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Current Research and Teaching Philosophy

The dance classroom is a laboratory – a place where those who gather can explore the body’s potential for movement, the mind’s capacity for attention and transformation, and the possibilities that transpire at the intersection of the two. This laboratory is an especially exciting place at the university level, where students are at a critical juncture between present goals and future successes. I craft dance experiences that are physically, creatively, and intellectually challenging, yet accessible, and I prepare students for professional opportunities ahead.

As a teacher of both movement and theory courses, I integrate academic inquiry with practical application, and invite students to be artists and scholars simultaneously. I acknowledge the layers of personal movement history that inform each student’s body, patterning, and aesthetic predilections before stepping foot in the studio. Students and I then examine these patterns so that they are clearly understood and to create room for them to expand and evolve as they construct their identities as dance technicians, choreographers, and scholars. I believe that a teacher is a catalyst for student effort – the force that brings out an insatiable interest for moving, thinking, and learning about the possibilities and purposes for movement and the human body. As a catalytic teacher, I achieve this reaction by setting an enthusiastic example in the studio and classroom. I aim to transform each student into a self-responsible learner.

Because the human body is our instrument, dance educators are charged with the great responsibility of teaching anatomically safe practices. In addition to referring to kinesiological principles, I use imagery – mental or kinesthetic representations of an internal or external experience – to awaken the body’s natural intelligence in the studio. My research in the field of dance imagery dates back ten years to my graduate thesis, when I first began exhuming the body of work by 20th century Ideokinesis visionaries Mabel Todd, Lulu Sweigard, Irene Dowd, and others. More recently, this research took me to Israel for seven months of intensive work in Ohad Naharin’s imagery-infused Gaga movement language. The result has been the development of *SubtleBodyBigDance*, a class model for contemporary dance technique that bridges the gap between improvisation and set choreography.

In both the studio and the classroom, I build a stimulating and respectful learning environment. I establish community by encouraging appreciation and support for one another’s efforts. This environment is an integral part of learning how to function in the larger strata of the department, the local community, and the dance world at large. In addition, I believe that situating our work in relationship to bodies of knowledge from other arts and fields of scholarship significantly deepens appreciation for our work and practice. The process of getting to know ourselves and our moving bodies becomes even more rich when each individual’s present experience is contextualized by an understanding of historical practices, practices around the world, and contemporary developments.

At the foundation of the educational experience is my self-appointed task to make dance as riveting for my students as my teachers made it for me. Dance teachers instill the value of a committed, physical practice and open students to the joy of daily self-discovery. In addition, we encourage dancers to be thinkers and makers – to tangle with the material of dance intellectually and creatively as well as physically. Ultimately, these aims have the potential to develop not only outstanding dancers, but thoughtful people.