



## **The National Core Arts Standards in Dance Education: A User's Handbook**

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Standards for Dance are not new. Back in 1994, President Clinton signed into law Goals 2000: The Education Act which required “world class” education in the core subjects of English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, history, geography, and the arts. The arts included dance, music, theater, and visual arts. On March 11, 1994, Richard W. Riley, U.S. Secretary of Education, formally accepted the *National Standards for Arts Education* (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, 1994) at a press conference held in Washington, DC. The headline on the front page of the Washington Post the next morning proclaimed, “Proposal Would Make Arts a School Staple, Not a Frill.” (Trescott, 1994) It was the first national acknowledgement that the arts are basic to good education. (Faber, 1997)

For those of you who reject the idea of dance standards as a regimen being commanded by central government, please know that standards are not mandated by the Department of Education. They are voluntary. The Department of Education “encourages” the implementation of standards through financial incentives, but has no legal recourse for their enforcement. (Faber, 1997) However, the standards provide clear guidance and 49 of the 50 states adopted the 1994 standards as a model for development of their own state standards. (The one state that didn’t was Utah because it had, and still supports excellent state standards for its great many highly developed dance programs).

The creation of the *National Standards for Dance Education* produced in 1994 played a great role in the formation of National Dance Education Organization. They were developed under the National Dance Association, which functioned as an arm of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. Standards for dance were defined as a fine art, not as Physical Education, and there became a rift between the goals of PE and those of dance. NDEO was born in December of 1997.

It became clear that the standards accepted in 1994 did not serve the needs of the art form and so, in 2005, NDEO published *Standards for Learning and Teaching Dance Education in the Arts*, a revised set of standards created by a broadly based committee inclusive of dance educators in studios and private dance schools, K-12, higher education, and community programs, plus the Department of Education.

### **How the 2005 NDEO Standards were Different from the 1994 Rendition**

The 1994 standards outlined “What Students Should Know and Be Able to Do” in the arts. The standards for dance defined 7 Content Standards that defined areas of content in dance education for the benchmark grade levels of 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 8<sup>th</sup> grade and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. They included: movement elements and skills; choreographic principles, processes and structures; dance as communication of meaning; critical

and creative thinking skills; dance in various cultures and historical periods; dance and healthful living; and dance and other disciplines. These content areas remained consistent and did not change as the age of students progressed.

Achievement Standards defined the level of performance expected for each student age. Achievement was not specific to genre or dance vocabulary, but outlined general levels of demonstrating knowledge and understanding in dance. The focus was not to train dancers but to introduce students to dance as an enjoyable and creative activity and for students to learn to appreciate dance as a form of communication with cultural and historical significance.

The 1994 standards were a fabulous beginning. They had great impact in bringing attention to the public and school administrators that dance was an art form with content worthy of inclusion in education by a dance specialist, not a gym coach.

In the meanwhile, NDEO was formed to “advance dance education in the arts.” (NDEO Mission Statement, 1998). NDEO initially set out to disseminate the 1994 standards for dance and bought a huge storehouse of copies from NDA. However, in training dance educators to use the standards, it became increasingly evident there were issues to overcome:

1. Dance educators in schools would look at seven Content Standards and become intimidated, overwhelmed, and even confused by how many areas they were asked to cover.
2. The NAEP Framework for the national assessments (NAEP, 1994) to measure what students knew and were able to do in the arts were constructed in a content structure of “Creating, Performing, and Responding,” which did not fit smoothly with the seven Content Standards. (NAEP, 1994)
3. Standards were also needed for ages in early childhood, and therefore *Standards for Dance in Early Childhood* were developed for ages birth through 5 years that aligned with the standards developed for older students. (NDEO 2005)
4. The language used focused on dance as an activity in educational institutions and alienated the majority of dance teachers practicing in studios. Standards were needed that used language and terminology more closely aligned with artistic language within the field of dance.
5. Focus was needed on the artistic processes of dance in arts-making that aligned dance education more closely with dance as an art form versus understanding dance as an activity.

The 2005 NDEO *Standards for Learning and Teaching Dance in the Arts* therefore coordinate with the NAEP structure using the arts-making processes of Creating, Performing, and Responding with the addition of Inter-Connecting. This relates dance to personal and contextual meanings that impart rich understandings of movement. As it turned out, the NDEO standards were forerunners of the National Core Arts Standards.

### **The National Core Arts Standards (NCAS) in Dance ([www.ncas.org](http://www.ncas.org))**

Although NDEO invited the other arts to join its revision process and revise their standards in 2004, it took another seven years before it became a full arts initiative. In cooperation with the other four arts of media arts (a new addition), music, theater, and visual arts, a format using Creating, Performing, Responding, and Connecting was adopted. Preschool was also included. Since these new standards focused on the arts in educational institutions (PreK-12), a curricular format called “Understanding by Design” (McTighe and Wiggins, 2005) was over-laid as a purpose- and goal-defining structure. This complicated the unpacking of the standards, but added greater depth and pedagogical significance to their use.

However, the Dance Task Force of the NCAS was comprised of ten standards writers who all had been professional dancers, choreographers, studio dance teachers, PreK-12 dance educators, and administrators. The dance “team” developed standards that address learning the art of dance in all venues and environments. They provide the full depth and scope that can be offered from dance education without out defining dance vocabulary in specific genres or styles.

The NCAS are also developed grade-by-grade instead of for benchmark grades. They are a series of stepping stones for growth of achievement; a graduated staircase leading toward excellence in dance. It is understood that only some students will continue toward a dance career. The aim is for all students to enjoy the art of dance and gain knowledge in it.

The dance standards are conceived with sensitivity to cognitive and child development. Standards for the youngest students (PreK-2<sup>nd</sup> grade) focus on a sensory and physical experience of movement and dance. Standards for older elementary ages (3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grades) relate to how things function and work. Students of these ages also love working on movement skills. Middle school students (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades) are consumed with comparisons and relationships, and so the standards accentuate “compare and contrast” and the relationships of movements and dances. At about 14-16 years of age, high school teens, the brain changes chemically and students become wired to understand abstract thought processes. The standards address aesthetic principles and structures, criteria, and conceptual abstraction. Since we are in a current educational climate that is accentuating the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, every standard, for every age level, begins with a cognitive verb. The dance standards received 98% public approval that they are addressing the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills.

In addition to outlining what “students should know and be able to do,” the NCAS include the assessment process by providing a Model Cornerstone Assessments (MCAs). These are not tests that are summations of learning. They are a formative assessment process that teach to the standards and can also serve to measure student learning of the standards. The units of instruction sampled in the NCAS website are not provided for you to copy, but are provided as a touchstone or model for your own creative teaching units and assessment practices. They demonstrate student learning with the full depth and scope encompassed by the standards.

The National Core Arts Standards were released in June of 2014 on the NCAS website: [www.ndeo.org](http://www.ndeo.org). While the 1994 standards were published only in hard copy (internet was not widely available), and cost \$27 per copy, the NCAS are web-based, downloadable for free, interactive, and can be custom- designed to fit individual teacher’s needs.

### **Understanding by Design (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005)**

The adoption of Understanding by Design (UbD) added layers to the NCAS that the 2005 NDEO Standards did not include. UbD is a system developed by Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins for both developing and teaching curricular content that has meaning. Since standards are used by teachers, but developed for student learning and development, the UbD format was adopted so students could understand why they are being taught the work. The application of UbD gave deep significance to the purpose and goals of the standards.

UbD provides scope. The standards take the “30,000 mile out” global view for all the arts before zoning in on specifics. They begin with five Philosophical Foundations and Long Range Goals. These pertain to the arts as: 1) communication, 2) personal realization, 3) culture, history, and connectors, 4) a means to well-being, and 5) engagement in community. What do we want students to “take away” with them and remember 30 years from now? (NCAS, 2014)

The UbD format defines “Enduring Understanding” (EUs) and “Essential Questions” (EQs) for each Process Component. (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005) Enduring Understandings are significant global concepts that students would, hopefully, remember for a long time. These are written in the standards at an eighth grade level so they are too conceptual and abstract for the youngest grades to comprehend.

It is assumed that teachers will rephrase them at the level their students would understand. This is also true for the Essential Questions, although many of these are basic to all ages. Essential Questions inspire a Socratic pedagogy of thoughtful investigation and examination. They place the standards in a larger and purposeful context.

### **Backwards Design**

The standards were built using a “backwards design” process. We started by examining, “What do we want our students to know and be able to do when they graduate high school?” Working backwards, incremental steps were developed to arrive there. In actuality, it was a backwards/forwards process, adjusting levels as necessary. But, at each stage of the writing, we had clear goals at an end-point.

### **Unpacking the National Core Arts Standards in Dance**

#### **The Arts-Making Processes: Creating, Performing, Responding, and Connecting**

The four arts-making Processes are the same across all the art forms, except “Perform” is also called “Present” and “Produce” in non-performance arts. The Processes define what we do when we engage in making art. The definitions of the Processes were agreed upon by all five art forms. They are listed linearly for clarity and definition, one at a time as if independent of one-another. But in practice they function simultaneously and can be addressed in any order. For example, when Creating, movement is imagined and improvised (Performing), it is reflected on (Responding), and related to the intent or purpose of the dance (Connecting). As a result, one lesson can address many standards at one time. In addition to replicating or repeating technical exercises or movements, students learn by solving movement problems, showing their ideas through movement, thinking critically about them, and relating them to other ideas, experiences, contexts, and meanings.

#### **Creating:** conceiving and creating new ideas and work – Nike version: **MAKE IT!**

“Create” is the highest level of critical thought in most current rendition of Bloom’s Taxonomy. Traditionally, dance is taught through replication and repetition of exercises or movement choreographed by the teacher. Teachers have voiced that young students don’t know enough dance techniques to choreograph. Yet children draw or paint before they produce realism and sing before they read notes. Dance is natural to children. The standards provide ways to inspire movement in students without defining specific areas of creativity. They lead students through a graduated path to choreograph high quality dance studies and dances.

#### **Performing:** realizing artistic ideas and work through interpretation and presentation – Nike version: **DO IT!**

In dance, Performing does not refer to only a final performance. It is the doing of dance movement. Most training in dance focuses on shaping and strengthening the body as an instrument and learning the movement vocabulary of a genre versus preparing for a specific presentation. Performing movement pertains to actualizing movements during class, rehearsal, while choreographing, or a final performance. Movement is manifest and is demonstrated when performed.

#### **Responding:** understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning – Nike version: **REFLECT ON IT!**

Responding refers to reflection inside and into a dance movement or work. It is a cognitive understanding of dance: awareness of movement, analysis of compositional structure, and

comprehension of how dance is communicating. Doing this requires an understanding of movement, the elements of dance, the principles of choreography and choreographic structures, and how dance is used to fulfill the artistic intent of the choreographer or teacher. Responding is both constructive learning, and a deconstructive analysis. It is an active state of reflection by the developing dancer, choreographer, and audience member.

**Connecting:** relating artistic ideas and work through personal and contextual meaning – Nike version: **RELATE IT!**

Connecting is the relationship of dance to elements of life, culture, knowledge or history that exist outside of the dance work that give a dance its meaning or form. As an expressive communicative language, dance evokes a great many images and meanings. Topics for dance can be personal, cultural, historical, traditional, and even spiritual. Since the dawn of humanity, dance has served as communication to a spiritual world, as community communion, as a passage of cultural history, and as emotional expression. Throughout the world dance has knit communities together and served as expression of their values and beliefs.

### **Components in Art-Making Processes**

Each Process is comprised of Components that shape a progression that guides students through the Process. The Components for each art form may vary, although music, visual arts and theater are similar, and dance and Media Arts mesh. Music, Theater, and Visual Arts view the Processes as discreet entities and so there is repetition of Components. Dance and Media Arts envision the simultaneous interaction of Processes so no repetition is necessary.

The Components are active verbs that outline what we do to fulfill each of the Processes and describe the performance standards. “Performance standards” define what students need to “know and do” to demonstrate their achievement. The term refers to standards in all the Processes, not just to the Process of “Performing.” Although the Components of the various art disciplines differ, an attempt was made to unify the NCAS by creating a common set of Anchor Standards, one for each of the 11 Components. These were constructed after each discipline developed their unique Components, therefore they are sometimes a perfect fit, and sometimes a stretch.

Components are sub-divided further into lower-case letter performance standards that serve to guide areas of curriculum without dictating them. In the dance standards, each of the horizontal grade-by-grade progressions in the lower-case letter standards centers on a main idea. These Big Ideas (a UbD term) are named as nouns. They are not mentioned in the NCAS website because other disciplines did not organize their standards progression around them. Since the website is a unified format, Dance could not be a different, but you can refer to the Big Ideas in the accompanying chart.

**Creating:** The Components for Creating lead through a process of developing movement, choreographing, refining dance, and documenting the progression. The other three Processes are embedded in and interactive with Creating.

**Explore: Anchor Standard 1** – Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

An initial step in creating dance is exploring ideas in movement or exploring movement ideas. It usually requires improvisation, but could also be achieved through mental imagery. Exploring dance uses the cognitive processes of responding (in movement), sensing, finding, examining, experimenting, problem solving, taking risk, implementing, and synthesizing. Educational and corporate research has determined that motivation, creative productivity and learning is increased when people are given freedom to liberally explore and problem-solve instead of working and learning through a regimen of direction. (Pink, 2009)

The two Big Ideas in Explore are:

- a. **Sources for Movement Ideas:** Source standards are ideas about how to release invention in movement. How do we find ideas for dancing? How do we inspire new ideas for movement? What movement ideas will help students learn dance through experiences and self-discovery? Ideas for generating dance are based on the age, experiences, and developmental understanding of dance.
- b. **Movement Generation and Development:** New movement possibilities are found through manipulating movements or dance structures, problem solving, communicating an artistic intent, and using movement as a language for expression. Awareness of movement and dance structures as artistic design and communication to fulfill an idea will foster greater creative freedom and the ability to generate a personal artistic “voice.”

**Plan: Anchor Standard 2** - Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

In order to develop a dance composition or a dance, a choreographer must make movement choices that fulfill the artistic intent or main idea of the dance. Movements are identified, defined, determined, chosen, developed, constructed, and applied. Planning can be individual or collaborative, and includes planning for a performance.

The two Big Ideas in Plan are:

- a. **Dance Structure:** Clear compositional structure and a variety of choreographic devices help develop a well-composed and interesting dance. Understanding and use of narrative structure guides student to develop a strong beginning, development of content, and conclusive ending. The standards emphasize effective use of dance elements; the body in motion using time, space, and energy. Movements are organized to expand movement patterns and possibilities and communicate and intensify the main idea of the dance.
- b. **Meaning and Content:** Although the standards are not limited to ballet or modern dance, meaning and content are emphasized. The meaning can be of cultural content and therefore apply to any genre of dance. All dances have content that reflects values and beliefs of the culture from which it is derived. Dances therefore have a cultural or contextual meaning that is their organizing force.

**Revise: Anchor Standard 3** - Refine and complete artistic work.

Excellent work is rarely executed in the first version and valuable learning is gained from a process of revision. Feedback from teacher and peer response provides helpful suggestions that inform the revision process. Revision involves applying suggestions, feedback, ideas from self-reflection, and appropriate criteria to clarify movement intent. Feedback and revision can be an individual or collaborative process. It leads to invaluable learning and the refinement and completion of a dance.

The two Big Ideas in Revise are:

- a. **Refinement and Completion:** The application of constructive feedback is a critical skill in achieving creative originality and compositional excellence. It leads to growth and improvement as an essential aspect of dance education. Successful revision is probably the most important skill for the developing choreographer to learn.

- b. **Documentation:** Dance is a temporal art form and, as such, is not permanent. Documentation for dance education includes recording the process of creating work as well as the finished product. It can take the form of journal writing, notation, film, video, or electronic recordation. Understanding why and how choices were made to arrive at a final product reveals insights that may not be evident without documentation. It also provides a means of analyzing and assessing the learning process.

**Performing:** The Components for Performing involve expressive interpretation and dynamic embodiment of artistic ideas. As previously mentioned, performing includes dance in class, rehearsals, and a final performance. Movement ideas are not dance until they are embodied and enacted. Performing Components encompass bodily movements that realize creative dance.

**Express: Anchor Standard 4** – Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.

The three Big Ideas in Express focus on the elements of dance movement:

- a. **Spatial Relationships:** The body exists in, occupies, and uses space, even if stationary. Dance is a planned and aesthetic use of space. It involves pathways, directions, lines, shapes, levels, patterns, designs, and spatial relationships. The standards explore the experience, development, and meaning communicated from spatial patterns and relationships.
- b. **Rhythm, Phrasing, and Musicality:** Dance is usually performed to rhythmic, instrumental music, or song but, even without music, dance movement is distinguished from pedestrian every day or sports movements by its rhythmic patterns and phrasing. Coordination with music and internal musicality are essential skills to develop in dance for both performer and choreographer.
- c. **Dynamics:** Dance dynamics are also called energy, force, efforts, or movement characteristics. Each genre uses codified movements that define its dynamics. Through the standards, dancers learn to perform movement dynamically, understand the movement characteristics of a chosen genre, and experience a variety of genres. The dynamic range of performance is expanded and heightened.

**Embody: Anchor Standard 5** - Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

Dance technique shapes and conditions the body as an instrument for movement. The standards do not define a method for learning technique and, since each genre has developed its unique pedagogy, the standards are inclusive of all genres and trainings. The standards focus on age-appropriate universal aspects of bodily movement: locomotor and non-locomotor skills (traveling in space and in place), alignment, balance, core strength, and flexibility. Dance educators are free to direct the standards toward any form or styles of dance. They do, however, encourage the learning of a variety of genres and dance styles.

The three Big Ideas of Embody are:

- a. **Skills and Techniques:** Each genre has its own dance movement vocabulary that requires particular physical abilities. Some dance forms are gymnastic, some require specific “line” and design of movements, some incorporate complex rhythmic patterns or complicated steps. Training will vary greatly, and the standards respect this.
- b. **Safety and Awareness:** Safe practices are important in dance to prevent injuries and move together in groups. Standards in this Big Idea involve moving in personal space, awareness of others, and learning to move and live healthfully to save the body from injury.

- c. **Practice and Rehearsal Strategies:** Preparing for a presentation or performance is often a goal for studying dance. Classes have demonstrations, schools have shows or concerts, studios have recitals, and dance of other forms are enjoyed in communities. Effective practice and rehearsal is a skill necessary for improvement. The verbs applied in these standards are: repeating, recalling, coordinating, cooperating, and collaborating.

**Present: Anchor Standard 6** - Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

A performance or presentation shares the joy of dance with a wider audience. For many dancers it is the culmination of their learning. Dancing for an audience is exciting but for some students it is scary. The standards therefore leave great leeway about the type or place of performance, especially for young children. Some students have natural charisma and projection on stage, others seem to shrink or hold back. The standards assume teachers will understand the most applicable form of performance for their students so all students can gain confidence and enjoyment from their experience.

There are two Big Ideas addressing the presentation of dance:

- a. **Performance Strategies:** Performance strategies focus on theatre and stage terminology, performance protocols and etiquette, responsibilities and cooperation. Importance is not placed on “mistakes” or level of technique, but rather personal motivation, engagement, leadership, and an attitude of cooperation and collaboration to develop the best performance possible.
- b. **Elements of Production:** Costumes, props, lighting, scenery, or media heighten the impact of a performance. The elements of production also include performance in a variety of venues and the production requirements of each. Production of a performance takes a great amount of organization to execute successfully. In exit standards at the Advanced Level, students learn to effectively produce their own concerts.

**Responding:** The cognitive processes of analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating dance are integral and apply to all the arts-making Processes. It is the reflective and feedback process that serves to improve all aspects of dance learning. The verbs address critical thinking skills ranging from: identify or describe (knowledge) to find, interpret, examine, explain, compare and contrast, evaluate, analyze, discuss, or critique. Responding to dance trains students to become active and knowledgeable dancers, choreographers, and audience members.

**Analyze: Anchor Standard 7** – Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Perception is not merely observation. It is metacognition about what is being observed; our understanding of our thoughts. This leads to the ability to analyze dance through an understanding of its use of movement patterns and elements, its movement relationships, designs, images, and its movement characteristics.

There are two Big Ideas:

- a. **Movement Patterns:** The brain naturally organizes experience into patterns. Bodily movement creates patterns that are enjoyable, considered beautiful, and distinguish dance from other forms of body movement. Defining what these patterns are and how they work in dance to convey style and meaning amplifies understanding and appreciation of dance.
- b. **Dance Styles, Genres, and Cultural Practices:** Many dancers study one specific genre of dance and learn little about other genres, forms, or styles. The standards hope to broaden the horizons

of dance students to include a variety of dance genres. Understanding other dance forms, movement styles and dynamics enriches knowledge about dance and develops heightened understanding about one's own choice of genre.

**Interpret: Anchor Standard 8** – Interpret intent and meaning in an artistic work.

How do we derive meaning from dance? What in a dance communicates to us and how does it do it? Dance imparts images, feelings, sometimes awe. The verbs used to interpret movement are observe, describe, cue, select, relate, explain, compare, and analyze.

There is only one Big idea:

- a. **Artistic Expression:** Dance is expressive and is a form of communication. It can be a personal viewpoint, a social statement, or a manifestation of cultural or historical values through bodily movement. It is known that every society on earth embodies a form of dance. Each culture develops its unique style as spiritual expression, entertainment, recreation, or for communal identity and unity. An understanding of how a dance communicates is key to learning its non-verbal language.

**Critique: Anchor Standard 9** – Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

How do we know if a dance is “good?” Does it work as intended and, if not, why not? Skillfully evaluating dance is a tool for improvement and artistic growth.

The one Big Idea shaping these standards is:

**Critical Evaluation:** The ability to critique dance begins with a personal reaction. Do you understand and like the dance study? But unpacking what you like or don't like about it, or why you understand it engages deeper knowledge. Critical evaluation requires analysis, comparisons, and the development of criteria upon which to set evaluation. Young children can relate their experience of the dance, older students can understand aesthetic criteria and choreographic principals. While the act of dancing and response to dance can be spontaneous and intuitive, understanding and knowledge of its processes and effects can raise art to its highest level while appearing spontaneous.

**Connecting:** During the Process of Connecting we travel from inside the dance to the outer world that is personal, cultural, historical, or relating to other knowledge and disciplines. Connecting is related to Responding in that Responding examines the internal aspects of a dance that shapes communication. Connecting refers to the external context that is communicated. Although there is no way of determining standards about an historical event, for example revolutionary war, standards can focus on the meaningful relationship of dance to external contexts.

There are four steps in the path to making connections. 1) It begins with a personal relationship to the dance. What does the dance evoke in the dancer or viewer? 2) But dance exists in wider contexts that are cultural, historical, or can relate to other knowledge or disciplines. 3) It deepens understanding of a dance to engage in research about the cultural, history, or topic of a dance. 4) The culmination of “Connecting” is a synthesis of the first three steps. They produce deep artistic understanding of a dance work. These four steps were reduced to two Components in NCAS for the sake of simplification.

**Synthesis: Anchor Standard 10** – Synthesize knowledge and personal experience to make art.

The focus in this Component is that creating meaning in dance is a combination of knowledge and personal experience. The verbs that relate dance to meaning are observe, recognize, find, describe, respond, relate, ask, compare, choose, research, investigate, collaborate, analyze, and review. These

actions produce deep movement experiences in coordination with Creating, Performing, and Responding.

There are two Big Ideas involved:

- a. **Personal Meaning:** Step one is the basic foundation for creating meaning. When watching a dance work, we may not know the intent of the choreographer, but we know its personal impact. We bring to a dance our lifetime experiences and thoughts, and these are touched.
- b. **Research:** Research deepens personal knowledge and opens new meanings in the dance experience. Research is not commonly thought about in relation to dance but is an excellent addition. It could pertain to the historical period or culture from which a dance is derived, about the topic of a dance, the choreographers who created or influenced the dance, or about the dancers who performed it. There are many avenues to enrich a dance experience through research.

**Relate: Anchor 11** – Relate artistic ideas and works with societal cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

This opens an area of the arts that has received great recognition in the past decade; the ability of the arts to teach other topics and disciplines. For dance, it is a back door through which dance programs gain validity in educational institutions. This seems to some artists a demeaning secondary purpose. However, we always dance about something, it might as well be to broaden knowledge, or about a topic being learned. If approached artistically in accordance with standards, the essentials of dance are taught in the process.

The one Big Idea for Relate is:

**Dance Integration:** Dance integration refers to the teaching of knowledge and other disciplines through bodily movement. It combines learning dance as an art with other contexts. Often, the art form is reduced to mime or “acting it out without words” (Faber), but this is not learning about a topic through the art of dance. A sure way to develop strong and effective dance integration is to apply these NCAS to academic learning or other knowledge. Both subjects are synthesized equally.

### **Model Cornerstone Assessments (MCAs)**

Model Cornerstone Assessments provide an example of a dance unit assessment. They are not envisioned as a test. They are based on formative assessment; a learning project that incorporates assessment from the beginning as a means to understand achievement levels from start to finish. Assessments are culled from a variety of dance tasks to fulfill a dance unit of study. A variety of assessment tools are modeled: rubrics, planning lists; journaling; discussion. A pencil-paper written exam is not one of the assessment instruments modeled.

The MCAs are not presented as grade-by-grade, but are conceived in the benchmark grades of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and the high school levels of Proficient, Accomplished and Advanced. Since they are example assessments and not exams, dance educators are encouraged to develop appropriate cornerstone assessments for whatever grade or age they are teaching. Administrators want evidence of student achievement, and the MCAs provide clear proof of student learning. Job employment may depend on documentation of evidence.

The NCAS topic chosen throughout the MCA benchmark grades is constant: the individual and community. Interpretation is open. The tasks are laid out in a progression of learning that includes assessments, some requiring writing or verbal expression. Assessment measurement tools are provided.

Dance educators are not generally taught assessment techniques and the process may be daunting for you. It is hoped these MCAs will serve as a guide so you can reap the benefit of clarity about your students' achievements whether or not your administrators require evidence.

### **Myths:**

A number of myths have been expressed by the general public about standards, mainly by people who have not examined the dance standards closely nor used them; an anti-standards sentiment has been voiced, especially by dance educators who are grounded in traditional dance pedagogy. In addition, K-12 has bred a negative attitude towards standards due to public cry against Common Core Standards.

The following issues are myths because they are not based in fact.

### **Standards mean standardization:**

Arts standards are not hard lines. They are guidelines. They provide a scaffold upon which to build individual age-appropriate programs and curricula. It is hoped the NCAS will ignite individuality, not squelch it. For those of you who have adopted the traditional pedagogy of dance which focuses solely on the replication and repetition of dance techniques, we hope these standards will open new territories for you to explore in training young dancers to be creative, thoughtful, and aware artists.

### **The NCAS in Dance inhibit creativity:**

Most dance classes focus on exercises and combinations of movements choreographed by the teacher and presented to the students to learn and perform in class. This is important for learning clean and strong technique and training the mind to pick up and remember movements quickly. However, most dance classes only include copying the teacher's movements. This is the equivalent of learning to read and write to only copy from someone else's books.

The Standards therefore address the full scope of dance training to develop its richness as a creative language for their thoughts and feelings. They develop artistic experiences to broaden the pedagogy in which students repeat and replicate movements given by the teacher. They present ideas and methods that release creative thinking across a broad range of aspects in dance. They are constructed as a touchstone for creativity in the art form of dance in a graduated progression of grade-by-grade levels that provide a staircase of understanding in the art of dance. This approach expands creative potential for the teacher as well as for students.

### **The NCAS in Dance focus on Modern Dance:**

Modern dance was founded approximately 100 years ago by free-thinking dancers in rebellion against the constructions of ballet and other codified forms of dance. A creative approach is therefore associated with modern dance. But training in modern dance became equally codified and rigid, albeit with a different movement vocabulary. Creativity pertains to any form of dance with any style of movement. The emergent popularity of Hip Hop is testimony to the need of young people to express their feelings and ideas through dance. We learn to write, not to copy other people's words, but to express our thoughts. Most all types of dance can communicate creatively.

### **The NCAS in Dance are meant for only K-12 Programs:**

It is true that the NCAS was a project to develop standards for American PreK-12 education. However, each of the Dance Task Force writers had careers as dance performers, choreographers, studio teachers, K-12 teachers and, ultimately, administrators of dance education in a variety of genres. Every facet of

dance was personally known and intimately understood. The Dance Standards were therefore written to address a variety of constituencies and venues for the delivery of dance: K-12 institutions, studios and private schools of dance, and community programs.

### **The National Core Arts Standards in Dance are Common Core:**

The National Core Standards in Dance are not Common Core. They are uncommon. Their connection with Common Core is that they promote originality and deep thinking about the content of dance in relation to dance composition, meaning, and its relationship to culture. It is hoped that the end result of the dance standards is dance literacy. This does not mean to know only about dance, dance history, and famous dancers, choreographers, and dance companies, but to know a variety of dance genres, to understand the language of movement and relate to it as a form of communication.

### **Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

In 1990, President W.H. Bush formed the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, a committee comprised of leading educators, prominent government leaders, scholars, and members of the business community. Their task was to study the state of education in the United States in relation to needs for employment in American society. It was determined that manufacturing was being outsourced to countries with cheap labor, and so the jobs in America were those in technology, management, and direct service (for example, health, home maintenance, restaurant service). When the younger Bush came into office, he formed the *New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce*. The findings, released in 2007, were discouraging. (*New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce*, 2007) The ranking of the United States, once very high, had dropped to 27 out of 50 developed nations. Not only was routine work outsourced, but technology had gone overseas, management was elsewhere, and the two remaining areas of employment in the United States were top executive positions and direct service jobs; jobs requiring creativity, problem solving, collaboration, communication, and leadership skills.

Meanwhile, “No Child Left Behind,” with its heightened reliance on standardized testing, had resulted in rote “learning for the test.” Curriculum focused on reading and math at the expense of all other learning, and it became evident the results were poor. Spending on education had steadily climbed while graduation rates fell and income wages dwindled. American education entered a state of crisis.

Leadership from the arts met in the lobby of the hall when the Report of the Commission was released. We knew the arts taught all the skills now sorely needed in American education. We hoped the arts would now rise in educational stature and be given a central role. Unfortunately, a year later, the great economic recession hit the country and educational budgets were slashed. Dance, in particular, was considered a frill and cut from many programs. Once again, there was a disconnect between what was needed and the reality of what happened.

It is hoped that the National Core Arts Standards will bring recognition of the power of the arts to teach major skills necessary for employment in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, an agency formed to move the educational agenda forward, realizes the potency of the arts to advance their four Learning and Innovation Skills: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity.

The NCAS in Dance develop all of these skills and will train students, whether they become dancers or not, for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## Resources

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Trescott, Jacqueline. (1994) *The Washington Post*. Washington, DC: March 12, 1994.

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## Biography:

In my own dance training as a child and teen, I studied with Anna Sokolow (ages 8-13), and directly under the tutelage of Martha Graham (age 13-17), two internationally acclaimed choreographers. They taught not one stitch of creative movement or choreography in their classes. Although their movement vocabularies were a new form of dance, they were, essentially, carrying forward the 400-year old pedagogy starting class with warm-up exercises for technical training, center combinations, and across the floor locomotor movements and combinations all choreographed by the teacher for students to perfect. They were producing the factory worker for their companies, not independent artists.

I have therefore spent the past 50 years working to change dance pedagogy. I first became involved in the national perspective during the development of the 1994 standards and assessments. I gave up my studio, was instrumental in forming NDEO, chaired the 2005 NDEO *Standards for Dance in Early Childhood* and *Standards for Learning and Teaching Dance in the Arts*, and chaired the Dance Task Force of the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards.