

Chapter 4

Seeking a Feminist Pedagogy for Children's Dance (1998, Revised)

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Abstract The author narrates her own journey of becoming, and continuing to become, a dance educator and a feminist, weaving in theory which illuminates the changes in her thinking over time. In the discussion of multiple versions of feminism, she places herself in a category of socialist feminism. At the same time, she notes that deciding on basic positions of belief and value doesn't necessarily offer clear guidance for personal and professional decision-making, because "most of us have a great deal of inconsistency between what we say we believe and what we do, a conflict we are able to maintain only by not thinking about it too much." Engaging in a reflective process brings these conflicts to the forefront, the painful process that is necessary to generate growth. To that end, the author critically examines several approaches to teaching dance (traditional dance pedagogy, critical pedagogy, and gender models for pedagogy/creative dance), and their relationship to feminist pedagogies. She then describes and critiques her own developing vision, identifying three key points related to feminist pedagogies:

- Finding one's own voice and inner authority,
- Cultivating awareness of relationship (with others in class, with one's own body, between self and world), and
- Responsibility and power for change.

She concludes with the acknowledgement that her goal is not to persuade her students or others to teach as she does, but for educators to engage in ongoing reflection about what they believe and why, and about the consequences of choices they make as persons and as educators.

I can't remember when I first heard the truism, "What we teach is who we are." Both our shared social-cultural experiences and our unique personal experiences, construct the selves that we become and that we teach. Some educational theorists (Greene 1973, 1978; Pinar 1988) have written about the importance of reflecting upon how our experience has shaped what we believe and why, and how we both participate in and resist the shaping. Similarly, some feminist educators (e.g., Grumet 1988) advocate revealing our own subjectivity in our work, bringing the personal (often considered "feminine") into public discourse (which is often considered more "masculine").

It is thus with the blessing of these authorities that I share my own story of becoming—and continuing to become—a dance educator and a feminist. Of course it is not my story alone, for many of the forces which have impacted my own experience and thinking have also affected other dance educators, regardless of whether they have come to the same conclusions. I hope that you will find your story somewhere within my comments, and will be stimulated as well to consider how your story differs.

4.1 Personal and Theoretical Context

Except for one year of ballet as a child, I began my dance study at the relatively late age of 16. A year later, when I started college, dance was taught in the physical education department; I alternated modern dance classes with various sports, primarily as a form of release from academic pressures. I had no plans for dance in my career, but continued classes for pleasure during my last two years of college while I pursued a major in sociology. I changed my mind about becoming a social worker close to graduation. As a white, middle class woman in 1968, I felt incapable of making a difference in the urban areas of the United States where riots were a regular weekend event. I decided to be a teacher instead of a social worker, and the only subject I loved enough to teach was dance. This led me to graduate school in dance, a modest amount of performing, and teaching children; eventually I was hired for a position in teacher preparation in dance on the university level.

I thus entered dance education out of a sense of powerlessness to change the larger world. When I danced, I could escape that world temporarily, and even feel some sense of personal power within the safe space of the studio. When I taught creative dance to children, I felt I was making a small contribution to the world without having to deal with the difficult problems outside my own small corner of it. Dance and dance education offered me a safe home, and it never occurred to me to be critical of home. I would have felt inadequate to criticize, anyway, since I had not reached the “pinnacle” of the field, professional performance.

Much later, during my doctoral program in cultural studies, I started to reexamine my experiences in learning and teaching dance, and became aware of what else students may be learning besides dance skills and knowledge—what curriculum theorists refer to as the “hidden curriculum.” I also encountered two questions posed by curriculum theorist James B. Macdonald (1977), which he named as the essential questions for all educators. These were not questions about the most effective ways to teach children to read or do plies or anything else. Rather, he asked us to ask ourselves, “What does it mean to be human?” and “How shall we live together?” With these influences, I started asking questions not only about what pedagogical methods have the best chance of making good dancers, but about the kind of persons, the kind of art, and the kind of world produced in the process.

My ongoing questioning of dance pedagogy was occurring as I was also asking questions about what it meant to be a woman in the world. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* was published in 1963; the same year I decided not to become a social worker, she was a guest speaker at the small women's college where I was a senior. I graduated feeling free to make many choices that had not been available to my own mother, yet, embarrassingly enough, most of mine were traditionally female ones anyway, including a conventional marriage that produced a daughter and a son. Although I took my career seriously, one could hardly pick a more traditionally feminine choice than being a dance teacher. My beliefs, however, were less traditional than my choices. As a charter subscriber to *Ms.* magazine and a self-declared feminist, I attempted to figure out how to be a woman and a mother, as well as a dance teacher, in a changing world.

One of my most helpful realizations was that the term "feminism" was an oversimplification, hiding such great diversity that "feminisms" seemed a more appropriate word to use. I found Allison Jagger's (1983) definitions of different feminist perspectives helpful in clarifying this diversity.

The best known feminism, which Jagger defines as liberal feminism, focuses on opportunities that are systematically denied to women because they are women, and the imposed barriers that keep women from competing on an equal footing with men. The goal is equal opportunity for women to enter the power structure within society and move up its hierarchy, based on their abilities. Such feminists tend to deny any basic differences between men and women other than those which are created (unfairly) by society, leaving women at a disadvantage in a competitive world. This was the kind of feminism that I first encountered in the 1960s.

Other visions of feminism, instead of denying differences between men and women, emphasize them. They point out that certain qualities and characteristics are found more often in men or women; there is often controversy regarding whether these are biologically or culturally determined, although it is generally agreed that they do not apply to all women or all men. Regardless of the source of the differences, such feminists note that the qualities identified as feminine—and the tasks that capitalize on them, usually known as "women's work"—are not valued as highly in our patriarchal society as those identified as masculine. They note that structures of society—institutions such as religion and education as well as corporate capitalism—were created by men and embody masculine values. Such values include individualism, competition, objectivity, abstraction, rationality, and a valuing of mind over body, culture over nature. Masculinist institutions are problematic not just because women have been denied access to power within them, but because they have collectively created a world which is "not healthy for children and other living things," a popular t-shirt slogan reflecting this feminism. The goal is not just allowing women to compete in a man's world, but changing that world.

Some feminists, labeled by Jagger (1983) as "radical feminists," believe that this different world should replace masculinist values and institutions with woman-centered ones. Others, whom Jagger called "socialist feminists," believe we must create new structures, new forms that deal with oppression by race and class as well as gender, to have the best chance for providing a humane life for all persons.

This brief discussion doesn't exhaust the list of feminisms, either in Jaggar's book or other sources. It is relevant to reveal, however, that I position myself in the category of socialist feminism. I have chosen this stance because I don't think that a world dominated by women would necessarily be any better than one dominated by men; also, I dream of a world that liberates my son as well as my daughter from narrow perceptions of gender roles, a world that responds to similar wishes by mothers of color and those who live in poverty.

Deciding on basic positions of belief and value, however, doesn't necessarily tell us how to live our lives. Most of us have a great deal of inconsistency between what we say we believe and what we do, a conflict we are able to maintain only by not thinking about it too much. Engaging in a reflective process brings these conflicts to the forefront, the painful process that is necessary to generate growth.

In the following sections of this paper, I critically examine several approaches to teaching dance and their relationship to a feminist pedagogy. Along the way, I highlight my own thinking about how to be a feminist dance educator and what that means to me.

4.2 Traditional Dance Pedagogy

Education has traditionally been a way to acculturate the young, to socialize them into the larger community and thus perpetuate it; this is the reproductive function of education. Traditional methods for teaching dance technique fulfill this function. The traditional technique class is the primary kind of dance class taken by students, and is ordinarily the only kind of class that is referred to as a "dance class." (Other kinds are known by other names, such as choreography class and dance history class.) Like most dance students, I spent many hours in technique classes, finding satisfaction in my growing strength, flexibility, control, and skill. The traditional technique class was the first kind of class I taught, and the first kind I critiqued.

In most dance technique classes, the teacher is the authority and the only recognized source of knowledge. All students face the teacher and a mirror, and the teacher often faces the mirror too, seeing her students only as reflections. Interaction between students is frowned upon. The teacher's voice is expected to be the only one heard, except in the case of a well-focused question. The teacher tells and shows the students what to do and, in some classes, how to do it. Students attempt to replicate the movement done by the teacher. Then the teacher gives verbal "corrections," the students usually repeat the movement, and the teacher continues giving corrections until it is time to move on to the next sequence. Some teachers give directions and corrections that refer to internal sensation and artistic qualities, not just the mechanics of the movement. But in reality, most dance training consists of learning how to follow directions and how to follow them well. The model for traditional dance pedagogy seems to be the authoritarian father in an individualistic world of "every man for himself."

A field study carried out by Judith Alter (1986) reveals evidence of masculinist values in dance classes. In an advanced modern dance class in a private studio set-

ting, Alter discovered a number of strong but unspoken rules of behavior among dance students at that studio, including the following: “Never talk to each other during class...never show how bad or good you feel about yourself, your dancing, or the teacher” (pp. 69–70). Alter found a sense of hierarchy among students, with “old-timers” (the most skillful dancers, who were usually members of the dance company associated with the studio) having priority in choice of space and the amount of space claimed. Old-timers were allowed to take exception to the unspoken rules of the class. Further, Alter found that “the entire...atmosphere was...full of...tension and...most students felt unable to dance or dance their best” (p. 49). While this was a class for adults, similar pedagogy prevails in most professional preparation classes in dance, which may begin for children as young as age eight.

A 1990 publication by myself and colleagues Donald Blumenfeld-Jones and Jan Van Dyke further illuminates this model through interpretations of dance pedagogy by 16–18 year old women who studied a variety of forms of dance in studio and conservatory settings. The young women made it clear that the focus of the dance technique class is doing the movement as given by the teacher and getting it right. For example, one respondent described her thoughts in class as “I gotta get it. Oh God I did that wrong. I gotta do this right” (p. 17). Competition was revealed as another characteristic of the dance class, with most students regarding it as constructive. As one respondent said, feeling competitive “is good in a way because it makes you strive for more” (p. 18).

Even though authoritarian pedagogy for dance technique is used in classes populated by both men and women, I believe that it has different impact upon them. Most women begin dance training as little girls, usually between the ages of 3 and 8. Dance training teaches little girls to be silent and do as they are told, reinforcing cultural expectations for both young children and women. In their landmark work, *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, Mary Belenky and her colleagues (1986) point out that adult women are silenced much more often than men. Their analysis reveals that “finding one’s voice” is a metaphor that appears frequently when women describe their own journeys from silence to critical thinking; for women, learning to think means learning to speak with one’s own voice. Traditional dance pedagogy, with its emphasis on silent conformity, does not facilitate such a journey. Dancers typically learn to reproduce what they receive, not to critique or create.

In contrast, most males in our society begin dance training later, at late adolescence or even early adulthood, when they have developed some sense of individual identity and “voice.” Further, limits for males seem made to be broken, and dance is likely no exception. To a young man, dance training may seem comparable to military training in that the necessary obedience is a rite of passage but not a permanent state. Once he is good enough, he will then have the power to tell others what to do, to reconceptualize what he has learned, to create art and not just reproduce it. This differential impact of dance training may contribute to the differences that are observed in leadership within the dance field. Although men are a minority among dancers, they are overrepresented in positions of power and influence and as recipients of grants (particularly the largest grants) and national awards (Van Dyke 1992).

In addition to reinforcing the idea of the silent passive woman (or the “good little girl”), dance training also intensifies cultural expectations in relation to female body image. The current dance aesthetic demands a long, thin body, carried to the extreme in ballet; many choreographers and directors, usually male, encourage and even demand the “anorexic look.” (See Brady 1982; Gordon 1983; Innes 1988; Kirkland with Lawrence 1986; Vincent 1979.) The same is increasingly true in modern dance, with many professional modern dancers now regarding the ballet class as their basic form of training and many modern dance choreographers setting their work on ballet companies. Even among young women in non-professional classes, criticism of one's body is part of the expected behavior. Alter (1986) noted that weight occurred as a topic in 18 of the 31 classes she studied. In the Stinson, Blumenfeld-Jones, and Van Dyke study (1990), the young respondents made such comments about their bodies as, “I don't like my body, the way it looks”; “Lots of time I think I'm too much of a brute to be a dancer”; and “If my legs matched my body then I'd be perfectly happy” (p. 17). Surely such feelings about the body are enhanced by a pedagogy in which the goal is an unattainable ideal and every attempt is met with corrections—indications of how one does not measure up—all the while dressed in clothing that reveals every flaw and looking in a mirror. In traditional dance classes, the body often seems to be regarded as an enemy to be overcome or an object to be judged. However, dance training merely intensifies the values of the larger social world to which both dance and women belong. In our society, while overweight is dreaded by all and the body is regarded as an enemy by both men and women who exercise compulsively and obsessively, women's bodies are more often identified as objects to be looked at and judged.

It seems clear that traditional dance pedagogy in many ways embraces values of a male-dominated society, such as separation and competition, despite the preponderance of women in dance. The goal is individual achievement—being on top—with little emphasis on community and caring, values more often regarded as feminine (Gilligan 1982). Another example of masculinist values in dance classes is the way the natural human body is denied in favor of a reshaped and highly trained body reflecting the cultural aesthetic. A number of feminist theorists have pointed out that the human body and Nature (as in Mother Nature and Mother Earth) are more closely connected with women, while the mind and Culture are regarded as the province of men (see Jaggar 1983). Further, in most dance technique classes, emotional feeling (again, regarded as feminine) is repressed, as students are required to leave any personal concerns outside the studio door; in some classes, even physical feeling is to be ignored (“no pain, no gain”).

At this point, I think we have to ask why women as well as men continue to teach in a way that seems so contrary to feminist ideals. For example, my colleague Jan Van Dyke, who has found evidence that women do not get their share of awards and financial support in dance (1992), recognizes ways that traditional dance training inhibits the development of skills that could promote equality. She still teaches a fairly traditional technique class, albeit with a couple of “talk classes” each month, in which the students discuss professional issues. Her hope is that these opportunities to talk will balance the hours of silent obedience in technique. However, she

acknowledges that she doesn't know how to achieve a training effect—increasing strength and flexibility, as well as development of efficient movement habits—outside the atmosphere that characterizes the technique class. Power is not possible without competence, she would argue, and we are not doing our students a favor if we do not help them become skillful movers. Further, dance is one area in which physical strength for women is accepted and even encouraged. Jan is one feminist who thinks that we should leave the technique class pretty much as it has been, and seek to develop other skills in other kinds of classes.

I acknowledge that a dance technique class was the first place that I experienced physical strength as acceptable for women, and I loved the feeling. Although I don't take dance technique classes any more, I have recently begun some weight training, where I follow the directions of the book as an authority—at least, up to a point. The satisfaction of this experience is seductive. There is the pleasure of feeling my developing muscularity, which had fallen by the wayside when I became a scholar and administrator. There is also the pleasure of following someone else's directions—It reminds me of words I wrote about taking technique classes at an earlier time in my life, when my children and my university teaching career were both young:

There is a kind of freedom in obedience, the freedom from responsibility. I appreciate it now when my days seem so full of responsibility, full of solving problems, making class assignments and grading scales as well as dentist appointments and carpool arrangements. What a relief to have someone tell me what to do. I take a dance technique class, and revel in the luxury of feeling active yet passive. She tells and shows everything I need to do. It is like having someone else feed me.

It is surely no sin to recognize one's own weariness, and the need for sustenance for an arduous journey. But how easy it is to lose sight of the journey in those delicious moments, and begin to think that we have made a real accomplishment...in digesting someone else's milk (revised from Stinson 1984, pp. 89–90).

So I am not suggesting that we give up technique classes—but that we become aware of what we give up as well as what we gain—and what we want to do about it.

4.3 Critical Pedagogy

In contrast to its reproductive role, education has also been used as a way to challenge the status quo, by helping students question and proposing alternatives to “the way things are”; this is the critical or emancipatory function of education. Critical pedagogy has developed as one alternative to traditional authoritarian pedagogy. Such pedagogy has its roots in critical social theory, which calls for social and economic justice as well as fundamental changes in how we view the worth of individuals. Elizabeth Ellsworth (1992) states that critical pedagogy “supported classroom analysis and the rejection of oppression, injustice, inequality, silencing of marginalized voices, and authoritarian social structures.... The goal of critical pedagogy was...democracy, individual freedom, social justice, and social change” (p. 92). Critical pedagogues often cite the work of Paulo Freire (1983; Freire and

Macedo 1987) as an example of this approach. I first resonated with Freire's critique of what he calls the "banking concept" of education, because in it I recognized traditional dance pedagogy:

- (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
- (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority.... (Freire 1983, p. 59)

Freire's work as a critical educator with illiterate Brazilian peasants sought to replace banking education with a different approach, one that was designed to promote democratic change in the society as a whole. The literacy program Freire designed (Freire and Macedo 1987) taught his adult students not only to read in the literal sense, but also to name their own oppression and to recognize their capacity to remake society.

While Freire focused on class oppression and did not discuss gender, some critical theorists (Apple 1984; Giroux 1991) have included women as another example of an oppressed group, and many feminist educators have adopted critical pedagogy as a model for feminist pedagogy (Maher 1987). For example, Carolyn Shrewsbury, in a 1987 article in *Women's Studies Quarterly*, defines the vision of the feminist classroom as

a liberatory environment in which we, teacher-student and student-teacher, act as subjects, not objects. Feminist pedagogy is engaged...with others in a struggle to get beyond our sexism and racism and homophobia and other destructive hatreds and to work together...with the community, with traditional organizations, and with movements for social change. (p. 6)

Shrewsbury notes three concepts that are central to feminist pedagogy: empowerment, community, and leadership. In some cases, however, these terms may be defined in a way different from common usage.

Leadership, for example, she defines as "the embodiment of our ability and our willingness to act on our beliefs" (p. 10). A feminist classroom, according to Shrewsbury, develops leadership skills such as planning, negotiating, and evaluating; understanding and articulating one's own needs and their relationship to the needs of others; and analyzing problems and finding alternative solutions.

Shrewsbury notes that feminists focus on power not as domination but as creative potential, and see power as "the glue holding a community together" (p. 8). She lists six strategies for achieving power in a feminist classroom, which include ways to move students toward greater autonomy and responsibility for their own learning, rather than dependence on the instructor. At the same time, students are encouraged to

connect with others in the class and support each other, and to recognize “the responsibility of all members of the class for the learning of all” (p. 9). In addition, a successful feminist pedagogy “expand[s] the students’ understanding of the subject matter of the course and of the joy and difficulty of intense intellectual activity” (p. 9). If she were writing about dance, I expect that she would include physical activity as well.

Shrewsbury notes that community is important in a feminist pedagogy because “women seek to build connections” and to “maintain connections that have been built” (p. 10). In a feminist classroom community, decisions are made not just according to formal rules, but also by consensus.

On the surface it is difficult to argue with any of these points. Indeed, a reviewer for an earlier version of this paper questioned whether Shrewsbury’s three principles can be claimed exclusively by feminist or critical pedagogy. What educator would admit to disagreement with the goal of helping students become independent learners who can work with others, or helping them learn to solve problems? And plenty of classrooms I go into today, even in elementary school, have posted a list of class rules developed by the students and teacher together. It is very easy for the strategies Shrewsbury outlines to become coopted by those without the more radical agenda of critical pedagogy, which is to change society by helping students recognize their power to become change agents.

When I first encountered critical pedagogy, it sounded to me like a noble endeavor not only in Brazil, but in my own country as well. I knew I wanted to teach prospective dance educators to critique their own educational experiences in dance and in schooling, and to recognize that they had the capacity to imagine and create a world that might be different. Within the fairly traditional boundaries of my dance education theory courses, I thought I was doing this to some extent. I also knew other educators attempting to integrate dance practice with ideas of critical theory.

Isabel Marques, a Brazilian dance educator, has applied the Freirian vision in a project to help classroom teachers (with little or no dance background) learn to use dance and movement with their young students (Marques 1995). She describes helping teachers learn to use what she calls “generative themes,” ones in which dance structures can be learned in the context of questioning and transforming social reality. For example, she would start with the dance concept of space, and end up with a discussion of housing shortages and homelessness. The teachers with whom she worked, primarily kindergarten teachers, reported great difficulty in working with generative themes and bringing up social content in their classrooms. Although that particular project ended due to a political change in the country, Marques has continued to develop her work into an approach that she calls “context-based dance education,” with promising outcomes (Marques 1997, 1998).

Sherry Shapiro (1996) practices critical pedagogy by integrating development of a choreographic work with helping students come to consciousness about their relationship to a particular theme. Shapiro selects a generative theme such as *eating*, for example, and encourages student dancers to journal about their relationship to the theme while she asks provocative questions that encourage them to challenge this relationship. The students’ words as well as their movement suggestions are selected and formed by Shapiro to become a piece of choreography. Because her

students are all women, Shapiro's choices of themes have been ones of particular importance to women.

I find the model of critical pedagogy useful in helping us recognize women as an oppressed group in solidarity with other oppressed groups, and in helping empower women to make change. In my own teaching of prospective dance educators, I have not found it difficult to get students to be critical of educational structures and practices and to want to change them. A fair number of my students have also made the connection between oppressive educational practices and larger social structures which schooling is designed to support. For example, they can recognize that schooling as it currently exists helps perpetuate inequalities among people, and that it is a myth that all children have equal chance for success in school. They can even recognize that our system needs some people to fail in school, as a way to justify the unequal distribution of goods and services in our society. They have a harder time, however, in taking the next step: to imagine how things might be different than they are. This step produces fears of socialism or resignation at the impossibilities of utopias.

I, too, have a harder time finding answers than questions at this step in the process of critical pedagogy. At an earlier stage of my life, I could easily imagine a world in which people would live together in small communities where everyone's contributions were equally valued, everyone shared in the responsibility for the community as a whole, and decisions were made by consensus. At this point, however, I am all too aware that communities frequently end up in conflict when people have different visions of its purpose, or when some do not do their share of the work of the community and others become resentful. It doesn't help that in some communities, including my own department, these conflicts about "housework" end up with women on one side and men on the other. Would these kinds of conflicts still happen if everyone were educated through a feminist critical pedagogy? Or is human nature such that self interest will take priority over community for some people? To take this to a more global level, even if members of a particular community agree, will they inevitably have conflict with other communities? These are large questions, ones with which I'm still struggling.

I also have some questions about outcomes of critical pedagogy with students in public schools, especially if it is successful. I was an undergraduate student in 1968, when students took over administration buildings and closed a number of college campuses in making demands for change. What are the implications of inciting younger students to revolution, in institutions where they have even less power to make changes than they did in the 1960s? One of my former students, Karen Anijar (1992) reported a middle school student's problems with the administration following her consciousness-raising in a dance project with a goal of liberating student consciousness. Furthermore, when I talk with prospective teachers about serving as change agents in the schools they will enter, I sometimes worry whether I am taking the easy way out: trying to get others to be on the front lines of the revolution while I take the ivory tower role of the professorial advisor, safe in my own tenured chair. Although I work to make modest and incremental change in my own institution and community, I do so within the given power structures. I still use words more than actions to try to accomplish social change, knowing that taking more direct action might be more effective but would involve more risk. Clearly we need to make sure

our students are aware of the risks of becoming change agents, so that they are able to make informed choices; we also need to reflect on the morality of encouraging others to take risks we are not willing to assume ourselves.

Of course, many themes with pro-social content can be used with public school age students, ones that seem relatively risk-free. We can have students make dances about recycling or appreciating differences, and feel that we are doing good without taking chances. To have this kind of student work become critical pedagogy, however, I think that we have to go further. In going further, students may want to do more than dance about an issue. They may decide, for example, not just to recycle but to take on local industries that discharge pollutants; they may not only appreciate differences but want to protest local groups campaigning against gay rights—actions of which many administrators are likely to disapprove. Clearly, critical pedagogy is not for the faint-hearted.

There are also pragmatic limitations, I think, to using methods of critical pedagogy with younger students, particularly pre-adolescents. The discourse of critical pedagogy as described by Freire and Shrewsbury demands the capacity for rational and even abstract thought, which are capacities that develop only with age (Stinson 1985).

Some other limitations to critical pedagogy are also persuasive, having to do with its emphasis on rational dialogue in which all voices may be heard. Elizabeth Ellsworth, in an article discussing the “repressive myths of critical pedagogy” (1992, p. 90) notes that critical pedagogy’s demand for rational dialogue can be problematic even for adults. This is because our narratives—the stories we tell in making sense of our lives—are partial and contradictory, and are grounded in our immediate social, emotional, and psychic experiences which are not always rational. Furthermore, she points out that in most situations, all voices cannot be heard equally; therefore, a demand to speak can be just as oppressive as a demand for silence. As Patti Lather reminds us, “We must be willing to learn from those who don’t speak up in words. What are their silences telling us?” (Lather, cited in Orner 1992, p. 81).

These concerns with critical pedagogy do not mean that I’m willing to give it up completely, any more than I am willing to give up pliéés because they are often taught through an oppressive pedagogy. But I take my concerns with me in my continuing construction of my own pedagogy.

4.4 Gender Models for Pedagogy: Creative Dance

A number of feminists have taken the image of the mother and used it as the basis for feminist pedagogy. Nel Noddings (1984, 1992) discusses caring, which she defines as receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness, as an essential aspect of pedagogy. She believes that caring derives from the “language of the mother” (p. 1), a feeling-level responsiveness of mother to infant. Carol Gilligan (1982) also notes the particular importance of caring in the lives of women; she found that an “ethic of care” underlies the moral thinking of women, as contrasted with the ethic of individual rights that predominates among men. In my study (1992, 1993b, c) of public school dance students on

the high school level, student respondents told me that perceiving that the teacher cared about them was one of the most important factors in their engagement and learning in all subjects. It is true that the concept of caring can easily be sentimentalized, and can provide an excuse for making students overly dependent and denying them the opportunity to set and meet challenges. Certainly part of caring is encouraging students to ask for help when they need it and to help others when they can, but another part is encouraging them to find and develop their own capabilities. Like many women, I find myself too easily seduced into the role of self sacrificing surrogate mother to my students. I find the same conflict in teaching as in parenting, a struggle to figure out when to help and when to back off and allow my students or my children to discover that they can handle, on their own, the difficulty they face.

In addition to Noddings, other feminists have derived models for pedagogy based not on women's oppression, but on "those aspects of female identity that come from their roles as mothers of children and their occupancy of the so-called private sphere of life" (Maher 1987, p. 95); Maher refers to these as gender models for pedagogy, which not only offer a critique of critical pedagogy, but also emphasize "the relation of personal experiences, emotions, and values to what we know" (p. 96).

Mary Belenky appears to support a gender pedagogy in *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al. 1986), which describes the difference between separate knowing and connected knowing. Belenky explains that separate knowing, found most often among men, begins with doubting one's own beliefs and those of others, then uses rational abstract thought to develop new beliefs; while authoritarian pedagogy values separate knowing, so does critical pedagogy, at least in its pre-feminist state. Connected knowing, found most often among women, involves listening to the voices of self and others, trying to perceive the world through a variety of lenses. While either of these routes culminates in the realization that Truth is relative and depends on the perspective from which one looks, the two are not equally valued in education. Because men have held primary power in academia, separate knowing has been more valued there. Belenky emphasizes relationship as essential in teaching girls and women.

The kind of educational approach advocated by Belenky makes so much sense to me as a woman that I have had to question why it has not been followed at least at the K-12 level, where women, many of whom are mothers, have predominated in the classroom for decades. Why do women teachers participate in what Madeline Grumet (1988) calls "delivering children to patriarchy," establishing classrooms which "cannot sustain human relationships of sufficient intimacy to support the risks, the trust, and the expression that learning requires" (p. 56)? Grumet offers an explanation through a historical look at women and teaching, in which she describes how women became teachers as a way to leave the hearth and gain access to at least some of the power and prerogatives of men that were denied to them in the home. No wonder that these women, educational pioneers in a man's world, resisted a definition in the role of teacher that replicated the nurturing role of the mother.

Today, several generations removed from these women pioneers, I see a similar explanation for why so many women teachers accept a pedagogy which denies their personal values: When one is trying to find power and influence, one often emulates those who already hold it. Women in the professional dance world, where men occupy more positions of power and influence, emulate those men by embodying masculinist values.

In contrast, I found myself attracted to what I see as a gender pedagogy for dance, one in which women are not only the primary occupants but also the ones with the most influence; this approach is known as creative dance for children. Indeed, this was where my own first attempt to find an alternative to traditional dance pedagogy led me. I felt at home when I read the words of Virginia Tanner, who was featured in the first international conference of Dance and the Child held in Alberta, Canada in 1979:

[The child's] world is filled with fantasy, which is frequently dimmed when parents, teachers, and friends turn down the lights in his [sic] treasure house of imagination. A child quickly recognizes whether or not you offer warmth, understanding, and interest. Only when rapport is established will he unlock the facets of his heart and allow you to share your treasures with him and his with you. (1981, pp. 30–31)

Tanner shared with pride a review of her students in performance by dance critic Walter Terry:

From the first there was beauty. But more important...was the vital innocence of the dancers themselves...the children danced as if they had faith in themselves, had love for those who were seeing them, actively believed in their God, and rejoiced in all these. (Terry, cited in Tanner 1981, p. 39)

Ruth Murray, regarded as one of the primary influences in the development of creative dance in the United States, wrote about self expression in “A Statement of Belief” for a 1981 publication produced by a national level Task Force on Children’s Dance:

Dance provides a primary medium for expression...Dance and the movement that produces it is “me,” and as such, is the most intimate of expressive media. A child’s self-concept, his [sic] own identity and self esteem are improved in relation to such use of his body’s movement. (p. 5)

Murray described problem solving as the preferred methodology in teaching children’s dance, because a “creative process can only be realized by a teaching method that is, in itself, creative” (p. 7).

Tanner, Murray, and other practitioners of creative dance reflected the philosophy of Margaret H’Doubler, regarded by many as the “Grandmother of Dance Education” in the United States for her success in establishing the first dance program in higher education and for teaching generations of dance educators. H’Doubler wrote about her vision of education in words first published in 1940:

Education should be a building toward the integration of human capacities and powers resulting in well-adjusted, useful, balanced individuals. The desire to find peace within ourselves and to bring about an adequate adjustment to life around us is the basis for all mental and physical activity. (H’Doubler 1977, p. 60)

H'Doubler stated the beliefs of practically every creative dance teacher when she noted that every child has a right to dance just "as every child has a right to a box of crayons" (p. 66).

Creative dance at first seemed to me to provide all the good things I hoped to do for children. The methodology encourages self expression and teaches problem solving, not passivity. It is non-elitist, because "Everyone can dance." It is about education rather than training, and uses "natural" movement rather than stylistically contrived forms. The teacher is expected to be accepting and nurturing rather than demanding, because "there are no wrong answers" in creative dance. The model for such a pedagogue is the loving mother within a supportive family.

Certainly it had been difficult for me to speak critically of traditional dance pedagogy, which had helped me develop the physical power and skill I treasured. It has been even more difficult to speak critically of creative dance, a realm in which I have found love and acceptance among children and those who care for them. However, using the lens of critical pedagogy, I eventually started to see that the myth perpetuated by creative dance is populated by images of only bright and happy children, running and skipping joyfully, seemingly untouched by poverty, hunger, homelessness, or any of the other realities with which so many children live. The poster for a 1991 international conference on dance for children exemplified this, showing children with smiling faces and open arms, dressed like fairies, cavorting across a wooded background; all the children except one in a corner of the poster were Euro-American.

Creative dance all too often tries to create a make believe world for the child, fostering escapism. Certainly mental escape from problems that cannot be changed may be appropriate, and children easily create their own make believe worlds without any assistance from adults. I admit that I treasure the times I get invited into them. Yet, despite my concerns about critical pedagogy, I still think that eventually children need to grow into adults empowered to change those things in the world which should not be tolerated. Virginia Tanner thought that creative dance could help change the world: "If our children could have their creative selves always fed, their destructive selves would gradually starve" (1981, p. 38). I began to question, however, whether creative dance pedagogy went far enough.

Other problems, too, are embedded within the pedagogy of creative dance, which derives from the progressive values of Dewey (1970), Pestalozzi (1970), and Froebel (1970). Although progressive pedagogical methods avoid the coercion of authoritarian approaches, their goals are similar: producing docile, well-disciplined individuals who will fit into the way things are, rather than attempt to change them. H'Doubler's language regarding adjustment as a goal of education reflects this. Walkerdine (1992) notes that progressive education established the schoolroom (and, one might add, the children's dance studio) as

a laboratory, where development could be watched, monitored and set along the right path. There was therefore no need for...discipline of the overt kind.... The classroom became the facilitating space for each individual, under the watchful and total gaze of the teacher, who was held responsible for the development of each individual....[In such a classroom] the children are only allowed happy sentiments and happy words...There is a denial of pain, oppression...There is also a denial of power, as though the helpful teacher didn't wield any. (pp. 17-20)

Thus, Walkerdine notes, when the nurturing mother figure replaced the authoritarian father figure in the classroom, both oppression and the powerlessness of the oppressed simply became invisible. Walkerdine suggests that the cost of the fantasy of liberation found in progressivism "is borne by the teacher, as it is borne by the mother.... She is the servant of the omnipotent child, whose needs she must meet at all times.... The servicing labor of women makes the child, the natural child, possible" (p. 21).

In recognizing that creative dance, too, was problematic, I felt much like Eve must have felt upon leaving the Garden of Eden. Creative dance offers a chance to live in a beautiful, loving, and joyful world. The world outside is difficult and often ugly, and there are times I wish I had never eaten the fruit from the tree of consciousness that made me recognize what was missing. Perhaps this is why I have looked for another model which preserves the image of the caring mother, yet expands it to fit the kind of mother and the kind of teacher that I want to be.

4.5 A Feminist's Pedagogy for Children's Dance: In Process

Maher (1987) notes the need for a synthesis between critical or liberatory pedagogy and gender pedagogy in order to have an adequate theory of feminist pedagogy. This may describe my current approach to teaching dance. My own vision of feminist pedagogy is concerned with both individuals and relationships, both liberation and caring. It is a vision that is still evolving, reflecting the partiality of my own experience and my attempts to expand it. It reflects my concerns about dance, about education, about girls and women, and about the world, but also contains the contradictions within my own values as well as my still-unanswered questions. I believe it most reflects the complexity and paradoxes of trying to make a new world when all that we are has been shaped by the old one. The vision I share here describes what I do and encourage other teachers to do, what I try to be doing, what I see others doing that I wish I were.

4.5.1 Finding One's Own Voice and Inner Authority

I encourage even very young children not to look to me as their only source of knowledge, but to find their own inner teacher and inner dancer, with words like, "Be your own teacher...Tell yourself when to change shapes." Instead of focusing on a mirror or on me as teacher, I try to encourage each student to listen to his or her own body. With young children, this involves such activities as listening to their own breath, and learning how to energize or calm themselves. With older students, it includes monitoring their own level of readiness for strenuous movement and recognizing how gently or vigorously to do a movement. I value language such as,

“Notice how you are using your feet” or “Find the tempo at which the movement feels most fulfilled on *your* body.”

Internal awareness requires silence, an active silence in which one listens to the inner self. However, I also find it essential that students have opportunities to speak, to find their own voice in words as well as movement and to share with others. Although it's not possible for all voices to be heard equally, I believe in class-time discussion and personal reflection during which students may identify the sources of their own visions. To reduce the pressure to speak, I make opportunities in my university level classes for “written participation,” an option appreciated by those students who take longer to think of what they want to say; I can then bring these ideas forward in a later class. Other teachers I know use journals for this purpose.

I also encourage students to suggest images for movement and to create their own movement. While some dance teachers believe that this kind of activity is only appropriate in choreography classes, my vision is for movement awareness, technical skills, improvisation, and composition/choreography to be integrated into a *dance* class.

4.5.2 Cultivating Awareness of Relationship

Because I see the world as a “web of relations” (Gilligan 1982), I look for ways to help students perceive relationship on several levels. One is relationships between and among students. As dance students discover their own skills and create their own knowledge, I encourage them to share these with peers as well as with me. When possible, students can help each other, serving as external “eyes” and offering suggestions; this kind of “partnering” is easily incorporated into a dance class, even a technique class, enhancing supportive student relationships.

I believe that emphasizing relationship can also enhance performance skill. It has always interested me that, although most performance opportunities require ensemble work, dance technique classes rarely cultivate the skills necessary to dance *with* another. Small-group work is common in creative dance classes for children, but even in technique classes, facings of students can be adjusted to facilitate relationship. When small groups of students move across the floor or do a combination, teachers can ask students to sense each other, to dance *together*. Such an approach can help dance class become not just preparation for dancing but dancing itself.

Another aspect of working toward relationship is reminding students of connections within their own bodies. In addition to facilitating more ease in movement and fewer injuries, such a relationship may have deeper implications. As noted previously, our bodies are a manifestation of nature and nature is personified as female (Mother Nature); some feminists have noted a connection between domination of nature and domination of women (see Jaggar 1983). While I am wary of some of the “back to nature” trends that I see among eco-feminists, I encourage dance students to care for and to cherish the body as a lovable and sensuous part of themselves,

rather than a beast to be brought under control, a machine to be well tuned, or an aesthetic object to be judged (Moore 1985).

A third kind of relationship I try to cultivate is that between what goes on in the studio and what happens outside it. Like traditional creative dance teachers, I structure many lessons for young children on themes from nature or other aspects of the child's world, in hopes that students will recognize their relationship with other life forms. As students get older, however, teachers can also connect issues faced within dance class (such as sexism, homophobia and fat phobia) with those outside of it by posing questions for discussion or journal-writing. We can question why most dance studios are populated primarily by white middle class students. We might explore why dance is considered a stereotypically female activity, and what girls have learned through dance about being female. When students study dance history, criticism, and aesthetics, they might reflect on such issues as why some forms of dance are considered art and others are considered recreation or entertainment, and who makes such decisions.

4.5.3 Responsibility and Power for Change

Exploring issues like those just mentioned can raise critical consciousness, which Kenway and Modra describe as enhancing "analysis of the context of problem situations for the purpose of enabling people together to transform their reality, rather than merely understand it or adapt to it with less discomfort" (1992, p. 156). Some choreographers are also able to use this kind of discussion as a springboard for socially conscious art, in which dancers' words and movement in relation to a particular issue are incorporated into the choreography. It may well be that socially conscious art, by presenting different images in society, may facilitate change. I am also aware, however, that recognizing a problem does not necessarily lead to a commitment to solve it. We must also recognize a responsibility for others and our own power to help make change.

Martin Buber (1955), in describing *I-Thou* relationships, helps me understand how relationships can lead to responsibility to care for that with which we are related. Buber speaks of "feeling from the other side," or feeling the results of our actions simultaneously with experiencing ourselves as causing them. He gives two examples, one of a man who strikes another and "suddenly receives in his soul the blow which he strikes" (p. 96). The second example involves a caress by a man who "feels the contact from two sides—with the palm of his hand still, and also with the woman's skin" (p. 96). If we truly feel the pain we cause others, we are less likely to cause it, and if we experience the pleasure we cause others, we are likely to increase it. To recognize relationship with another is to recognize the responsibility to care for the other as we care for ourselves. As Buber states, "love is the responsibility of an *I* for a *Thou*" (1958, p. 15). I hope that dealing in dance class with relationships on many levels, and extending class activity into discussion, can be a small part of bringing students to a sense of responsibility for themselves and others.

Power, skill, and courage are other essential ingredients for change. I know the sense of physical power that I have felt in dance, a sense that often evaporates as soon as I leave the security of the studio. I know the skills I have developed in dance, which have not always seemed to translate into life skills. I developed courage to express my own ideas in dance and to share them in public, courage that does not necessarily transfer to other situations. Can there be transfer from art to life, from studio or stage to the places we live our lives? I hope that, as we help students to find their own authority and voice, they will recognize that they can speak and act for more than dance. I think that Shrewsbury's (1987) ideas for helping students develop power and leadership skills, presented earlier in this paper, are part of the answer. Yet I still have more questions than answers about how to construct the bridge from dance to the rest of the world, and about how great an impact it can have.

4.6 Some Further Questions

Many dance educators may question whether the kind of pedagogy I propose is the most effective and efficient way to teach people to dance, to make dances, or to respond to dance. I don't think that it is. There are things that we give up, as well as things that we gain, with any approach.

Another issue for me is that my vision of feminist pedagogy is very clearly culturally bound, which concerns me as I educate dance teachers in an increasingly global society. At this point I am comfortable applying it only to teaching Western dance forms. Many non-Western forms are also taught using a pedagogy in which the teacher is master, and silent students receive knowledge. Yet I am uncomfortable critiquing a cultural tradition I can understand only as an outsider. I acknowledge my limitations in this regard, and hope that feminists within non-Western traditions may provide insight regarding a feminist approach to teaching dance forms from their cultures.

Another conflict I face even in critiquing Western dance pedagogy is my continuing ambivalence over the issue of professional training. I wonder if the whole concept of the "professional" reflects male-dominated, hierarchic thinking, leaving no room for a feminist pedagogy. But if I question hierarchy in dance, and argue that all of us are dancers by virtue of being human, I have to extend similar questioning to my role as a professional educator. How can I deny hierarchy in dance performance if I am one of those who possess position and prestige in dance education?

4.7 Conclusions

Changes in dance pedagogy will change the art, perhaps in very significant ways, and we do not really know what they might be. I can imagine that it might create greater diversity and more room in the field for individual visions. I can also imagine less technical virtuosity, more variety in shapes and sizes of dancers, and probably more "bad dance" (self indulgent, poorly crafted, and all of the other negatives

pointed out by critics) as well as more “good dance.” Perhaps we would have less interest in judging dance as good or bad, and might see it less as an object and more as shared experience. Perhaps there would be more women in leadership positions in dance, and even new definitions of leadership. As someone who is an educator first and a dance educator second, I admit that my concerns are more for young people and the adults they will become, than for the art form.

As I continue to recognize ways that dance mirrors the larger culture, I find myself focused less on dance education specifically. Instead I am concerned more with structures both inside and outside dance that keep us from being the persons we wish to be and responding to the relationships that connect us with each other and the world we share. For me, dance education has become less an escape from the world than a laboratory for understanding it and understanding myself.

It is clear to me that traditional dance pedagogy, and even creative dance pedagogy, contributes to maintaining not just the dance world but the larger world as it is. It is less clear whether or not we can change the larger world through any changes we might make in dance. I cannot help but think of the words my mother wrote in a book of remembrances for my daughter, when she described me as someone who, when I was an adolescent, “wanted to change the world,” and then noted that I “became a dance teacher instead.”

Even if our pedagogy does not lead to changes in the world, however, reflecting on it does change those doing the reflecting. My own thinking about dance curriculum and pedagogy and their relationship to my values has clearly changed my consciousness. My goal, however, is not to persuade my students or others to teach as I do, but for each of us to engage in ongoing reflection about what we believe and why, and about the consequences of the choices we make as persons and as educators.

Commentary

This chapter evolved over many years, beginning with literature in my 1984 doctoral dissertation, when I first began seeing in feminist pedagogy a possibility for resolving the ethical/social justice issues with which I was struggling. I presented earlier versions of this work at two conferences. One was sponsored by the Congress on Research in Dance (CORD) in 1988; I was invited to submit a piece based on that presentation to *Women in Performance*, where it was published in 1993 (Stinson 1993a). The second was at a 1994 conference of Dance and the Child: International (daCi) Australia, on a panel about feminist pedagogy that included colleagues Isabel Marques and Sherry Shapiro; Sherry later edited the book in which this chapter appeared. At the Australian conference, I had created quite a stir and angered some distinguished creative dance teachers by my feminist critique of creative dance, especially my suggestion that it may foster escapism and docility as well as reinforce the oppression of women. The heated discussion continued after the session ended. I was invited to present this work at other international events in years following its publication, so there were further revisions (such as a short addition included in this version).

The final model for teaching children's dance presented here is one I was still trying to follow by the end of my teaching career, although an observer might have found it harder to recognize. By that time, standards for student achievement that were being mandated by the state, and the demand for rigorous assessment of student outcomes, were taking priority. I have addressed these issues in other chapters in this volume, especially in Chap. 10.

This chapter openly acknowledges that my concerns are more for young people and the adults they will become, than for any art form, a risky admission for a faculty member in a dance department, like myself. It also reveals my increasing willingness to see my own thinking as a continuing journey and to reveal my own uncertainties and my recognition that not all outcomes would necessarily lead to better art. The final sentence of this chapter could summarize my overall approach to writing and teaching, when I expressed less interest in convincing others to agree with me than to encourage "ongoing reflection about what we believe and why, and about the consequences of the choices we make as persons and as educators."

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