

The Importance of Choosing a Qualified Dance School



I have been asked by parents many times over the years about the importance of choosing the right and qualified dance school. A few years ago I wrote an article on the subject and thought I would re-print it here. It is unfortunate that over the years dance schools have sprung up in basements and halls and many times the teachers don't have qualifications and are not current with dance education and children and parents have a bad experience in a wonderful art form.

I would like to say that there is a strong advocacy in the dance education field to weed out bad teachers and schools but unfortunately the dance community is fragmented in regard to this so it becomes buyer beware. Don't get me wrong there are many very good dance schools and dance instructors in Calgary but there is an equal amount that are not or are not or do not make it their priority.

Rightfully so, a lot of time and energy is expended in researching and choosing the right educational avenues for our children. This is appropriate as so much depends on the development of the mind ranging from sound fundamentals to a creative and challenging environment.

Similarly when we introduce our children to the arts, particularly dance, one has to pay particular attention to some critical yet at times overlooked basics. Many times parents are forced to make their decisions on a dance school without the benefits of knowing some of the basics of dance training. Therefore choosing the appropriate dance school for their child becomes a process of guesswork.

Where you take your child to study dance is critical. Even if your child only wants to recreationally dance, technique should still be taught properly to prevent potentially serious dance related injuries. If a dance student is taught to recreate a movement the wrong way and continues to dance repeating incorrect technique year after year, they could be developing chronic long-term problems.

The following is information on what I consider four areas critical in determining the right school for your child and perhaps some questions to ask when you are ready to choose.

- 1) *Qualifications – What are the credentials of the teachers you are entrusting to your child? The instructors should be qualified and experienced (i.e. – registered teachers with the Royal Academy of Dance). Teachers should stay current by attending dance education courses and workshops.*

Does the school follow a recognized and respected syllabus? There are many recognized syllabus such as the Royal Academy of Dance, Imperial Society of Dance, Cecchetti, etc. This is important because these syllabus have been developed over the years by trained dance professionals and therefore children will be developed using techniques that are safe and the most beneficial as opposed to an ad hoc syllabus that might have been developed by an independent instructor.

Are the teachers well trained and qualified in the dance form they are teaching? Do they know and teach the roots and history of the dance form?

- 2) *Philosophy – Does the school adhere to a philosophy that learning to dance should be a positive experience and not a pressured experience? Check if the school presents dance as an art form to enjoy. Does your dancer have the opportunity to work with a set syllabus and respected examinations such as the Royal Academy of Dance? Is there an opportunity to perform in a non-competitive atmosphere?*
- 3) *Facilities – Does the school provide a good physical environment? Good basic facilities are important. Of particular importance is the aspect of wood sprung floors or a sport floor that provides cushioning for growing bones. Not all ballerinas are graceful and light on their feet at first. The studio should be clean and roomy, allowing students to move in an unconfined space. Don't be fooled by lots of mirrors and barres that provide the ambiance without the basics. Also, does the school provide a live musician (pianist) to develop heightened musicality in your child?*
- 4) *Costs – What are the costs? Although not the most important issue you should be getting good value for your dollar. Be cognizant that there may be costs associated with Recitals (i.e. – costumes) exams and dance wear*

that are over and above monthly fees. Ensure you know what the school's philosophy and policy is on this. Fees may vary and it is important to shop around but do not base your decision on the price alone.

Proper training cannot be emphasized enough in learning dance. When parents enroll their student into their first dance class, you do not know whether or not they will want to train seriously throughout their school years or approach dance on a recreational level. So it is important to set the basics of dance training on firm fundamentals. Your child could blossom into a well-developed dancer or repeat bad habits that could eventually diminish the dance experience.

With proper training and a positive environment associated with caring and qualified instructors, your child will have the opportunity to develop a positive outlook, self-discipline, self-awareness with physical and mental well-being no matter how long they partake in this wonderful and fulfilling art form.

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