from mobility to expressiveness, from improvisation and guided discovery to structured dance experiences, opportunities for dance making, problem solving and ultimately to performance opportunities (formal and informal). Increased literacy in terms of dance vocabulary, symbols (motifs), understanding of the routine and flow of a dance class, exposure to choreographic explorations, wide range of locomotor and non-locomotor range, as well as an understanding of space, effort/dynamics, rhythm and developing relationships to teacher and peers with an increasing level of cooperation. Increased range of motion, coordination and strength and flexibility leading to expanded skill acquisition and expressive ability. Increased understanding of common links between dance and other disciplines such as literature, art, music, science and math. Elements of Body, Concepts, Effort, Space and Relationships refer to Laban Movement Analysis chart for Early Childhood Dance.

	Dance (see Aesthetic and Musical below):	Body:	Concepts:	Effort:	Space:	Relationship:
Age 2-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Move rhythmically •Enjoy imitating adults dancing •Have a favorite song to dance to •Sing •Play instruments •Manipulate props while dancing •Identify and locate body parts (not all and sometimes a time delay) •Follow a movement warm-up (over time) •Follow a guided movement exploration •Dance to music •Focus on a partner (adult) •Stop for a brief moment •Dance with variations in tempo (but hard to control and modulate) •Display a range of locomotor and non-locomotor movements: •Make shapes with their bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Words (balance (assisted), step, march, roll (assisted), run (hard to stop), gallop (beginning), bounce, crawl) • Body parts – (Can identify head, arms, legs, back, belly, knees, feet and toes) •Body shapes: wide, round •Levels: High - low 	Big/Small	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tempo- fast and slow (very hard to go slow) • Weight – light (hard to do) and strong (contrasting efforts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space words – over, under, through (a tunnel) • Pathways: irregular 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual in group • Individual in relation to teacher •Following
Age 3-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Move rhythmically (not always) •Move with varied tempo and some control •Imitate adults and peers dancing (guided) •Create a favorite dance •Display a sense of personal style •Sing and dance at the same time •Play instruments while dancing •Manipulate props while dancing •Identify and locate most body parts •Lead movement with different body parts •Follow a movement warm-up •Be guided through a movement exploration •Contribute their own ideas to dance making •Perform a short dance for an audience •Begin still and end still while performing a dance (periodic and with verbal cueing from teacher) •Dance to a range of types of music •Focus on a partner (adult) •Understand how to stop moving (momentarily) •Respond to a musical cue (dance drum, music pausing etc) •Display a wider range of locomotor and non-locomotor movements •Make complex shapes with their bodies •Travel on straight and curvy pathways (particularly when given a path to follow) •Understand that you can invent a dance from a story •Understand that there can be different characters in a dance similar to a story •Begin to express different moods and feelings through dance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Words (balance, step, march, run, stamp, gallop, turn, leap, hop, jump, crawl, creep, rise, melt) • Still difficult to freeze for a sustained period of time but can for short moments • Body parts – (head, torso, arms, legs, back, belly, knees, feet and toes) •Body shapes: wide, pointy, round, pretzel •Levels: High – low 	Big/small, Open/Close, In/Out, Rise/Melt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tempo- fast and slow • Timing - Own timing and with the music (guided) • Weight - light and strong (contrasting efforts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space words – over, under, in front, behind, sideways (not left and right) • Pathways: straight and curvy (guided) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual in group • Individual in relation to teacher •Small group (guided) and not necessarily cooperative •Copying, following

<p>Age 4-</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Maintain personal space (with guidance) •Travel in the general space without bumping (with guidance) •Make their own dances and remember them •Move rhythmically •Move with varied tempo and control •Follow and copy adults and peers dancing •Display a clear sense of personal style •Sing and dance at the same time •Play instruments while dancing •Manipulate props while dancing with a wider range •Identify and locate most body parts •Lead movement with different body parts •Memorize a movement warm-up •Contribute their own ideas to dance making •Remember a short movement sequence (verbal cue from teacher) •Perform a short dance for an audience •Begin in a still shape and end in a still shape while performing a dance •Dance to a range of types of music •Dance with a partner (peer) •<i>Freeze</i> for a short period of time •Consistently respond to a musical cue (dance drum, pause etc) •Display a wide range of locomotor and non-locomotor movements •Make complex shapes with their bodies •Memorize invented body shapes and repeat them when asked •Travel on straight and curvy pathways •Understand that you can invent a dance from a story •Create a group dance •Understand that there can be different characters in a dance •Express different moods and feelings through dance •Develop technical skills in dance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Words (balance, step, roll, march, run, gallop, turn, twirl, leap (beginning to learn), hop, jump, crawl, creep, rise, melt, sink, slither, twist, bend, stretch, reach, swing, rock) • Still difficult to freeze in a specific shape for a sustained period of time but can for short moments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body parts – (hands, head, torso, shoulders, arms, legs, back, belly, knees, feet and toes) •Body shapes: wide, pointy, round, pretzel •Levels: High – low 	<p>Big/small, Open/Close, Happy/sad, Weak/Strong, Expand/Contract, Rise/Sink, Toward/Away</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tempo- fast and slow • Timing - Own timing and with the music • Weight - light and strong (contrasting efforts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space words – over, under, through, in front, behind, sideways (not left and right), toward, away from, center, above, below • Pathways: straight and curvy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual in group • Individual in relation to teacher •Partners (guided) •Small group (guided) •Mirroring, copying, following
<p>Age 5-</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Demonstrate a very wide range of locomotor and non-locomotor dance movements •Display a wider range of effort/dynamics in dance •Consistently maintain personal space •Travel in the general space without bumping •Work on choreographing a dance over a period of time •Write, draw, notate or map dance •Describe own dance or peer’s dance using dance vocabulary (guided) •Contribute ideas to a movement warm-up •Work cooperatively (with guidance) with a partner or small group •Remember several short movement sequences (verbal cues from teacher or following a notated score) •Perform several short dances for an audience •Perform a solo dance for an audience •Choose what kind of music they want to dance to •<i>Freeze</i> for a longer period of time •Invent and name their own new dance movements •Make complex shapes with their bodies while traveling •Travel on straight, curvy, zigzag and irregular pathways •Create and perform a solo and small group dance •Maintain focus and concentration during a sharing/ performance •Develop wider technical skills in dance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Words (balance, step, roll, march, run, gallop, skip, spin, twirl, turn, leap, hop, jump, crawl, creep, rise, melt, sink, fall, slither, twist, bend, stretch, reach, swing, rock, collapse) • Still difficult to freeze in a specific shape for a sustained period of time but can for short moments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body parts – (hands, head, torso, arms, shoulders, legs, back, belly, hips, knees, feet and toes) •Can emphasize and combine different body parts in movement •Body shapes: wide, pointy, round, pretzel •Levels: High– middle – low 	<p>Big/small, Open/Close, Happy/sad/angry, Weak/Strong, Expand/Contract, Rise/Sink, Toward/Away, Spin/Collapse, Accelerate/decelerate, Twist/Untwist, Balance/Off balance, Symmetrical/ Asymmetrical</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tempo- fast and slow (can accelerate and decelerate) • Timing - Own timing and with the music • Weight - light and strong (contrasting efforts) • Bound/ free movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space words - near, far, above, below, in front, behind, sideways (not left and right) • Love to spin and turn on the spot and traveling adding elevation (jumps) • •Pathways: straight, curvy, zigzag, irregular 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual in group • Individual in relation to teacher •Partners •Small group •Mirroring, copying, following, action/ reaction

Early Childhood Developmental Benchmarks:

Dance: ability to move from mobility to expressiveness, from improvisation and guided discovery to structured dance experiences, opportunities for dance making, problem solving and ultimately to performance opportunities (formal and informal). Increased literacy in terms of dance vocabulary, understanding of the routine and flow of a dance class, exposure to choreographic explorations, wide range of locomotor and non-locomotor range, as well as an understanding of space, effort/dynamics, rhythm and developing relationships to teacher and peers with an increasing level of cooperation. Increased understanding of common links between dance and other disciplines such as literature, art, music, science and math. Elements of Body, Concepts, Effort, Space and Relationships refer to LMA chart for Early Childhood Dance.

Physical/kinesthetic: kinesthetic awareness, development of basic gross motor skills such as forms of locomotion, increased mobility, development of fine motor skills at different levels especially in 3's – 5's, general understanding of personal versus general space and the ability to identify and locate various body parts and use them in a range of ways

Social: listening, responding, being guided through movement, being part of a group or class, beginning to work with a partner or a small group and turn taking. Themes of friendship, family and community are important. Learning parameters of expected social behaviors and mores over the course of early childhood to prepare for kindergarten expectations

Cognitive: understanding directions at different degrees, repeating or mimicking movement (caregiver first then teacher & peers), recognizing patterns, shapes, colors, simple motifs, remembering routines, sequences of movement, identifying body parts, movement concepts, comparing movement of self and others, as well as experiencing other dance genres

Emotional/Affective: ability to respond to and express and identify different moods and feelings in self and others over the course of early childhood. Emotional development is quite changeable and varies from child to child, although each age seems to display general behaviors e.g. *autonomy* or *rebellion* being expressed in varying degrees by young children. All of which will play out in the classroom and dance studio. Degrees of frustration, verbal response, emotional volatility and verbal expressiveness will vary. Young children need to explore a range of feelings through dance, books and the arts to help them expand their range of emotional literacy and depth of feeling ultimately leading to feelings of *empathy*.

Language/Literacy: ability to communicate effectively and with a range of vocabulary and expressiveness, increased ability to share and express feelings, thoughts, ideas to an adult and peers, ability to look at books, understand and derive meaning from books, ability to begin to read and write stories and ideas and understand the structure and sequence of a story, poem, song, dance, etc.

	Physical/Kinesthetic:	Social:	Cognitive:	Emotional/Affective:	Language/Literacy:
Age 2-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Are generally more active than any other point in their lives •Are often in constant motion and have difficulty being still for extended periods •Walk, run, march, climb, walk up and down stairs, can learn how to gallop, some can jump, roll, begin to extend limbs and tip toe •Have a hard time controlling themselves in physical activities •Still fall a lot and still spend a lot of time on floor (sitting, lying, rolling, etc.) •Still are in the oral phase but can be reminded not to put things in mouth •Developing fine motor skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Begin to play simple pretend games •Generally are self-centered •Have a hard time sharing •Can display affection, blow kisses and hugs, recognize favorite people and begin to ask for them, talk about them in absence •Enjoy playing near other children (parallel play) but not yet with children •Are in the No! phase •Have difficulty waiting •Are increasingly enthusiastic about being with other children •Demonstrate increasing independence •Begin to show defiant behavior (tantrums, no!) •Experience increasing episodes of separation anxiety •Are increasingly aware of his- or herself as separate from others •Need help with transitions •Can begin to help with tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Like to imitate the behavior of adults and older children (siblings) •Begin to think about doing something before doing it •Have trouble making choices, but want to talk about them in absence •Have a limited attention space •Shows mindset: certain things in certain orders •Can understand a 2-step request •Cannot remember rules but can at times understand them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Can become frustrated easily and yet might refuse help •Still need a strong sense of security •Are more sure of themselves •Experience temper tantrums - especially with children w/out verbal skills to express themselves •Begin to experience more self-control •Experience less separation anxiety (depends on child) •Can retain a picture of someone when they are out of sight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Are increasing their vocabulary at a rapid rate •Can express feelings and wishes •Begin to talk in full sentences •Can memorize short rhymes •Understand stories

	Physical/Kinesthetic:	Social:	Cognitive:	Emotional/Affective:	Language/Literacy:
Age 3-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Walk heel to toe •Walk on tiptoes •Stand on one foot and balance •Jump horizontally •Handle small objects •Need a balance between active and quiet play •Are still napping •Are growing at a rapid rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Can cooperate with other children •Can separate from caregiver •Can show affection towards friends/inanimate objects like stuffed animals •Will test adults over and over again •Begin to learn how to share •Need to know clear and consistent rules and what consequences for breaking them are •Love to be the leader •Enjoy dramatic play with other children •Are beginning to develop friendships –nurtured by adults mainly •May become possessive of favorite toys •Are more independent, yet still dependent •Can make transitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Want to touch, taste, smell, hear and test things for themselves •Connect more to what they are learning •Are eager to learn •Primarily learn by experiencing and doing •Learn from their play •Have a longer attention span; activities can be expanded •Enjoy trying new things •Can negotiate solutions to conflicts •Begins to view self as a whole person involving body, mind and feelings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Experience a wide range of emotions which can be usually extreme but short lived •Often question and test parental authority •Demonstrate awareness of other’s feelings •Experience fears, which might include new places and experiences as well as separation from parents and other important people •Can articulate feelings or act out feelings (anger, frustration, sadness, happy) •Can have clear likes and dislikes •Often cannot distinguish between reality and fantasy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Can express their needs and basic feelings •Have greater control of language •Understand stories and like to “read” or be read to •Want to share what they are thinking about •Can speak in a group setting (adults and peers) •Are continuing to expand their vocabulary

	Physical/Kinesthetic:	Social:	Cognitive:	Emotional/Affective:	Language/Literacy:
Age 4-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Are developing greater strength •Demonstrate increased coordination •Can balance for a longer period of time •Demonstrate greater range of flexibility •Have more small and large muscle control •Demonstrate a wider range of locomotor and non-locomotor movements •Are very active and can be aggressive in their play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Want to please friends and adults and can be eagerly cooperative •Want to be like friends •Are developing a strong sense of independence •Are more likely to agree to rules •Can recite the rules back to teacher •Many are in pre-school or pre-k learning situation •Understand belonging to a group •Like to monitor other children to do the right thing •Are developing strong friendships •Can display leadership •Can take turns (intermittently and with guidance) •Can share toys (intermittently and with guidance) •Love to be silly and giggle and laugh 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Understand and can follow routines of a day in pre-school, pre-K •Can remember expectations of parent/teacher •Respond well to choices •Can problem solve •Might fixate on things (special toys/games, or what they want to wear or not wear) •Can apply knowledge to new situations •Are able to distinguish reality from fantasy but still like to be magical and believe in make-believe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Develop a clear sense of self •Can voice likes and dislikes •Can be very stubborn and demanding •Have fears and experience nightmares •Like to voice their strong opinions •Can express empathy with animals and sometimes friends •Can display loving and affectionate behavior to a range of people •Display a wider range of emotions •Are sensitive to parent/teacher preferences •Can have <i>good</i> days and <i>bad</i> days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Are beginning to pre-write and read •Are storytellers and love to “read” books •Have an expanded vocabulary •Are verbally quite expressive

	Physical/Kinesthetic:	Social:	Cognitive:	Emotional/ Affective:	Language/Literacy:
Age 5-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Are no longer napping •Are developing greater strength •Demonstrate increased coordination •Can balance for a longer period of time •Demonstrate greater range of flexibility •Have more small and large muscle control •Demonstrate a wider range of locomotor and non-locomotor movements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Concerned with maintaining the status quo •Respond to positive reinforcement & rewards •Have stronger bonds to friends and can have “best friends” •Are accustomed to a school environment •Need clear and simple rules so they know the boundaries of acceptable behaviors •Can be aggressive but want friends and enjoy being with other children •Tend to brag and be bossy •Are accustomed to sharing and turn taking •Love to gather in groups together and act as leader •Take pride in doing a “good job” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Can focus for longer periods of time •Can apply knowledge and understanding in a variety of ways •Developing a scientific mind •Can consistently follow rules •Understand the consequences of not following directions •Still enjoy pretending and using their imaginations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Need to feel important and worthwhile •Need opportunities to feel more freedom and independence •Appreciate praise for their achievements •Understand the order of follow rules •Benefits from consistent routines •Can still be fearful of the dark and monsters •Understands the concept of danger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Speak in fairly complex sentences •Can adapt language to listener’s level •Love to talk and tell stories •Are extremely verbally expressive •Can discuss a wide range of topics