



# Dance Program Bridges Divide Between the Education of the Body and Mind

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By Jane Hawley, Professor of Dance  
February 8, 2021



These are delicate and dark days as our politics and pandemic seem to override the common communion of being human—essentially creating more barriers for health and wellbeing and especially touch.

However, I am emboldened through my roles of dancer, movement artist, professor, and scholar, that whether by chance or circumstance, we can still choose to find connections—metaphorically or literally—to feel our place in a dance of tenderness while joining efforts to become a part of something larger or better.

Listening to students' experiences of the COVID classroom from last spring (March 2020) to today has become my inspiration and the reason why I applied for [Luther's Nena Amundson Distinguished Professorship](#). I empathize with our current students' struggles of not getting the space and time to experience college as usual and graduating in the normal way. I also get how it's not always easy to learn via zoom and why they often experience social media fatigue.

For twenty-four years the Luther dance studio has been a research laboratory and experiential learning platform for [Movement Fundamentals](#)®. In the dance studio, we work to replace judgment with curiosity, and expectations with gratitude for every outcome. Through this engaging process, the students have taught me exactly what I know today about creative research in expressing being and becoming. I have been collecting their testimonials for years and am deeply grateful to continue this research through the Nena Amundson Distinguished Professorship..

## Creative Research

With each course or performance practicum, I often hear several concerns such as, "I don't dance" or "I am not a dancer" indicating a first time encounter with the body as subject or the lived experience as the text. In this domain, there is no right or wrong. In addition, the Movement Fundamentals paradigm, teaches through concepts rather than steps, which come with no pattern to mimic the person in front of the room. This practice can be scary and the study can be exquisitely important to the college student encountering the body as the material of creative expression. Where in our previous public education are we asked to be so vulnerable? To so deeply and authentically be and become ourselves? I know from my research that this way of learning and creating is healing.

I wonder what our world would be like today if the natural instinct to move and dance had been valued and developed

through ongoing public education?

## Embodied Expression

When I was young, I used to think about dance similarly to the student who stresses from their unfamiliarity with or lack of exposure to dance and movement studies. In fact, I only dared to dance when I was alone on a dirt road about one-quarter mile from our family farmhouse in western Iowa. I would dream about dance when I became bored with math, science, or even PE class as I wanted the assignments and games to be different. It was when I turned 19 and became a first-year student at Luther College living in Brandt Hall that I started dancing (at night and in the dark) in what used to be the third-floor ballroom of Koren Hall. Eventually, I too took my first dance course at Luther and auditioned for the Luther Dance Ensemble, wearing a one-piece bathing suit because I didn't own a leotard. This choice, and my leap over the great divide between education of the body or education of the mind, became my foundation in embodied expression and creation.

This leap launched a new way of thinking. Movement is a universal language, which involves the lived (and living) experience of the body. The mind is shaped and formed differently and uniquely from the practice and study of dance and movement. Dance and movement can bring forth our forming identity or reflect upon our past identity in time and space.

## Sensing Identity

Moving to express what one thinks or feels from the inside brings shape and form to the outside. This action and creation can communicate how one endures diverse and complex encounters. Making movement into a dance can exercise emotions. This process can create a balance between any well or woe and become a composition or publication to be shared or shown, or even just done alone.

Dance is an authentic symbology born to us from birth. Using movement or dance to foster an exchange between the dancer and the witness offers a touching translation to any social, political, racial, religious, economic, generational, and cultural experience.

## Identifying Connections

For example, I could be dancing about the loss of a loved one and some witnessing sentient (including my dog) can sense the feeling of loss through the movement. Dance dilutes the details of one's specific experience and moves them into an elixir for a common experience. This transformative creative act invites the dancer and the witness together to experience a bond of connectivity. Though the details are untold, dance as an authentic symbology creates a connection with almost anyone across the divide.

During these delicate and dark days, may we encourage and empower ourselves to take a leap across our own great divides. Maybe this COVID moment can translate into a time of moving and dancing. Go on! Feel your authentic foundation through embodied expression and forge your fury into a dance of wellbeing.





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## Comments

February 10 2021 at 10:21 am

**Miriam**

Thank you Jane!

February 10 2021 at 5:29 pm

**Danica**

This is lovely, Jane! Thank you!

February 10 2021 at 7:03 pm

**Shannon Hallberg**

Such beautifully written testimony to the power of embodied education. My deep gratitude to you Jane for your

years of dedication to the progressive evolution of the Movement Arts.

With peace and admiration,

Shannon

February 12 2021 at 10:12 am

Lily Sloan

Inspiring and refreshing!

February 13 2021 at 8:21 am

Anne

Thank you for sharing this, Jane! I so respect and admire your courage and willingness to have first said yes to loving yourself that deeply as a child. Alone on a rural dirt road. That you were open and selfless enough to allow those ancient wild and winged horses to serve others through you is, I'm convinced, the work of sainthood.

February 21 2021 at 1:17 pm






Brennan Wilder

Such inspiring words from a brilliant dancer, artist and educator! Beyond proud every day to have been your student. Thank you for sharing your experience and life with all of us! Luther is so incredibly lucky to have you!

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