

Panel Presentation: Dance Education: A Redefinition

Susan R. Koff, with Ann Kipling Brown, John-Mario Sevilla and Alfdaniels Mabingo

Abstract

Dance Education: A Redefinition was published in 2021. Much of the ideas for this book arose when working with different daCi presentations over 25 years of conferences. For daCi 2023, I gathered three of the chapter authors (Ann Kipling Brown, John-Mario Sevilla, and Alfdaniels Mabingo) for a panel to summarize the book and introduce it to daCi audiences.

Introduction

“Dancing is everywhere. All you have to do is look.” This was the title of a photographic essay I saw that included people caught in everyday moments, but not in any formal dance moments. This is the essence of the book. The book actually began in 2000 when I published a journal article, “Toward a Definition of Dance Education,” that has continually been quoted and cited since that time. This was published in the *Journal of Childhood Education* because dance educators at that time did not express interest in what this article had to say. However, it now has close to 10,000 reads on Research Gate and it has been cited more than 100 times. In 2017 an editor at Methuen Drama (Bloomsbury) contacted me seeking my interest in writing a book based on this article. As a result, I worked with this editor and published *Dance Education, A Redefinition* in 2021.

Throughout the book many aspects of dance education are discussed. In the world at large, when the concept of dance education is discussed, it is commonly mistaken for professional training. The text aims to dispel this notion. It begins with the history of dance education in the west. The pathway of dance education into formal education was through physical education. Over many years, dance education separated from physical education within formal settings, and this allowed professionalism to encroach and confuse the definition.

Training does occur within dance education but there is a much larger goal. As a contrast, I state that the goal of English education is not to create the next great novelist; it is to enable students the best facility at verbal and written communication. Taking this parallel into dance education, the goal of dance education is not the next great dancer, but that all students excel in non-verbal communication enabling students to develop self-knowledge, better communication and growth.

The book is divided into three sections:

- Dance education, a definition of our lives
- Dance in educational and life settings
- Dance in our lives

Through 11 chapters, this book covers educational history, educational philosophy, and education in multiple contexts. Summarized in the 12th chapter, there is never a sense of definitive explication but rather that “there is always, always more” (Maxine Greene, 2001).

The three sections are detailed by their individual chapters:

Dance education, a definition of our lives

- History of dance education
- Pedagogy and pedagogical history as applied to dance education
- Revisiting the definition
- Comprehending racism and silencing within dance education.

Dance in Educational and Life Settings

- Exposition and detail of dance in formal, non-formal and informal settings.
- Framed by
 - A formal international research project that revealed responses to dance in all three settings. (Ann Kipling Brown)
 - A personal story of experiencing dance fluidly through all three settings. (John-Mario Sevilla)

Dance in Our Lives

- Ethnorelativism in dance education as a way to reflect on our own pasts as teachers and how perceptions and conceptions developed, in order to change. (Alfdaniels Mabingo)
- Reflection on indigenous pedagogy in the United States, in recognition that throughout the world so many indigenous pedagogies have been silenced. (Wil Huntington)
- “Dance as an aspect of everyday living.”

The structure of the book, and especially the section “Dance in Educational and Life Settings” is built upon the UNESCO Definitions of Education

- ‘formal learning’ is concerned with curriculum offerings within education and training institutions;
- ‘non-formal’ learning is learning that has been acquired in addition or alternatively to formal learning; and,
- ‘informal learning’ is learning that occurs in daily life, in the family, in the workplace, in communities and through interests and activities of all individuals

Several concepts are focused upon through the text. First, colonialism is defined as “a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another.” This is then addressed in many different ways. The text also includes reflection through philosophical concepts: Many different philosophical concepts are presented and provide important avenues through which to consider concepts that are not absolute. Self-reflection and “ethnorelativism” (emphasized in Chapter 10) become an outgrowth of this process. Finally, this text aims to avoid ‘othering’ “as a *set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities*” (<https://belonging.berkeley.edu/redefining-who-belongs/glossary>).

Several contributing authors summarize their aspects of the presentation as follows:

Ann Kipling Brown

"Chapter 5. Global Dance Education: A Research Summary

The chapter provided an opportunity to summarize the research that Susan Koff (USA), Jeff Meiners (Australia), Charlotte Svendler Nielsen (Denmark) and I (Canada) had undertaken over several years. We came together in 2012 and through our discussions and interest in dance education we realized we had some common themes we would like to pursue. Foremost we sought answers to what is being learned when participants engage in dance activities in specialized learning contexts or personal settings. We wanted to know what is significant to people who pursue dance as an interest or career. We also wanted to make sure that people understood the significance of children and young people's involvement in dance – the importance of those embodied experiences and the relevance of democratic pedagogical practices and relevant curriculum design and implementation.

Our commitment to the research reflects our strong interest and desire to communicate with others what is possible through dance, that dance is more than learning a set of steps and that dance can provide life-changing and long-term enjoyment, meaning and well-being for many. This collaborative research endeavor is located within the discipline of dance education study, which has emerged over past decades. Our interest was often a consequence of earlier involvements in dance, various teaching and study experiences and developing philosophies regarding curriculum and pedagogy. We were intrigued by the power of dance to support the development of young people's cognitive and affective domains of learning. We believed the research would provide a voice for those who have not been represented in the dance literature and for those who have not had access to a meaningful dance experience, advocating that dance should not sit in the periphery of education but should be a core arts subject with science, engineering, technology and mathematics.

There were two strands to our research. The first strand involved a qualitative study beginning with a survey and followed by in-depth interviews which are all analyzed and coded. The survey questionnaire asked people to talk about their experiences in formal settings (school, studio, university programs), non-formal settings (such as community programs) and informal settings (daily life with parents, etc). In the responses we found how dance is experienced and uncovered the deeper personal meanings of people staying involved in dance. We found many positive benefits from the various experiences that people had in formal, informal, and non-formal contexts, identifying four major themes – Embodiment (kinaesthetic awareness and mind-body connection as well as physical skills), Culture (identity, openness and social skills), Holistic Development (self-esteem, confidence, knowledge of feelings) and Communication (connectivity, community, awareness of differences of others, identity, openness and social skills).

As we deepened the research into individual interviews, from the stories represent the conflict that has been imposed upon the participants by those who teach in formal settings, who have denigrated the informal learning as inferior learning. Thus, we found a further theme, one of Disconnect. Each of the respondents identified that there was a lack of continuity or disconnect between informal and formal dance experiences, that in many cases formal learning contradicted informal learning. We argue that this informal learning in dance is powerful for the individual in identity formation and becomes significant when considered in life choices and direction. We were motivated to uncover more details and to examine the nature of this disconnect as well as implications for future teaching and learning. The clearest implication so far is to first inform dance educators in formal and non-formal sectors about the value of informal dance learning, and to encourage them in valuing this past learning of their students within their formal and non-formal classrooms. In some ways this is implied within culturally responsive teaching.

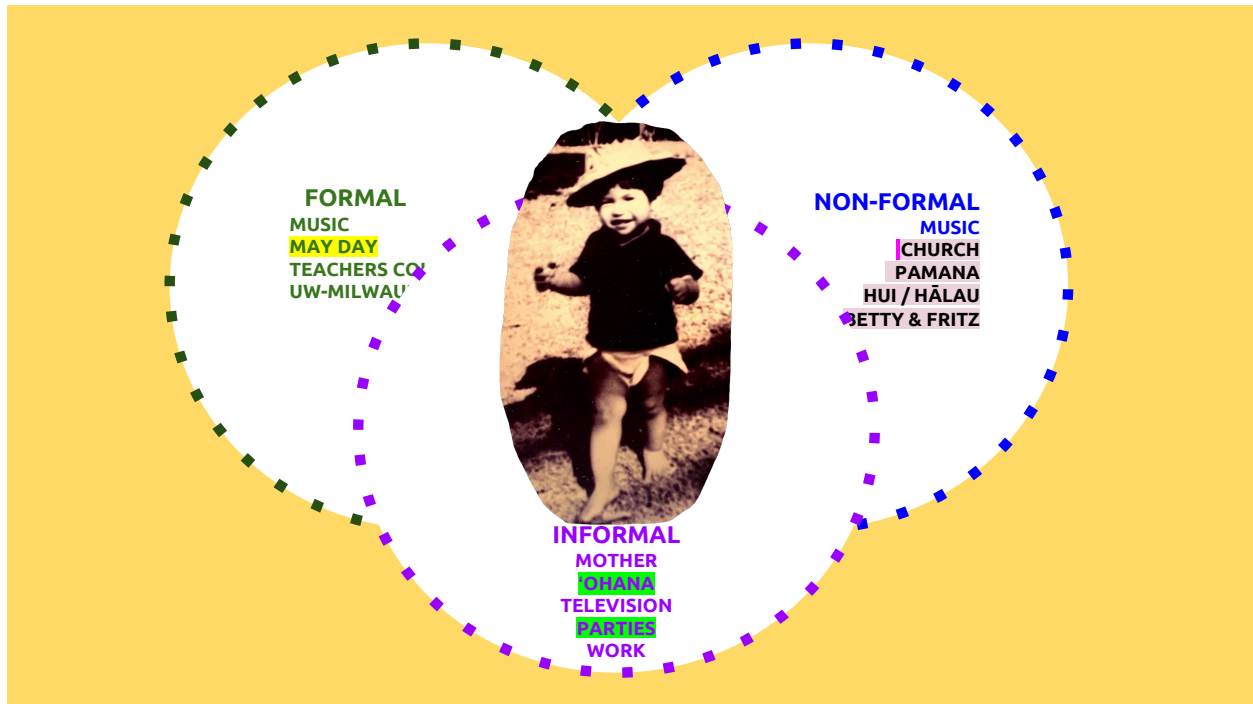
The second strand of our research was a review of dance scholars' writings and investigation of selected dance curricula. Here we identified and supported our colleagues' writings about the importance of recognizing and supporting students' experiences in dance and providing relevant and respectful programs for diverse contexts and populations.

In conclusion, our intention to explore learning in dance in various dance settings produced some meaningful data regarding how dance is experienced, what is and can be learned in, about and through dance and what is important about how people are engaged in dance. We believe that this research contributes to discourses on dance education with a particular focus on the embodied performative nature of dance as significant lived experience.

We also deem that these findings may be constructive for researchers and others in the educational field for shaping future policy directions for dance education. We acknowledge that further research in this area could have wide application across early childhood education, elementary, secondary, and tertiary sectors of education. Such research outcomes might provide evidence to support renewed attention on the value of dance for government policy focusing on citizens' artistic and social engagement, health, and well-being, all the while applying this value within all sectors engaging with dance, especially the informal sector.

John-Mario Sevilla

John-Mario Sevilla brought the three defined forms of education together when he discussed how his dance education wove seamlessly through formal, non-formal and informal education, throughout his life. This chapter brings the previous research and clarification of the three areas of education into vivid focus. The experiences were interwoven and, in many ways, flowed from one aspect to the other throughout years of experiences, as illustrated here:



Alfdaniels Mabingo (with Susan Koff)

This chapter discusses ethnorelativism in dance education, an important concept mentioned earlier. In 1986, Milton Bennett developed the “Developmental model of Intercultural Sensitivity.” Within this model, there is a shifting from ethnocentrism (denial, defence, and minimisation) to ethnorelativism (acceptance, adaptation, and integration) in cross-cultural interactions. As we look at this model in relation to dance education, we find that within communities that experienced European colonialism, the systems of oppression and marginalisation entrenched Eurocentric ethnocentrism in dance education, research, scholarship, and practices. This ethnocentrism is evident to the current day. As a result, through ethnocentrism, Eurocentric dance education has erased, undermined, and rendered invisible the Indigenous education practices and the philosophies that undergird these dance forms and the people that bear the dance knowledge.

The current systems of dance education, research and scholarship are still grounded in the colonial and racially oppressive and biased mindsets. I (Mabingo) detail how I moved from my village to the ‘mirror room’ and had a Eurocentric ethnocentrism experience. Within the university of my own country, I discovered that dance educators in Indigenous communities that are dominated by Eurocentric ethnocentrism tend to elevate the colonial mindsets and systems ahead of their own Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies.

Such dance educators need to embrace ethnorelativism in an attempt towards decolonizing themselves, and developing and applying pedagogies that seek to nourish social justice, equity, and equality. It first needs to happen within Indigenous

communities and among Indigenous educators. Then it can move to Eurocentric educators (Susan) as a model and support them to shift their perspectives first, before teaching others how to reconceptualize the dance world in this fashion. Shifting from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism calls for reflection and conscientization of the past, and taking time to understand and value the rich knowledge, experiences, and insights from Indigenous cosmologies.

Summary

The book begins with history and definition, moves to delineating specifics of the ways in which dance education occurs, and concludes by returning to the main concepts covered throughout:

- Recognition of the vestiges of colonialism and how to begin to undo the remaining ideas.
- Adapting life practice of reflection through philosophical concepts to continue self-reflection and “ethnorelativism”
- Continue to avoid ‘othering,’ by focusing on conscious change of thinking and practice of the above concepts.

The book covers philosophical, educational and socio-cultural concepts, bringing this all together to a viable, breathing, evolving definition of dance education.

References

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Biographies

Susan R. Koff, Clinical Professor, Dance Education Program, NYU/Steinhardt. Past positions: Louisiana State University; Teachers College, Columbia University; University of Denver; Pennsylvania State University; Jerusalem Rubin Academy of Music and Dance in Israel. Currently at NYU chair of TEC (Teacher Education Council) achieving 7-year accreditation for all certification teacher education programs. Academic and service activities are in the area of Dance Education, USA and internationally, including Keynote, RAD Australia; Side event, UNESCO World Conference on Culture and Arts Education. Recently Chair of the Board for Dance and the Child International (daCi), Fulbright Scholarship recipient. Publications: *Journal of Dance Education*, *Research in Dance Education*, *Childhood Education*. Book: *Dance Education, A Redefinition* Methuen/Bloomsbury, London.

Ann Kipling Brown is Professor Emerita in dance education at the University of Regina in Canada. She has worked extensively with children, youth and adults in teacher preparation, creative/modern dance, composition, and notation. Her philosophy focuses

on incorporating movement in education for a complete understanding of self. Research, presentations, and publications focus on dance pedagogy and curriculum, the history and impact of early pioneers of creative/modern dance and the organization “Dance and the Child International” (daCi), and the role of dance in the child’ and adult’s lived world and learning and teaching of dance in intergenerational groups.

John-Mario Arcilla Sevilla, from Maui, is a hula student of Hōkūlani Holt, June Ka’ililani Tanoue, and Kawika Alfiche. Currently the Director of Development and Operations at Luna Dance & Creativity in Berkeley, CA, he previously was the Visiting Scholar at NYU’s Asia Pacific American Institute and directed 92Y Harkness Dance Center, Dance Education Laboratory and NYC Ballet Education. His choreography has been presented at CounterPulse, The Atlantic Theater Company, 92NY, The Met Museum, LaMaMa, Movement Research, Harkness Dance Center, Dance Theatre Workshop, Lower East Side Tenement Museum, The Asia Society and Bronx Academy of Art and Dance. He has danced in the companies of Pilobolus, Alison Chase, Murray Louis and Alwin Nikolais, Anna Sokolow, among others.

Alfdaniels Mabingo is a Ugandan dance researcher, scholar, performer, and educator. He holds a Ph.D. in Dance Studies from the University of Auckland. A recipient of the prestigious Fulbright scholarship, Mabingo also holds an MA in Dance Education from NYU, an MA in Performing Arts, and a BA in Dance degree, both from Makerere University. He has taught dance and collaborated on research and scholarly worldwide. Mabingo’s research traverses’ decolonization, interculturalism, postcolonialism, dance pedagogy, and African philosophy. His latest book is titled ‘Ubuntu as Dance Pedagogy: Individuality, Community, and Inclusion in Teaching and Learning of Indigenous Dances in Uganda’.

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