

PARTNERING DANCE AND EDUCATION: INTELLIGENT MOVES FOR CHANGING TIMES

by Judith Lynne Hanna. Champaign, Ill: Human Kinetics Press, 1999. xvi + 256 pp., photographs, illustrations, appendices, bibliography, index. \$30.00 paperbound.

By: Sue Stinson

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Article:

Judith Lynne Hanna is probably best known for her work as an anthropologist of dance. Since the publication of her book *To Dance Is Human* in 1987, however, she has done research on a variety of other topics. Dance education is her latest focus, and this interest has culminated in an important book, *Partnering Dance and Education: Intelligent Moves for Changing Times*. With so much nation-wide attention given to arts education recently, this volume is certainly timely.

Hanna begins the book with a rationale for its existence and a theoretical discussion of the nature of dance. The reader may find evidence for the value of dance education in several places: chapter 2 describes both anecdotal reports and research evidence regarding potential benefits, and other chapters contain multiple examples of "teaching academic, citizenship, and workplace skills through dance" (chapter 5) and programs that have been especially successful with "at-risk youth" (chapter 6). In chapter 4, Hanna discusses who should teach dance and describes the diverse ways this question is answered across the country. I found chapter 8 to be the meatiest in terms of probing critical issues addressing national identity and cultural diversity. Hanna asks thoughtful questions about issues of cultural diversity in dance education; I longed for such a critical perspective in other chapters. Three chapters are primarily focused on Hanna's previous research into children's dance as play (chapter 7), gender (chapter 9), and stress (chapter 10); a few critical issues are raised in these chapters.

It is undeniably valuable to the field to have this quantity of information from a wide variety of sources collected in one spot. Hanna has interviewed planners and participants of a number of special dance programs for young people, generating information that is either not published or not widely circulated. Hanna is wise to recognize the significance of making this material more available to others not closely connected with these projects. Because new projects are constantly being created, the book makes me realize how useful it would be to have some sort of national clearinghouse on dance education, where one could obtain curriculum guides, project reports, and other similar material of limited circulation.

Dance education exists in a great variety of forms throughout the U.S. and Hanna attempts to cover them all, at least briefly. This overview is a strength of the book, and it could well be argued that such breadth is necessary for a textbook. There are also weaknesses in this approach, however. One weakness is that, in covering so much, there is more possibility for factual and editorial errors. For example, the name of a North Carolina colleague, Jody Sutlive, is misspelled (p. 101) and my own degree is misstated in the acknowledgments (I have an Ed.D. not a Ph.D.). Most conversations with individuals have no date cited, making it more difficult to understand the particular context of the statement. In my reading, occasionally a photo caption seemed confusing or an explanation was not sufficiently clear.

In the first edition of a book covering so much, such errors are probably inevitable. Similarly, in any volume such as this, some individuals are bound to be omitted. For instance, some of the pioneers in children's dance get left out of the text and receive mere mention in a list of additional references not cited; Ruth Murray and Joyce Boorman fall into this category. The 1954 edition of Gladys Andrews' book gets a listing, but not the 1976 revision under her married name, Gladys Andrews Fleming. (In contrast, Hanna cites much of her own work and lists forty-six of her own publications in the references.) There is no mention of Virginia Tanner, who never published a book but was a major influence in the field. Those of us who cherish our foremothers will have to add to this book if using it as a text.

The focus of the book is clearly on the present moment, and this is perhaps a justification for the brevity of the historical section (pp. 50-58). This contemporary focus is also apparent in the valuable list of resources, with the notable omission of website addresses. Although there is a statement that names, addresses, and phone numbers are subject to change, such information changes with such rapidity that one might easily question its value in a book. Perhaps by the time of a second edition of this volume, such information can be provided electronically. The new National Dance Education Organization (NDEO) is a likely candidate to collect and disseminate such resources, although its name has changed (from NDEA) since the book went to press!

Minor criticisms and suggestions aside, I found this better than most textbooks I recall. I admit my own fondness for assigning original sources and a variety of authors, but I would be surprised if most faculty teaching dance education theory courses do not use at least portions of this book.

Hanna has a real passion for dance programs for young people and the possibilities that dance can create in their lives. This passion enhances the readability of the book and makes it especially useful as a source for advocacy. Again, however, the opposite side of a strength is a weakness. Hanna's enthusiasm for every dance program she describes implies that all kinds of dance experience for young people are equally valuable; she does not give readers tools for discriminating their own values or those embedded in the programs she describes. If one were to judge by the program that receives the most coverage, her own preference might be for those like Ailey- Camp, run by professional companies for at-risk young people. If one were to judge by the cover of the book, it might be the kind that produces highly trained performers like the one pictured there. The cover photo is that of a male dancer who either possesses a level of flexibility not usually observed in young men or has undergone many years of training to allow him to attain a body shape not possible for most dance students. The selection of this photo for the cover reveals a very particular vision. Even if one recognizes the many positive benefits of programs with these kinds of goals, one should also recognize that every program, like every book (and every book review!) has possibilities and limitations.

A distinction between dance education and dance training would be especially useful in the book, but it is not to be found. *Training* may be disparaged by educators in general, but there is an important place for it in enhancement of any physical skill, including dance. Repetitive activity with increasing demands is necessary to increase strength, flexibility, and endurance. *Education* involves teaching students principles as well as practices, so they may apply these principles to new situations. It also includes a critical perspective, so that students may develop the capacity to ask serious questions of themselves as well as authorities.

Because Hanna never makes this distinction, I found myself questioning statements like this: "Students *usually* [my emphasis] begin their dance education by learning the building blocks of dance" (p. 13), defined as a list of movement principles. Is Hanna indeed referring only to dance *education* programs, as I have defined them above? If she is referring to all dance students when she speaks of dance education, in the inclusive way she does throughout the book, then this statement is a false generalization: certainly most dance students in the U.S. do not begin with basic principles but rather with imitating steps

demonstrated by the teacher. One might question, of course, whether learning steps without principles can be considered education, even though it may have other benefits, including enhanced self-esteem for those who are successful. I wish Hanna had raised this issue and similar ones which I consider important in a theory course. While we may consider both education and training to be important in dance programs for young people, time is a limited resource, and we must make difficult choices. It is critical that dance educators consider their values and their goals as well as the needs of the students they teach and the political and practical context in which they make such decisions.

In short, as one expects from all books, this one has both strengths and weaknesses. Hanna presents a great deal of information in one volume, making the book handy for reference. She is an unabashed cheerleader for dance experiences for young people, and the book contains much useful advocacy material. The stories she tells are inspiring—ones I will make sure that my own students read. With regard to its weaknesses, it is up to those of us who educate dance educators to add what is left out and to remind our students that the printed word is not infallible; we cannot rely on any textbook to raise all of the important questions necessary to help our students become both critical thinkers and advocates in our field.