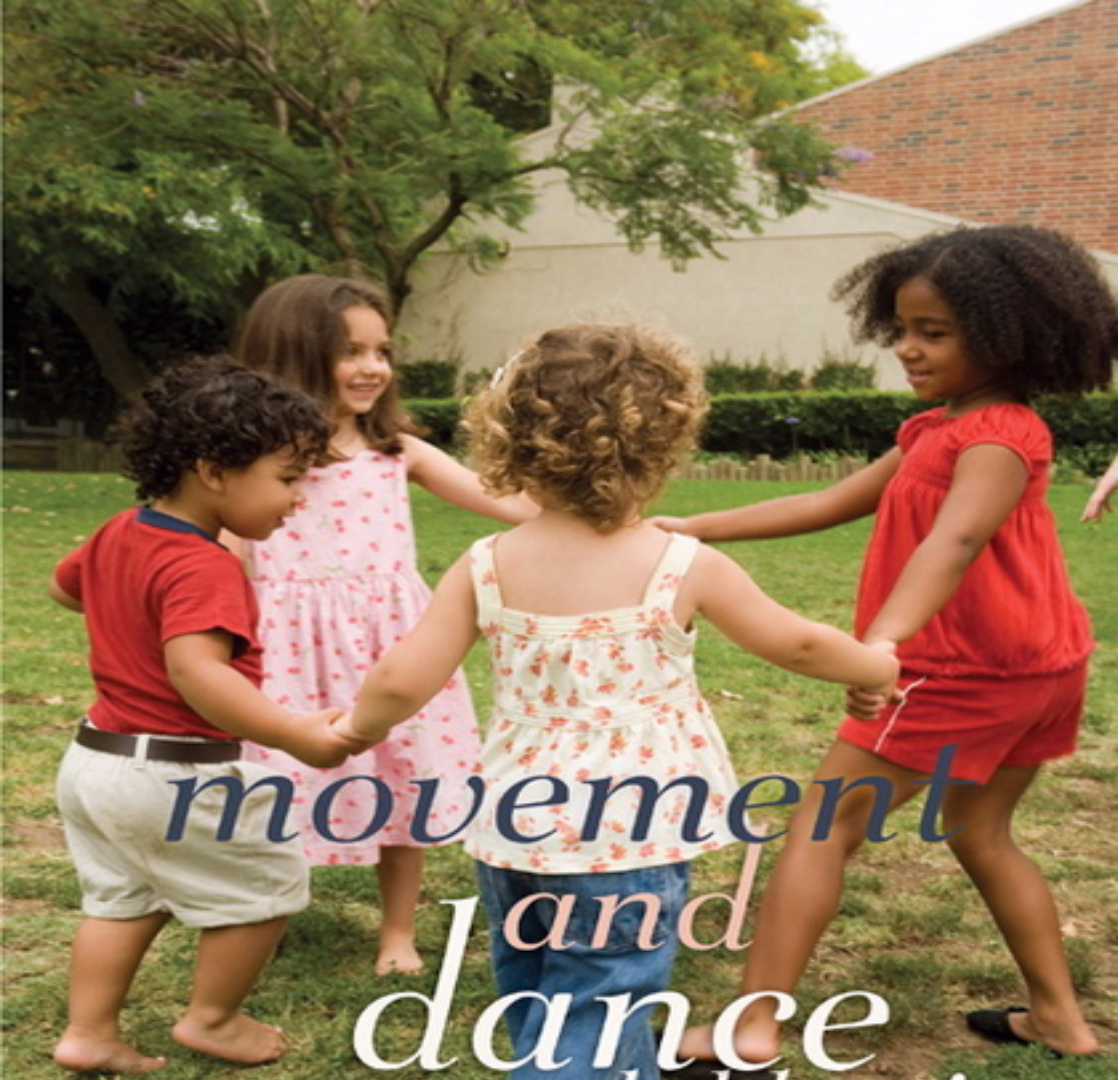




movement
and
dance
in young children's
lives

CROSSING THE DIVIDE

ADRIENNE N. SANSOM

Introduction

When they discovered, however, that I was serious, they asked whether it was true that in our day we had to have schools and teachers and examinations to make sure that babies learned to talk and walk.

John Dewey (1933)

In the pedagogical landscape of early childhood, movement is purported to be central to the holistic development of the young child. Yet, movement-related experiences and other bodily activities such as play and dance often present contradictions and multiple conundrums for early childhood educators. As a mode of learning, movement has endured a questionable existence despite the evidence of supportive research and theory, which provides sound reasons for the inclusion of movement in early years curricula. When movement is linked to dance and the transition between these two areas are examined, there are further provocations to consider. The intent of this book is to look at the place of movement in young children's lives and address how movement as a form of expression can become dance. Together with this examination the book will discuss the variety of concerns and confusions that accompany dance in education and interpret what this means for children, students, and teachers in teacher education programs and early childhood settings.

As one of the arts in education, dance sits precariously on the edge of educational curricula, even within the context of early childhood. Together with other bodily pursuits such as movement and play, dance often experiences a restricted or limited existence. Consequently, dance is barely visible within educational programs as well as, on occasion, completely absent. As noted by other authors, dance as a subject is often marginalized within educational institutions being seen as something that is done as extra-curricular or of limited pedagogical value, or to expend children's energy in preparation for other more serious areas of

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learning (Koff, 2000; Schiller & Meiners, 2003; Wright, 2003b). From this standpoint, dance and its counterpart movement are considered as something frivolous and, therefore, not taken seriously as ways of learning.

When dance is evident in the curriculum, its use is sometimes justified as a way to learn about other things, thus devaluing the status of dance as a distinct discipline (Bond & Stinson, 2007; Stinson, 2005). Dance can also be favored when used to showcase an educational setting (Wright, 2003b) or, alternatively, used as a redemptive agent when it comes to health and exercise, especially in these times of record obesity (Stinson, 2005). Conversely, because dance is of the moment and generally only visible when actively occurring (Liu, 2008), dance can become the forgotten subject.

An array of social issues surround dance and these matters only go to ostracize dance even further (Shapiro & Shapiro, 2002b). Aspects such as eroticizing dance as a sensuous and, therefore, seductive activity (Ehrenreich, 2007) as well as the taboo of touching tends to place dance in serious jeopardy (Jones, 2003; Tobin, 2004; Sapon-Shevin, 2009). Societal views about the body thwart the presence of dance, and dance as an elitist pursuit destined for only a talented few renders dance as unattainable by the general population (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2004; Shapiro, 1998; 1999). Gendered, racial, and cultural attitudes about dance can effectively dictate who or how one should dance (Bond, 1994a; 1994b; Henry, 2001; Matos, 2008; Risner, 2007a; 2007b; 2008; Walker, 2008) and the pervasive presence of popular culture (Woodson, 2007) is also evident as a prevalent and sometimes detrimental construct of dance. Those in early childhood are not immune from these societal factors as many of these attitudes and ways of thinking often have their genesis during the early years. As a consequence, there is a never-ending stream of disadvantageous antagonisms to consider as well as, at times, resistance against dance from students and teachers, which challenges dance educators especially at the levels of university or teacher education.

The general trend for the erasure of the physical in education, especially within educational institutes in the United States (Tobin, 2004), rings alarm bells for heightened vigilance regarding the presence of the human body in learning. Threats to areas such

as physical education, limited recess, or times for play act as pertinent reminders for the need to combat the constant, yet subtle elimination of bodily pursuits in the day-to-day pedagogy of teachers and students. Dance education can provide a liminal space to encompass the performance of the endangered body, thus rendering the possibility of a renaissance of physicality in education.

Concomitantly, when viewed from the other side, or as an outsider to the mainstream educational curricula, dance can prosper by being in a position that affords less scrutiny, i.e. under the radar or panoptical eyes of the all-seeing mantra of education. Such a position affords dance the opportunity to revel in the possibility of pursuing a creative and even subversive role as a counter-narrative to narrow educational objectives or limitations of mis-education generally designated for the standardized curriculum. Sometimes being on the parameter has its own rewards, which is important to consider when staking claims for movement and dance or other creative pursuits in early childhood educational programs (McArdle, 2008).

Aligned with revolutionary views about alternative approaches dance might offer are the percepts of the new sociology of the image of the child, especially in early years education. With edges between adult-culture and child-culture blurring and merging, different pedagogical approaches are now emerging that challenges the traditional (and fairly recent) power relationships that have existed in teaching and learning environments (Fleer, Anning, & Cullen, 2009; Cannella, 2002; 2010; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; MacNaughton, 2005; 2009; Soto, 1999; 2010). Such a revolution prompts a call for counter narratives related to teaching practices, which, in dance, challenges the dominant use of abstract language and conventional pedagogical practices (Anttila, 2003; 2007; Lindqvist, 2001).

An unveiling of the myths and misconceptions surrounding the functions of movement and dance is required, as well as shedding light on the possibilities that these ways of knowing and being can offer. Although this has been done before to a limited extent, further voices need to join the fray. This is where I lend my voice as a dance educator to unpack and reconceptualize dance (with links to movement) drawing from my experiences as an early

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childhood educator and as a university lecturer teaching dance in a teacher education program for early childhood generalist teachers.

Movement and Dance in Young Children's Lives: Crossing the Divide addresses the aforementioned concerns, whilst offering alternatives. The intention of this book is to look at movement and dance education in the early years from a critical and socially conscious perspective. Incorporated in this approach are the cultural, political, and historical aspects that influence the place of movement and dance in young children's lives as seen through the lens of the author. The writing includes some autobiographical accounts of the author as a dance educator and shows how this process of autobiography uncovers particular stories, which, while personally significant, may be pertinent to others in the field of dance, arts, or early years education. These accounts may be especially relevant to those who might also be exploring the social and cultural factors that impact what they do and how they see the world. The intent is to open up those places and spaces where assumptions, fears, and misconceptions about movement and dance can be examined, analyzed, and reconceptualized, and search for the interstices to create a new vision for the role of movement and dance in education.

The book is intended for dance educators and teachers at college or university level in teacher education programs and in educational settings (both early childhood and elementary/primary sectors). The focus of the content will specifically relate, but not necessarily be confined to, the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Other possible audiences could include interdisciplinary arts educators, and those involved in critical and cultural studies.

While other books published explore similar issues pertaining to movement and dance (for example: Ashley, 2002; Batt, 2004; Bresler, 2004a; 2007; Bresler & Thompson, 2002a; Davies, 2003; Hanna, 1999; Stinson, 1988; Shapiro, 1998; 1999; 2008a; Shapiro & Shapiro, 2002a; Wright, 2003a), there is a dearth of writing from a New Zealand perspective. Subsequently, a minimal account of dance education comes from the South Pacific area, which has a unique indigenous population. There is also very little written socially and critically about movement and dance or a pedagogy of the body from an early childhood standpoint. A particular approach this book might offer is another way to address issues pertaining to movement and dance through the lived experiences

of the author. In spite of the fact that there has been increased popularity in personal narratives or autobiographies, not much has been explored in the area of movement and dance education from this aspect.

I envision that the larger purpose for this book is to explore the idea of expressive bodily movement and by association dance as a form of liberatory education (Anttila, 2004; Shapiro, 1998; 2008b; 2009). The book also endeavors to connect the concept of liberation (emancipation) through dance to the early years of education. Even though these two ideologies may appear to be far apart, the intention here is to show how life from its very beginning can be conducive to understanding justice as a result of young children's propensity for bodily engagement and encountering dance. I maintain that it is never too soon to sow the seeds for social democracy and social justice. Such an understanding is developed through experiencing and respecting the body and, therefore, the self in multiple ways and involves how to make choices while connecting to the empathetic tendencies the young child possesses and exhibits. Movement and dance as corporeal ways of knowing can act as ways to comprehend the human condition through the specific (although not necessarily exclusive) characteristics these areas can offer, namely holistic or embodied learning.

The following chapters encompass a range of areas I view applicable to a critical discussion about movement and dance in education, particularly pertaining to the early years. It is my belief that one's lived experiences, conjoined with affective, visceral, and emotional traits in and through movement and dance can lead to fun, relationships, and an understanding of self and others. I also uphold that the opportunities to move expressively can enhance the connectors between movement and dance, which, in turn, deepens the possibility to foster creativity and imagination, while providing an artistic and aesthetic experience. Moreover, when one is fully engaged in dance holistically, complete in body, mind, and spirit, there is the possibility dance can become a way to understand difference because of the interconnected link between the physical body and being human. Dance can become a place where change can be created via the agency of the body because of a shared understanding about the body as the site for our common humanity (Shapiro, 2008b). Thus, dance can make a meaningful contribution to the world and the way we live our lives. This book