

PITTSBURGH BALLET THEATRE

The Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre's Pre-K Creative Movement curriculum guide is designed to present a comprehensive understanding of all components of the program. This guide presents detailed information on specific elements of the curriculum such as philosophical and research basis, connected state learning standards, learning objectives, program goals, conceptual scope, and class structure.

The curriculum materials contained in this guide are the culmination of creative movement classes taught over the course of many years. Based upon previous editions of PBT Creative Movement curriculum handbooks, this guide has been directed by experts in the fields of dance and education.

HISTORY OF PBT'S CREATIVE MOVEMENT PROGRAM

Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre established the Creative Movement Residency Program to provide a meaningful movement experience for young children in public and private school settings. Recognizing the importance of learning through creative exploration of dance and movement PBT partnered with local districts to support the integration of movement into young student's academic curriculum. In 1997 PBT began collaborating with Pittsburgh Public Schools to engage 200 students and teachers in 6 elementary schools. As the program developed, PBT expanded to include Pre- Kindergarten classrooms in 2007. During the 2016-2017 season, PBT worked with approximately 1,050 students and teacher in over 50 classrooms throughout the Pittsburgh region.

The development of the curriculum was an iterative process, that has now resulted in a 9-week movement class and an instructional performance to acquaint students with the classical art of ballet (program descriptions below) occurring at participating schools.

The curriculum is designed to:

- Provide opportunities for children to engage in movement activities that foster and support the development of executive function skills (detailed below);
- Expose children to motor skills fundamental in building a foundation of dance;
- Support social-emotional development through creative play;
- Incorporate language and literacy learning opportunities through movement-based strategies.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Educator Professional Development: Classroom teachers who choose to participate in the Creative Movement program agree to participate in a pre-residency, 2-hour professional development workshop, “Creative Movement 101.” This workshop provides teachers with an introduction to creative movement and offers a sample of the interactive activities they, along with their students, will experience. The teacher will also choose four creative movement activities that they would like to learn in the classroom and, after working with the PBT instructor, facilitate a short lesson based on that skill during the residency.

Creative Movement Residency Program: Partnering with the Pittsburgh Board of Education, this program is designed to provide in-class experiences in creative movement and dance for Pre-K Students. A PBT instructor, in a team-teaching situation with a classroom teacher, provides a nine-week movement experience.

Instructional Performance- Ballet FUNdamentals: This instructional, interactive session sheds light on the basic foundation of ballet. Children will meet a pre-professional dancer who will demonstrate the essential ballet positions and several ballet steps. Costumes and pointe shoes will be introduced and explored during the session. A ballet story will also be read to the children.

Family Engagement Opportunities: Families will be invited to attend any and all classes of the Creative Movement residency through an initial take-home letter at the beginning of the residency. Other take-homes with prompts for movement and discussion will be provided to families three times during the course of the residency. Parents/Guardians will also be invited to attend the instructional performance as well as an after-school event, “The Barnyard Dance Party,” where PBT instructors demonstrate how to activate the literature through movement. Both parents and children will be invited to move and dance out the story of *The Barnyard Dance*, a book by Sandra Boynton. Tip sheets for movement will be available for parents and a copy of the book will be sent home with each student.

BACKGROUND

During early childhood, children are learning through movement, exploring their environment and processing and updating the information they receive. The brain is highly plastic at this time, adapting structurally and functionally based on environment and experience. During the early years of a child’s life, their brain is processing, reacting and responding to stimuli. As the child develops their brain undergoes significant changes and connections are made through the formation of synapses in response to experiences. Synapses that are used often will strengthen, while those that are not will eventually weaken and “prune away.” This process of the wiring of the brain is extremely sensitive during early childhood, making this particular timeframe important to the nurturing of neurocognitive processes and overall development.

The value of engaging children in meaningful learning experiences during this sensitive period is evident. We will evaluate the importance of supporting children’s development and learning through a creative movement lens.

What is Creative Movement?

Creative movement is used to describe the artform of dance utilizing imagination and original ideas. It assumes the use of your body as the main instrument for expression, which can be enhanced through the use of props or affordances for movement (e.g. scarf, ribbon or egg shaker). Creative movement impacts key areas of children development which are further discussed below.

Motor Skill Development. Motor skills such as run, jump, hop, skip, etc. are considered the foundations for complex motor behavior essential to physical activity, including dance. Although it was believed that the acquisition of motor skills was a naturally occurring process, research supports the need to expose children to opportunities that promote and spur development of these skills(Stodden & Goodway, 2007; Wang, 2004; Goodway & Branta, 2003).

Creative movement exposes children to motor skills and provides them with opportunities to practice skills that can then be transferred in other settings. Many of the activities encourage children to perform gross motor movements with a creative element. Children may be asked to gallop like a horse, hop through the space as if it were filled with marshmallows, or tip toe tall-as if they were a giraffe. This requires children to use their imaginations and promotes flexibility in their approach to the movement tasks at hand. Along with these skills, there are also opportunities to build students' fine motor skills through the manipulation of props and affordances. This is key, as it greatly contributes to a child's overall motor development.

Social-Emotional Development. Creative movement offers an environment that embraces self expression and fosters emotional awareness. Children participate in numerous activities that challenge them to be reflective. This may be to reflect on one's self, other children in the room, or experiences in stories.

Students are also challenged with problems they must solve using a creative strategy. The idea of role playing can be beneficial when faced with difficult situations. Creative movement allows children to pretend to be someone or something else, which enhances their understanding of how someone or something should respond in a situation. They can be creative in their thinking and use this strategy to respond in a positive manner.

Literacy Development. The use of kinesthetic association and musical elements are especially useful in the development of literacy. Movement can be used to understand the meaning of specific words or elements of a story. In creative movement, children learn to use the movement or sequence created to represent a significant message in a story or a new vocabulary word. This strategy can be useful during the early learning years, as children are learning kinesthetically by taking in their environment and exploring all that is occurring in a hands-on approach. Musical elements are also beneficial in promoting the understanding of syllables. Utilizing a steady beat, as well as asking children to replicate rhythms, both transfer to reading skills in the future years.

Executive Function and Movement

There has been a growing interest in the development of executive function in young children. Research points to the effects of the environment and experiences during early childhood in overall development, due to the plasticity of the brain and the neurological adaptations occurring rapidly during what are known as critical periods.

Executive Function (EF) refers to the neurocognitive processes that assist in planning, remaining focused, remembering directions and managing multiple tasks. It is crucial to expose children to activities that can foster and support the development of these skills as it has been shown to link to academic success, specifically assisting with the transition to kindergarten.

There is a body of research presenting the benefits of interventions that support the development of executive function skills in children ages 3 to 5. Exposure to games and activities that include mindfulness and reflection, following game or activity rule changes, and inhibiting a comfortable response, have proven to further the development of executive function skills rapidly in children of this age group. (See highlighted research articles that suggest implications for the success of developing EF skills through creative movement in the chart below).

Due to the high rate at which neuroplasticity occurs in young children, PBT seeks to expose children to skills that will improve executive function in a wide range of contexts. These skills include:

1. Inhibitory Control- resisting impulsive behaviors
 2. Cognitive Flexibility- fluidly shifting from one perspective to another
 3. Working Memory - holding information in mind and updating it as necessary
- (Source: reflectionsciences.com)

Creative Movement Discussion

In the context of creative movement, elements of the class experience are thought to foster executive function skills. Starting and stopping on cue, an integral part of all movement classes, may assist in the development of inhibitory control. Responding to multiple directions to accomplish a movement activity is necessary in many of the exercises. Teaching artists also explore changing the directions throughout activities, causing children to exhibit and improve cognitive flexibility. Throughout the classes, children must also rely on their working memory, calling upon steps and movements in response to different musical prompts. Creative movement that supports the connection of the three key areas of executive function allows children to practice skills in a fun and creative way.

By focusing on a commonly- used activity in creative movement classes, such as freeze dance, and analyzing the components of this activity, the importance of research to determine the benefits of engaging in creative movement activities becomes evident. Freeze dance requires children to stop and start on a cue. Directions are given at the beginning of the activity. Children are told to move throughout the space while the music is playing. Once the music stops, they are to remain in one place and freeze. The teaching artist does not call out “freeze” when the music stops, causing the children to remember the direction to stop when the music stops without a verbal prompt. Once the initial rules are grasped and followed, this activity can become more complex and the children may be asked to switch the rules. Children are then told to dance in silence, and when they hear the music they must stop movement. With this simple alteration alone, the challenges many children face will become clear. They will need to work to inhibit their impulses to follow the first set of directions (to dance while the music is playing). This simply shows the use and practice of the skills needed to exhibit inhibitory control. Moreover, this game can be taken a step further. Children may be asked to perform particular steps to specific music. In this case, they must remember which movement is paired with each rhythm. They must use their working memory to perform this change accurately. They will need to remain flexible in their thinking as they switch between different rules that add cognitive flexibility and alter what originally began as a simple game of freeze dance.

Although we can infer the benefits of creative movement on the development of executive function skills, the ability to research the gains after participating in the program is valuable to the continuous evaluations and analysis of PBT's curriculum. Research will assist in bettering PBT's curriculum to ensure executive function skills are being fostered and practiced. Furthermore, research will validate the curriculum as an intervention in supporting and enhancing executive function skills in young children. This is especially important for children with low socioeconomic status (SES), as research has shown large gaps in executive function scores when comparing children with low to high SES. There is great value in assuring that children receive access to creative movement if there are well-researched links to improving executive function skills. Research presents a strong correlation between high levels of executive function skills and success in school readiness, academic achievement, social functioning, and physical and mental health.

Creative Movement Concept Chart

Concept	Literature	Connection to PBT Creative Movement	Citation
<p>1. Circle time games improve self-regulation in preschooler, having the largest effects on children with initial low scores on executive function tasks.</p> <p>Games include more complex versions of:</p> <p>Freeze Dance Red Light, Green Light Simon Says Music/ Rhythm Activities</p>	<p>In a randomized trial with 65 preschool children, children's participation in circle time games were assessed as a means to improve self-regulation. The intervention group participated in 30 minute play groups twice a week for 8 weeks. On average children attended 11.3 sessions (based on attendance). Although there was no statistical significance when the intervention group was compared to the control group, there was statistical significance in the gains assessed when comparing children with low to high initial executive function scores.</p>	<p>Currently PBT's Creative Movement Curriculum utilizes games very similar to typical circle time games. Students are asked to freeze and/or perform various movement steps on cue. Rhythmic activities are used throughout the sessions both with body movement and instrument use. Activities with that require multiple directions are also used.</p>	<p>Tominey, S.L., and McClelland, M.M. (2011). Red Light, Purple Light: Findings from a Randomized Trial Using Circle Time Games to Improve Behavioral Self-Regulation in Preschool. <i>Early Education and Development</i>, 22(3): 489-519.</p>
<p>2. Reflection training can be useful in improving children's executive function skills as it allows the child to reflect on the directions of the task to perform it accurately instead</p>	<p>In a study assessing reflection training of a Dimensional Change Card Sorting task, children were randomly assigned to a reflection training condition or a control condition. Those given the instructions to reflect on the rule saw significant gains in their scoring on the card task. Children took</p>	<p>Dance classes often require feedback with reflection on why the step was not performed accurately. In PBT's Creative Movement this is embedded in the curriculum, not only in accurate performance of movement skills, but also</p>	<p>Espinet, S.D., Anderson, J.E., and Zelazo, P.D. (2013). Reflection Training Improves Executive Function in</p>

<p>of just receive corrective feedback on whether they performed it right or wrong.</p>	<p>the time to be reflective when directions and/or rules changed in the task, suppressing the reflexive response.</p>	<p>in the various games and activities played in the class. These activities often require flexible thinking as the child is asked to switch from one rule to another or to perform multiple movements in a specified order.</p>	<p>Preschool Children: Behavioral and Neural Effects. Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience, 4: 3-15. doi: 10.1016/j.dcn.2012.11.009.</p>
<p>3. Creativity and imaginative play can be useful in the development of executive function skills as it allows children to be flexible in their thinking on how to approach a task.</p>	<p>In an article assessing the benefits of movement in preschool, the importance of creativity in critical thinking is explored. Through creative movement children are often asked to problem solve in innovative ways. This allows them practice being flexible in their thinking and approach.</p>	<p>Creativity is an important component of PBT's curriculum. Children are challenged with creating movement in response to prompts and cues. Tasks are also given with various constraints in order to foster problem solving thinking skills.</p>	<p>Marigliano, M.L and Russo, M.J. (2011). Moving Bodies, Building Minds Foster Preschooler' Critical Thinking and Problem Solving through Movement. National Association for the Education of Young Children, 66(5):44-49.</p>

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participating in the Pre-K Creative Movement program benefits students, families, and teachers in multiple ways.

By the end of the Pre-K Creative Movement program, students will be able to:

- Exhibit executive function skills: working memory, inhibitory control and cognitive flexibility
- Self-regulate their bodies through starting and stopping on cue, following multi-step directions, and waiting their turn to move by knowing that dancers, themselves included, are always in control of their bodies (when and how they move)
- Respond appropriately with their bodies to other people's bodies by understanding the concept of person and general space, and spatial boundaries
- Understand that dance and movement express ideas, emotions, etc.

By the end of the Pre-K Creative Movement program, families will be able to:

- Begin dialogues with their children about the importance and value of dance and movement.

By the end of the Pre-K Creative Movement residency, teachers will be able to:

- Incorporate exemplary lessons and model activities that utilize creative movement concepts
- Facilitate activities with little support from teaching artist
- Reflect on how and continue utilizing creative movement activities in their classrooms for a variety of purposes
- Adapt activities to continuing developing and fostering executive function

LEARNING STANDARDS

The Pennsylvania Department of Education and Department of Public Welfare have created early learning standards for children in pre-kindergarten, first, and second grades as a means to inform and guide educators, administrators, and parents in the design and implementation of instruction. The Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre utilizes and connects these state standards to the Creative Movement curriculum. The following are a few of the standards which the Creative Movement curriculum fundamentally incorporates into every single session; other standards may be addressed depending upon that module's or unit's focus. Please refer to the *Creative Movement Activity Breakdown* for a detailed description of activity and standards addressed.

Pre-K Early Learning Standards (2009)

Approaches to Learning Through Play

15.2: Organizing and Understanding Information

15.3: Applying Knowledge

Creative Thinking and Expression

9.1a: Production and Performance: Music and Movement

PA Common Core: Mathematics

2.1: Numbers and Operations

2.2: Algebraic Concepts

2.3: Geometry

Health, Wellness and Physical Development

10.1-3.2: Body Awareness

10.4: Physical Activity: Gross Motor Coordination

PA Common Core: English Language Arts

1.5: Speaking and Listening

CREATIVE MOVEMENT CLASS STRUCTURE

Creative movement classes have a consistent structure that builds upon itself. Certain elements may remind students of activities from their gym or music classes. The students are encouraged to work with a minimum of talking—unless directed to do so—as they progress through the residency. The reason for this goes beyond etiquette, as the students are learning to express concepts and ideas with their bodies instead of relying on their voices.

Each class begins with a warm-up. This section of class prepares the students' bodies for the work (and play) to follow, and is very similar to the warm-ups that professionals do before they begin to dance. Warm-up often includes a section of isolation of body parts and may incorporate shaking, swinging, and other non-locomotor movements.

An activity that fosters executive function skills will then be introduced as a part of the warm-up. The concepts will then be further developed throughout the session.

One or two activities will be chosen by the PBT instructor and/or the classroom teacher from the *Curriculum Activity Breakdown* that will best address the needs of the classroom. A scaffolded approach will allow students to progress through creative movement concepts and executive function skills.

Every class will end with Closing Rituals. Typical closing rituals in PreK Creative Movement include participating in a "Ballet Bow," clapping for and thanking the instructor and accompanist, and handing out stickers to students who participated in the session.

Part One	Dance Class Warm-Ups <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Reinforces module's vocabulary and outcomes● Can be opportunity to assess recall of vocabulary and concepts● Opportunity to practice executive function skills● Start with imitation, work towards students leading and choosing parts of warm-ups	5 min
Part Two	Main Activities (1-2 activities)	20 min
Part Three	Closing Ritual and Rewards <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Returning to space while reviewing of concepts● Ballet Bow● Claps● Stickers for participation	5 min

Creative Movement Teaching Tips:

- Create an attention-grabbing call and response in order to regain the students' attention between activities. This can be vocal, percussive, or gestural.
- Give the students a high level of responsibility for following precise directions. For example: when transitioning from a circle formation to one side of the room a teacher could say, "When I say go, I would like you all to stand up quietly without touching the floor, walk quietly on your tiptoes without talking or touching anyone, and sit down on the red line (or other landmark) without touching the floor and leaving space around you for your bubble." After repeating the sequence and asking them if they remember it, even very young students can follow movement directions meticulously.
- Modeling examples helps to get the ball rolling creatively. Sometimes asking, "What are some ways we could move across the room?" can be met with shyness or silence. Instead, a teacher can model a few examples to spark creativity. "I could run, or slide, or crawl across the floor. What are some other ways I could move from here to there?"
- Creating boundaries helps students to access ideas that they might not have come up with otherwise. To say "Please make a low-level shape with your body" might always result in a bunch of kids lying on the floor. Instead try saying, "Please make a low-level shape without touching your belly or your back to the floor" or "Please make a low-level shape where one hip is touching the floor, or both elbows, or only one foot."
- When working in a large space it sometimes helps the students to create a frame for free movement by sitting in a circle. Smaller groups can move freely inside the circle and not get lost or distracted by other things in the room. It also affords the students a chance to practice good audience behavior.
- When working in a small space it is definitely possible to do movement on a smaller scale. Students can stand at their desks and practice non-locomotor movements, and shapes can be made with the upper body while seated. If desks can be pushed aside the same circle that created a frame in a large gym can create a frame to keep things from growing too unruly for the classroom as well.