



## The Top Ten Reasons Why Classes at Smarty Dance are Brain-Compatible *and* So Much Fun!

**1. We provide meaningful curriculum.** The brain wants to learn and make meaning out of experiences. Smarty Dance's curriculum is based on 15 dance concepts. These dance concepts are rich in meaning and relate to many facets of life. Exploring these concepts in a variety of ways through the multiple intelligences means students don't just learn dance steps; they make choices, develop critical thinking skills, and use the concept to construct their own learning. The curriculum is supported by the 5 Part Lesson Plan which allows for teacher-directed movement to alternate with student-centered activities. A dance class that includes repetition, relationships, reflection, and recuperation supports meaningful learning for all.

**2. We provide an enriched environment.** A multi-sensory environment and challenging curriculum promote the growth of brain cells that are larger, have more dendrites, and communicate better with one another. In our dance classes props and manipulatives, pictures, music, written language, spoken language, obstacle courses, movement and motor skill development all contribute to a stimulating sensory experience.

**3. We give meaningful feedback.** Teachers at Smarty Dance give specific, descriptive, timely, and positive feedback to students throughout the lesson. Students are able to learn, grow, and develop with this interactive and meaningful feedback; the brain needs feedback to make meaning out of an experience.

**4. We include opportunities for emotional engagement.** We strive to create a joyful, fun, and challenging atmosphere in our classes. This helps to release the chemical serotonin (a feel good chemical). A negative or stressful environment releases the chemical cortisol, which in large amounts can actually damage brain cells. Reflection and sharing thoughts and experiences after exploring a dance concept, developing skills, or sharing choreography, emotionally engages students.

**5. We allow for social interaction.** Humans are social creatures and because the brain learns through social interaction we seek out relationships. Classes at the Creative Dance Center include a variety of groupings such as pairs, trios, and small and large groups. This allows students to learn from one another, collaborate, problem-solve, and breaks down gender, cultural, and learning style differences.

**6. We present developmentally appropriate curriculum.** Understanding the developmental stages of the students in a class is critical to offering a

curriculum that is challenging but achievable. Bored or frustrated students will often engage in inappropriate behavior if inappropriate curriculum is presented. Through teacher education, workshops, and collaborative discussions, Smarty Dance's faculty is able to present developmentally appropriate curriculum to all ages.

**7. We allow students to take control of their learning.** Teachers at Smarty Dance are facilitators who allow students to construct their own learning and re-create what they have learned. The brain learns by working out solutions in order to understand material and will retain information longer if given this student-centered opportunity. Exploring dance concepts and solving movement "problems" in a variety of ways motivates, engages, and bestows responsibility on students. Improvising, creating, and choreographing synthesizes concepts and makes what has been learned personally meaningful.

**8. We provide both novel and repetitious experiences.** Optimal learning is made up of a balance of novelty and repetition. Novelty creates the brain's synaptic connections and repetition hard-wires those connections. The conceptual approach we use at the Smarty Dance introduces novelty into each class by exploring a new dance concept each week. Repetition is inherent in the structure of our 5-part lesson. Through repetition, dance skills and technique can be developed and improved. The novelty of the dance concept keeps this skill development from becoming boring or disengaging.

**9. We provide information about proper nutrition.** Our brains need good nutrition, plenty of water, and oxygen. Without them, our brains cannot fully function. The importance of a healthy diet and a hydrated body receiving plenty of oxygen through breath and exercise is something we share with students during rest time and at other valuable moments.

**10. We offer a curriculum that is holistic and sequential.** All teachers at Smarty Dance have an amazing tool that makes lesson planning automatically holistic and sequential. The 5-Part Lesson Plan gives students the opportunity to learn about a whole idea in context rather than in sub-parts and pieces. The dance concept is the "big idea" of the class and the (1) BrainDance (warming-up), (2) Exploration of the Concept, (3) Developing Skills, (4) Creating, and (5) Closure/Cooling Down are the sequential pieces that make the whole so satisfying.

The next time you have the opportunity to observe a **Smarty Dance** class give yourself a little test. See if you can identify where brain-compatible principles are being used in the lesson plan and notice how learning, behavior, skill development, and creating are affected by putting these principles into practice.

