

## WHY CHOOSE A CONCEPTUAL DANCE PROGRAM BY CHANTEL SAMPSON

I grew up in a traditional competitive dance studio studying Ballet, Tap, and Jazz. I attended the Edmonton School of Ballet alongside my competitive dance studio learning in a traditional style of rote and mastery. I loved competition (and secretly to this day I still do) and thrived in the environment that demanded practice, attention to detail and performance. However the day came when I was told I didn't have the body for a ballerina. I knew that being a professional dancer was not in my future however I was determined to keep dancing. I continued to take private point lessons where no one would judge the size of my hips or the height of my extension. One day I was lucky enough to stumble across Vanessa Harris. She was teaching a weekend jazz class at the university and although I was still in high school she agreed to let me take the class. It was the first time in my life that I experienced dancing with a group of people for the sheer joy of dancing. No one cared what they wore, there was no trying to outdo the person beside them, there was just dance. The women in the class were fantastic dancers and I found myself relaxing and enjoying dance in a different way for the first time.

When I began my teaching career a few years later dance was always a part of it. As a beginning classroom teacher I studied Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences and worked on a committee writing curricular support materials for teachers focusing on each of the **7 multiple intelligences**. I began to explore the way that dance and movement could be used to teach the curricular outcomes in a way that would appeal to the kinesthetic learner. I quickly realized that through dance, many aspects of the curriculum could be taught and that dance easily became a platform to where all seven intelligences could be included in every class.

## WHAT IS CONCEPTUAL DANCE?

This was the beginning of my research into conceptual dance. Teaching dance through the **Dance Concepts** rather than simply through a series of unrelated steps in a syllabus. I had studied some of Anne Green Gilbert's work in University and through continued research and practice I created a community based program called Kreative Kidz. After joining J'Adore Dance I found that I could bridge my lessons from my community teaching with the Creative Jazz Ballet program. As an owner I became the Artistic Director of the full year programs and continued to building and developing the Creative Jazz Ballet Program. I travelled to the Creative Dance Centre in Seattle to spend a week studying with Anne Green Gillbert at her Summer Teacher Training Intensive. I was completely hooked on using conceptual dance as the basis for all my dance programs (both in the schools and at J'Adore). One of my strengths as a dancer had always been creating and performing and by using conceptual dance with my students I was able to have them develop a deeper understanding of how and why they were moving and they quickly learned to take on the role of creator and performer.

## WHAT ARE THE DANCE CONCEPTS?

The Kreative Kidz™ and Urban Kidz™ curriculums are based on fifteen dance concepts adapted from movement educator Rudolf Laban's Movement Analysis which was is way of creating, describing, and understanding any kind of human movement. Each month a different concept is selected as the focus for all the dance classes. This dance concept, combined with an overarching theme, is the thread that ties the

lessons together. Teaching from a concept base makes the lessons more meaningful and motivating than teaching only steps and routines. Dance without concepts is movement without meaning, without purpose. Children who learn dance through concepts aren't using rote memory but accessing higher brain functioning through application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, in essence they become smart dancers.

Children who learn dance steps and technique through an understanding of concepts become master communicators and masters of their own body. They can use concepts to convey various emotions, topics, themes and stories. They have a thesaurus of body language, that expands their movement repertoire.

Dance Concepts covered in Kreative Kidz™ and Urban Kidz™

#### Space

1. Place self (personal) space, general space, empty space
2. Size big (far reach), medium (mid-reach), small (near reach)
3. Level high, middle, low
4. Direction forward, backward, right, left, up, down
5. Pathway curved, straight, zigzag
6. Focus single focus, multi-focus

#### Time

7. Speed fast, medium, slow
8. Rhythm pulse, pattern, grouping, breath

#### Force

9. Energy sharp, smooth, shaky, swingy
10. Weight strong, light, active, passive
11. Flow free, bound

#### Body

12. Parts head, neck, shoulders, arm, wrists, elbows, hands, fingers, hips, pelvis, trunk, spine, stomach, sternum, legs, knees, feet, toes, heels, etc.
13. Relationships over, under, around, through, above, below, beside, between, near, far, in, out, on, off, together, apart, alone, connected, in front, in back
14. Shapes curved, straight, angular, twisted, symmetrical, asymmetrical
15. Balance off balance, on balance

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### THE 7 MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES IN DANCE

- Dance and learn together, creating a special time for bonding and building social skills (Interpersonal Intelligence).
- Practice fundamental movement patterns (*BrainDance*) that reorganize our brains, helping us to fill in any missing gaps in our sensory/motor development (Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence).
- Respond to a variety of music pieces in a joyful way, and explore musical concepts (Musical Intelligence).
- Learn an extensive movement vocabulary, and use that vocabulary in discussions and writing (Verbal Linguistic Intelligence).
- Move through space with ease and safety, explore relationships between people and objects, copy movements, and work on concepts that increase proprioception (the body's sense of itself in space) (Visual-Spatial Intelligence).
- Learn movement patterns and sequences, solve problems through movement, create and perform movement phrases/dances to metered music and counts (Mathematical-Logical Intelligence).
- Explore opposing dance concepts (high/low, fast/slow) that expand the emotional and physical repertoire, and reflect on those feelings (Intrapersonal Intelligence).

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## WHAT IS BRAINDANCE?

Developed by Anne Green Gilbert, the BrainDance is a series of exercises that we use in creative dance classes. It is comprised of eight fundamental movement patterns that we move through in the first year of life. Research has shown that these patterns are crucial to the wiring of our central nervous system. As babies, we did these movements on our tummies on the floor. However, cycling through these patterns sitting or standing has been found to be beneficial. This "dance" is an excellent full body and brain warm-up for children and adults in all settings. The BrainDance can be done at the beginning of class; before tests, performances, and presentations; and during computer work and TV watching for brain reorganization, oxygenation, and recuperation.

The benefits for children and adults in cycling through these patterns include:

**Reorganization of the neurological system:** The fundamental movement patterns wire the central nervous system laying the foundation for sensory-motor development and life-long learning. Cycling through these patterns on a daily basis may correct flaws in a person's perceptual process and reorganize the central nervous system so to develop better proprioception, balance, attention, memory, eye-tracking, behavior, sensory integration, and motor skills.

**Enhanced core support, connectivity, and alignment:** Becoming aware of the visceral and muscular systems that support the body leads to correct use of body structures and helps children and adults to be injury-free and move with ease and coordination. Each pattern underlies and supports the next pattern and when done in succession brings connectivity to our use of the body, reflecting an integration of body and mind.

**Increased blood and oxygen flow to the respiratory system and brain:** The brain consumes one-fifth of the body's oxygen. Deep breathing is essential for a fully functioning body and brain. All movements and rhythms are based on breath.

**Deeper understanding of the elements of dance technique:** The fundamental movement patterns are an integral part of dance technique. Whether taking a Ballet, Modern, Jazz, or Creative Dance class, students are able to integrate and apply the patterns of the BrainDance to their technical skill development. Dancers acquire and practice skills with more ease when they are aware that a particular pattern underlies the movement. Movement intent becomes clearer as dancers embody the BrainDance patterns.

## THE BRAINDANCE PATTERNS

Here are the basic 8 sequential patterns of the BrainDance

1. **Breath-** take 5-6 deep breaths in and out
2. **Tactile-** squeeze, tap, pat, brush, scratch all body parts
3. **Core-** Distal- Reach out with toes, fingers, head, tail and then curl back to your core.
4. **Head-Tail-** Move head and tail separately and together in all planes, wiggle spine.
5. **Upper-Lower-** Move all parts in the Upper body, then move all parts in the Lower body

6. **Body Sides-** Move all parts on the right side of the body, then move all parts on the left side of the body, do horizontal eye tracking
7. **Cross Lateral-** Move across midline and connect upper and lower body quadrants do vertical eye tracking
8. **Vestibular-**Move off balance with spins, rolls, swings, dips, and tips on all levels.

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## WHAT IS BRAIN-COMPATIBLE DANCE EDUCATION? – BY ANNE GREEN GILBERT

Brain-compatible dance education is a philosophy about and an approach to teaching dance, which integrates current research on how the brain learns into the teaching of dance concepts and technique. Below is a list of how students learn through a brain-compatible approach (Jensen 1998, Brandt 1998, Wolfe 2001). Students learn best:

- through a multi-sensory approach (hear, see, say and do);
- when the material is authentic and meaningful;
- when they are emotionally engaged and given opportunities for reflection;
- through social interaction and collaboration;
- when the material is challenging but achievable;
- when the feedback is positive, specific, timely, and learner-controlled;
- through novelty and repetition;
- when the material is developmentally appropriate and student-centered;
- when the material is presented sequentially and holistically, rather than randomly and in sub-parts;
- through a variety of teaching strategies.