

# Dance in the Faculty of Education

Sir Ken Robinson states:

The arts offer many different ways to think and communicate – ways that have been the drivers of human culture and creativity down the ages. Too many young people never discover these abilities because education doesn't value or look hard enough for them. As a result, they often turn away from or against education altogether...The arts are important in themselves; they are also essential elements of a broad and dynamic curriculum. Motivation is born out of success. When young people find what they're good at in education, they tend to improve overall. (Forward to Renaissance in the Classroom: Arts Integration and meaningful learning, 2001)

Elliot Eisner states:

Work in the arts is not only a way of creating performances and products; it is a way of creating our lives by expanding our consciousness, shaping our dispositions, satisfying our quest for meaning, establishing contact with others and sharing a culture. (The Arts and Creation of Mind, p. 3)

The World Alliance for Arts Education declaration (2006):

We have united to define an integrated strategy that responds to a critical moment in human history: social fragmentation, a dominant global culture of competition, endemic urban and ecological violence, and the marginalization of key educational and cultural languages of transformation.

We believe that today's knowledge-based, post-industrial societies require citizens with confident flexible intelligences, creative verbal and non-verbal communication skills, abilities to think critically and imaginatively, intercultural understandings and an empathetic commitment to cultural diversity.

For more than half a century, our associations have contributed significantly to the development of curricula and teaching approaches. We are now ready to respond proactively to the diverse social and cultural needs of our world...to collaborate with all governments, networks, institutions, communities and individuals who share our vision.

## Dance and the Faculty of Education

Of all the arts in our curriculum, dance is most certainly the least understood and the least delivered by teachers in Ontario schools. As Kaufman and Ellis (2007) recognize dance seems to suffer the most since many pre-service teachers “did not experience dance while they were elementary students and have no appreciation for the artform” (p. 7). Some researchers (Upitis, 2005) indicate the presence of a *lost or failed* generation of students, “referring to the reduction of arts experiences occurring in the schools for the past several decades,” these students are now our current generalist teachers,



expected to teach the arts in their classrooms (p. 7). There are few (if any) Faculties of Education in Ontario that offer formal pedagogical dance education experiences for their primary, junior and intermediate teacher candidates i.e. those generalist teachers who are expected to be able to teach dance in their classrooms. There are also very few professional development experiences in the province (save one Additional Qualifications course) for in-service teachers. This desert of dance education has led to a great misunderstanding of the efficacy and type of dance education called for in our Arts curriculum document. It has also led to a model where dance education in many school boards is being *outsourced* to companies (You Can Dance, Fit2Dance, Luv2Groove) making a great deal of money offering to *cover* the entire dance strand including assessment, in just one week. Many of these companies deliver rote learning of popular dance styles (e.g. hip-hop) or aerobic-like routines that not only undervalue the creative potential of our students but contribute to contemporary populist archetypes of dance and the body in popular culture: “the body as a hypersexual, hyperstrong, never-aging, traveling billboard” (Hagoood, 2006). In these situations there is a complete disregard for the creative process and the rich potential for learning *in, about* and *through* dance in order to allow our students to make connections across the curriculum and to their own lives. There is no call for this type of rote learning in our Arts document or in a curriculum that espouses 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.

Sansom (2008) recognizes that Faculty of Education students are skeptical of the concept of using the body as a site of learning and expression because they didn’t experience it in their own education. Many in-service elementary teachers avoid teaching dance because of their own negative experiences with dance in schools e.g. square dancing, line dancing, or being required to create dances without any scaffolding of the creative process in dance (Richard, 2009). Research suggests that even more than null experiences, it is these negative experiences that prevent pre-service teachers from feeling comfortable teaching dance education -- these are the influences that Faculties of Education must overcome (Hennessy, Rolfe & Chedzoy, 2001). Even when teacher candidates are provided with creative dance experiences at the Faculty of Education, uninformed in-service host teachers often prevent creative dance education from gaining a foothold in schools. Pre-service teacher candidates are being asked by their host teachers to teach specific popular styles of dance to elementary students (hip-hop, jazz, ballroom) via a teacher-directed banking model of dance education, more similar to dance training than dance education, despite a clear emphasis in the Arts document (Ministry, 2009) on students own authentic language of movement, creativity and the critical analysis process. There is a great discrepancy between the dance expectations in the arts document (i.e. policy) and teachers praxis in Ontario dance education.

As Sheets-Johnstone (2011) opines “movement is the mother of all cognition...[it is] first of all the mode by which we make sense of our own bodies and by which we first come to understand the world” (xxi-xxv). But movement (and the body in general) is virtually ignored in education (Sansom, 2011). Sheets-Johnstone (2011) recognizes the fore grounding of verbal and written language and the assumption that thinking only happens via these languages. She offers the alternative notion that from the moment we are born we *think in movement*. Creative dance education (as outlined in our newest elementary arts curriculum) offers teachers and students an opportunity to re-connect with their original source of thinking – the body. It offers the possibility for an embodied form of



learning (Stinson, 1995, 2004; Bresler, 2004) that may offer a “counter-narrative to narrow educational objectives” especially in the early grades (Sansom, 2011, p. 3). Hanlon-Johnson (2009) reminds us that educational theorists such as John Dewey, Rudolf Steiner and Maria Montessori all advocated for a focus on movement in early years. Creativity and imagination advocates for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning such as Sir Ken Robinson (2001b) believe that dance should be taught daily in schools. Herbert (2005) recognizes important crossovers between the American national standards for dance education and the skills and learning outcomes put forward by the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills: working collaboratively with people from diverse cultures, developing teamwork and leadership skills including empathy, acting responsibly within a group and setting high standards, staying open to alternative perspectives and developing new ideas, tolerating ambiguity, and making choices that are complex (p. 37). As well, there is a profound emphasis in current educational literature, on the notion of creativity and imagination as concepts crucial for 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning and future success.

The Creative Partnerships (2008) group in England has provided a crucible for research on creativity and dance education. Chappell (2008) recognizes that dance education offers a focus on individual, collaborative and communal creativity, which goes beyond the market-driven focus on individual creativity and opens up the possibilities for a *humanizing creativity*, grounded in an embodied way of knowing i.e. a thinking body mind in which difference and conflict is embraced, allowing previously hidden voices to be heard and the opportunity for social good (p. 16-17). In examining students cognition in the creative process Giguere (2011) found “the social aspect of dance creation provides unique opportunities for cognitive development because it is essentially collaborative” (p. 25). It is this important social aspect of the creative learning in dance that makes dance education an important ally for the recent accepting schools legislation. As Sansom (2011) reminds us “When there is the possibility of re-awakening bodily engagement and enhancement of a deeper understanding of the self, connecting to and respecting the lives of others may have more promise” (p.47).

Dance education provides an essential embodied resource for teachers and students alike, allowing all the stakeholders in education to re-connect with their original source of learning – their bodies. As Stinson (2005b) warns us education needs dance far more than dance needs education. She suggests that “we not limit our thinking to what schools are now, but consider what they might be, and that one major purpose of schooling might be, should be, learning how to live a meaningful, satisfying human life – what some people call *happiness*” (p.83). Dance education provides an opportunity for both students and teachers to reconnect with their original language, the language of the body and in doing so can provide a source for happiness.



## References

- Bresler, L. (2004). Dancing the curriculum: Exploring the body and movement in elementary schools. In L. Bresler (Ed.), *Knowing bodies, moving minds: Towards embodied teaching and learning*. London: Kluwer Academic
- Chappell, K. (2008). Towards Humanising Creativity. UNESCO Observatory E- Journal Special Issue on Creativity, policy and practice discourses: productive tensions in the new millennium Volume 1, Issue 3, December 2008.
- Eisner, E. W. (2002). *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Giguere, M. (2011). Dancing thoughts: an examination of children's cognition and creative process in dance. *Research in Dance Education*, 12(1)5-28.
- Hanlon Johnson, D. (2009). The cultivation of children's bodies toward intricate thinking and sensitive behavior. In H.S. Shapiro (Ed.) *Education and hope in troubled times: Visions of change for our children's world*. (pp. 157-167). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hennessy, S., Rolfe, L. & Chedzoy, S. (2001). The factors which influence student teachers' confidence to teach the arts in primary classrooms. *Research in Dance Education*, 2(1) 53-71.
- Herbert, D. (2006). Arts Education and the Creative Economy. *Journal of Dance Education*, 2: 37-40.
- Kaufman, K. & Ellis, B. (2007). Preparing Pre-Service Generalist Teacher to use Creative Movement in K-6. *Journal of Dance Education*, 7(1) 7-13.
- Ministry of Education (2009). *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8: The Arts (Revised)*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2009.
- Richard, M. (2009). *Finding the Key to Dance in Elementary Schools: A study of the current state of dance education in one Ontario school board*. (Unpublished MA thesis), York University.
- Robinson, K. (2001). Forward to *Renaissance in the Classroom: Arts Integration and Meaningful Learning* by Gail E. Burnaford. (Ed.) Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Robinson, K. (2001b). *Out of our minds*. Chichester, West Sussex: Capstone Publishing Ltd
- Sansom, A. (2011). *Movement and dance in young children's lives: Crossing the divide*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Sheets-Johnstone, M. (2011). *The Primacy of Movement: Expanded Second Edition*. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins North America.
- Stinson, S. (1995). Body of knowledge. *Educational Theory*, 45(1) 43 – 54.
- Stinson, S. (2004). My body/myself: Lesson from dance education. In L. Bresler (Ed.), *Knowing bodies, moving minds: Toward embodied teaching and learning*. London: Kluwer Academic.
- Stinson, S. (2005). Reflections on educating dance educators. In (Ed) Chazin-Bennahum, J. *Teaching dance studies* (pp. 217-234). New York: Routledge.
- Stinson, S. (2005b). Why are we doing this? *Journal of Dance Education*, 5(3) 82-89.
- Upitis, R. (2005). Experiences of Artists and Artist-Teachers Involved in Teacher Professional Development Programs. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 6(8) (2005)1-12.

