Music and Dance Experiences for School-Age Children

As a school-age staff member, you will be planning music and dance experiences for school-age children. The information below will provide you with ideas of things you can do:

Types of Music Activities

Music can be incorporated into the school-age learning environment in a variety of ways. You should provide a variety of open-ended and skill-based experiences for children to explore. Music areas in the learning environment should be available to children whenever appropriate. If possible, they should be located in an area that will not disturb children involved in quiet activities. Music areas can include musical instruments, books on famous musicians or composers, music listening centers, and elements that allow children to explore the science of sound. Depending on your program, you might offer skill-based music experiences for children as well. Teaching children to read, play and write music are examples of skill-based experiences. You do not have to be a musician to teach children musical skills. You can teach skills such as rhythm, counting, sound science, patterns and pitch without having much musical skill. The list below will provide you with some more examples of musical learning activities:

- Listening to music
- Playing musical instruments
- Making musical instruments
- Creative writing while listening to music
- Drawing while listening to different types of music
- Writing music
- Learning music history
- Musician studies
- Composer studies
- Musical performances
- Musical theater
- Exploring the science of sound
- Exploring sound effects
- Exploring environmental sounds
- Exploring sounds found in nature

Types of Dance Activities

There are a variety of dance and creative movement activities that can be incorporated into a school-age learning environment. Similar to what you learned in the Visual Art and Literature lesson, there should be a combination of open-ended and skill-based experiences planned. There should also be free-time activities and adult-led experiences. Here is a list of example activities that can be planned to include dance in your activity plans:
• Movement response: Responding by movement can be explored in a variety of ways. Allowing children to move while responding to music, poetry, artwork or phrases are all methods of movement response.
• Gestures: Include gestures in an activity plan by playing games like charades. You can also assign children emotions to act out a gesture that corresponds while other children guess.
• Keeping a beat: This can be done with clapping, wooden sticks, or any form of percussive material. Children can try to match a beat supplied by an adult, an automatic keyboard or piece of music.
• Nonverbal communication: With school-age children, it is important to talk about how body language gives off an impression. Discuss different forms of body language, such as having your arms crossed or hunching your shoulders, and what that might say about a person.
• Body percussion: Explore the sounds you can make using nothing but the body. Clapping hands, clicking fingers, whistling, or using your mouth to make sounds are all ways of exploring body percussion. This is considered an art form, called beatboxing, and is commonly used in a cappella music.
• Cultural dances: Explore the dances used in different cultures all over the world.
• Era dances: Share the music and popular dance steps found in different eras.
• Created dances: Allow children to create their own dance moves.
• Dance video games: There are now a variety of video games that have the players mimic dance moves. These games are fun and a great way to encourage children to keep moving.
• Group dances: Children will enjoy learning steps to a group dance and practicing together. These can be adult led or older school-age children can help instruct the younger ones.
• Free dance: Giving children time to dance is something that should not be overlooked. Let them play their favorite songs and dance the day away.

Connecting with Music and Dance in Our Cultures
Music and dance are another method of infusing multicultural elements into the learning environment. Most cultures have traditional music, costumes and dances that are used as part of ceremonies or celebrations. You can infuse cultural elements into the learning environment by playing music or learning dance steps from a specific culture. School-age children will be able to share these elements of their culture, or of a culture they have lived in or experienced. Use their knowledge to help make the connections between the cultural elements and the music or dance.