

Book Review

Creative Dance Inspirations—Facilitating Expression. Sheryle Bergmann Drewe. Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises, 1998, 155 pages.

Reviewed by *Ann Kipling Brown*
University of Regina

A Justification for Creative Dance

Movement is considered an important part of life, and the body is seen as an integral part of the process of defining self. Learning through movement begins at birth, and movement skills that help us to communicate continue to develop into adulthood. The creative dance form is an extension of movement and provides students with a way to interpret ideas, feelings, and impressions through the body. Through creative dance students can both shape their own dance expressions and learn through using the body to explore, create, and perform. The exploration, selection, and refinement of dance concepts into studies and dances are important aspects of the creative dance process; building a kinaesthetic awareness and sensibility, developing the ability to describe and analyze dance, and enabling connection with and appreciation of dance from other times and cultures.

The text *Creative Dance Inspirations: Facilitating Expression* by Sheryle Bergmann Drewe is offered as a resource for the generalist or specialist educator of creative dance in preschool to senior-level dance contexts. The author is cognizant that in most dance curricula the creative dance form is prescribed as the introduction to the language of movement and dancemaking. She is also aware that the responsibility for teaching dance can be given to either the generalist or the specialist teacher. Thus she has presented a text that could be used by the generalist or specialist and in an area where many may need some help.

Those responsible for teaching dance in the public schools fall into certain categories. Most often the generalist, the classroom teacher who is designated to teach every subject, has had no experience in dance and has received no training in teaching dance. Some generalists who are arts educators may have had some dance education experiences. Then there are the specialists who have taken dance lessons from an early age in such forms as ballet, jazz, or tap. They spent most of their time performing set sequences prescribed by the teacher in one or all of these dance forms. They have had no dance teacher training.

Ann Kipling Brown is a dance educator, performer, and choreographer. She studies dance in the United Kingdom and completed her doctorate in the validity of notation systems at the University of Alberta. She is currently an associate professor in dance education and Chair of the Arts Education Program in the Faculty of Education. She is involved in the preparation of teachers and leads classes in pedagogy, aesthetics, and curriculum design in dance.

Finally there is the specialist who has had dance training in various dance forms and has pursued a degree in dance education. I would agree that the text can be useful to all teachers; however, I would suggest that the generalist needs more than is outlined in this text.

In the brief introduction, Bergmann Drewe makes reference to an earlier text, *Creative Dance: Enriching Understanding*, which, she suggests, should be read in conjunction with this text. I would urge the teacher to read the additional text because it is there that Bergmann Drewe discusses the meaning and role of the creative dance form. Having this first text as a reference provides what some other dance texts do not contribute. It sets out the rationale and context for the teaching of the creative dance form, showing that the use of the body and the language of dance have a unique and meaningful role to play in the student's expression.

Thus the text *Creative Dance Inspirations: Facilitating Expression* follows quite logically on the first text, explaining the components of movement and their subdivisions in dancemaking. Bergmann Drewe offers specific experiences for students and provides a structure through which students can articulate their ideas in and about dance. She explains the actions of the body, the spatial, dynamic, and temporal features, and the relationships with people and objects are set out in a table format based on the work of Sheila Stanley, an active and notable figure in movement education in physical education in Canada.

The analysis is based on the principles of movement developed by Rudolf Laban and his many followers. It is relevant that Bergmann Drewe references the work of Rudolf Laban (1879-1958) as the basis for a relevant dance experience for students. Because Rudolf Laban's *Modern Educational Dance* was first published in 1948, many dance educators, especially in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, have acknowledged his influence and contribution to dance education and have used his theories in developing and organizing dance curricula and programs for students.

Laban was a visionary, a leader, a dancer, a teacher, and a theorist. His analysis is thorough and provides a firm basis on which to set the work for many dance contexts. His work has influenced and continues to inspire many educators to base their programs and curricula on those principles. Laban was born to Hungarian parents in Bratislava. During his life he lived in many European cities and traveled extensively. He worked with people in theater, movement analysis, movement notation, work study, and education with the result that certain fields in dance and movement studies have based the analysis and structure of their programs on his theories.

In education such notable figures as Marion North, Joan Russell, Valerie Preston-Dunlop, Joyce Boorman, Sheila Stanley, and Mary Joyce were influenced by Laban's theories. These educators believed in the value of dance as an art form and that it is an important subject that should be taught to all children. In particular, such advocates suggest that the creative dance form offers a sound basis from which to understand dance. They believe the teaching of dance concepts, not dance steps, provides a strong basis for expression.

Many texts set out to explain creative dance. They often contain information about the content of dance and how this content should be taught. They describe detailed examples of dance lessons, unit plans, and connected experi-

ences with the other arts. Many of these texts are useful and help to shape some dance experiences for the student. However, most often they become a series of “recipes” for the teacher to follow. Bergmann Drewe has attempted to provide a how-to book that illustrates the framework of the dance lessons and experiences provided in the latter part of the book.

A chart describes the components of movement and each of their important subdivisions. Unfortunately, this is an abbreviated and limited analysis and would be confusing, particularly for the beginner teacher of creative dance. For instance, one of the misunderstandings often arises in the component of space. In one subdivision the aspects of space, general and personal space, levels, pathways, and extensions in space are listed. And then in the effort qualities, there is an additional reference to space. The difference or relationship to the spatial component is not fully explained.

In addition, the temporal component is not discussed at all; such aspects as speed—fast, slow, acceleration, deceleration, and so forth—are not included. Time in this context is different from the time element in the effort actions where the attitude to time is based on the sudden or sustained quality of a movement. There is no reference to time as it is manifested in the overall shape of the dance.

The most difficult area for students and teachers is that of Laban’s effort qualities. This area has caused much controversy and confusion. In this text Bergmann Drewe provides the customary truncated version. The effort qualities of weight, time, space, and flow, together with the combinations of two and three effort actions, are listed in the table format and are briefly described in the text. Laban’s theory provides a functional examination of movement; unfortunately, the practical application of these effort qualities, particularly when using the eight effort actions, has been restrictive. It would be appropriate and acceptable to extend the description of effort qualities, specifically the eight effort actions: glide, press, float, wring, dab, thrust, flick, and slash. Creating dances that are based on the effort actions has often resulted in a narrow interpretation of the dynamics of movement. A fuller explanation and examples of the application of these effort actions would show how the nuances of the dynamics shape the expressive aspect of movement.

Bergmann Drewe does provide the teacher with a framework to access the aesthetic qualities in the dance, namely, the elements and principles of design. She briefly sets out these elements and principles of design in dance and then supplies examples from other art forms. The use of line, shape, color, and form in other art forms certainly helps to make connections for the teacher. However, how the aesthetic qualities are explored, selected, and shaped into dance are not revealed in this text.

Creative dance is not only an opportunity to develop and extend one’s movement vocabulary, but also an opportunity to shape one’s own dances. However, there is no mention of the motivation for dancemaking, the making of dances in a cultural context, and only briefly are we engaged in the critical response to dance. The chapter “Implementing Creative Dance Lessons” provides a way of organizing experiences either through situating movement in a functional context or dramatizing the movement in an imaginary context.

To dramatize a movement is one way of stimulating and forming dance; many other innovative ways can be employed to shape movement into dance.

The later chapters provide a series of set directions for shaping dances in the same way we would make the cake that our grandmothers once made. In the suggested lessons there are clear instructions for starting the lesson, organizing the movement exploration, and relating the exploration to a dance idea. In beginning experiences, and certainly for the younger student, the teacher is responsible for shaping the dance experience and guiding the shape of the dance. The format suggested here is sensible and safe, particularly for the inexperienced student and/or teacher. However, in the dance experiences for the senior student, and certainly those with more experience, the lesson would become more open-ended, permitting the student to shape the idea and content of the dance. I would also suggest that some of the dances that are suggested for the senior student would not challenge or interest them.

In the creative dance lesson there is opportunity to open students' eyes to the many interpretations and innovations that their classmates have made in their dances. Bergmann Drewe gives conclusions for the lessons, suggesting that this is the only time that discussion about the dances occurs. These concluding discussions are brief and do not go beyond asking the students to comment on what they liked and what they saw. These advised conclusions do not refer to the earlier suggested framework for discussion. In an earlier chapter Bergmann Drewe made reference to Larry Lavender's work, which sets out a clear way of responding to and reflecting on dance. Instead of listing the many ideas for dance lessons, Bergmann Drewe could have shown the teacher the different ways Lavender's work can be applied in the creative dance experience.

Creative Dance Inspirations: Facilitating Expression together with *Creative Dance: Enriching Understanding* provide a resource for teachers. Specialist dance teachers would find the texts a useful addition to their library. They would spark ideas and show how an open framework would guide their students in learning and understanding movement and dance. However, for the generalist who does not have the personal experience in dance, a fuller explanation of the movement components and the elements and principles of design would help. Teachers with little experience in dance need guidance in what performing and making dances can mean to their students. They need direction in how to shape dance experiences, whether in making dances or commenting on dances, so that students understand and become involved in the art of making dances.