

92NY Dance Education Laboratory (DEL) Curriculum ©2025

Supports for Diverse Learners

All students deserve access to dance education as an expressive art form. Fortunately, today's classrooms are increasingly inclusive, composed of both students with disabilities and students who are typically developing. Teaching in this inclusive classroom is both rewarding and challenging. Here, we share some resources and strategies that support access to learning for all students.

Preparing the Dance Space

These considerations help you create a safe space for your students.

- The space should be **distraction-free and uncluttered**. Supplies and materials not being used for a lesson can be in closed-door cabinets, storage areas, or bookshelves.
- Ensure the space is **well-lit, with soft light**. If possible replace fluorescent lights with LED lights or purchase fluorescent light covers to soften the light.
- Include a **quiet or calm area** in the classroom where students can take sensory breaks. Include a small rug or bean bag chair, soft lighting, and sound-canceling headphones. Books, fidgets, weighted blankets, and pillows are also helpful.
- Ensure **calming acoustics** in the room. Hang curtains and put up sound-absorbing panels to quiet a noisy room. Mindfully locate speakers, balance bass and treble sounds, and lower the music volume as needed.
- Visually identify **spaces for different activities** such as warm-up, discussion, and dancing across the floor using vinyl floor tape, floor spots, and other materials.
- **Good Ventilation**. A room that is hot or drafty will be uncomfortable. Use curtains, fans, windows, and doors to improve airflow.
- Provide **visual supports** for your students. See more about visuals on page 3.

Creating an Environment of Respect in the Dance Classroom

Students must be ready to learn, and these activities support learning readiness.

- Teach signals for quiet and attention. [Signals for Quiet](#)** may include:
 - Call and response patterns (clapping, vocal)
 - Playing a chime or Tibetan Singing Bowl
 - Holding up a hand to signal quiet
- Teach students to respect personal space. The Space Bubbles activity described in the [Dance: Arts and Students with Disabilities Compendium](#)** (p. 18) is a widely used personal space activity.
- [Establish Classroom Rules](#)** that tell students what they **should be doing**, such as *listen while others are speaking* and *keep your hands to yourself*. Build community by engaging students in the creation of the class rules.

Planning for Student Access Needs

At the beginning of a year gather information on the supports your students need to gain full access to the dance curriculum. This information can be gathered via parent/guardian surveys in the private sector and student IEPs in public schools. Classroom teachers, physical and occupational therapists, speech therapists, and paraprofessionals are allies who can also provide this information. Ask them about student needs and the strategies they have implemented to meet them.

Support from Routines

A highly structured, predictable environment helps children feel safe and supports their learning readiness. **Routines can be designed for every part of the class**, from entering the studio to relaxation and ending the class. See Tips for Classroom Procedures in [Dance: Arts and Students with Disabilities Compendium](#)** (page 19).

Explicitly Teach Routines

- Introduce the routine verbally and with symbols.
- Model the routine several times.
- Praise your students when they participate in the routine.
- Repeat the introduction of the routine over several classes.

- Have patience. Students who are not participating are learning by observing.

Examples of Routines

- **Greeting:** Meet students at the door and bring them to their floor spots.
- **Introduction:** Share the visual schedule before each class.
- **Warm Up:** Create a circle-based warm-up built on a sequence of 3 or 4 activities. Repeat every class, adding movements as students become comfortable.
- **Dancing Across the Floor.** Provide taped lines or floor spots to indicate where to begin and end dancing across the floor.

Written, Verbal, and Visual Language

Students with autism, visual impairments, dyslexia, and students who are deaf and hearing impaired all have language access needs. Common strategies include:

- Sign language interpreters for students who are deaf.
- Text-to-speech systems for students with visual impairments or Dyslexia.
- Large print materials for students with low vision.
- Teacher as scribe for students who struggle with writing.
- Use of visual supports for students with autism, ADD, ADHD and dyslexia, used as tools for dance making, learning dance vocabulary and reflection/feedback.

Visual Supports

Visual support can be created for every part of the dance class. You can find additional information on [Visual Supports for Children with ASD**](#). Here are some examples:

- *A Visual Schedule* for the day's lesson provides students with structure and understanding of the sequence of class.
 - [D75 K-2 Lesson 1 - M2 DEL Dance and Literacy: Creating Connections](#)
- *Visual Movement Vocabulary Cards*. These cards can be used to help children sequence movement, select activities, pair actions with levels and directions, and much more! Some examples:
 - [DEL Dance and Literacy Picture Cards](#)
 - [Action Word Vocabulary Cards](#)
 - [Feelings Vocabulary Cards](#)
- *A Visual Movement Sentence*.
 - [D75 3-5 Movement Sentence Example: DEL Dance and Literacy](#)

- A *Peer Feedback* worksheet.
 - [D75 3-5 Peer Feedback Form - DEL Dance and Literacy: Creating Connections](#)
- A *Dance Making* Worksheet.
 - [3-5 Worksheet, “I am the Change I Want to See”- DEL Dance and Literacy](#)
 - [D75 K-2 Lesson 6 - M2 DEL Dance and Literacy: Creating Connections](#)

Collaborating with Paraprofessionals and Assistants

Building collaborative relationships with classroom partners in both public school and private sector dance classes is an essential key to success. Here are some ways classroom partners can support students:

- Share information with teachers about students' access needs, behavior, and the support they are provided in other spaces.
- Provide 1:1 support with dance tasks.
- Provide support for small group work.
- Sit next to or behind students during warm-up.
- Supervise breaks in the classroom's quiet space.
- Break down tasks into manageable steps.
- Monitor the environment, lowering music and decluttering the space as needed.
- Provide visual support.
- Provide props, fidgets, noise-canceling headphones, and other sensory supports.

Additional Inclusive Classroom Strategies

- **Find and explore the essence of the movement.** For example,
 - When a child has difficulty jumping, focus on elevation or level.
 - When teaching a tendu, explore stretching away from a stable center.
- **Try Mirroring** for students who have difficulty partnering.
- **Ignore behavior** that may be distracting but does not pose harm to the child or the class. For example, if a child walks around the room, keep an eye on the student. Over time, they are likely to participate in the activity.
- **Incorporate high-energy moves** such as jumping and jumping jacks into warm-up for children who enter with high energy and struggle to regulate.
- **Allow students to watch class.** Respecting students' comfort level will

open the door to participation.

- **Provide extended time** for students to complete tasks.
- **Take a pause** after asking a question to give students processing time.
- **Allow for varied responses** such as drawing, selecting visual images, demonstrating, and giving verbal responses.
- **Provide fidgets** and other tactile supports for students.

Integrate the Arts: Access Learning from All Modalities

- **Add singing!** Use simple songs where movement instructions are embedded. Make your own songs and repeat them. Soon, the class will be singing along.
- **Create a Drum Circle** using drums, rhythm sticks, maracas, or other hand-held percussion instruments.
- **Incorporate visual arts activities** into class time. Sitting at a table or on the floor with their own materials is a calming and focusing experience for students.

Resource Links

- [Classroom Rules: Importance and Tips for Creating and Enforcing Them](#)** by Public School Works. Practical insights and actionable tips that promote learning.
- [Dance: Arts and Students with Disabilities Compendium](#)**. See page 5: Classroom Environment, with links to these documents:
 - *Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport in the Dance Classroom*
 - *Tips for Classroom Procedures*
 - *Managing Student Behavior in the Dance Classroom*
- [Dancing with Students with Disabilities: A Sensory Approach](#). Stratton-Gonzalez. Pages 10-23: sensory strategies. Pages 37-48: additional best practices.
- [GIVE: Growing Inclusivity for Vibrant Engagement](#)**. Free online resources created for educators working in Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) Classrooms.
- [A Movement and Music Program for Children with Autism](#). Sandra Stratton-Gonzalez. Dance Education in practice, Vol 1, #1. 2015
- [Signals for Quiet](#)**. The Responsive Classroom website, August 2024.
- [Strategies for Teaching Dance to Diverse Learners - Crelata](#)®**
- [Targeted Prevention Strategies for Dance](#) by Dr. Diane Duggan. Based on the work of Fritz Redl and Nicholas Long.

- [Universal Design for Learning and Differentiation](#)**
- [Universal Design for Learning: Why Does it Matter to Dance Teaching? Patricia Reedy](#).** October, 2013. Dance Magazine.
- [Understanding Autism: Common Sensory Aspects](#). Table courtesy of Ricki Robinson, M.D., M.P.H., author of Autism Solutions.
- [Visual Supports for Children with ASD](#).** University of New Mexico Center for Development and Disability.

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