



# **Ballet Arts** — *for* — **Young Children**

**Classwork & Teaching Helps for the  
Ballet Teacher of Children Ages 5 to 7**



**Ruth H. Brinkerhoff, B.A.**

Former Director, Utah Ballet Academy  
Registered Teacher, Royal Academy of Dance



## The Teacher Must Decide

The Ballet Arts For Young Children manuals, (Level 1, 2, and 3) provide information, activities and suggestions for the teacher of ballet to children of preschool and kindergarten ages. The materials in these books have worked well for the author, and for other teachers of her acquaintance.

However, the author cannot know what approach or which physical activities will be appropriate and safe for any particular teacher, class, or student. It is the responsibility of each ballet teacher to use his or her best judgment in applying the information and teaching suggestions contained herein, and in using the activities, enchainements, dances and teaching materials contained in the Ballet Arts for Young Children manuals.

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# I. Preparing to Teach

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# Ballet Arts for Young Children Level 3

## Two grades of classwork are included in this manual

The age range for Level 3 is from 5 to 7 1/2 years. Teachers who have students this age will have some who are just starting, and some who have had some Ballet Arts or other dance experience. Those who have had a year or two of dancing will not necessarily be ready for the Classical Basics class.

A Starter Class is included for those who are just beginning, or who are finished with Level 2, but are not quite ready for the Classical Basics Class.

The Level 3 Starter Class reviews the movements from Levels 1 and 2 in slightly more difficult arrangements. If in doubt, spend a few weeks on exercises from the Starter Class, to make sure the children are ready to go on. A checklist of skills and behaviors needed for promotion to Classical Basics is on pages 47-49.

Level 3 includes many enchainements of basic movements. However, the children also need to sometimes do the steps separately from the enchainements. It is perfectly okay to use a few exercises and activities from previous grades if it seems appropriate and enjoyable. Carrying a few things forward often helps children to make a smoother transition to a higher grade. They often like doing a few

old favorites just for fun. Many of the exercises in both Level 3 classes can also be used to help older beginners.

Many children who have had Ballet Arts Level 2 or a comparable dance background will be ready to go on to the Classical Basics Class. This class adds ballet styling to the basic steps and movements. It also includes more ballet exercises and steps, more enchainements, new steps, and longer, more involved dances. Level 4 is designed to allow for the young dancer's growth pattern. It is a bridge between pre-ballet and formal ballet classes. It presents the beginnings of ballet technique in ways that are appropriate for young children.

See page 81 for a chart showing which items are included in each of the two classes. The intended ages for Ballet Arts Levels are listed below. However, many of the exercises and dances can also be used for children a little older, or a little younger. Teachers need to be flexible and to use what works best for their classes.

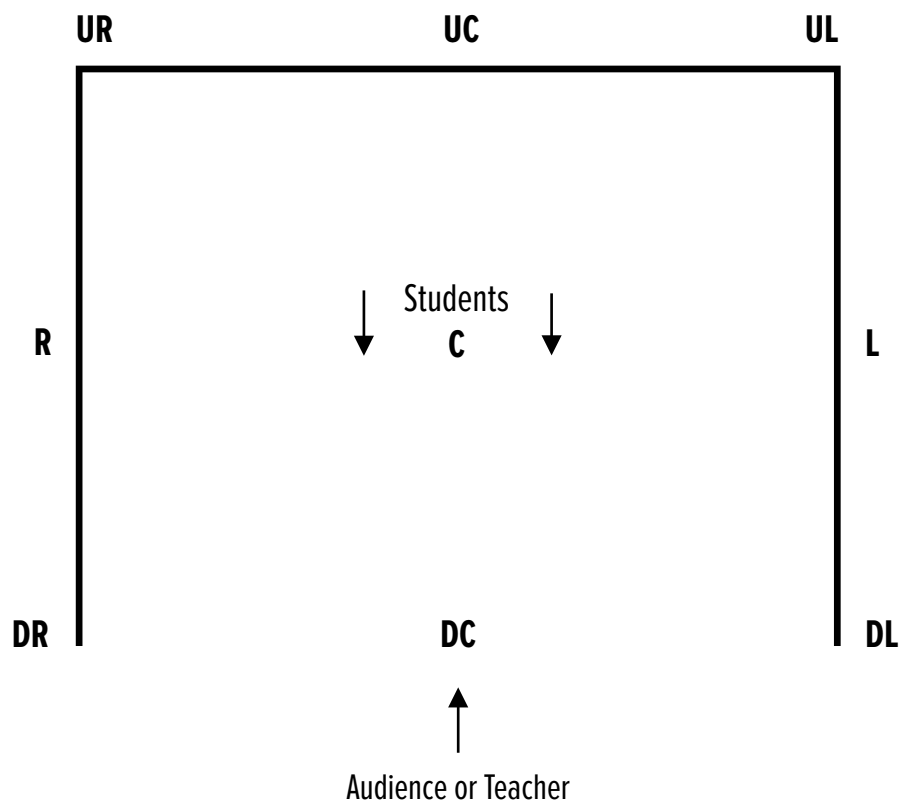
### Ballet Arts For Young Children:

Level 1	Age 3-4
Level 2	Age 4-5
Level 3, Starter Class	Age 5-6
Level 3, Classical Basics	Age 5-7

## Clarifications:

### Abbreviations

R refers to the right foot or right arm; L refers to the left foot or arm; UL is upstage left; UR is upstage right; DR is downstage right; DL is downstage left.



### Arms

The names of arm positions in this course are based on those used by the Royal Academy of Dancing. Teachers using other systems will need to make note of any differences in the choreography sections and on page 114.

# Introducing Ballet Arts For Young Children Into Your School

This course provides a concrete answer to the question of exactly what to teach young children in ballet! It is offered in the hope that it will make pre-ballet teaching and learning more fun, more effective and more rewarding for all.

There is much to be gained by reading and learning the philosophies and concepts in each of the teachers manuals. However, it is also possible for a teacher to simply turn to the syllabus section, put on the recorded music, and begin. If you are just starting a new pre-ballet class, you can use the classwork just as it is presented.

## Changing Class Procedures

If the course is a bit different from what you have been doing with your pre-ballet classes, use only bits and pieces of it at first. Give yourself and the children time to adjust to those things that are new to you.

The change should be done gradually, a little at a time, so the children do not become confused. Whenever you plan to teach or do something in a different way from before, be sure to present it as a step upward in maturity, or in advancement.

At first, introduce only one or two new elements each lesson, either in procedure or in activity. As they become used to the course elements, more can be added without causing confusion.

For all new things, explain in simple terms what you want the class to do, and how it differs from what has been done before. Motivate their cooperation by telling them that it is a more advanced way of doing things, or a more “grown-up” way, or a way that At will help them progress towards “becoming a dancer.”

## Assign Individual Places

Assigning a place to each child gives the class a look and feel of order and discipline. Giving the children a place and a position in which to sit between activities helps to eliminate many behavior problems. It gets their attention on listening to the teacher. It gives them something to do with their hands and feet while you give them instructions and motivation!

If you have not assigned individual places for your students before, you will need to explain the procedure to them. Make the change after you have started class in your usual way. Tell them you are trying a new way of organizing the class.

Suggest that it will help them to get ready for the discipline required of a corps de ballet on stage. Everyone has to dance in their assigned places if the ballet is to look good. You could also call it a more advanced way or a more grown up way for them to do their class.

As you give each child their place for that day's class, put a mark of some kind either on the floor, or on the wall directly in front of them. It needs to be very easy for them to identify and find their places. Have them sit with legs crossed, heads up, backs straight, and hands on knees. If their hands tend to get into mischief, have them fold their arms. Explain that they are to return to their places each time after finishing an exercise.

Colored tape with the child's name printed on it with a marker can be stuck to the floor. This does not interfere with dancing, and can be removed by the children at the end of each class.

### **Teachers Who Have Used the Course**

The course and suggestions offered here have been successfully tested in the field by many teachers over the

past fifteen years. Teachers using this course have been enthusiastic about the results. They have seen a difference in their students' progress towards ballet. Teachers love being able to keep order in class without losing the fun. They like the idea of doing things in dance class that will benefit the posture and coordination of young children as they move forward into more advanced classes.

As you feel positive and excited about the classwork, your young students will very likely pick up your attitude and feel good about what they are doing in class. Good luck! May your classes of young dancers be happy and fun!



# Principles of Classical Ballet

1. Posture
2. Turnout
3. Placement
4. Balance
5. Transfer of Weight
6. Theory
7. Coordination

The challenge of classical ballet: to master its technique and artistry without losing the spontaneity and enjoyment expressed by children and folk dancers. This makes it the most demanding of disciplines, both artistically and physically.

## Principles of Classical Ballet for Young Dancers

1. Balance; symmetry in stance and in natural movements.
2. Turnout; how much at each age.
3. Transfer of Weight; centering over the support.
4. Creativity; using expression and feeling in movement.
5. Miming; using natural subjects for interpretation through movement.

-Ruth H. Brinkerhoff, July 1989

### Balance

Children under eight who study ballet are not ready mentally, physically, or artistically to learn and apply all of the principles of classical ballet. They are still very much involved in growing and strengthening, and in learning to move and balance against gravity.

It is appropriate for them to be concerned with balance, both standing and moving. This is a natural part of their physical development. Their balance is constantly changing as their body changes in shape, size, and strength. This will be true for many years to come. Watch that their muscle use is correct, even if the resulting position or movement does not look "finished." It is the correctness of muscle use that builds the final beauty of ballet, rather than the attempt to create a "perfect appearance" in beginners.

### Turnout

Turnout needs to be limited for young children. Full use of the child's turnout capacity should be delayed until around age eight or nine, and not expected the first year of ballet study at any age.

Before five to six years only a slight amount of turnout is used: 60°-80°. At about five and a half to seven years old 90° is used with the feet making a right angle. This 90° turnout is easy to teach and easy for the young dancer to find, and to understand. Their feet in first position form the "corner of a box." The concept of turning the entire leg from the hip joint can be introduced successfully while sitting on the floor.

This 90° turnout should be used for a year or more, to allow for a good strengthening of the hip joints.

From age eight the degree of turnout can be gradually increased as the muscles involved in turnout begin to strengthen, and as student is able to use these muscles correctly in demi plies and in landing from sautes. It is a good idea to include some exercises in parallel position in all grades, to be sure strength is maintained in the natural alignments.

Students learn that both legs always turn out equally, and that feet never turn out more than the legs can go. Adjustments for individual differences are sometime necessary. Unequal turning of the legs cause a lack of symmetry and muscle balance in the dancer.

For a correct third position, start with the feet in first with equal turnout. Then move one leg to third position being careful to maintain the same exact turnout. This may not look as nice as some other methods, but it will create stronger, better feet and legs for ballet. The feet in third at this age will form the letter “T” as seen at a 45° angle: “T for Third”!

Any adaptation of bone alignment at the ankle joint in order to achieve the “perfect fifth” should wait until age sixteen, and then be done only if a professional career is chosen. Any change from nature’s intended alignment carries with it a much greater risk of injury.

## Transfer of Weight

Without accurate placement of the body weight, balance and control are lost, and the dancer looks clumsy and inept.

We begin watching the awareness of one’s body weight to young students with the rocking and swaying exercises in Levels 1, 2, and 3. Weight should transfer fully between the two feet, and be balanced on the supporting leg between transfers.

Weight is transferred in all locomotor movements, and in all movements where the support of the body changes: from two feet to one foot, one foot to the other, etc. Jumps are transfers of weight, either vertical or a combination of vertical and horizontal.

Ballet is made up of constant transfers of weight, all of which must be fully under the dancer’s control. This wonderful control of one’s body against gravity begins naturally with the first step a toddler takes. The goal of improving on it should begin in the youngest of dance classes, and never stop.

## Creativity

Creativity does not happen in a vacuum! Children are very imitative, but cannot create until they have some ideas and concepts inside to work with. The teacher of young children prepares them for creativity by leading

and guiding them through appropriate imaginative activities. Dancers need to acquire a rich movement experience from which to draw later.

Children can learn that dancing is feeling, expressing, and telling; that dance is not just mechanical movements. They can begin to learn that technique is a means of extending the communication potential of movement, and not an end in itself.

## **Miming**

Miming teaches the young dancer to act out roles and events; to use movement as a means of communicating. The movements are to be taken from “everyday life”, so as to be universally understood. The movements can be isolated and put in to logical sequences to make their meanings more clear. Movements must be adopted in size and speed so that what the dancer is saying can be clearly understood.

## **Summary**

The first three principles for the Ballet Arts for Young Children graces are physical in nature and have to do with success in the learning of technical skill. The last two principles are for the development of the performing side of the dancer’s talent.

## **Principles of Classical Ballet to Be Studied Later**

### **Posture**

Posture for ballet sometimes called Stance. Ballet requires a special

extension of what may be considered good posture for other activities. The young dancer’s body does not have the proportions or muscular control needed to perform the stance required for classical ballet. Muscular and skeletal readiness for this principle usually appears at age eight to nine. Before that age, encourage dancers to stand tall, stand evenly on both feet, breathe well, and keep the shoulders and arms relaxed.

### **Placement**

Placement, or placing, refers to the correct alignment of bones, joints, and muscles while doing positions and movements. The ability to form accurate positioning of feet, legs, arms, hands, and head to assume the finished look of ballet positions and movements begins gently around age 7. From there, the positions should be perfected gradually, working towards a full understanding of what is correct by age fourteen.

The ability to produce correctness will vary. Some understanding of basic anatomy and muscle use is needed for the student to be fully successful with this principle. Surprisingly, an understanding of muscle use can begin at Level 3, or age five. When placement is correct, balance is also there.

### **Balance**

The weight must be evenly distributed throughout the entire body. The dancer must understand about counterbalancing the parts of the body.

Some dancers know where their balance is instinctively, others must be taught. The dancer must be able to quickly arrive at an accurate position, and hold it. The laws of opposition and of epaulement are used to give a balanced appearance to the positions and movements characteristic of classical ballet

## Theory

Theory includes terminology and the rules for the technical requirements of classical ballet. Terminology defines the step and positions, describing how they are to be performed. Rules are traditional procedures for the dancer to follow which create the style that identifies the movement and positions as belonging to ballet. Example: the arms move across the center line of the body. There are special rules for the head, for the eyes, for the arms, for the hands, for the body, for the legs, for the feet. There are rules of epaulement, rules of directions on stage, and rules for relationships of arms, legs, and head. Learning and applying these rules takes time! It is these rules that give ballet its own unique style that sets it apart from other types of dance.

## Coordination as a Principle of Classical Ballet

*Can coordination be taught to dancers?*

Many ballet authorities believe that coordination cannot be taught, but is a part of a student's natural talent. In other words, by the time a student is

ready for formal ballet training, they are either coordinated or they are not. Some feel the development of coordination in ballet occurs as a side effect of correctly taught ballet classes. Few, if any, believe that coordination can be taught as a separate principle in the same way that other principles can be taught.

## The Elements of Coordination

If we examine the coordination of an accomplished dancer, we find that it is not a single quality, but rather several interwoven skills, and that a dancer may have some of these qualities and not others.

Physical coordination can be divided into two parts. First, there is the base of coordination within the dancer, the smooth working together of the dancer's arms, hands, legs, feet, body, head and eyes. This inner coordination within the neuromuscular system gives a graceful appearance to whatever the dancer does. It enables the dancer to express feeling through movement. It also enables the dancer to interact in a spatially coordinated manner with other dancers, and with props and scenery.

The second category of physical coordination is the coordinating of choreographic elements with the dancer's own inner coordination. It also includes coordinating the various parts of the choreography with each other. This part of physical coordination is seldom thought of as being separate



from musical coordination. However, students who lack a natural feel for musicality may benefit greatly from first coordinating themselves with the choreographed movements without music. Once they coordinated themselves with the choreographic elements, and the choreographic elements with each other, they may find it easier to fit this whole package to the music.

Musical coordination, often referred to as musicality, is the ability to coordinate the dancer's movements to music. This can be encouraged in even the youngest dancer. It can begin to be more specifically taught in the Level 3 class. This creates good artistic habits, and also helps the young dancers to gain the refined control of their muscles that will be needed for more advanced ballet.

Young students can learn to match their movements to the timing and expression in music, especially in those exercises that they perform regularly. Everything should be "danced" as soon as it is learned. Neglecting the musicality on simple things will result in poor musical coordination.

**The coordination needed for ballet includes three very important considerations:**

1. Coordination within the dancer, the natural development of their neuromuscular system;
2. Coordination by the dancer of the choreographic elements to be

performed. These elements need to be coordinated with each other, and to the dancer's own inner coordination;

3. Musicality, which includes both the coordination of the dancer to the music, and a coordination of the choreographic elements to the music.

Problems with any of these areas will result in an "uncoordinated" appearance. Coordination, as it is seen in this way, can be "taught" at most levels of ability. The specifics of the teaching will need to be carefully matched to the student's age and ability. Exercises will need to be created by the teacher, which will isolate the item being taught, and guide its performance in the right direction.

### **Coordination for Ballet Arts Level 3**

The early years of lessons are where the natural inner coordination can be encouraged and helped. Teachers need to know what to do, and what not to do, in order to successfully help students acquire their potential for coordination. Ballet Arts for Young Children gives teachers a wonderful outline to follow for helping their coordination!

Coordination is not listed as a principle for the younger dancer, as physical coordination within the body should not be specifically taught during the pre-ballet years. Rather it is to be encouraged to happen naturally through the use of appropriate movement experiences. The natural

growth of coordination must not be interfered with by attempts to teach specific arm and leg coordination. For more about coordination, see Section IV.

### **Coordination for Older Students**

Physically uncoordinated preteens, teens, and adults can be helped to improve their coordination. They will need extensive practice of the natural movements taught in the Ballet Arts for Young Children grades. These movements can be mixed in with the formal exercises and given to the entire class. They can be given in enchainement form, at an intellectual level appropriate for the older students. Explain to the class that enjoying these natural movements for a few minutes in each class will improve their coordination, build their aerobic abilities, and will make the performance of technical ballet easier for them.

### **Conclusion**

As teachers do those things in class that assist the inner coordination to improve, all of the students will be helped. This means that the less coordinated student may still be far behind the very talented student. But, that less coordinated student should progress beyond what they could have accomplished without the teacher's attention and expertise!

For children, it is important that their ballet training improve their natural talents. Most will not become dancers when they are older. But their dancing should count for something. One should be able to tell that they have studied ballet. And, there are those borderline students who may have the desire and determination to dance, whose coordination can be lifted to make this possible.

# The Real Purpose of Teaching

*The real purpose of teaching is to enable the student to perform without the teacher.*

Teachers should demonstrate only as needed, not all of the time. Students need to show what they can do without having to follow the teacher. And, the teacher needs to be able to observe the progress of the students.

Encourage their efforts. Encourage their enthusiasm for movement. Encourage them in learning to control their muscles and direct their movements. Encourage expression in movement. Encourage the beginnings of creativity—imagination and feeling appropriate for the situation.

Teach more than just movement. Teach them what is appropriate in behavior, in attitude, speech, and feeling, for the situations encountered in dance class. They don't come to class knowing these things.

They need your wise teaching. Just as you would not let them run around the room out of control, or hit the other children, you must not let them have attitudes or speech that is inappropriate, either. They will assume and learn that whatever you permit is the right thing to do, or think, or say. So, whether you give guidance in these areas or not, they will learn something from you.

Your choice is to either teach correct behavior, speech, and attitudes along with the dancing, or to let them learn that “anything goes”. They will learn something in the non-dancing areas,

whether you teach it or not. The job of a teacher is to decide for the children exactly what they are going to learn. Whether you want to or not, you will be teaching the whole child, not just the dancing muscles.

Children aged three to six present special challenges to ballet teachers. But they also present an invaluable opportunity to correctly prepare their muscles and coordination for greater success in classical ballet.

Maybe you have heard the two sides of an ongoing controversy: “never teach technique to children under eight;” and, “but it isn't really ballet unless you teach technique!”

Common sense tells us not to treat the body of an infant the same way we do the body of an older child. We take greater care in picking up and handling an infant.

It also follows, then, that the body of a five year old is still more delicate, and easier to injure than that of an eight year old.

Researchers tell us that the years up through age seven are the years where nature prepares the child to later learn physical skills and develop physical talents. It is called the Fundamentals stage.

The more formal and complex skill learning stage should not be imposed on a child that has not spent adequate time learning and practicing the fundamental movements.

A few years back, researchers discovered that children who did not go through the fundamental movement experience of learning to crawl (creep), and went directly to walking had problems learning to read later on. They realized that there was a strong, direct correlation between movement experience and intellectual learning.

Nature plans for the child to move naturally through the various levels within the fundamentals stage from about age two to age seven. If this happens, children are well prepared to learn more complex and detailed movements and intellectual skills at about seven and a half to eight years of age.

Classes that are built upon this natural order of progression often appear to move slower than the less appropriate programs. But it is the fundamental classes that provide for real progress in

coordination, and give the best base for learning classical ballet.

To the uninformed observer, these classes may not look quite as much like ballet, but they lead the child in the right direction.

Fives can nearly always skip, or quickly learn to skip; those who cannot probably lack sufficient background in fundamental movement experience. To strengthen and become coordinated as they should, the children need to be allowed to move freely\* in the non-technical forms of movement skills: walking, running, jumping, hopping, and galloping.

\*Freely does not mean out of order, but that their movements are performed naturally, according to their individual strengths and abilities. Arms are not choreographed, but are left free to respond naturally to the movement.



# Creating a Comfortable Class

Children are happiest when their muscles are happy, and their brains are happy. Then their feelings can be happy. Most of us can remember being in a school or college class where we felt unable to understand what was being presented. It wasn't much fun, was it?

A dance class can feel that way to a young child. The brains and muscles of the children must be kept from frustration if they are to be a happy, well behaved class. Remember, too, that pre-ballet classes build your dance school from a business standpoint. Happy children make happy parents. It is indeed worth the effort to make comfortable, happy classes for your young dancers!

A Level 3 ballet class needs to be fun, natural, imaginative, on the child's level, and interesting to both the children and the teacher. Extensive experience at this level will make their eventual learning of formal ballet technique easier, more graceful, and more expressive.

The class must not involve formal ballet training. It must give the child's neuromuscular system time to develop and time to practice the skills needed as a base for ballet. Just because a child "can do" the class does not mean they are ready to move up. Depth of experience will strengthen the base.

## **Build the Class around Basic Skills.**

Use the basics such as walking, running, galloping, jumping, hopping and skipping. When doing these movements, the young child's arms should be allowed to move freely. Sometimes hands can be on waist, or arms in demi 2nd, for appearances.

For all movements done across the floor, you must teach the concept that "dancers don't bump." Compliance is essential for their safety and good feelings.

## **Choreograph Arms & Legs Separately**

While feet are dancing, arms should be left to move naturally, or hands placed on waist or arms in a single position such as demi second. Specific arm or head movements should be performed while the feet and legs are not moving.

## **Have Them Change Legs Frequently.**

Have them do only one or three repetitions on one leg before changing to the other leg. Keep the exercises short enough to be well done. Match tempos to their comfort.

## **Alternate Activities on the Feet with Activities on the Floor.**

The younger the student, the more often their legs will need a short rest. Rest them about every eight to ten minutes. Returning to sit in their places between activities will help give their legs some rest, also.

### **Right and Left Awareness is Not Secure At This Level.**

They are not all ready to differentiate right and left sides of the body while moving. Some authorities believe that requiring this response too soon can interfere with a balanced development of the two sides of the brain, or with the development of a secure handedness, or dominance.

Children of five, six or seven can begin using the correct foot or leg in dance class. Demonstrate by mirror image which side to use, but don't force. They will follow you correctly when their brains and muscles are ready.

### **While Demonstrating, Face Your Class; Use the Mirror Image Method.**

This means you must use the left foot when you want them to use the right foot, etc. Explain to them what you are doing, and how you expect them to respond. Some may have been taught the other way, but it will not be hard for them to change to the "mirror image" type of response. It is an easier, more natural way for children to follow.

Demonstrate at their level, not at your more advanced level. You are their example. Show the correct amount of turnout for them; lift your leg only as high as you want them to go. Sometimes you can show the "wrong" things and ask them to fix it for you

### **Use the Same Class Format Each Week.**

Vary some things, but keep the basic content and procedures the same. They need the security that structure and familiar procedure brings. Young muscles, minds, and feelings need repetition. Vary the stories, the presentations, the goals for repeating things, but do repeat the basic movement, enchainements and dances that they are learning, and have already learned.

Too many words will frustrate and confuse. Keep directions short and simple. Use short sentences. Show, say, and then ask them to try. When they have been successful with your help, let them try it without you. Finally, let them show it by turns one at a time, or in small groups.

Select what you want to work on each week. Repeat a lot. Children need lots of repetition. Children like familiar activities. Praise their progress.

It takes ten to twelve weeks for a skill to become firmly established in the muscles and brain. Be enthusiastic, be imaginative, and they will have fun doing the same skills again and again.

### **Challenge? Or Frustration?**

Sometimes parents or other adults will think it is a good idea to "challenge" children with something that they cannot do. Goals given to children need to be possible for them to accomplish

within one or two lessons. Things that are more difficult create frustration. A success-oriented program will build confidence and progress.

Mentally quick children must be challenged by giving them more complicated settings: enchainements, mimes, dances, creative movement, counting steps, etc. They should not be moved up before completing at least a year at Level 3.

### **Divide the Class For Group Turns**

If your class is large enough to divide for some or the group activities, you make the divisions, then assign names to the groups such as chipmunks, squirrels, rabbits. Do not base your division on ability. Use age, height, color of leotard, or some other quality not related to ability.

### **Give Individual Help Sometimes**

Sometimes help them one at a time when teaching a new movement. If the class is large, you may want an assistant to help with this. And do give occasional chances for them to perform individually in class. Have the rest of the class sit as they watch and wait for their turn. Free or unstructured practice is not a good idea.

They love to show you what they can do on their own! This prepares them for being confident on a stage.

### **Be Flexible In Your Teaching.**

We like to do what we do well. Children are no different; they need to

learn a movement and feel comfortable with it before they can really like it.

If what you are doing is not working, change it. Drop whatever is not going over very well. No matter how much you want them to get it, if it is too hard for them to grasp in a few minutes, it needs to be saved for later.

When the children can't seem to do a movement, more background may be needed, more muscle maturity, or a less complicated presentation. Do more preparatory work. Skills happen when the growth and readiness is there, not before. No amount of instruction or help can replace needed preparatory skills.

Next week or next month you can adjust the approach. Begin more basically. Use more steps to get where you are going. Relate or compare it to something they can already do.

"The real purpose of teaching is to enable the student to perform without the teacher's help!" When material is within their limited abilities, is presented at their level, and is carefully rehearsed, this can happen.

### **Teach Ballet Skills In The Center.**

Ballet barre skills performed in the center help the young student to develop a sense of balance and posture. Young students find the movement much easier to perform without the barre. Children under age eight develop better technique and better posture if kept away from the barre.

### **Teach Them about Music.**

Phrase steps and short enchainements with the music. Students age five and older should be able to follow the musical beats on most things. With specific teaching, their musical abilities will improve.

Work first with the feel of music. Mention how it fits the feel of the movement. Then work with musical phrasing, changing ideas or actions with the phrases. Finally, use rhythm instruments or clapping to help them hear the beats and follow them. Dancing on the music also requires a good sense of balance, so use easy movements for rhythm study, such as walks, and marches. Having words to sing or say with the music helps.

Rhythm instruments can make music interesting to dancers. Give them some simple rhythm patterns to copy or to do with you. Use patterns from their exercises and dances. Then have them “dance” the rhythm without music. Give them chances to listen, to hear the elements in music, and to respond to the music.

### **Children Love Imagery.**

Use stories, moods, and feelings when choreographing for them. Stick to things within their rather limited experience. Use stories and themes that are appropriate for childhood. However “cute” it may be, avoid having them imitate adult ideas and behaviors. They need to be children for a few years yet!

### **Create at Their Level.**

This is where they learn best, and where they perform best. Children need to move in child-like ways, and to not go beyond their current development.

Create little stories to act out, using the exercises and movements in the syllabus and mimes about things they are familiar with. You want them to build a strong, secure base for future coordination, grace, and technical excellence.

A “dance drum” or similar item lets you do creative things without having to rely on recorded music. It helps the children develop an ability to hear rhythm patterns in music.

Keep the props simple, and not too numerous. Their concentration is quickly distracted by a constant use of pictures, props, etc. Schedule some time in the class, “just past the middle,” for something creative or fun or different.

Keep your themes childlike. They will become teens and adults all too soon. Capitalize on the natural charm of childhood while there is still time for you, the kids, and the parents to enjoy it.

### **Help Them Improve Their Work.**

Wait until a movement or enchainement is well learned. Discuss how to make it better for ballet. Show



them what you want, at their level. Let them try it. Sometimes show the wrong way and let them correct you.

Compliment their efforts. It is best to not give individual correction at this age. Show it with one child, then have all of them practice the improvement. Talk about what looks good for ballet, and what doesn't. Give the class only one improvement at a time.

Take the time to teach and practice careful beginnings and endings. Ballet is a performing art. Every exercise should be a miniature performance.

### **Make the Choices for Them.**

It works best at this age if you make all of the choices, and all of the assignments. Class is too short to spend time on turns for all of the children's choices. How can you refuse an inappropriate choice and still seem fair to the children?

Children have difficulty with choices and decisions because they are immature and lack experience. Their sense of what is correct for each situation is still a bit hazy. They can be very uncomfortable when even small decisions are placed on them instead of decided by the teacher. They may look or act bored, or they may act out or deliberately make a wrong choice because they are unsure of what would be acceptable.

### **Guide Their Energetic Behavior!**

Have a specific, consistent way of

starting and ending class. Practice these procedures with each new class, and again when a new student joins a class.

Use the roll call to start the class in an orderly way. Some individual attention can be given by calling on each one to show a position or movement.

Assign each child a spot, a place to dance when performing in place; a place to return to when an activity is finished; a place to go to wait for the teacher's instructions.

Whether dealing with dance movements or with behavior, "telling them is not enough." The movement or procedure that you want must be rehearsed many times, or it won't happen. Children do like to know exactly what is expected of them.

Use children's ideas for mimes and activities when it is appropriate. But don't let them "direct" the lesson. Unsolicited ideas should be put off until later in the class, or next week, so that you are the one deciding what is done, and when.

It works best if students are not allowed to choose their own partners. If they choose, it can very quickly lead to hurt feelings. Having to choose a partner puts their attention on the social relations between class members, rather than on the activity and the learning.

Keep track of any special privileges or turns, or partners. Rotate these from week to week to be sure they get equal

turns, and that they get to dance with everyone in the class. Use the partner cards idea on page 110.

### **More Than Enough To Do!**

It is tempting to try to teach everything right away. This manual contains much more material than you can use for one class, even in two years. That is intentional.

Choose a reasonable number of activities for your class to learn in one year. Starter classes can handle from 22 to 30 items. The Classical Basics level can do from 26 to 34 items. Be sure to include several items from each section of the class.

Teach about half of the items you have chosen. When they have those learned pretty well, start adding one or two new ones each lesson. Items which are lead ups to harder skills can be dropped to make time for newer, more advanced things. Creative sequences and mimes can be changed occasionally for variety.

You may decide that you want to use the exact same classwork for a couple of years in order to learn the material a little better, or to save on lesson preparation. But, you don't have to. There is plenty to choose from.

You can use a different combination of items for your next class at this level. It means teachers do not have to teach the exact same classwork every year!

Once you are familiar with the level of difficulty suitable for your class, feel free to occasionally choreograph your own variations on the work. You

may want to arrange some slightly different enchainements and dances. The possibilities are endless.

You may also find other music that works with this level. Be sure to keep the length within their ability to concentrate and remember. Most music and dances being sold for pre-ballet are far too long, and far too hard for them to accomplish without constant prompting.

### **Teaching Pre-ballet is a Challenge!**

It is a challenge for creative teachers to keep the ballet and other choreographic movements within the abilities of young dancers! It is worth your time and effort to do so. The end result will be better dancers in your older classes!

Ballet Arts for Young Children is a carefully planned pre-ballet course based on fundamental movement experiences, adding Classical Direction as the children can handle it. And again, the class should have a feeling of fun, a touch of humor, and a feeling of responding to music.

The age for moving up to Classical Basics 2 (Level 4) is seven or eight for most children. A few with good dance experience may be ready at six and a half.

In a year or two you will most likely begin to see the results of this program. You will have ballet students in your higher grades who can actually do more and understand more than those who did not have the privilege of starting with the Ballet Arts courses.

## II. What to Teach Them?

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### Level 3 is TWO Levels!

1. Starter Class for beginners up to age 8 and for those needing more work on basic skills before adding technical refinements.
2. Classical Basics Class for those with a good command of the basic skills, who are ready for the challenge of more ballet steps, enchainements, and longer dances.

# Teach Them to Skip!

Skipping requires balance, symmetry in muscle use, self esteem, and some natural coordination. It is often used as an indicator of “readiness to learn” academic subjects. It is expected that children in a dance class will learn to skip. Skipping is a complex skill composed of and built upon several more basic skills. The skills below are not listed in any particular order.

Students age five to seven who are ready for a Level 3 class are usually able to skip. If you have one or more who don't skip, review the skills listed below with the entire class. Do it informally, in fun settings.

It is best to not single students out for individual help or corrections, as this age is very sensitive to making mistakes. They need to know that they are adequate, and that they can do things right.

## Twelve Pre-Skipping Skills

1. Standing: Stand evenly on two feet, feet matched, arms relaxed at sides. Lift arms straight up to a natural 2nd position, slightly below shoulder level, hands facing the floor. Child should show good symmetry, and good balance.
2. Walking: Walking should show a smooth action, steps of equal length; equal use of both legs. Arms are relaxed and freely moving in any pattern natural to the child.
3. Running: Smooth action, steps of equal length; equal use of both legs: arms relaxed and freely moving in any pattern natural to the child.
4. Crawling (creeping) on hands & knees: The knees are picked up, not dragged. Child allows equal use of both sides of body, good sense of balance, arms and thighs used approximately perpendicular to the floor.
5. & 6. Jumps (on two feet), Hops (on one foot): Child shows an equal or nearly equal use of both legs, correct knee action. Child also pushes some with feet to help himself or herself get off the floor. Traveling slightly forward: 4 jumps, 4 hops on me the right leg, 4 jumps, 4 hops on the left leg.
7. Arm Movements: Child can swing arms forward and back, in unison or alternating. Swing both arms forward and back 4 times, then alternating with one front and one back 8 times.
8. Head Movements and Balance: Child's head is generally held upright, level, balanced, and centered over the shoulders. Child can do the three basic head movements: nodding up and down, turning from side to side, and inclining to right and to left with face to the front.



9. Feet flexing and extending: Child can flex and extend feet at the ankle joints. While sitting, with legs together straight out in front, flex and extend, matching feet, 4 times, then flex and extend alternating feet 6 times.
10. Marching: Lift thighs to a horizontal alignment, arms swinging in any pattern natural to the child, 16 natural (not styled) marches on the whole foot.
11. Galloping Forward: Child should be able to use either foot in front. Do 4 gallops with the right foot in front then 4 gallops with the left foot in front, and repeat. Arms are left free to move as is natural to the child, or hands can be placed on waist.
12. Side Gallops: Child should be able to go both directions. Holding hands in a circle, or working alone with arms in 2nd, do 8 side gallops to the right and 8 to the left.

### **Preparing Them To Skip**

Watch to see which of these skills the non-skippers need to practice. Spend a little extra time on these skills in class for a few weeks. Work them into the other classwork. You might also ask the parents of those having trouble to practice with them at home.

An ability to perform the above skills is usually needed before students will be able to skip nicely on both legs. No

specific use of arms should be taught, and no variations on the skip itself.

The one sided skip may appear first. The weaker leg takes longer to skip because it is less strong and less coordinated. Allowing and encouraging the one sided skip helps the weaker side to strengthen. It may help to practice eight extra hops on the weaker leg each day of class or home practice.

### **Marching Can Become Skipping**

When children seem ready to skip, but are not quite doing it, try this approach. "Skipping is like marching in the air, a little off the floor." Have the class march in a circle to the skipping music, and then add a tiny hop to each step to turn the marches into skips.

1-8 Do 8 marches.

1-8 Add a little hop to each marching step, getting slightly off the floor. (As if your feet have the hiccups!)

1-16 Repeat.

### **Partners Can Help!**

Have them skip in a circle with partners, assigning the weak skippers to stronger skippers. Have everyone skip with partners at this time, so that it doesn't draw attention to what any one child can't do. Ask them to "match feet" with their partner, so the two of them are using the same feet at the same time. Show enthusiasm; make it fun!

## Parents Can Help!

Be sure parents understand about the skills that need to precede skipping. They may be overanxious for their child to succeed, and try to force the skipping before the foundation is secure. Reassure them that all of the children will learn to skip, and that it needs to be a fun piece of their progress in dance class, not a pressured “have to”.

Give simple homework assignments that parents can use to help the skipping along. Suggest that they do the home practice on the days that they do not have class. One example: “For practice this week do 10 jumps on two feet. Rest a minute, then do 10 hops on the right foot. Rest a minute, then do ten hops on the left foot.” The same homework can be given to those who

skip already. It will build leg strength and coordination.

Another assignment might read: “Practice for this week: (1) 16 marches, lifting your knees high and swinging your arms. (2) 16 ballet walks with your arms in demi 2nd. Stand tall and look beautiful!”

If the weather is good, assign them to gallop around their house once with the right foot in front, then once with the left foot in front. Those who can’t do this outside could do 16 gallops with each leg.

Short, easy assignments are fun for the kids, and easy for parents to follow through on. Home practice will help all of the children to become stronger, better dancers.

# Choreography for Level 3 Starter Class

Because the activities are divided between two classes in Level 3, some numbers will be missing from this list. Those items are more advanced and are in the Classical Basics Class. Look at the chart on page 81 to see which items go with which class. Also, note that the skill exercises are identified by numbers, but the dances and creative sequences are designated with capital letters to set them apart. A few of the items are to be done without musical accompaniment.

The exercises are short so that the children can sustain their good performance to the end. Some days you may want to repeat some of the exercises two or three times, to improve their skills and their memory. The musical information and the counts listed are to help the teacher, not the children. The children are not ready for very much musical counting, so if you have them count, keep it short, up to 4 or 8 at a time, and not for very long at a time. There are more items included here than can reasonably be used with any one class or in any one year. Choose about one fourth to one half of them to use this year. Next year you can use the same or different items with your next Starter Class.

Unless stated otherwise, the starting position is held through the introduction. For movements done across the floor, teach the concept that “dancers don’t bump.” This is essential for their safety and good feelings. Feel free to adapt, make changes in, or create variations on these activities, so long as the main ideas and basic skills are not lost.

## I. Welcome and Warming Up

### 1. Greeting the Students

Taking roll, getting them primed for class, etc. The children sit in staggered rows in their assigned places. They “sit like dancers” with legs folded (feet crossed), backs straight, head up, and hands on knees or hands clasped, hopefully with a smile.

Give a few words of greeting, and mark the roll. You can use the beginning of class as a mental warmup to dancing by reviewing a few things they should know, and for giving a few seconds of individual attention to each child.

**tr# 1**  
 ♪ 3/4, 1 ct/m,  
 2m intro, 24m

## 2.a. Arm Swings and Runs

1-4	Swing arms forward, arms back, (lean slightly fwd), forward, back.	"Swing front, swing back, swing front, swing back,
5-8	3 arm circles at sides, pause in front.	"Then make a ferris wheel.
1-4	Lower arms slowly to sides.	"It . . . runs . . . down
1-4	4 clown rocks, elbows bent, hands up.	"See the clowns, funny clowns,
5-8	Run in place	"They run very fast,
1-4	Slowly sit down in places.	"And then ...sit ...down."

**tr# 2**  
 ♪ 3/4, 1 ct/m,  
 2m intro, 16m

## 3. Stretching Up and Standing Tall

The imagery is of a tree growing tall and straight. The body and head represent the tree trunk. The arms represent the branches. Hands and fingers are the leaves. Start sitting on feet, curled up.

1-4	First the tree trunk grows up out of the ground. The branches grow outward.
5-8	Branches and leaves grow up above the tree, higher and higher. The tree trunk stretches as tall as it can, and the branches go even higher.
1-4	The leaves reach up towards the sun.
5-8	For a finish, have the children slowly melt down to the floor and relax.

## II. For Awareness of Space, Their Place in Space, and Coordination

**tr# 3**  
 ♪ 3/4, 3 cts/m,  
 2m intro, 16m

## 4.a. Walking on the Dancer's Circle

The Dancer's Circle is the circular path they follow in doing steps around the room. Mark the circle on the floor with pieces of colored tape for each dancer to stand on to begin. This helps them to keep their spacing. Start facing counterclockwise. Arms can be relaxed or held in demi second.

1-6	Walks forward 6 steps, arriving at the next spot on the circle.
7-12	Move arms softly up to 2nd position, then down again.
13-48	Continue through the music.

**tr# 4** 4.b. High and Low Walks  
 ♪ 3/4, 3 cts/m, 1m intro, 16m chord  
 For fun, you might call these nosy walks (looking over the neighbor's fence), and sneaky walks (hiding behind bushes).

1-12 12 demi pointe walks

1-12 12 low walks on the whole foot, with bent knees, body inclined forward.

1-24 Repeat all.

**tr# 5** 4.c. The Ballet Walk  
 ♪ 3/4, 3 cts/m, 1m intro, 16m  
 Walk reaching forward with the toes. Dancers arrive at next spot at the same time.

1-48 Continuous ballet walks around the circle.

**tr# 6** 5. The Ballet Run  
 ♪ 2/4, 2 cts/m, 2m intro, 16m  
 Start feet together. Use arms as birds, butterflies, airplanes, etc. Ballet runs are on the balls of the feet (knees and ankles relaxed and natural). Use short fast steps. A scarf can add interest, and encourage a relaxed use of arms.

1-32 Continuous runs on the dancers circle.

Alternate version:

1-4 Run to the next spot on the circle.

5-8 Twirl around.

9-32 Continue through the music.

**tr# 7** 6.a. Jumps and Hops  
 ♪ 6/4, 6 cts/m, 1m intro, 8m  
 Jumping and hopping are skipping skills. Start feet together, arms free for balance. Travel a few inches on each hop or jump. Emphasize getting off the floor, and being light on the feet.

1-4 Do four jumps on both feet, traveling forward.

5-6 Stop and pick up the left foot.

1-4 Do four hops on the right foot, traveling forward.

5-6 Stop and put feet together.

1-12 Repeat all, picking up the right foot this time.

1-24 Repeat both sides.



**tr# 8/60**  
♫ 6/8, 2 cts/m,  
2m intro, 16m

## 6.b. Skipping

1-32	32 Skips around the Dancer's Circle.
------	--------------------------------------

**tr# 9**  
♫ 6/8, 2 cts/m,  
2m intro, 24m

### 7.a. (1) Four Points, Four Gallops, Change Feet

Start Feet Together facing counterclockwise, hands on waist or arms free for balance.

Intro: 1-4	Point right foot forward.
1-4	Tap R toes 4 times in front, counting aloud to four.
5-8	4 gallops forward with the R foot in front.
9-12	Stop, point L foot forward, wait.
13-24	Repeat with the L foot.
1-24	Repeat both sides.

The next two exercises are included to further help children progress into doing Gallops in 4's. Use whichever of the three versions of 7.a. seem to work best for you and your students. Some teachers like to use all three.

**tr# 10**  
♫ 6/8, 2 cts/m,  
2m intro, 16m

### 7.a.(2) Four Gallops, Change Feet

This is the same exercise, and the same music, except, we leave out the four points. Start right off with 4 gallops, stop to change feet, then continue through the music. This exercise emphasizes the changing of the feet.

**tr# 11**  
♫ 6/8, 2 cts/m,  
2m intro, 24m

### 7.a.(3) Four Points, Four Gallops

Start with the 4 points, 4 gallops, then hop slightly to change feet as you start the 4 points with the left foot, 4 gallops, etc. This makes them change feet quickly, as in Galloping in 4's. It emphasizes the counting of fours, and helps them in learning to use the weaker leg. Galloping in 4's is an important pre-skipping skill. It builds coordination.

**tr# 12/61** 7.b. Galloping in 4's  
 ♪ 6/8, 2 cts/m,  
 2m intro, 16m

1-32	32 gallops around the circle changing feet with a slight hop every 4th count.
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### III. Floor Exercises for Classical Line, Muscles, and Expression

**tr# 13/62** 8. Beautiful Arms  
 ♪ 3/4, 1 ct/m,  
 2m intro, 8m,  
 repeated,  
 4m coda

This teaches the path of a classical port de bras, and encourages ballet styling in the hands. Pick the flower with the thumb and middle finger. Begin sitting sideways on the left hip, feet and knees bent back to the right, weight partially resting on the left arm. A small basket and some flowers can be used as props.

Intro: 1-2	Look at flowers, deciding which ones to pick.	
1	Right hand pick flower with thumb and middle finger.	"Pick a flower.
2	Right arm through 1st to 5th, eyes following flower.	"Lift it up high.
3	Right arm to 2nd position, eyes following flower.	"Show it to your friend.
4	Right arm to demi 2nd, placing flower in basket.	"Put it in the basket."
5-8	Repeat all.	
Interlude: 1-2	Shift legs and props to the other side.	
1-8	Repeat on the other side, sitting on the right hip, using the left arm.	
Coda: 1-4	For improvisation by teacher, students, or both.	

**tr# 14** 9.a. Toes and Heels  
 ♪ 2/4, 2 cts/m,  
 2m intro, 16m

Begin sitting tall, legs straight in front, hands on floor next to hips for support. Sit tall, use ankles fully in both directions.

&1-4	Stretch ankles, pointing feet away.
&5-8	Flex ankles, pulling toes up, hold.
9-32	Continue through the music.

**tr# 15** 10.a. Learning Retiré  
 ♪ 2/4, 2 cts/m,  
 2m intro, 24m

Begin sitting, legs straight in front. Hands on floor slightly in back, bracing arms for steadiness. Legs must stay parallel, with the knees

pointing slightly up, Once learned, try it lying down to more closely resemble the body position used in marching and skipping.

1-2	Slide R foot up next to L knee.	"Lift your knee and
3-4	Lift heel and point the foot.	"Point your foot.
5-7	Hold.	"This is called Retiré.
8	Slide foot forward, straighten leg.	
9-16	Repeat with the L leg.	
1-4	Retiré with R leg, and straighten.	"Retire with the right leg.
5-8	Retiré with L leg, and straighten.	"Retiré with the left leg.
9 16	Repeat the last two retires	"Retiré is so pretty. Retiré is ballet."

**tr# 16**  
 ♪ 6/8, 2 cts/m,  
 2m intro, 8m

### 11.a. Lifting Legs

Begin sitting, legs straight in front, hands on the floor next to hips for support. Tell them, "Make your leg straight like a pencil. Sharpen your pencil." (Point feet.)

1-2	Lift R leg a few inches off the floor. Keep it fairly straight.
3-4	Lower it to the floor.
5-8	Repeat with L leg.
9-16	Continue through the music.

**tr# 17**  
 ♪ 6/8, 2 cts/m,  
 2m intro, 8m

### 11.b. Turning Out for Ballet

Explain about the Sartorius muscle or "knee muscle" It turns out the legs.\*

1-2	Rotate thighs (legs) outward.
3-4	Rotate inward to parallel alignment.
5-16	Repeat through the music, holding the turnout the last time.

\*Why learn about the Sartorius muscle? This muscle is important to turnout and is easy for young children to locate. They can see it, find the insertion just Inside the knee, and feel it working during the Leg Lifts and Turning Legs Out. They can become aware of it during demi plies and when landing from sautés. Once they know where a muscle is, and what it does, they can begin to direct it. Dancers do need some knowledge of their dancing muscles.

# Thank you!

Thanks for taking *Ballet Arts for Young Children: Level 3* for a test run!

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