

Show Time vs Grow Time

Dance in the form of ballet, jazz dance and similar styles is a theatre art, a form of cultivated entertainment. Children who are attending dance classes will usually be involved in a school performance at intervals over the years. Working towards a performance encourages each individual to think, be responsible for their own part in the show so as not to let the others down and fosters friendship, bringing the pupils closer together as a group. This is as true for five year olds as it is for eighteen year olds. While work in class or maybe training for a ballet exam sees each pupil working as an individual, honing their technique, a group choreography introduces the element of spatial awareness and keeping time, being a part of a bigger picture.



So what is a sensible interval between shows? Two years is in my opinion a good guide leaving time in between for some serious work on the nitty gritty, time to improve technique so that there is more to show at the next performance.

It is probably not wise to state this in terms of time to younger children to whom two years seems an infinite stretch of time!

Young children are prompted to ask soon after one show when the next one will be and would not be perturbed to hear that it is next month whereby in reality the planning, organising and choreography that goes on in the background, without them being aware of it, takes months. Even older children would appreciate having the chance to go on stage more often but an explanation of why a gap is needed and what should be achieved in that time helps them understand.

What then are we doing in between times? This is the 'grow time'. We go back to

training the body and mind, working to achieve straight backs, strong turned-out legs and feet, good balance, co-ordination between legs, arms and head, a sense of rhythm

and musicality and it is hoped, some creativity when children are given a chance to create their own movements at a given point in class. All this should, over the years, instil confidence that manifests itself in a poised, upright posture and awareness of body language. These aims are of course prioritised differently for different age groups but over the course of several years this is the wished for effect.

And it does rightfully take time. In order to improve fine motor skills such as are needed for small jumps relying on accuracy of placing the feet in order to perform them correctly, many repetitions are needed, but not too many in one session to prevent boredom creeping in. An experienced teacher knows when enough is enough and to put off further practice until the next class.

It can be difficult to instil the patience necessary to master technically intricate steps as there is a lack of understanding about time-frames when

children see contestants on reality TV shows seemingly becoming stars in a matter of weeks. When one hears that large numbers of teenagers when asked about their future career choices, reply that they want to be famous, it is easy to understand the preoccupation with these programmes. But the experts who are judging and, to take 'Strictly Come Dancing' as an example, the professional dancers and coaches have trained for years to reach the standard they have attained.

The number of repetitions necessary to perform a simple 'port de bras' (a sequence of arm movements) not just correctly but beautifully is huge despite the fact that arm positions can be made to look good in a comparatively short space of time, due to the fact that strength doesn't have to be built up as it does for leg movements.

It is of course not just in dance that there has to be a large investment of time to achieve worthwhile results. This will be true of most professions. The sense of achievement, pride and self-fulfilment that it brings and the confidence that this in turn fosters, is euphoric.

However, foundations must be built gradually and thoroughly. There has to be time to grow before the work put in by students and teachers culminates in the next performance. Then that performance will be all the more interesting and worthwhile particularly for parents who have seen their child on stage last time and see how much more they can do and how much more proficient they are at doing it.

As the proverb goes: *'Patience is a virtue'*.

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