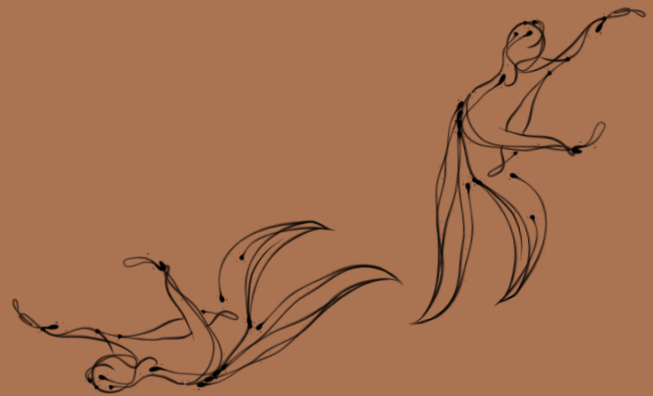
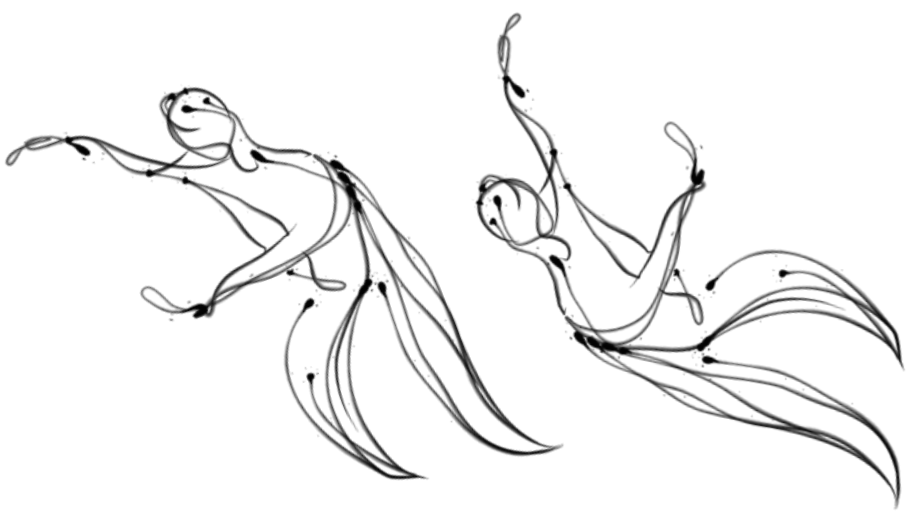
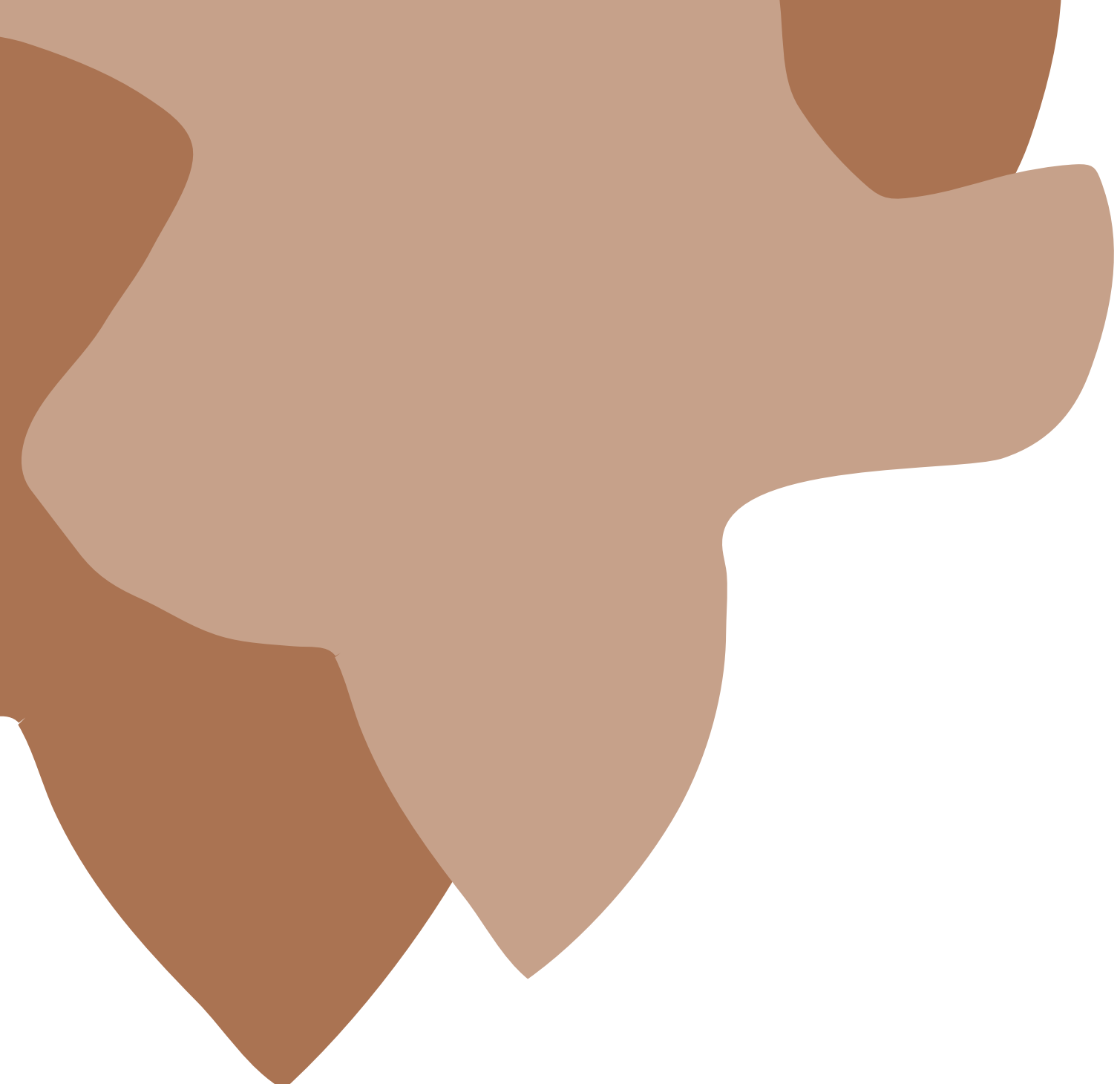




**16th conference of
Dance and the Child International**

Keynotes





Embodying Hope through Dance

Eeva Anttila

University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland

Suvi Honkanen

Freelance dancer



Figure 1: Suvi Honkanen and Eeva Anttila. Photo: Mirjam Lamut.

During our presentation we explored hope as an embodied phenomenon. Our aim was to illuminate how hope may be embodied, ignited, and sustained through dance. We focused on hope from the perspective of sensing, living body and emphasized how hope can be seen as action and as affect. Affects are bodily background feelings, or bodily states not (yet) recognized as emotions. They are energies that move across human and non-human bodies, animating shared spaces, and in so doing, they create reciprocal movements of 'being affected – affecting'. From this perspective hope takes place in the present moment, without the need to focus on future outcomes, benefits, and aims. This way, it is possible to sense meaningfulness here and now. Seeing hope as affect and action challenges the psychological view of hope as a form of human motivation connected to a desired outcome or future goal, or as religious belief or political aspiration.

For Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator and father of critical pedagogy, hope is ontological. This means that hope is an integral part of being human. Freirean pedagogy of hope is grounded in practice, involves action, and thus connects the mind and the body. Instead of “instilling” hope into learners pedagogy of hope aims to evoke hope and give it guidance.

Sustaining hope throughout childhood and adolescence is critical, especially for young people who live in dire circumstances. These periods are critical stages in terms of identity construction. In our presentation we wanted to emphasize that dance education has great potential in re-imagining processes related to constructing identities. Fulfilling this potential, however, requires educators’ awareness about young people’s identities being still fluid. Identities evolve through non-binary modes and acknowledging this, along with allowing bending norms is crucial in the practice of dance education. Through exploring boundaries in a safe environment young people can find new forms of embodied expressions. To illuminate these themes, our presentation included artistic elements that were also to shed light on the conference themes of improvisation, imagination, identity, and intelligence both from embodied and scholarly perspectives.

Understanding dance education as pedagogy of hope seems important in developing the field during these challenging times. During these times of polycrises it is important to appreciate the significance of art in igniting and sustaining hope. Experiencing meaningful moments here and now may ignite hope even when the future is uncertain, as it is for many children. We, dance educators and artists, also need to be animated and mobilized by hope to encounter disengaging and immobilizing forces in society. Hope as action and affect makes it possible to sense lightness, connectedness, and an animated sense of life. Through this, we can see that dance can be an act of love and hope.



Figure 2: Eeva Anttila and Suvi Honkanen. Photo: Mirjam Lamut.



Figure 3: Eeva Anttila and Suvi Honkanen. Photo: Mirjam Lamut.

Biographies

Eeva Anttila works as a professor in dance pedagogy at Theatre Academy of University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland, and leads the MA program for dance pedagogy. Her research interests include dialogical and critical dance pedagogy, embodied learning, embodied knowledge, social justice, and equality in arts education, as well as practice-based/ artistic research methods. During 2009 -13 she led a development and research project in collaboration titled “The entire school dances!” Anttila is actively involved in national and international dance and arts education organizations and journals. She served as the Chair of Dance and the Child International (2009–2012) and has published several articles and book chapters nationally and internationally. She was involved in the ARTSEQUAL -research project (2015-2021) as Arts@School team leader and Visions group member (see artsequal.fi/en). Currently she leads the ELLA -research project, funded by KONE foundation. ELLA focuses on embodied language learning through the arts. She is a founding member of Observatory of Arts and Cultural Education, Finland.

Suvi Honkanen is a versatile dancer, performer and writer. She has studied dance at Helsinki Dance Institute (Finland), Boulder Ballet School (USA), Finnish National Ballet School, and Vaganova Ballet Academy in St. Petersburg (Russia). Upon graduation in 2010 she was hired to Finnish National Ballet and continued with the company until 2019, performing in both major classical ballets and contemporary work. She has since studied creative writing, journalism, and acting both in Finland and the United States and currently works as a freelance writer, actor and dancer.

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The first-person artistic experience in contemporary pedagogical approaches

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University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

The central theme of this paper is a discussion of the significance of the first-person artistic experience in contemporary pedagogical approaches, particularly in the context of performing arts such as dance.

The basic assumption related to the importance of art in contemporary pedagogical approaches is that art can be attributed pedagogical value due to its specific nature, which, when it comes to supporting the development of humanity, cannot be equitably replaced by other media for acquiring knowledge and experience, provided, of course, when art education emphasizes the student's first-hand artistic experience and not merely information about the importance of art as part of general education.

Many authors see the significance of art in the specificity of artistic languages, which can be characterized by imaginative creativity (Kant, Schiller), and the playfulness of representation (Gadamer, Fink), which enables experiential (Dewey), inductive (Aristotle), and hermeneutic knowledge of oneself and the represented world (Gadamer). In phenomenology, however, artistic events are also defined as an experienced way of entering the anthropological world of art, i.e., as a special life practice in which we are involved with our whole body (Merleau-Ponty) and through which we can even improve our position in the world (Pallasmaa) (Kroflič, 2019). The shift in understanding the meaning of art from the communicativeness of artistic languages to participation in the artistic event, which is particularly important for the consideration of the performing arts, including dance, radically changes the basic understanding of the aesthetic phenomenon and, consequently, the educational value of art. From aesthetics as a science concerned with the formation of good taste, we are moving towards the original ancient understanding of aesthesis as a sensory sensitivity (mindfulness) that enables us to establish a dialogical contact with the world and to form visions of a meaningful construction of existence (Kroflič, 2022).

The concept of first-person artistic experience can be described as the direct involvement of an individual in an artistic event, either as a creator or as a user of art. This experience enables us to get to know the world, ourselves, and relationships in a special way—through the symbolic languages of art, which cannot be fully translated into rational or scientific concepts. In this sense, art is not merely representation, but poiesis, the creative process of shaping a vision of the world that engages the imagination, emotions, body, and critical thinking (Kroflič, 2022). Art makes this possible because it can be understood as mimesis

praxis, i.e., as a specific representation of action in the world in which previously hidden patterns and unexplored meanings can be discovered (Aristotle, Kearney). It can also be described as a special form of human activity in the world—praxis as poiesis—characterized by the playful nature of artistic creation and experience. Play is also the first natural form of learning, which we enter into with intellectual curiosity, intense experience, and physical activity.

The first-person artistic experience condenses the key abilities of a rich human life: imagination, playful improvisation, embodied intelligence, and interpersonal connectedness, which ensures inclusive coexistence. At the same time, its value can be recognized in numerous contemporary educational approaches, in relational pedagogy (Bingham and Sidorkin), in dialogical pedagogy (Matusov), in pedagogy of listening (Rinaldi), in communicative autopoietic pedagogy (Luhmann, Medveš) and in a comprehensive inductive educational approach (Kroflič, 2019; Kroflič, 2022).

Among the theoretical ideas that further substantiate the pedagogical significance of dance, special emphasis should be placed on Merleau-Ponty's (1962) concept of the "body as the axis of our experience of the world," as the world is given to us through the body, which is the enduring condition of experience and allows us perceptual openness to the world; Grassi's (1981) idea of shaping an anthropological space of dwelling, through which we inhabit the world and transform a foreign cosmos into a familiar landscape; and Kearney's and Treanor's (2015) hermeneutics of the flesh, which is based on the assumption that before we become aware of ourselves as speaking beings, we are already engaged in meaningful bodily relationships with others—an idea that also supports Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's (2011) notion of "consciousness of dance as pre-reflective consciousness."

The post-COVID, technologically destructive, competitive, and quantifying era has revealed numerous mental health issues among young people, which are affecting their academic performance and, in particular, their desire for knowledge. At the same time, children and young people who missed school have discovered the importance of direct human relationships and the emptiness of mathematized, technological languages. In such a world, a rich cultural and artistic environment can improve our quality of life, as pointed out by great phenomenologists such as Gadamer in his lecture *The Multiplicity of Languages and the Understanding of the World* (2024) and the latest UNESCO recommendations (2024), which emphasize that culture is "at the heart of what makes us human and forms the basis of our values, choices, and relationships with each other and with nature, enabling us to think critically, feel a sense of identity, and respect and accept diversity." Or, as Schiller (2006) similarly expressed it, "a spirit of abstraction suffocates the fire that might have warmed the heart and inflamed the imagination."

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Biography

Robi Kroflič PhD, is a full professor in the Department of Pedagogy and Andragogy at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. He specialises in general pedagogy and educational theory. His specific areas of research include theories of pedagogical authority and pedagogical eros, the promotion of prosocial and moral development of children and adolescents, inclusive education, discipline and punishment, and the study of artistic experience as a medium of education. In recent years he has formulated the concept of a comprehensive inductive approach to education, with particular emphasis on education through the arts and the creation of conditions for greater participation and emancipation of children from vulnerable social groups. An important area within this comprehensive approach is education through the arts. He has provided professional guidance in projects integrating arts education, such as Cultural Enrichment for the Youngest, Land Art, Urban Art, Graphics, Storytelling through Photography, Theatre Playground, Elementary Film School, Storytelling Festival and Fairy Tale Studio, as well as the SKUM project (Development of Communication Skills through Cultural and Artistic Education). He is also a member of the ACIIS — Academy for Creative, Innovative and Inclusive Schools project. He conducts teacher training for selected film content at the Municipal Kinodvor Art Cinema and has also contributed to the creation of the first scientific monograph on phototherapy in Slovenia.

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Dance education between personalities and practices

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Secondary Preschool Education, Grammar School and Performing Arts Grammar School
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Rok Vevar

Temporary Slovenian Dance Archive, Slovenia

In the field of contemporary dance, approaches to teaching dance have changed within educational models according to needs, but teaching methods have always been fundamentally conditioned and limited by the way in which pedagogues perceive the success of the educational process. As well as generating kinetic competences, models of dance education have given rise to modes of the human behaviour, openness to artistic practices and forms of social responsiveness (feeling for the dance community) of those following various educational programs. Not least, educational programs have always generated opportunities for artistic creativity, which, in a variety of ways and within different dance paradigms, have generated the art of dance as well as its public life. In the region of today's Slovenia, different approaches to dance education have emerged over time, and competence in the field of dance has meant different things.

Rok Vevar and Maja Delak draw on a corpus of examples to create a composition of selected concepts, a network of examples and stories that bear witness to various approaches to education, the needs of the art of dance, and the temporal and spatial environments in which dance enters into communication with its audiences.

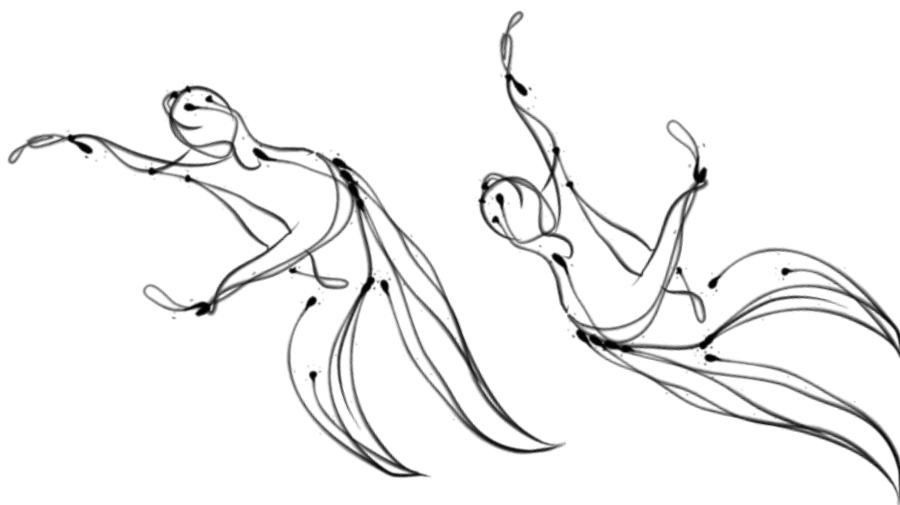
The development of dance education in Slovenia shows its rich preceding with pioneers such as Meta Vidmar, Katja Delak, Pia and Pino Mlakar, Marta Paulin Brina, and Živa Kraigher which laid the groundwork, while initiatives like Neja Kos's extracurricular programs in the frame of Public Fund for Cultural Activities (since 1977) expanded access to children and youth. Dance education was again strongly marked by the founding of Dance Theater Ljubljana (1985), the change of education structures in the 1980s, and the gradual professionalisation of the dance field.

Artists began educating both dancers and the public, combining performance with lecture-demonstration formats. This echoed earlier advocacy and promotion of contemporary dance in Britain in the 1960s, which Ksenija Hribar brought into the Slovenian context. Institutional support came with the foundation of the Contemporary Dance Association Slovenia (CDAS) in 1994, which prioritised education, communication, and international cooperation and remains central in promoting and sustaining the tradition of contemporary dance in Slovenia.

A major turning point was the structuring of a formal education vertical, gradually built from primary through secondary and lately tertiary levels, with the Performing Arts Grammar School Ljubljana introducing its dance program in 1999.

The dance-specialised program is a four-year educational program designed to cultivate students' artistic talent through a combination of practical dance training with a thorough grounding in both the physical and intellectual aspects of dance. The curriculum is tailored to support the development of individual creative and technical qualities, while also providing a comprehensive general education. In parallel with specialised dance studies, students follow the full general program, culminating in the national matura examination, which ensures eligibility for admission to universities. Through the integration of technical preparation, theoretical knowledge, and artistic exploration, the program fosters technical dance skills as well as first steps toward formation of an individual artistic identity. Together, these shifts created the conditions for contemporary dance in Slovenia to move from isolated initiatives toward a structured, professional field with lasting educational and cultural impact.

Illustrated by photographic and written materials on where and how dance teaching has crossed the boundaries between learning the private, individual dance styles that are typical of the modern era, and providing kinetic and creative tools from which students and dance artists can shape diverse examples of their creative will, authors claim that the need for dance education has changed according to the public experience of dance art.



Biographies

Maja Delak is a performer, choreographer and pedagogue. She studied contemporary dance at CNDC L'Esquisse in Angers, France, and graduated in psychology at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. She initiated the secondary school programme of contemporary dance, run by the Secondary Preschool Education, Grammar School and Performing Arts Grammar School Ljubljana, where she teaches regularly. Her choreographic poetics lie at the intersection of various themes and creative practices fed by the methodology of contemporary dance. For her work in the field of contemporary dance, she has received numerous awards. In recent years, she has collaborated with Luka Prinčič on several sound and music projects and performs with the collective The Feminalz. She is the founder and artistic director of Emanat, Institute for development and affirmation of dance and contemporary art.

Rok Vevar is a theatre scholar, writer, researcher, curator and historian of contemporary dance, who has been a multifaceted presence in the field of contemporary Slovenian performing arts for more than two decades. He is the initiator and founder of numerous festivals and initiatives, as well as the Temporary Slovenian Dance Archive (2011) and, last but not least, the author of the monograph *Ksenija, Xenia: Ksenia Hribar's London Dance Years 1960–1978*, in which he focuses on the early period of the artistic career of this dancer and choreographer, who is considered one of the central figures of Slovenian contemporary dance history.

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Minds in Motion: Creative Movement as a language for learning

Susan Griss

Bank Street College of Education in NYC, United States of America

Teaching academic curriculum through dance and movement can be a lifeline for children, making learning more meaningful, personal, creative, engaging, and memorable. Dance improvisation nurtures the development and expression of identity and sparks the imagination, while interdisciplinary teaching deepens and broadens intelligence. Creative movement also allows children to express their own feelings in a safe, controlled environment. And it can enable insecure and hesitant children to find a new self-confidence through this physical language that brings great joy into the classroom!

The ancient Chinese saying “I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand” is the foundation of kinesthetic teaching. By allowing students to embody the curriculum, we acknowledge and respect a huge part of their identities: their physical beings. This kind of experiential learning, called “episodic encoding,” connects memory to time, place, and feelings. It is much more powerful than learning by being told about something. Experiential learning is especially important for children who are learning in a new language or those with short attention spans or other learning challenges.

Because dancing is deeply encoded in human beings, and young children haven't yet learned otherwise, they have easier access to this form of creative expression. When teachers take advantage of that, they see what John Dewey revealed over a hundred years ago: the more a child is actively involved in a learning activity, the greater the learning.

Through dance improvisation children can better understand a character, a theme, or the sequence or meaning of a story. They can transform punctuation marks into whole body movements that reflect the punctuation's meaning, shape, and placement. They can experience the magic of multiplication as they watch 5 children perform 3 skips simultaneously, showing 5 X 3 skips in the blink of an eye. And discover that sound travels fastest through solid through a relay race of molecules transferring sound waves through gas, liquid, and solid. Students can also choreograph the sequence of the water cycle, the order of operations of long division, or an interpretation of a poem. And they can dance a journey enacting Gandhi's Salt March in India or the escape of enslaved people on the Underground Railroad in the US.

Words are abstract and easily dissipate into the air. But creative movement demands active participation and constant decision-making, which engages students. It stimulates

development of executive function skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving, as well as self-regulation especially while navigating a constantly moving environment. Wild and excitable children can dance tenderly with silk scarves as they embody the first flight of a butterfly. Timid and petite children can explode with strength as they become the whirlwind of a hurricane. Because there is no right or wrong in improvisation, children are provided a safe environment in which to take risks. And by translating information into their own physical language children gain ownership of their learning.

Research in neuroscience is uncovering the relationship between movement and learning. Harvard professor Dr. John Ratey explains that physical exercise stimulates the growth of dendrites and neurons in the brain by releasing a protein called BDNF, priming the brain to receive and retain new information. Researchers have also established that physical exercise releases dopamine, a neurotransmitter vital to our ability to learn. And they have shown that muscles carry memory. No wonder neurophysiologist Dr. Carla Hannaford tells us that movement anchors thought and is indispensable to learning and thinking.

As teachers, we have the ability, opportunity, and responsibility to inspire students to heal our world. Anything we can do to bring people together is vitally important. Dance can help children connect with others and work as a team toward a common goal. It can give a deeper, more personal meaning to what is being learned. It allows children to experience being active, creative participants in the world. People often say that arts in the schools are just frosting on the cake. But as Rollo May asks, “What if imagination and art are not frosting at all ... but the fountainhead of human experience?”

Biography

Susan Griss is a pioneer in the field of arts-in-education. Rooted in her background as a dancer/ choreographer, her successful methods of teaching academic curriculum through movement have been presented to principals, classroom teachers, teaching artists and pre-service teachers throughout the U.S., in Denmark, Slovenia and Israel, and in India through the Fulbright Specialist Program. She is author of the book *Minds in Motion: A Kinesthetic Approach to Teaching Elementary Curriculum*, as well as numerous articles. Ms. Griss was a faculty member of Bank Street College of Education in NYC and taught in the graduate department of Lesley University in the Creative Arts in Learning Program. She presented workshops for the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and in New York was co-founder/co-director of BEYOND PAPER AND PENCIL: Bringing Literacy to Life through the Performing Arts, offering professional development and artist residencies in elementary schools to promote student learning through arts-in-education.

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