

Teaching Philosophy

Being a teacher means a lot to me. I love performing and learning as well and they are very dear to me, but teaching is special. I love teaching because it gives me the opportunity to enrich and enliven others; children and adults alike. It's truly rewarding when dancers are excited about learning because it gives you a sense of satisfaction and a willingness and eagerness to teach them. I would love to be a teacher of all dance disciplines. To teach all I know and am continuing to learn from the technical forms to the ethnic forms including West African dance which I have been granted permission to teach by Moussa Diabate.

Dance has such a deep and rich history that one can only scratch the surface of in one lifetime. Not only is the dance technique important but the history of the dance is of equal importance. For instance, many young people are excited to learn Hip Hop but the fact that it is derived from African dance forms is important as well.

Too many teachers today are specialty teachers who are qualified to teach just one discipline. Especially in the public school environment it is important for dance teachers to have a well-rounded and eclectic background in many different dance disciplines. Just as every dancer will not choose to be a prima ballerina...not all forms of dance are of equal interest to young dancers. As an educator, it is the dance teacher's responsibility to share a solid, general knowledge of many dance forms and history with their students and to leave them not necessarily with a desire to become a dancer but with an appreciation and understanding of the art.

Not only is the appreciation of dance as an art form important to share with students, but the study of the history of modern forms is an opportunity to spread awareness of other peoples and cultures and how they relate to young people today. I believe that the more people know about each other, the less likely it is that they will have problems with each other and they will respect each other better. So many times people judge others without knowing more about them, or they think that they know a lot when in fact all they "know" is hearsay and gossip. It's just like the telephone game.

Although I feel a generalist background is important in the public school environment, there is obviously a place for teachers with specialized backgrounds. One type of specialty teacher is a creative dance teacher. Which brings up the question, what is creative dance? There isn't really one exact definition of what creative dance is. But if I had to pick one I would have to say that creative dance is moving organically and allowing the students to explore without fear of being right or wrong. It isn't really technical, but it is about process. I feel this is really beneficial for children because it forces them to have to think more about what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how they are doing it. It gives them a different way of thinking than the standard logical process they learn in Math and English.

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Dance, and all art disciplines, is important to have in a school setting today. The study of art is a study in the creative process. Creativity is the basis of all the spectacular advances in math and science made throughout history. We would not have wheels if someone hadn't watched a round stone roll across the ground and imagined what they could do with that action. Creativity and imagination is the basis of all great invention and what better way for students to practice than through the study of an art form like dance.

The study of art and in particular dance is not easy. It requires dedication and discipline. It is hard physical work. These principles are important for all students to master. In many instances learning and school has been made too easy. Healthy competition has been eliminated. Students have been babied and the result is an undisciplined approach to life and learning. Is it any wonder that the academic progress of our students is lagging? The fault though does not lie entirely with the school system. Although being a champion for their children is important; parents today have become much too adept at making excuses for them. Too often teachers are accused of being too mean or teaching subjects that are too hard or for expecting too much from their students. Dance can't solve that problem but I think it can help and challenge the kids and get them thinking. Not every dancer can be the Sugar Plum Fairy. Some dancers need to be the mice too. A child who doesn't necessarily get the part they want or they believe they deserve is given an opportunity to reflect on why Sally got "their" part and hopefully to emulate her hard work in their own study.

I came from a school district that values the arts and I went to a arts magnet program which was doubly good. I was constantly challenged on a daily basis to work harder; to practice discipline; and to think creatively in every class whether it was science, math or dance class. I joke with my mom when she asks me how college. I've often sad that "wow, high school was way harder than college." This is not to say that my college experience has not been amazingly challenging but that my public high school education really prepared me for. So I would have to say that yes, dance and other art forms are very integral parts of education today. Art not only challenges students but they can learn while having fun and it gives them a means to express themselves in another way and get their brains thinking in a less cookie cutter way.

I started teaching at 15 so I was still a kid myself but I had a lot I could offer my students. I started demonstrating in classes when I was 9 and began assisting when I was 12. When my Hip Hop teacher was picked as a Dallas Maverick's dancer, the studio director had to find a replacement for her on the night she would be rehearsing. Since I'd been working with her for several years as her assistant I had to suck it up...go into class...and substitute teach a room full of middle school students. I was so nervous. I had assisted enough to have a good idea of what I

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was doing. What I didn't know was that the class was my "audition" as a teacher. The owner of the studio stood outside the class and listened to the comments from the parents and watched me teach. At the end of class she heard the kids saying they loved it and then she asked if I would be willing to teach this class for the rest of the year. I said "Yes Ma'am I would."

Kids are full of surprises. That's all that really needs to be said. They will continue to amaze you if you let them. The dancers I teach now are constantly surprising me with their eagerness to learn and how hard they practice to get the trickiest of combinations or the hardest of steps. It makes me happy seeing them be able to do things that are difficult. The sky is the limit. I would rather challenge them not to the point where the goal is unattainable but to where it's difficult enough that they earn a true sense of accomplishment. My dancers learn quickly I think in part because I have faith in them and their ability to master new skills and also because they are happy to see me proud of what they've learned.

Kids are so fun to teach and they are little balls of energy and joy and also a little crazy. But what I really love is being able to teach them something and seeing the look on their faces when they get it right. Or when they run up to me at the end of class and wrap their little arms around me and tell me I am the best teacher ever. It makes me feel good that I can share something with them. I have taught kids with special needs before and they work just as hard as their peers and make outstanding progress. They do not let their disabilities hold them back and they aren't afraid of looking or being different. The mom of a non-verbal little boy with autism that I taught told me she could tell he loved it because he would run to the studio. I taught a girl with Down Syndrome who worked so hard in class and did so well that most people didn't realize she had special needs. Another little girl had started going deaf and blind shortly after she started dancing. But her face would light up when she danced and she took class with everyone else. I had to do more hands on with her and let her feel on me what she was supposed to do, but by concert time she was up on stage with her friends dancing her heart out. I have a little girl I teach now who has speech anxiety and refuses to talk except to certain people and even then it's a whisper. I have seen so much improvement since she started taking class. She greets me when she comes in; talks to her classmates and rushes to raise her hand and answer questions. Her mom has been shocked with how much improvement she has made in such a short time. It makes me feel really good knowing I was able to positively influence someone's life. Being a teacher is hard at times but it is one of the most rewarding jobs anyone can love.