**Why Dance Matters: Survival of the Fittest**

July 12, 2012 By [Heather Vaughan-Southard](http://www.danceadvantage.net/author/educatingdancers/) [2 Comments](http://www.danceadvantage.net/2012/07/12/why-dance-matters-survival-of-the-fittest/#comments)

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**The dance classroom is more than a studio; it is a laboratory.  It is the training ground for an unforeseeable future.**

In the age of standardized testing, arts environments can provide the safe havens where mistakes are treated as discoveries and expression is celebrated. Higher order thinking is a natural part of the performance and students exit the stage smarter and more prepared for whatever life has in store for them. Dancers have an edge.

**Dance matters because it teaches kids to think and respond to the world around them.**

Dance education can teach early learners to practice what is usually reserved for older students in other academic subjects. Dance gives the freedom and permission for students to question and explore, “What if?”

From a movement strand to composition structure to the study of alignment, the dance class is a constant set of negotiations happening in real time.

“What if I send my ribs this way?” “What if I emphasize the end of the port de bras and not the beginning?” “What if the next movement faced upstage?”

Students learn theory and apply it immediately. Students assess their own bodies and adjust to find better balance and higher elevations. Goals are immediate, concrete, and progressive.

**Dance matters because it demands focus.**

The body is constantly engaged in physical experiments dealing with weight, time, and force with variables shifting day by day or even hour by hour. Students have to be present and aware in a way that traditional classes wish they could engage.

The type of learning involved in dance study engages the whole child: physically, emotionally, and intellectually. As a result, it is also an inclusive environment where students with all types of learning styles can have an equal chance for success.

The key for this, of course, is that we as educators recognize excellent dance students are not always the most technical dancers.

The more varied the type of dance experiences- dance production, management, history, composition, dance science, notation, and so on- the more dynamic the lessons can be and the more likely students of all learning styles can succeed and build confidence.

If we compare Bloom’s Taxonomy, a theory about learning styles divided into three main categories (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor), to general approaches to the creative process, we see that they are virtually the same.

The traditions of dance training innately apply these sophisticated goals. Imagine what could be done with attention to teaching details that allow the students to see behind the curtain and have some input in how and why they produce dance.

*Higher Order Thinking:  A Creative Process*

* Creating:  Generating ideas and movement relating to a topic or story
* Evaluating:  Assessing which of these ideas and movement “make the cut”
* Analyzing:  Deciding how to structure the movement to best convey the meaning
* Applying:  Use this method to generate more ideas on a related point or supporting detail  
  Understanding:  Comprehending on a deep level the sequence of movement and how it develops
* Remembering:  Being able to re-create the dance, the process, and the lessons learned

Creating dance, particularly when involved in the information gathering and decision-making aspects of dance-making, is a direct example of higher order thinking- the most valuable type of learning.

Essentially, students are learning how to learn and how to communicate. This is what kids need in order to be able to address a future world we can only dare to imagine now. This knowledge will set them free.

And what about the future when the students become the teachers? When “they” become “us”.

Dance has taught us to be life-long learners. We, as dancers, rely on the consistency of our training and the daily conversations with our bodies to know what to do and how to proceed.

**Dance matters because through it we know our minds, our bodies, and our spirits.**

**Dance matters because it demands that we set goals and see them through to our greatest extent.**

**Dance matters because it directs us to depend on ourselves.**

**Dance matters because it keeps us moving.**

**Why does dance matter to you?**

### About [Heather Vaughan-Southard](http://www.danceadvantage.net/author/educatingdancers/)

**Heather Vaughan-Southard** is a dance educator and freelance choreographer based in Michigan with rich teaching experiences in higher education, K-12 public schools, and private studios. With an approach of teaching dance as a liberal art, she draws from her experiences dancing professionally in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles to create experiences that move beyond the boundaries of a studio, producing well-rounded, thinking dance citizens. She is author of the blog [EducatingDancers](http://educatingdancers.com/), where she chronicles her perspectives on dance and dance education. Heather holds an MFA in Dance from the University of Michigan, BFA in dance from Western Michigan University, K-12 Dance Certification from Wayne State University and is the mother of two small children whom never seem to stop moving.