

Dance Artists, Dance Education, and Society

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In this paper I take an historical look at dance artists and theorists, examining their influence on today's curriculum in our school system. I argue that dance education should be recognized as of equal importance as other art forms, that it is essential for our society's well being, and that it should be included and fostered in our school curricula. I further examine a number of key contributors to dance and dance education within the last century in the Western sphere. Key questions I examine are: Who were some of the most influential dance artists and dance educators of the past century? Who were the innovators and key contributors? How has their work affected dance education? How has their work been passed on? Have their bodies of work, their methodologies, or their beliefs about the body changed society? Has their work shaped culture or was it a byproduct or reflection of culture and the forces of the time they lived? As well as an historical look at dance artists and theorists, I also undertake a philosophical inquiry, examining the idea of dance in the curriculum as being misunderstood: as an area to explore feeling, but not intellect. Finally, I look at the essentialness of an integrated dance and movement education as a way of connecting human beings to their bodies, as well as using the body as an essential means of expression.



Magda Hanova Karlsbad 1926¹

Introduction

Creating an awareness of the value of the arts for education might be an effective way to ensure the inclusion of the arts in the curriculum. One of the smaller and most neglected elements within the artistic sphere is dance and dance education. Dance educators believe that dance is just as important among the arts as other forms of artistic expression and deserves a more prominent place in the curriculum. In order to view dance as an equally important art form, we must examine the role of dance artists and theorists and their place in society and education. An historical investigation and a philosophical inquiry of these are necessary to further illuminate and persuade educators and curriculum builders of the importance of the inclusion of dance in the curriculum. The three areas of art, society, and arts education thus should be studied simultaneously in order for the student of the arts

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and art lover to better understand the inner workings of how great art has come to be but also to be informed about the tremendous influence these three subjects have upon one another.

The philosophical inquiry will center on examining the idea of dance in the curriculum, which is misunderstood as an area to explore only feeling but not intellect. However, it will also look at the essentialness of a dance/movement education as a way of reconnecting human beings with their bodies and the use of the body as an essential means of expression that has long been neglected.

To address the approach I will take historically, I quote Donald S. Blumenfeld-Jones (2001, p. 1), a noted dancer and dance critic, who says it succinctly when he states some well thought-out reasons for historical investigation.

There are many reasons to write a history. One might write a history in order to correct misunderstandings of the past. One might be interested in understanding a history in different terms (perhaps in “social conditions” terms rather than “great people acting terms”). One might want to write a history that memorialized or enshrined or celebrated some past. Or one might write a history to find out about one’s own past, to come to understand oneself in the light of that past. ...In all these cases the historian is practicing a partial historical practice in multiple ways: partial in the sense of having a viewpoint to develop, presenting only a portion or part of the story, wanting or desiring (being partial to) a certain kind of story.

With this view of the possibilities for historical writing about dance, my personal story is to investigate and show a partial history of whom I believe to be some of the key historical contributors to dance and dance education, within the last one hundred years and in the Western sphere. My reason for doing this is threefold. Firstly, I want to understand myself as a dancer in the light of the past teachers I have studied with. Secondly, I would like to understand what it is to be educated historically about how we as a society have moved the dance art from its past form to its present form. Thirdly, I am hoping to further enlighten myself as to how my own ideas, concepts, beliefs, and tastes about dance have evolved? Why does dance look the way it does today? What has come before that shaped the way we view movement? And what, if anything, do we feel important to include, concerning dance education in the curriculum in our school system? For that matter, is there still a place for dance education in our curriculum? And if so, where?

Historical Key Questions

Who were some of the most influential dance artists and dance educators of the past century? Who were the innovators and key contributors? And how has their work affected dance education? Has their body of work, their methodology, or their beliefs about the body changed society? Has their work shaped culture or was their work (their dance art) a byproduct or reflection of culture and the forces of the time they lived? To answer these questions, one must first examine when and who has been significant to dance history and who, through their work or art, made lasting changes to our society and to our education system.

A Brief History of Dance

There are many excellent books, which in great detail explain and examine dance throughout the ages. For this short paper I will give a very brief overview of what has come before our present age in dance in order to lay some groundwork for the reader so they may understand dance’s place in our culture today. The reader must keep in mind that the omission of any key artist or educator or exclusion of specific dance styles is due to the limited length of this work, and is not in any way due to

the unimportance of the said dance artist, educator, or dance style. It is also a history from the author's perspective, her history, her story, the choosing of sources for this research was thus based on the author's experiences and her investigating sources which had meaning and significance for her.

The dance impulse seems to date from the very beginning of humankind's existence on Earth. Dance may have been the first means of communication. Dance as an art, as distinct from a natural activity, can be traced from the moment when it was harnessed to a rhythm, probably the stamping of feet and clapping of hands. Dance historian, Jane Harris (1988, p. 4) states that,

Dance and the dancer have belonged to every age and culture since the beginning of time and it is evident that dance and the dancer have played a significant role in the evolution of mankind. In all ages, the human body, as an instrument moving in space and time, has made dance unique among the arts.

Dance can also be seen as an intangible art, existing only in the bodies of the performers and dying with them. It has only been in the last century that it has been possible to preserve on film or in precise notation the actions of dancers. According to Martin (1963, p. 8), "Dance can be seen to be a basic, fundamental element of man's behavior and one which is motivated by impulses and intuitions to express that which lies inside and is too deep for words."

Dance is thus a means to express with our bodies and to communicate our inner selves to others. All cultures have dance and the universal urge to dance can be seen throughout the ages as expressed by all human beings. Primitive man probably first used dance to bridge the gap between himself and his Creator and to communicate praise, thankfulness or supplications. Dance has always played a part in human social interactions and celebrations, be it for marriages, feasts, plantings or harvestings, religious rites, or victories in war.

But dance goes beyond being only an activity that is important to share at social functions. Curt Sachs (1963, p. 3), a noted dance historian, makes this profound statement about dance as one of the foundational arts for humanity:

The dance is the mother of the arts. Music and poetry exist in time, painting and architecture in space. But the dance lives at once in time and space. The creator and the thing created, the artist and the work are still one and the same thing. Rhythmical patterns of movement, the plastic sense of space, the vivid representation of a world seen and imagined—these things man creates in his own body in the dance before he uses substance and stone and word to give expression to his inner experiences.

Dance may thus be seen as one of the first art forms or ways human beings shared their experiences with others, before the creation of the more sophisticated art forms, which require language or specific materials. Dance only requires the body and its inhabitant's desire to express something, for dance is the art of gesture and movement. It transforms images, ideas, and feelings into patterns and narratives that are personally and socially significant. Dance organizes physical energy within time and space. Dance is a natural means of communication and expression, integrating movement, feeling, and intellect.

So we can see that dance a long a detailed history. But how did dance as an art form, a concert given on the *modern* stage, come to be? To answer this question we must look to Europe during the Renaissance. Ivor Guest, (1960, p.2), in his book, *The Dancer's Heritage: A Short History of Ballet*, informs us that

The art of the theatre which we call ballet, is an art of recent times, and emerges some five hundred years ago during the period known as the Renaissance—the very starting point of modern history...This was the setting for the appearance of the earliest professional dancing-masters, who were often important figures at the Italian courts. Under their influence, dancing

developed from a pastime into an art possessing a definite technique which evolved, elaborated and codified, and from which our present ballet technique has sprung.

As the ballet evolved and waxed and waned in popularity at the European royal courts, it came to form part of the opera and other stage productions, and thus had a chance to grow as an entertainment, not only among the aristocracy, but also among the rising middle class. Guest (1960, p. 37) further states, "During the period of the Romantic Ballet, 1800 and on, the main center of ballet activity was the Paris Opera, where *La Sylphide* and *Giselle* were first produced and where most of the greatest ballerinas of the time built up their reputations."

As the century progressed, the ballet produced many stars, but also went into decline. It was not until the early 1900s that ballet saw a revival, primarily because of one man, Serge Diaghilev. A Russian entrepreneur, Diaghilev brought together the best of the arts to his ballet presentations. He used the most talented set designers, musicians, composers and dancers of the day, and toured the world, thus raising the profile of ballet and the dance to equal the other arts. His company employed the famous choreographer Fokine, the dance master Cecchetti, the dancers, Nijinsky, Karsavina, and Pavlova, and used the music of Stravinsky, Debussy, and Satie.

After Diaghilev's death in 1929, ballet continued to enjoy its high profile and for major capital cities in Europe to be considered cultural centres, it (almost) became a requirement that they had ballet schools and ballet companies. Throughout the twentieth and thus far in this twenty-first century, ballet has continued to set the standard for dance as an art form and is still immensely popular.

But while Diaghilev was experiencing great success, another style of dance was emerging to rival his productions. This new style of dance was called Free Dance or Modern Dance. According to Gay Cheney, (1989, p. 2), "It all began at the turn of the [twentieth] century. The spirit of change and revolution was in the air and contagious among people in many different areas of dance and art." In Europe, Francois Delsarte, Emile Jacques-Dalcroze, and Rudolph von Laban developed theories of human movement and expression, and methods of instruction that led to the development of European Modern and Expressionist Dance. But their ideas and theories went much further afield than Europe and changed concert dance and the ways in which dance artists express themselves, as well as the education of physical movement all over the world.

In fact, these three men have had an enormous influence on the arts in general and their ideas and theories have formed the basis for many of the current ways we learn to act dramatically, express ourselves in dance, and teach physical movement.

Francois Delsarte (1811-1871) was a French-American musician and singer, born in Paris. He developed an acting style that attempted to connect the inner emotional experience of actors with a systemized set of gestures and movements based upon his own observations of human interaction. To develop his method, he closely studied and examined the voice, breath, movement dynamics, and all manner of the expressive elements of the human body. His work was taken up by many followers and brought to America, where it became immensely popular and was interpreted in many different ways.

Jacques-Dalcroze (1865-1950) was a Swiss composer and musician known for developing Eurhythmics, an approach to music education involving whole body movement. He developed "Rhythmic Gymnastics," after searching for a better way for his students to hear accurately and respond spontaneously to music. This special movement work concentrated on the body as the original instrument and involved natural movement such as walking, lunging, and skipping in order to musical rhythm, as well as using and developing the voice and breathing techniques. He established his own school in Geneva, the Institut Jacques-Dalcroze, where he taught until his death in 1950.

But probably the most remarkable person whose theories have had a lasting effect on Modern Dance and dance education was Rudolph von Laban. Born in Austro-Hungary (he lived from 1879 until 1953), Laban was a dancer, choreographer, and movement experimenter. Laban's work and ideas have come to form the basis for our current movement theory and are used as the underpinnings of the programs used at most universities and public schools in North America and Europe.

Jane Winearls (1958, p. 11) outlines how Laban came to create and conceive of his theories, she writes that

Beginning with studies of ballet, of the work of Delsarte, of many kinds of folk dance, of the laws of mathematics and geometry, Laban evolved a means of “dissecting out” the basic elements which create and control every kind of movement of which human anatomy is capable.

Identifying these basic elements, Laban created the tools on which dance could now be recorded.

Also, according to Joan Russell (1968, p. 17), “Laban’s system of movement notation uses abstract symbols to record the direction of the movement, the part of the body doing the movement, the level of the movement, and the length of time it takes to do the movement.” Laban labeled these categories *Space*, *Weight*, *Time*, and *Flow*. He also used abstract symbols to represent “effort” or dynamics, a system for understanding the more subtle characteristics about the way a movement is done with respect to inner intention.

I have a deep personal connection to Laban’s work and theory, as my dance teachers, Gertrud and Magda Hanova, studied with him in London in the 1950s. They opened up the first Modern Dance School in Vancouver in 1959. Laban’s ideas and methods were taught to me as a child and colored my growing concepts of movement and choreography. They became part of the way I view and value dance as an art.

Laban’s work was extended and carried on by many students in Europe, which include famous dancers Kurt Jooss, Sigurd Leeder, Mary Wigman and Hanya Holm. Irmgard Bartenieff, also a student of Laban, founded the Laban/Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies in New York. The so-called Bartenieff Fundamentals are an extension of the Laban Movement Analysis, and in 1973 her student Peggy Hackney created a certification program in the Laban Movement Analysis. Before her death, Bartenieff stated (1980, p. 10), “Fifty years in the field have only strengthened my convictions that Laban’s multifaceted approach to the study of the human behavior through body movement has a unique contribution to make to the understanding of our world.”

Francois Delsarte, Jacques-Dalcroze and especially Rudolph von Laban clearly stand out as major contributors to dance philosophy and dance education, and their ideas have formed the foundation for how movement is now taught and perceived. Their important new methods and theories had an enormous influence on the early modern dance pioneers of Europe and America. Their teachings allowed new forms of dance to flourish and inspired the first modern dance artists to shed the technique of classical ballet, along with its constraints and limitations, costumes and shoes. Having been exposed to the new ideas of Delsarte, Dalcroze, and Laban, these early “free” dancers were thus enabled by the new philosophies of movement to have a strong basis with which to create their own innovative work and soon generated an immense interest in modern dance as an art form.

In America Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Doris Humphrey, and Martha Graham developed their own styles of free dance and laid the foundations of American Modern Dance with their choreography and teaching.

It is worthwhile to take a closer look at some of these artists and in particular those who had a lasting effect on education to discover how they shaped and influenced the modern dance of today and the type of dance taught in our present school curriculums.

Isadora Duncan (1878 – 1927), an American dancer, clearly stands out as a performer and teacher. She was one of the earliest and most influential. Born in San Francisco, she studied ballet but found it too mechanical. According to Don McDonagh (1970, p. 20), “She set out to discover the source of her own movement and decided it came from her solar plexus and flowed outward. The combination of this outward flow and her own deep understanding of music eventually made Duncan the international force that she was.”

Duncan saw herself as a serious artist and therefore used only serious music. She was the first to choose major composers like Wagner, Beethoven, and Chopin to create inspirational work and so made the dance a theatrical presence, which could rival ballet. She was immensely popular in Europe but not as well received by the more conservative American public.

According to Julia Levien in her book *Duncan Dance*,

The effect of Isadora Duncan on the development of the art of the dance has been generally acknowledged. But the realization of her important contribution to the field of education for children through dance is still to be fully appreciated. In 1904, when Isadora announced her free school for the “New Dance”, most of her suggestions, which today are unquestioned, were unheard of. Her school, open to all children from all economic levels, advocated the arts as an integral part of the curriculum and that children should experience their body through dance movements as an avenue to learning. (1994, p. vii)

In effect Isadora Duncan brought much of the most innovative ideas of her period to the public and helped make these ideas more acceptable through her dance and dance schools. She was an early feminist and advocated for women’s rights. She broke all the moral codes of the era, by having children out of wedlock and not marrying their fathers. Politically she also stepped on many toes by embracing the new communist Russia and marrying a Russian poet younger than herself. At this time there were many new movements which she adopted. Dress-reform, one such new movement, advocated changes to women’s dress, from confining layers of corsets to looser and shorter styles which encouraged freer movement and better hygiene as the shorter skirts did not drag on the ground and pick up mud and germs. For her dance costumes, Isadora adopted the Greek tunic as the “most free” to the body and fitting style of dress to wear and forsook any type of shoes as too confining. She scandalized but fascinated her audiences by her unconventional behavior and dress.

Isadora Duncan also saw education as a right for all persons and did not see women as delicate and unable to use their brains without harming their bodies, a popular myth that had kept women out of higher education. She also employed the Delsarte system, a reform that encouraged women to explore bodily freedom and health through its dance-like drills, which encouraged opening the lungs and self-expression. Delsarte and Dalcroze and their ideas had a big influence on Duncan as she formed her own theories and style of movement. Their ideas of natural movement in the form of walking, running, and skipping rang true to her. Duncan also adopted Dalcroze’s method of feeling the rhythm of music and responding from the inner self during improvisation.

In short, Isadora Duncan and her beliefs, dance innovations, and the philosophy of movement she wove together from many different sources of her day have had a tremendous influence on dance education and how we presently view the purposes of a dance education. As Levien (1994, p. xi) succinctly puts it, Duncan “rediscovered the right to positive assertion and the joy of action.”

Laban and Duncan clearly stand out as major contributors to dance philosophy and changes in how dance was taught and perceived by the general public. Their important ideas and theories formed the basis for other modern dancers’ work and raised the profile of the necessity of dance education.

The 1930s saw the development of the next generation of modern dancers. In Europe, Mary Wigman clearly stands out. Mary Wigman (1886-1973) was a German dancer, choreographer and one of the key founders of Expressionist Dance. She was a student of Rhythmic Gymnastics, and studied with Dalcroze and Laban. Wigman’s choreography was the first to use silence as she felt dance was an art equal to music.

She also often used only percussion and gongs as accompaniment. Her dramatic and strong style was unique when compared to the popular lyrical dance of this era. (She also taught my dancing teachers, the Hanova Sisters, and I feel honored to have heard first hand about her school and work.)



Magda and Gertrud Hanova in 1938

In America, Doris Humphrey and Martha Graham were creating their own unique styles of movement which have both had a lasting effect on dance education and theory. Their innovative work changed the look of dance as an art form and how audiences perceived dance in the theater.

Doris Humphrey (1895-1958), created the important theory of fall and recovery and wrote “The Art of Making Dances” which furthered the choreographer’s art. Martha Graham (1894-1991) also went beyond dancing in the new “free” style and created her own unique vocabulary of movement. According to Cheney (1989, p. 4), “Graham’s theory is that movement arises from the pelvis and is reflected through the rest of the spine, arms and legs. From this theory grew a highly structured and sequenced technique based on the contraction and release of the lower torso.” Graham was also a highly prolific choreographer and produced over 150 works. Most importantly, according to Walter Terry, Graham thought that

Dancing should deal with such serious matters as poverty, racial bias, neuroses, and even war. Some of these dances would not be entertaining. They would be disturbing to the mind and to the guts. They would demand that audiences feel deeply and think deeply. (1975, p. 56)

In the early 1930s, this was a new kind of material that could not be labeled aesthetic or interpretative and so the title “modern” dance came into use, although Graham disliked the name and used the term “Contemporary Dance” to describe her work. Graham’s company operated until 1991 and her technique and movement style is still taught all over the world and considered one of the major techniques for modern dance.

From these great artists, and their dance schools, stem the modern dance that we know today. Many of their students went on and developed their own original work and we can see that from the mid-century, right through until the present, they have continued to keep the spirit of modern dance alive. Modern dance seems to reflect the times and is always open to new ways of moving, using new technology and music. It is highly intellectual and is used by artists to make statements about the world and their own inner landscapes. Presently we see Modern or Contemporary Dance taking off into even more new directions, for example, in Butoh, Postmodern Dance and Contact Improvisation.

But how did the work and ideas of these great artists and theorists come to be available to the general public without one enrolling in their schools? How was their work introduced and incorporated into our present educational institutions? According to Cheney

The worlds of concert dance and dance education proceeded in parallel but separate paths for many years. The university dance departments developed dance studies in art, science, and philosophy, and sent many influential people out into the world. There were performers, choreographers, teachers of dance, and dance therapists who stretched our understanding not only of dance as a creative art form, but dance as a means of education and growth and as a way to self-knowledge and healing. (1989, p. 9)

Dance in Education

One of the most noted of these educators was Margaret H'Doubler (1889-1982). In 1926, Margaret H'Doubler established the first dance major in higher education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. It was begun in the Department of Physical Education for Women.

A basketball coach, H'Doubler was sent to New York in 1916 by her superior Blanche Trilling, to discover "some sort of dance worth teaching to young women." For a year, she relentlessly searched studios to return with what she felt was "worthy of higher education." The sort of dance she discovered was a mixture of Colby's creative dance based on natural movement and Bird Larson's Science of Movement—a system in which movement originated in the torso. Throughout her career, H'Doubler strived to keep the kind of dancing she taught a liberal and non-stratified, creative learning experience.

H'Doubler was one of the most decisive influences in establishing the art of dance as a focus of study equal to the other arts. Two of her most famous books are *Methods of Dance Teaching* and *Dance: A Creative Art Experience*, both of which have had a tremendous influence on dance educators. Her students carried her work to other universities in North America and lobbied for dance education and so spread her philosophy. H'Doubler believed that dance was something for everyone and so should be taught as an integral part of a public education. She expresses her views about dance education in this famous quote from *Dance: A Creative Art Experience* (H'Doubler, 1940, p. 354).

It is to be expected that not everyone will be a great dancer, and that dancing, of course, will be experienced as a complete art form more by some than others; but, as every child has a right to a box of crayons and some instruction in the fundamental principles of drawing and in the use of color, whether or not there is any chance of his becoming a professional artist, so every child has the right to know how to achieve control of his body in order that he may use it to the limit of his ability for the expression of his own reactions to life. Even if he can never carry his efforts far enough to realize dance in its highest forms, he may experience the sheer joy of the rhythmic sense of free, controlled, and expressive movement, and through this know an addition to life to which every human being is entitled.

According to Mary Brennan, John Wilson, and Thomas Hagood (2006, p. 63), H'Doubler's legacy is "in her identification of dance as a science and an art, and her convictions that dance is something to study and not just to do." Further, H'Doubler developed the study of improvisation, movement fundamentals, dance philosophy, composition, anatomy, history, rhythm, and pedagogy. In short, her contributions include some of the first serious writings on dance in art and education. H'Doubler also used Dewey's educational theory to develop her ideas about both dance education practice and dance as a distinctive educational good. Above all she believed and stated in her book, *Dance: A Creative Art Experience*, that

The body should be given as careful a study and as high a perfection of technique as the associated processes of thought and feeling. The most completely developed person is the one who has trained all his powers with equal dignity and consideration,

in order that he may be physically, intellectually, and emotionally integrated. (1940. P. 66)

H'Doubler did not see herself as remarkable and downplayed her accomplishments. She also seems to have been a product of her time in that she obviously believed the new ideas that women had a right to a serious education and so took the opportunities that arose in her life and created stimulating programs that would allow women the study of movement in a scientific manner. She is often not credited for her work and philosophy. To add another personal note to my story, I was fortunate to have a dance professor at the University of Alberta, Dorothy Harris, for my undergraduate degree, who studied with Margaret H'Doubler in Wisconsin. Thus, I reaped the benefit of the wealth of her knowledge and spirit of experimentation and freedom to explore the educational value of dance that she had learned from Margaret H'Doubler.

Modern, Contemporary or Creative Dance as it may be called, and taught in some school curricula, can thus be seen as having been constructed from what has come before but also has been shaped by society and its forces. Like the other arts, there have been many outstanding individuals who have moved the dance art and dance education forward and introduced new concepts and ways of viewing and understanding human movement and the reasons to value it as an art form. We can now see that a dance curriculum in the school setting may include many equally valued dance styles or forms besides Creative/Modern dance such as Ballet, Hip-Hop, Jazz, Folk dance and Social dance.

With this history, now comes an understanding of where we have been as a society in our dance development. And so the questions I have posed at the beginning of this paper concerning the future of dance and dance education can now be looked at with a clearer understanding. It would seem that dance, as an art form, would appear to many to be on the same footing as the other arts and as important, but it is certainly not valued in the same way in our school system. After all, music, visual art, and drama are always offered as part of the fine arts curriculum. But dance is not.

A Philosophical Inquiry

A philosophical inquiry examining dance in the current curriculum, which seems to be misunderstood, as an area to explore feeling not intellect will further round out the argument I am presenting in favour of dance's equal and essential inclusion. But I also wish to look at the essentialness of a dance/movement education as a way of reconnecting human beings with their bodies and the use of the body as an essential means of expression.

There are many dance educators who have advocated and lobbied for the continued inclusion of dance education in the curriculum. Like them, I too believe dance has a significant place in the education of children and adults. But where should it be placed: in the Physical Education curriculum or in the Arts/Music sphere of fine arts?

In British Columbia, teachers have the autonomy, to some extent, to interpret the curriculum, individually. So, if a teacher does not dance, does not like dance or is not trained to teach dance, what happens to this component of the curriculum? It seems entirely up to them to decide whether or not they include dance in their classroom. Dance currently resides as part of Physical Education, but it has also been seen to fit into the Fine Arts curriculum. But, for the most part, dance is ignored and seen as a frill. The curriculum is so full already. And it is often treated as the least important subject to study or explore, a subject whose exclusion from the curriculum seemingly does not matter.

I advocate for more recognition and mandatory inclusion of dance education in the curriculum and recognition of it as just as important for students as Music, Art classes, or Drama, for that matter as important as Math or Social Studies or Writing. It is a subject which can contribute to making children more whole, sensitive, and healthy human beings; a subject, which encompasses and addresses many modes of learning. According to Fels and Belliveau (2008, p. 23), "The arts cross the boundaries

between intelligences. Dance, for example, covers bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical (patterns), interpersonal, musical, visual-spatial, performative-imaginative, and emotional intelligences.”

Unfortunately, dance and dance education are not seen as a political priority. Therefore, dance education is underfunded or often completely ignored. Dance is not considered a political priority because it is not seen as part of an essential education, and I would argue that this is due to the general public’s ignorance of dance’s great benefits. This is a vicious circle. Unless dance education is valued, it will continue to be pushed to the sidelines and will continue to be seen as other fine arts are viewed in the curriculum, namely as unessential extras, to be indulged in when there are any extra dollars.

We seem to have lost touch with our bodies in our North American culture. We don’t seem to listen to our bodies or acknowledge what our bodies tell us. And according to Snowber (2002, p. 22), “Much of our relating in the world is experienced through our body, yet seldom do we take this as a serious place of study.” We need to therefore reconnect all of our parts. Dance education will give students the keys, the concepts, the cognition of movement. It will enable students to appreciate the art form, especially those who choose not to be or identify themselves as dancers, and it will help them to become dancers and free their bodies, to explore parts of themselves that have perhaps been neglected and which need to be experienced in order to foster the whole integration of the human being.

I feel that dance in the curriculum should be placed within the Fine Arts strand. After all, dance is an art form. Dance is different than sports: although both are useful physical pastimes and promote physical health, sports do not address moving the body as a means of expression. But what is expression and why is it important for children to experience it? It could be said that expression is getting out your inner emotions, and according to David Best (1974, p. 3), “Artistic expression is thought to be a release of feelings through the artist’s particular medium, a sort of emotional catharsis.” Is this important? Are people who know how to express themselves artistically, and particularly physically in dance, healthier mentally, physically, and, dare I say, spiritually? Are they made happier and more complete by exploring their inner landscape and sharing it with others? It would seem that people who know how to express themselves physically and express their emotions are people who are more empathetic and in touch with others and are thus better communicators, as well as being better able to appreciate all aesthetic qualities inherent in the world.

I therefore believe that an education in dance is essential to have balance in the curriculum and a balance between our whole selves. The matter of addressing the whole person in education is a popular philosophy but one often given only lip service. I heartily agree with Best (1989, p. 71) in his article, “Feeling and Reason in the Arts: The Rationality of Feeling,” when he states that “Only if we recognize the crucial place of understanding and cognition can we give an intelligible account of educating in the arts.”

Best (p. 71) goes on to argue that “Art (or dance) education has been misunderstood to consist of frivolous feeling, creativity, and individuality—not cognition and reason. When in fact Art (or dance) education is all about cognition, reasoning, opening up new perspectives, new visions, fresh evaluations.”

Louis Amoud Reid (1989, p. 20), in his article “The Arts Within a Plural Concept of Knowledge,” argues that “Emotion and cognition are no longer divided in the holistic experience of art, but completely united in existential knowledge, existential knowledge of art. It is this which makes experience of the arts of such importance, in itself, throughout life, for everyone, and in education, where the very existence of the arts is more than even now threatened.”

To support dance education further, I look to phenomenological research, which encourages the researcher of knowledge, the student of life to, as Max Van Manen puts it, “Experience reflectively life’s meaning at the level of sensory and prereflective awareness as well as at the level of reflective meaning that concerns our place in life” (2002, p. 238). Continuing on, Max Van Manen writes:

The phenomenologist, (as the dancer artist, choreographer), does not present its audience with a conclusive argument or presentation or with a determinate set of ideas, essences or insights.

Instead, he or she aims to be allusive by orienting the reader (viewer) reflectively to that region of lived experience where the phenomenon dwells in recognizable form. More strongly put, the reader (viewer), must become possessed by the allusive power of text or dance – taken, touched, overcome by the addressive effect of its reflective engagement with lived experience.

So to relate this to dance education, one must actually move one's own body, experiment with it and experience movement in many forms, to understand oneself and one's own life.

Further, as David Abram (1996, p. 37) states, "The body is the mysterious and multifaceted phenomenon that seems always to accompany one's awareness, and indeed to be the very location of one's awareness within the field of appearances." He adds: "the body is my very means of entering into relationship with all things" (p. 47). Thus what we perceive and experience before we conceptualize is very important. We need to be aware and be in tune with our bodies in order not to miss out on all that is there for us to experience and learn from our inner and outer environments. Dance education can provide this vital link.

The disembodiment of our North American culture has somehow gone unnoticed. It seems we are all bodybuilding, running, and dancing—at least according to television commercials and music videos. But are we? These are constructions by ad agencies that want us to buy products. By the number of obese and out of shape people I observe I believe we have become a society of, for the most part, watchers not participants and what we choose to watch are television programs, movies, and games linked to profit and diversion from what certain governments and corporations would like us to ignore. This mind dulling, some might argue, is just entertainment for the tired worker or school child after a long day of labour or study. They are entitled to relax and rest. But what has happened is that people are becoming less and less doers and thinkers and more and more watchers and unengaged spectators; and some might add that they are thus less likely to cause problems for their government or even vote, as they might have to miss a favourite show on television.

This loss of connection to our physical bodies is unhealthy and disconcerting. Our physical bodies are so inextricably linked to our minds and spiritual essence that to ignore, block, or sever this connection limits our intellectual and intuitive powers. Thus we can easily ignore big issues in our environment and society, for a society of people who do not go for walks, run, or ride bikes regularly won't see a polluted stream or a dying forest. They won't notice that the air is hard to breathe or that there are no birds singing. It is no mere coincidence that as women of the early 1900s loosened their stays and corsets and started to get in touch with their bodies, they also became more liberated politically, economically, and socially. Isadora Duncan was a model for women of her time. She showed women that there were alternate possibilities for life and that being free involved engaging the spirit, the mind, and the body, together.

To conclude, let me to reiterate the answers to key questions I have asked. Historically, we can see how dance artists and theorists have mirrored or reflected culture but also been shapers of it. Our history of dance as an art form seems to have paralleled social, political, and economic changes in western society. The great men and women who have contributed to dance history, whom I have mentioned (notably, Delsarte, Dalcroze, Laban, Duncan, Graham, and H'Doubler) are only a few of the many who have left an important legacy and had a great influence on the dance arts and dance education.

Dance is presently part of the curriculum in British Columbia's schools, placed in either Physical Education or in Fine Arts. The necessity and importance of including dance/movement education as a part of a balanced and whole education cannot be stressed enough. Dance should be an essential part of a complete education, which we need in order to restore to our society a dance that is creative, expressive, communicative, meaningful, and, in the words of H'Doubler, "in a way that will qualify it as art." This can clearly only be achieved by giving dance education more resources, both monetary and in teaching power. We need more educators who find joy in the dance and know the

enormous benefits dance imparts to keep sharing and teaching to ensure our dance heritage as human beings is not lost.



Hanova School (1940) Bombay

Acknowledgments

The pictures that accompany this article are of Magda and Gertrud Hanova who were the founders of the first Modern Dance School in Vancouver in 1957. Both Gertrud (1903-2003) and Magda (1905-1993) were born in Bischof-Teinitz, Czechoslovakia. They studied with Max Terpis, Mary Wigman, Udi Shankar, Menaka, and Rudolph Laban. As well as Vancouver, they also had dance schools in Karlsbad (1922-1932), Bombay (1932-1950), and London (1950-57). Karen Kurnaedy finds herself fortunate to have been a student of theirs starting from 1965. The Hanova method is a unique blend of yoga, Indian dance, ballet and modern dance. The Hanova sisters shared their love of dance all of their lives and are fondly remembered and missed by the Vancouver dance community.

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