

Dance-based Method for Evaluating Youth Arts Programming

Wilder Research created this dance-based method for evaluating youth arts programming as part of a larger project with the Minnesota State Arts Board. We used this method to help evaluate a dance program for elementary and middle school students. This document provides an overview of the method we used, instructions for youth program staff to implement the method, and a worksheet that youth program staff can duplicate to engage young people in the method.

Dance-based method overview

There are many ways to evaluate youth arts programming, such as surveys, observations, or dance-based methods. By “dance-based methods,” we mean evaluation methods that incorporate dance in some way. The dance-based method we created invites young people to make a short dance about what they learned through youth arts programming.

Implementation instructions

This dance-based method involves two parts: 1) introduction and creative activity, and 2) documentation and sharing.

Introduction and creative activity

To introduce the method, Wilder suggests that youth program staff share common outcomes of youth arts programming, such as art outcomes (like increased interest in the arts and improved arts skills), social-emotional outcomes (like improved peer skills, better emotional regulation, and increased connections to caring adults), and educational or career outcomes (like setting goals and making plans to achieve them).

Suggested introduction script: What can we learn by making art? We can get better at something by learning new skills or techniques. We can learn about ourselves and why we feel or think the way we do. We can make new friends and learn more about the friends we have. We can meet people in our neighborhood or community and learn about what’s important to them. We can learn what skills or support we need to accomplish our goals.

Creative activity prompt: Think about what you have learned by making art with _____
Please use the worksheet to create a short dance about what you have learned. Note: Young people can work individually or in pairs or small groups to create a dance. Allow more time if young people work in pairs or small groups.

Documentation and sharing

As young people create their dance, they should use the worksheet to document the moves that make up their dance. The worksheet presumes that young people will create an 8-count phrase.

After creating their dance, youth program staff should facilitate an opportunity for young people to share their dance, including sharing their response to the open-ended question at the bottom of the worksheet. Youth program staff should take notes of young people’s responses or ensure that their writing on the worksheets is legible.

What have you learned by making art with

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In the boxes below, please create an 8-movement dance about the ways you have changed by making art with . There are 8 squares below – please use these to draw or describe each movement. You can draw a stick figure for each movement with arrows to show the movement's direction. Otherwise, you can describe the movement by writing things like “arms straight up” or “twirl 2 times.” For each movement, please also circle whether it is fast or slow, and happy or sad. Lastly, please write your response to the question at the bottom of the page.

Dance title: _____

Movement 1		Movement 2		Movement 3		Movement 4	
Fast 😊	Slow 😞	Fast 😊	Slow 😞	Fast 😊	Slow 😞	Fast 😊	Slow 😞
Movement 5		Movement 6		Movement 7		Movement 8	
Fast 😊	Slow 😞	Fast 😊	Slow 😞	Fast 😊	Slow 😞	Fast 😊	Slow 😞

What are the biggest ways you have changed by making art with
What is the story you are telling through this dance?

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Thank you for completing this worksheet! Please give it to someone from .