

1-1-1984

The State of Dance in Education: Past and Present

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Dance has occupied a central place in educational theory since the times of the ancient philosophers Plato and Aristotle, who believed that dance contributes to aesthetic, moral, and intellectual values as well as to enhancing physical adeptness and overall well-being. Plato asserted, for example, that dance trains the mind and soul to differentiate among those forms of actions, feelings, and ideas capable of producing nobility of character and refinement of the mind. Aristotle ranked dance among the educational activities qualifying as ends or things of value for themselves. As such, these activities help cultivate the mind. Subsequent philosophers including Lucian (100-200 A.D.), Castiglione (1478-1529), and John Locke (1632-1704), representing

Hellenic, Renaissance, and modern empiricist cultures, all affirmed the importance of dance as a primary element in the development of an educated person.

In America, dance has been a part of education since Colonial times when dance masters provided the more prosperous families with training in graceful bodily movement and social skills.¹ The immediate precursors of our modern approaches to educational dance were those educators who incorporated German theories of gymnastic dancing into programs for physical education. The teaching of dance in the schools evolved as visionary educators like Dudley Sargent of Boston and others introduced "aesthetic dancing" as a part of physical education. The main substance of these programs consisted of gymnastic type movements, but some also included ballet. The growing importance of dance at the beginning of the present century was recognized significantly when, in 1905, the American Physical Education Association chose dance for the theme of its national convention.

The case for a modern approach to dance education, with objectives differing both from the training of Colonial aristocrats (to participate in the society of their time) and the direction set by the gymnastic movements of late 19th century Germany, received a major boost from the influence of Dalcroze and Delsarte whose theories of bodily movement attracted the attention of dancers and dance teachers in America. Also important were the influences of progressive educators such as John Dewey and the creative approaches to artistic modern dance led by Isadora Duncan, Denishawn, Martha Graham, and others. Dewey's theories of aesthetics and progressive education, which emphasized personal development, reinforced the desire of the pioneers of modern dance education to develop an approach to dance education based on aesthetic and humanistic principles.

The shift to modern dance education emerged in various universities and colleges in the early part of the century through the efforts of physical education teachers responding to these new influences. Especially important figures were Gertrude Colby and Bird Larson at Teacher's College, Columbia; Margaret H'Doubler at the University of Wisconsin; and Martha Hill at New York University. From

these efforts to establish dance education two distinct directions emerged, one aimed at dancing as a means to developing personal experiences and the other at artistic performances. The differences are exemplified by the contrasting programs established at the University of Wisconsin and Bennington College.

The Wisconsin program was founded by Margaret H'Doubler who began teaching dance there in 1917 and launched the first university dance major in 1926. H'Doubler's philosophy of dance education is set forth in her own words:

Of all the arts, dance is particularly suited to . . . a fulfillment of the personality. . . .It serves all the ends of individual growth; it helps to develop the body; it stimulates the imagination and challenges the intellect; it helps to cultivate an appreciation for beauty and refines the emotional nature. (H'Doubler, 1940, pp. 64, 66)

At Wisconsin, the aim was to foster personal experience as distinct from preparation for the theater. H'Doubler's approach to dance education combined insights drawn from aesthetics with a scientific knowledge of bodily movement. Like the progressive thinkers G. Stanley Hall and Dewey, she incorporated into her teaching democratic ideals (for example, individual personal development) that she believed were essential to a program of dance education suitable for the public schools. H'Doubler's writings on dance education have had a major influence on subsequent dance education. Under the guidance of its founder, the program at Wisconsin has held a major place in dance education. Its graduates occupy major positions in the field and a few of them, including Ann Halprin, Mary Hinkson, and Don Redlich, achieved national status as performers.

In contrast to the program at Wisconsin, the Bennington School of Dance emerged as a place for artistic experimentation and collaboration with an eye toward creating dance for the theater.² It was founded in 1934 through the cooperative efforts of two physical education teachers, Martha Hill and Mary Jo Shelly, with the strong support and assistance of Bennington College President Robert Devoe Leigh. Although initially envisioned as a place for training dancers, choreographers, and teachers of the dance, Bennington soon became

the thriving center for modern dance in America. Serving as a laboratory for younger and experienced choreographers, it quickly established itself as a major production center. Its teacher-performers were among the leading artists, composers, designers, and critics of the day, and included choreographers Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and Hanya Holm; musical composers Louis Horst and Otto Luening; and critic John Martin. While the Bennington program lasted for a relatively short period, ending in 1941, its impact on the theater was considerable.

The Current State of Dance in Education

During the years since these early programs were founded, there has been substantial growth in dance programs. Dance has spread throughout the colleges and universities across the nation, and many high schools and elementary schools now have dance programs.³ Currently there are 241 college and university degree programs in dance studies, 349 minor and non-degree programs, and 5 non-credit and certificate programs listed in the *Dance Magazine College Guide* (1982).⁴ Among the college and university programs, 97 are offered in separate dance departments, 197 in performing, theatre, or fine arts departments, and 277 in physical education. Among the degree programs, however, 92 are in performing, theatre, or fine arts departments, 84 in separate dance departments, and only 51 in physical education.

The course content of current dance programs at the college and university level varies significantly. Many programs include classes in movement training and composition, history, and aesthetics, while a few offer notation, dance anthropology, and dance therapy. The classes in movement include eurhythmics (as inspired by Dalcroze); creative movement; improvisational dance; modern dance techniques along the lines of Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Hanya Holm, or Merce Cunningham; ballet; ethnic dance including African; and American jazz and tap. Also offered are approaches to dance movement inspired by the Eastern martial arts, by various body therapies such as the Alexander or the Rolf techniques of bodily relaxation, and by post-modern approaches to the performance arts

which introduce "anti-dance," "task oriented movements," and other "real life" movements into dancing.

Courses intended to prepare students with an understanding of the musical foundations of dancing and skills in lighting and stage design augment the courses of dance movement. In addition, students intending to teach dance in the schools are offered special courses related to curriculum development and teaching methods.

While the research has not been done to establish precisely the extent or the content of dance currently being taught at the secondary and elementary level, many schools include dance in physical education and some teach dance as a part of the performing arts curriculum. A few specialty schools around the nation feature dance as one of several fine arts concentrations, most notably the High School of Performing Arts in New York, the North Carolina School of the Arts, and Interlochen.

It can be seen from this survey that dance is moving forward as a force in education. The increasing popularity of live and televised dance performances and the current physical fitness movement in American culture have helped raise the consciousness of educators and the general public vis-a-vis the role of dance. Further, a modest tradition of 20th century dance scholarship, particularly in the area of dance history, has begun to evolve. This development is partly the result of expanding the role of dance in education from its original locus in physical education to its inclusion among the fine arts. This trend has made it easier to introduce into the dance curriculum a fuller treatment of history and aesthetics, and to begin to explore the relation of an academic discipline of dance to other studies in the arts and humanities. Corresponding efforts to relate scientific disciplines such as anthropology and kinesiology to dance are also ongoing.

Despite these signs of progress, the state of dance in American education suffers from the same limits common to other "special subjects," such as art, music, and physical education. Since it is not a high priority in the curriculum, dance is among the first to feel the impact of economic constraint. The proponents who believe dance to be an essential part of physical, moral, and intellectual development,

as Plato did, or that dance serves all the ends of individual growth, as H'Doubler did, have not been entirely successful in selling their ideas to the policy makers of our educational institutions, or to the community of citizens at large. Why not? Perhaps dance education is burdened with a lingering stigma which associates dance with homosexuality. Or it may be hindered because the prospects for a career in dance are not as financially promising as those in law or medicine. In a time of economic uncertainty, it is particularly difficult for many parents and students to see how a degree in personal experiences will translate into a base for meaningful employment. The problem is compounded since the competition for positions in the field of dance is intense. Consequently, students who choose to study dance may face a lack of parental support. In fact, it is not unusual for a serious student to study dance "on the sly."

Beyond these concerns are some more fundamental ones that will need to be given serious consideration as dance moves forward to the next stage of its participation in the institutions of American education. Among the major concerns are these: goals and directions, curriculum and standards, scholarly research and publication, and the role of the professional organizations. Each of these concerns will be discussed briefly here.

Goals and Directions

In the first half of the century, when the framework for modern dance was established, a few experimental programs had a clear direction; for example, the programs at Wisconsin and Bennington referred to earlier. Today there are still notable programs with a clear sense of direction and well-defined goals. These include the newly formed intercampus dance history program of the University of California, which has its headquarters on the Riverside Campus; the program at the State University of New York at Purchase, whose primary goal is the preparation of students for careers in professional dancing for the theater; Ohio State University's program in dance notation; University of California, Los Angeles's programs in dance therapy and ethnology; and the recently established program for choreography at Northwestern. Most of these programs also offer a

broader curriculum, but each one has singled out particular aspects of dance studies for concentration or for graduate degree programs.

The decision to specialize in a particular aspect of dance studies is, in one respect, a sign of maturation within the discipline because it allows for more in-depth coverage of one subject area of dance studies. A few universities have pursued specialization to the extent that they have formed separate programs for the different areas of dance they wish to emphasize. The University of Utah, for example, maintains separate departments of ballet and modern dance, and New York University offers separate programs in performance studies and dance education. One might argue that this degree of specialization goes too far in the direction of creating artificial barriers among the different facets of dance studies which should, in some sense, be understood in relation to each other.

Other colleges and universities have attempted to maintain a range of choices which might include any or all of the specializations referred to above. Such programs are offered at the Five College Program in Massachusetts, operated jointly by Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke, Smith, and the University of Massachusetts; Ohio University, Athens; University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana; University of Maryland; University of Texas; and University of Wisconsin, Madison. The principal merit of such programs is a variety of choices and the opportunity to explore the interfacing of these various aspects of dance studies.

These new possibilities and developments in dance studies are mitigated by economic pressures to conserve resources. It becomes increasingly difficult to offer such variety with adequate faculty and curricular support at the appropriate level of excellence. Given the promise of dance education and economic constraints, it behooves dance program planners to review and carefully consider their goals and directions in the light of realistic assessments of available resources and the present needs of the discipline.

Curriculum and Standards

Curriculum for dance studies has changed according to the needs and demands of the times. Among the factors resulting in recent changes, three stand out as having especially far-reaching implications for the present and future states of dance education: the introduction of ballet into the curriculum; the current cultural emphasis on physical fitness; and the rise of academic studies of artistic dance.

The addition of ballet as a serious professional endeavor into college and university dance programs has created a very different orientation: one which is potentially in conflict with prior educational aims. Unlike modern dance classes which can be taken on a less frequent basis, ballet, with its more highly structured system of movement training, requires a substantially greater commitment of student and faculty time. Among other things, the introduction of ballet implies a stronger orientation toward technique and performance. Ballet training is now essential for performance-oriented programs since much of the choreography performed today demands a great range of skills—skills perfected in the rigor of ballet. A distinction between modern dance and ballet is thus no longer valid when it comes to the range of technique required by the choreography.

The introduction of ballet into the dance curriculum and the corresponding technical demands of contemporary choreography have no doubt expanded the artistic capabilities of the art of dance. Nevertheless, these developments have created a tension within many university dance programs between technical and academic aims and needs. Technical demands confront the equally strong need to educate students in the manner expected of a college or university; that is, to provide verbal literacy comparable to that offered in other disciplines. The confrontation of these two competing needs has never been resolved, and a crisis stage is approaching in some schools as faculty members and students alike ponder the question of career alternatives for those who are unable to earn a living as performers, or those who face the inevitable mid-career change which comes for most dancers in the mid-30s to 40s.

While we may anticipate that the demands of students for careers in artistic theater dance and in the teaching of dance will continue, the rise of physical fitness as an established feature of contemporary American culture, together with the rising popularity of live and televised dance performances, has contributed to a new demand for dance courses for students who have no plans for a career in dance. This increased demand helps in many ways to realize the dreams of those ancient philosophers in which dance is a part of the education of all citizens. The growing demand for courses in dance to meet the needs of such students must figure prominently in curricular planning. Ironically, the demand for programs outside the formal, career oriented structures may not be welcomed by educators whose goals are centered on producing professionals for the theater or for some aspect of dance education. The demand of non-dance students, however, creates an opportunity which should not be overlooked. The main problem, however, will be one of stretching scarce faculty and support resources to meet the needs of the professional and the general dance curriculum.

The growing interest of students and scholars in developing curriculum for the "academic" side of dance (that is, its history, aesthetics, anthropology, criticism, systems of notation, etc.) requires that students more carefully consider their goals for study in the field. Those students currently entering the field must choose between a curriculum that emphasizes the academic side of dance and the more traditional approaches to professional training for the theater and movement education. Given the diversity and range of choices, dance programs must take care to match student abilities and their educational aims on a realistic basis. A student whose goals are oriented to professional performance will naturally require greater technical facility and the potential for artistic creation. On the other hand, a student interested in scholarly dance work will require substantially greater training in those skills necessary to do research and writing in the field of dance.

The question of standards for programs in dance education has concerned dance educators and university administrators for some time. One difficulty has been the matter of how to judge dance programs, given the norms applied to other disciplines. Such

standards as profiles of applicants, external reputation, visibility in the university, evaluation of student and faculty concerts, the placement of graduates, and, of course, scholarly publications were recently discussed at a conference organized by the American Dance Guild.⁵

Until recently, however, there has been no formal accrediting body for evaluating programs in dance education. In 1979 the Council of Dance Administrators, a more or less self-appointed group of educators from more than 20 dance programs across the country, published a set of standards for dance major programs. The standards are the result of 12 years of study and exploration which began in 1966 at a "Developmental Conference on Dance." The publication containing these standards lists three purposes:

1. To set forth guidelines that will be useful in the process of developing new programs.
2. To provide standards that can be used by established programs as a tool for self-evaluation.
3. To keep administrators attuned to criteria which protect the quality of dance programs and effectively serve students.
(Council of Dance Administrators, 1979)

More recently, an association called the National Association for Schools of Dance has developed a formal program which offers evaluation of dance programs for purposes of accreditation. Participation in the National Association's accrediting project remains voluntary, however, and the program is not yet widely accepted. It is therefore too early to assess the impact of this new effort to establish standards for dance programs.

Another approach to the question of standards for programs in dance is through state certification of teachers as dance specialists. At present, only four states-Idaho, Maryland, Utah, and Wisconsin-have dance certification programs. At the college level, certification guidelines include requirements for credit hours and directions for curriculum planning. In an attempt to provide standards for the actual teaching of dance at the high school and elementary levels, some states also produce curriculum guides.⁶

Scholarly Research and Publication

During the past decade scholarly research in the field of dance has experienced a substantial revival and has broadened its scope to include a greater attention to the study of dance as an art form. Today, writers from the humanities are joining those who work exclusively in the field of dance education to explore developments in all areas of dance. This effort is in part the result of pioneering efforts of scholars such as Selma Jeanne Cohen who has almost single-handedly initiated a mid-20th century revival of interest in dance research in America.

This revival is a welcome effort in a relatively weak area of 20th century dance education. While H'Doubler and some of the other pioneers wrote widely of their ideas about dance education, the programs they developed have not, in general, produced a level of scholarship comparable to other academic fields. Many able teacher-performers who might have been scholars were caught in a dilemma between teaching and dancing or doing scholarly research. The energy and time required to perform and to provide students with adequate training in dance techniques left little time for the demanding tasks of scholarly research and writing. Also, some dance educators may have hesitated to devote time to scholarly efforts because they and their artistic peers believed that serious artistic endeavors were incompatible with scholarly research. Further, in many instances research and publication lagged simply because the education of the dance faculty members had not provided sufficient academic training in research methods and writing skills.

Given the circumstances of competing interests between performance and scholarship and the present state of dance research and publication, it would appear that in general dance educators are still more at home in the studio than the library. There are many in the profession who believe this is as it should be. On the other hand, if the current trend toward developing the academic side of dance studies continues, the situation may be quite different in the future. Much will depend on the quality of students attracted to dance studies in the present generation and the choices they make regarding preparation for serious scholarship.

The Role of Professional Organizations

The growth of professional organizations for dance educators, scholars, and critics has accompanied the emergence of dance programs within educational institutions. The principal organizations are the National Dance Association, C.O.R.D (Congress on Research in Dance), the American Dance Guild, the Society for Dance History Scholars, and the Dance Critics Association. Each has several hundred members or participants. The largest of these, the National Dance Association, an affiliate of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, claims a membership of approximately 3,000. Its members are primarily dance teachers in physical education departments. C.O.R.D., which publishes *The Dance Research Journal*, focuses on research on all aspects of dance.

The American Dance Guild is primarily a professional service organization that has attempted to address the needs of dance educators in colleges and universities, and in private studios, as well as writers, dance companies, and individual dancers. The Society of Dance History Scholars promotes scholarly research and publication in dance history and related fields through its annual conference and publishes an annual collection of proceedings papers. The Dance Critics Association consists of working critics and other interested writers, many of whom function in academic settings. It provides workshops to facilitate professional writing about dance.

At the present time the professional organizations function to inform teachers of the latest available research through scholarly papers, workshops, and demonstrations of current work in the field. They also encourage teachers and scholars to engage in research which can be shared through the auspices of annual conferences. The gatherings sponsored by these organizations also act as a forum to explore common professional concerns. One important question facing the professional dance organizations today is the question of what type of organizational structure can best serve the needs of dance education; that is, whether a single all-encompassing structure incorporating the several existing organizations should replace the four

or five separate dance organizations. Opinion is divided among those who argue for centralizing efforts on grounds of economy and effective representation, and those who argue that a plurality of smaller organizations more adequately serves the needs of the special interests such as dance history or criticism.

Meanwhile, the older organizations such as C.O.R.D. and the American Dance Guild struggle to redefine their purpose and function amid the emergence of newer organizations such as the Dance Critics Association and the Society of Dance History Scholars which have more narrowly defined purposes. Both the older and the newer organizations are being challenged to explore common goals and needs by members who feel that for reasons of economy of operations, coordination of efforts, and general effectiveness in representing dance in the academic world and the international dance community, dance education will be better served by consolidating under a common organizational structure. At the present time, the boards of directors of the various organizations are considering the matter. So far, the most significant cooperative move has been to hold periodic joint conferences, the last one in 1981 at Los Angeles.

Conclusion

Impressions formed during the preparation of this report on the state of dance in education suggest that dance has entered substantially into the life of American educational institutions, as it has into American life. It is now recognized as an art form comparable to music, drama, and the visual arts, and equally worthy of study.

Like these other subjects, however, dance is vulnerable to unfavorable economic conditions and changing emphases in education. Tensions between nonverbal performance requirements and the verbal emphasis that dominates education in general are unresolved in present dance education programs and likely to be a continuing issue. Further, we may anticipate the increasing encroachment of popular culture, for instance American jazz and tap dance, into educational programs, forcing the educational system at all levels to decide what role these indigenous arts of American popular culture are to have in present and future dance education. Scholarship in dance is moving in

positive directions, but is by no means firmly established. Teaching positions are not plentiful and publication opportunities for scholarly materials on dance are limited by a relatively small audience. Nevertheless, those artists, teachers, and scholars who care will find a way to continue their pursuit of this important art. And our civilization will be richer for it.

Notes

1. For information on the history of dance education in America see Ruyter (1978), from which I have drawn some of the information provided here.
2. For information on the Bennington School of Dance see Kriegsman (1981), which is the main source used here.
3. The information gathered for this section represents a compilation of materials gathered over the past several months primarily from conversations with various individuals in the profession and from observations gathered through my participation in professional dance meetings over several years. The selection of sources for this article has not followed any "scientific" methodology, and undoubtedly many persons not consulted could have contributed further insights. Among those consulted are persons currently in leadership positions in the major dance organizations. I would like to thank Selma Jeanne Cohen, general editor of the forthcoming *International Encyclopedia of Dance*, whose criticisms of an earlier draft and suggestions have immensely improved the text. Others who have contributed their ideas and provided information include the following: Sally Banes, editor of *Dance Research Journal* and a faculty member at the State University of New York, Purchase; Rayma K. Seal of Miami University, Oxford, OH; Mary Alice Brennan of the University of Wisconsin, Madison; Noel Carroll, dance writer based in New York; Marjorie Hanson, executive director of the National Dance Association, Washington, DC; Margaret Pierpont, education editor of *Dance Magazine*; Marcia Purdy, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; Patricia Rowe, New York University; Nancy Ruyter, president of C.O.R.D. and faculty member at the University of California, Irvine; and Christena Schlundt, University of California, Riverside.

In addition, I wish to thank the panelists at the American Dance Guild Conference on Dance Education held at Hampshire College, Amherst, Massachusetts, June 17-19, 1983, especially Jean Beaman, emeritus, University of Pittsburgh; Betsy Carden, Brooklyn College; Susan Lee, Northwestern University; and Ruth Solomon, University of

California, Santa Cruz; and my fellow officers and directors of the Society of Dance History Scholars from whom I have gleaned many insights into the current state of dance education. Responsibility for the interpretation and presentation of information from these sources, for better or for worse, is my own.

4. The guide also lists a few miscellaneous programs under Interdisciplinary Studies, 11; Dance Therapy, 5; Movement and Dance, 2; and 7 with no label.
5. The American Dance Guild Conference was held at Hampshire College, Amherst, MA, June 17-19, 1983, on the topic of dance education.
6. *Dance: Creative Rhythmic Movement Education* (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.) is an especially useful example.

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