



PROJECT MUSE®

Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence and Dance Education:
Critique, Revision, and Potentials for the Democratic Ideal

Donald Blumenfeld-Jones

The Journal of Aesthetic Education, Volume 43, Number 1, Spring 2009,
pp. 59-76 (Article)

Published by University of Illinois Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jae.0.0029>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/258508>

Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence and Dance Education: Critique, Revision, and Potentials for the Democratic Ideal

DONALD BLUMENFELD-JONES

Introduction

When Howard Gardner broached the idea of multiple intelligences in 1983, those of us in arts education enthusiastically embraced his thoughts. As an example, in the *Journal of Aesthetic Education* review of Gardner's book *Frames of Mind*, Marc H. Bornstein wrote that Gardner had begun to "set aright the heavily parochial psychological view of intelligence as uniquely or exclusively logical and verbal."¹ He went on to write that Gardner's reasoning was "astute and subtle."² This kind of admiration was echoed in the education circles within which I worked. In general the arts educators with whom I was familiar were grateful that their sense of the educational legitimacy of the arts was being demonstrated by a credible nonartist, that, as the above reviewer writes, there is more to a human being than his or her ability to compute or read or write.

In this essay I do not intend to argue with that perspective. Rather, I intend to critically revisit Gardner's theory by performing a detailed analysis of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, in order to think about the place of dance education in a democracy and what dance educators might hope for in reference to that democracy. There is a long history of linking dance to democracy (H'Doubler, Hawkins, Turner, to name three dance thinkers) but these ways into the linkage tend to owe much to education theory and less to the actual experience of dancing the art form itself. What can be said for these dance educators can be said for Gardner as well. His work is distant from the actual experience of dancing, and in being distant, it misconstrues the character of the act and, consequently, misconstrues the

Dr. Donald Blumenfeld-Jones is associate professor of ethics and curriculum studies at Arizona State University. He spent twenty years as a professional modern dancer in New York City and teaching dance at Duke University and the University North Carolina at Greensboro, where he earned his M.F.A. in dance and Ed.D. in curriculum studies. Most recently he has written "Dance and Social Science Research" for *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research* and "Aesthetic Consciousness and Dance Curriculum: Liberation Possibilities for Inner-City Schools" in *Encyclopedia of Urban Education*.

Journal of Aesthetic Education, Vol. 43, No. 1, Spring 2009
©2009 Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois

character of this intelligence. The purpose of this essay is to rectify such misconstruals and, in so doing, offer some images of what might be a more robust understanding of the intelligence. It should be understood that in addressing this intelligence I am not admitting to its physiological reality (one of Gardner's criteria for admitting an intelligence into the pantheon) but, rather, using the idea of the intelligence to understand better the implications of dance education in a democracy. It should also be understood that I am not treating Gardner's work as quintessential cognitive science but as a narrative for how to think about education in the arts in general. He provides us with a leverage point (the multiplicity of intelligence rather than the tradition of its singularity spread over all domains of human activity), and everything hinges on the composition of that leverage point. I will be providing different content from Gardner's work and, in so doing, supply what I see as necessary correctives to it.

Gardner offers three criteria for including an intelligence in his list of intelligences. These are brain aphasia such that a particular intelligence disappears or is greatly impaired when only one part of the brain is damaged (suggesting multiplicity), the way the intelligence contributes to the evolution of humankind, and whether or not the culture has identified exemplars of the intelligence (what I term the "genius" criterion). Because this is the "bodily-kinesthetic" intelligence, I would argue brain aphasia is too amorphous a topic to be useful (and, in any event, he does not present robust examples of such aphasias for this intelligence). The other two criteria of evolutionary value and cultural exemplars are more available for such a critique. I will provide a "reading" of dance (as the central human activity exemplifying this intelligence in its most unencumbered form) that will provide an image of it from the inside by focusing on the act of dancing itself rather than on what we see when we watch people dance. I shall then discuss the "genius criterion" as being flawed in itself since we can use it to write ourselves out of possessing this intelligence because we cannot achieve the heights of the professional or exemplar person. Further, I shall attempt to show that the ways in which Gardner has employed these two criteria forestall democratic inclusivity. In so doing I shall, simultaneously, be showing in what ways we might reconstruct our thinking about intelligence in order to have dance be a venue in which democracy might actually be fostered.

Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence and Dancing: Establishing and Defining the Relationship

Let us begin with a review of Gardner's original discussion of the bodily-kinesthetic intelligence as a template for the discussion. After this I will proceed with a more detailed analysis of dance as a species of this intelligence. I

have chosen dance because, in my estimation, it presents the clearest image of this intelligence. In dance the entire focus is on the bodily aspect in and of itself with no attention to the body as an instrument for attaining other ends, such as securing food or making objects or fulfilling a mission stipulated by the mind (fulfilling the ends of a sport such as successfully running with a football to gain yardage or hitting a homerun, and the like). Indeed, at this early juncture it is worth noting that there may be no distinction between the skill of a dance artist fulfilling movement for aesthetic purposes and the skill of an athletically skilled person who exhibits extraordinary abilities to do what few others can perform, such as hitting a baseball moving at ninety miles an hour—hitting it by making contact, much less successfully getting on base. Both dancer and baseball player employ a sense of body and an integration of intention for movement with execution of movement that transcends thinking about such movement before performance. That is, there is a more or less direct connection between intention and execution that requires a kind of discrete intelligence that can be cultivated but is, nonetheless, extraordinary in its execution. In short, skilled athleticism is also a species of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, albeit the desired ends of activity are different for the dance artist. That Gardner agrees with this perspective is evidenced by his discussion of athletes and mimes as well as dancers in describing particular instances of the intelligence. The fact that these many exemplars are not dancers need not trouble us. The purpose here is to show that dancers, in particular, felicitously exhibit this intelligence and, more importantly, that educationally dance holds the greatest potential for cultivating the intelligence because of its direct, unmediated expression of it.

Gardner, in *Frames of Mind*, describes bodily-kinesthetic intelligence in terms of characteristics:

the ability to use one's body in highly differentiated and skilled ways, for expressive as well as goal-directed purposes . . . the capacity to work skillfully with objects, both those that involve the fine motor movements of one's fingers and hands and those that exploit gross motor movements of the body. . . . I treat these two capacities—control of one's bodily motions and capacity to handle objects skillfully—as the cores of bodily intelligence. . . . skill in the use of the body for functional or expressive purposes tends to go hand in hand with skill in the manipulation of objects.³

Gardner asserts that using our bodies per se and using our bodies to accomplish other ends (“manipulation of objects”) go “hand in hand.” This may or may not be correct and requires empirical validation. Our focus, however, will be on what I am asserting is the real core of this intelligence: the ability to use our bodies in ways that achieve ends through no other means. That is, this intelligence, and dance specifically, offer one aspect of human existence

that can bring us knowledge and activity that is unique to the intelligence. To be even more explicit, as Isadora Duncan said, "If I could have said it I would have." She couldn't "say" what was in her dancing, except by dancing. The athlete cannot achieve the end of moving the football forward except by doing it. No amount of talking or working out the mathematics of the situation will "tell" the athlete what s/he knows in the doing or what the skilled woodworker knows about the use of a plane. Such working out may point toward the activity but describes it only obliquely. To understand this intelligence we must enter into it without the prejudice of other forms of understanding the activity at hand. It is not that other intelligences may not be involved in the execution of the physical activity but that such other intelligences play only a support role (albeit even, perhaps, an important role) and do not yield the knowledge and life achievable through the employment of this intelligence. The choice of dance is particularly direct because there are no accoutrements necessary to demonstrate or develop the intelligence. In turn, as already asserted, because of this "purity" dance presents perhaps the most useful mode of educating for this intelligence. Given these assertions, I will proceed with a detailed discussion of dance as an exemplar of the intelligence.

Dance Per Se

There seems little doubt that Gardner is correct in asserting the existence of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. Many professional dancers and dance educators agree that a certain capacity named "bodily-kinesthetic intelligence" exists. There are, anecdotally, those dancers and dance students for whom learning to dance was never difficult. I recall that one of my students, Trudy, when I would suggest an alteration in how she was performing a particular phrase of movement, would immediately be able to take that suggestion and enact it. I found it extraordinary. In another example, the dancer Robert Small, who danced with Murray Louis for many years, always danced with a kind of facility available to few of us. So, I would not deny that these two individuals possessed a high level of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence.

Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence possessed by the above people is comprised of many interrelated abilities. Primary among these is the ability to be aware of one's motion: kinesis (Greek for "motion") and aesthesis (Greek for "sensory"), thus the sensing of one's motion. Viewed from this perspective we can understand bodily-kinesthetic intelligence as "a personal knowing of one's own motion" that does not require that knowing to be visible to another. What is meant by "personal knowing" that it need not be visible to another for the intelligence to be warrantable? This notion is akin to Michael Polanyi's idea of "tacit dimension."⁴ Polanyi asserts that we always know more than we can tell, that such "personal knowledge" is real and fecund

even if we cannot describe it to someone else or, even, to ourselves. In the *Tacit Dimension* he gives the example of presenting someone with a picture of a crowd of people and asking that person to pick out his or her mother in the picture. The person will be able to do so because the person knows that person in ways he or she could not explain. If you ask the person to explain how s/he accomplished this, s/he would not be able to give an adequate explanation because there is always that dimension that s/he cannot communicate or even know in the usual ways we have of determining whether or not we know something. Similarly, the “knowledge” gained and/or experienced in employing bodily-kinesthetic intelligence transcends standard ways of communicating what we know. Even a display of our movement might not suffice to demonstrate that we know what we claim, for if it were to be claimed that there is something being experienced that has not quite “surfaced” so that it is visible and can be acknowledged by others, can we be sure that this person is mistaken? Or it could be that the viewer does not, yet, know how to “read” the knowledge that is present. There is always the difficulty of “speaking the same language” so that if this is not the case the viewer might dismiss and/or misconstrue the proffered knowledge. In the context of education this suggests that emphasis should be on the process of using bodily-kinesthetic intelligence rather than on products of the intelligence (although it must be acknowledged that only through the act of dancing does the process become educationally available, that is, through actual making of dance as opposed to thinking about dance).

“Personal knowing,” as described by Polanyi, is an attribute of all knowing and a natural characteristic of knowing. For bodily-kinesthetic intelligence as a developed capacity, “personal knowing” in movement means something toward which we can educate: it references the ability of one to be aware of the fullness of her/his motion throughout her/his body in an integrated fashion so the mover is aware of all of her/his body at once (even when one is holding most of her/his body still). Further, for the dance artist, the expressive intentions are in the motions, and the dancer experiences whatever those expressive intentions are simultaneously with the motion. In short, such “personal knowing” is integrative in character and the person is able to “inhabit” the totality of the moment. This would hold as true for talented athletes as much as for dancers or talented painters who are fully aware of their physicality as they apply paint to a surface. For most people such knowing is not easily achieved: to be aware in a full way of one’s own motion requires a level of bodily attention and intention to be attentive that is not simply accomplished in a matter of days or weeks. It requires years of trial and error to develop it. There are, however, those few individuals who possess the gift of such awareness as a seemingly native capacity. This awareness becomes apparent to the rest of us when, for example, we notice the speed with which such a gifted person learns new motions.

There appears to be a direct line between their seeing another's motion and reproducing that motion. This immediacy of response bypasses the kind of work that most of us have to do in order to produce the same reproduction. Even more, such gifted people seem to have direct access to the relation between spoken words and rudimentary motional illustration; they respond seemingly effortlessly to corrections offered in a dance class or on the sport field. It is interesting to note that such people often do not make good teachers. They have a bodily understanding at such an immediate level that it is difficult for them to analyze what they do and explain it or show it in its particulars to another and help that person do what he or she does. They have not learned it through the process of learning in our ordinary sense (didactic instruction coupled with experience).

Gardner, as I have written, offers as part of his illustrations of this intelligence the great practitioners of dance, and he uses these people to forward his ideas. An exploration into what makes for great dancers can illuminate this intelligence through detailed descriptions of acts of dancing. In so doing, more characteristics of this intelligence will become apparent. We have already noted that great dancers would, perforce, have to have a phenomenal "personal knowing of her/his own motion." In possessing a depth of awareness and intensity of attention to their motion, they couple this with an ability to display that attention. It should be noted that performance (public display of knowledge) is educationally important. It is a truism within the dance world that the dancer never really knows what a dance is like, what is important, what needs more weight, more or less speed, and more until s/he has an audience who is responding to the performance; the dancer learns something about the movement only with the intensity of an audience. This truism is well-known to those who dance, but the only corroborating evidence is in the stories told among dancers and occasionally in the biography or autobiography of a dancer, and only then when the dancer may speak to what s/he came to know about a particular dance in the heat of performance.

A second ability of the mature intelligence coheres around intentionality. The great dancer is able to couple attention with the intentions that fuel the dance and its aesthetic, and, again, s/he performs the movement such that his/her intention is visible.⁵ Two examples illustrate the point. Many years ago, at an American Ballet Theatre performance in the New York State Theater at Lincoln Center (a huge theater seating several thousand people), one of the dance offerings was a duet for Mikhail Baryshnikov and Natalia Makarova. Baryshnikov had been doing some spectacular work holding on to Makarova's hand as they proceeded upstage side by side. He would jump to the side, while holding her hand, with his legs being held together and becoming horizontal. He would hover for a moment and then come down. He did this three times. The hovering was the extraordinary thing for he

was up so long it was almost as if he would stay. The first time viewed, one might not believe what was being seen, but Baryshnikov did it twice more, as if to say “Just in case you didn’t believe the first time,” or “You thought I couldn’t do that again.” This part of the anecdote illustrates one accepted aspect of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence: the ability to perform extraordinary motion.

The above anecdote does not, however, tell the important part of the performance. Later on in the same dance Baryshnikov offered his hand to Makarova. It was a small gesture, a seemingly inconsequential gesture. Yet in that vast theater (even for those, like myself, sitting in the top balcony, very far away from the stage) there was an incredible hush, a riveting of attention as every eye in that theater full of thousands of spectators became focused upon that hand, was swept to it by Baryshnikov’s whole-hearted attention to the moment. His ability to pour himself into that nonspectacular moment fixated, not through the bravado of his elevations but through his total devotion to his motion.

One more anecdote completes the notion. A few years prior to this I attended a performance of Martha Graham’s full-evening dance, *Clytemnestra*. The role of Clytemnestra was being danced by Pearl Lang, one of Graham’s most respected dancers who was long past her spectacular movement prime. At one moment during the dance Lang seated herself upon a sculptured set element stage right. There was much else going on onstage at that moment, but all I could see was Lang sitting down. She commanded my attention by the thoroughness of her attention. And not just my attention. Just as with the Baryshnikov example, every eye moved to her. Lang was revealing the regality of Clytemnestra, her stubborn pride, her overwhelming desire, by sitting down!

In both examples it is not just complete attention that is at work but, also, a precision of attention. It is clear that each dancer *knew* exactly what he or she was doing with every fiber of his or her body. This quality of precision is a transcultural value as we know that ritual dance, for instance, relies upon precision for its efficacy. Those dancers who are acknowledged as great within their traditions are recognized as great due to their ability to fulfill the dance in nuanced, complete absorption and precision so that they take what might be merely movements and transform them into dance. They are entirely the dance. This constitutes, I would argue, the virtuoso performance.

There is, beyond these qualities, the ability to perform particularly difficult movement or motional sequences, such as Baryshnikov did with Makarova. Such performance requires an internal balance and harmony (even when in an unbalanced state). While bodily-kinesthetic intelligence may, conventionally, be most often associated with this ability to be spectacular, it is, in actuality, neither the whole nor even the most important aspect

of this intelligence. If it were, then exemplars of northern Indian dance, for instance, would not be considered as displaying a high degree of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence for theirs is not a spectacular practice in this sense but rather a more subtle rendering of bodily skill.

Please notice what has *not* been mentioned in discussing this intelligence: choreography and art. The examples have been of conventionally identified great dance artists, but nothing has been written about the choreography. Just as it is said there are no small parts, only small actors, so there are no small movements—only small performers of those movements. The important part of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence is not the ability to rise to difficult movement but to know, in a thorough way, what you are doing with your body, both in spectacle and nonspectacle.

A number of characteristics have been enumerated that delineate bodily-kinesthetic intelligence: internal knowing of one's motion, facility at reproducing motion, ability to display one's attention linked to intention, a knowing precision of motion, and the ability to perform particularly difficult motion with relative ease. A careful reading of Gardner shows that he, too, sees these qualities as components of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. However, the discussion so far has attempted to undermine what can be termed "culturally normative" visions of these capacities. That is, the intelligence is usually associated with the spectacular, whether it be embodied, as Gardner avows, in Marcel Marceau, in Mikhail Baryshnikov, or in Michael Jordan.⁶ Although Baryshnikov and Lang have been the examples, the focus has not been upon the spectacular but, rather, on other, more fundamental attributes of their abilities. All of these acts of attention are situated in the act of dancing. An exploration of dancing will allow a deeper understanding of this intelligence.

What Is Dancing? Gardner's Evolution Criterion

What is dance movement? Although normally thought of as codified movement, we should understand the origin of that movement. All dance movement is based on ordinary, everyday movement. No matter how strange the dance movement may appear, it can never exceed either the natural capacities of the human body nor escape its ordinary origins. The battement of ballet, the twisted fourth position of Graham technique, the stylization of arms in Balinese dance are, in this sense, all the same and no different from a casual stroll down the street. This suggests that even the casual stroll is, or potentially can be, dance.

What transforms the stroll into dance? It is nothing else than the primary component of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence: attending to one's movement. In fact, more than simply attending to one's movement (casually strolling down the street, swinging one's arms), it is paying attention to all the connections between identifiable movements (steps and arm swing). Alwin

Nikolais⁷ made a distinction between movement and motion. Movement is moving from point A to point B. Motion is paying attention to the itinerary of that movement. There are many ways to get from point A to point B. When you can pay close attention to the itinerary of your motional journey, you may be said to be dancing. How different this is from attending to the brilliant, sometimes nearly supernatural (thinking here of Nijinsky's legendary single leap through an open window from upstage to fully downstage in *La Spectre de la Rose*)⁸ iconic performance. Now dance becomes something graspable by many people and the associated intelligence becomes more possible as well as more relevant. Rather than an us/them condition, the intelligence can be viewed as a continuum of possibility.

Gardner employs the criterion of "evolution" to include an intelligence in his list. He wants to discover whether or not a particular intelligence is foundational to the development of humankind. Given the above discussion about the dimensions of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, let us now focus on how developing attention and intentionality of attention can be linked to the intelligence's evolutionary contribution.

Gardner writes of the evolutionary criterion applied to bodily-kinesthetic intelligence that "one set of clues [to how refined bodily and mechanical intelligence came about] derives from a study of the evolution of cognitive skills."⁹ This seems a very strange route to take. To focus on the body is to, intentionally, not focus on the cognitive (which is mostly a function of language and other forms of obvious symbol manipulation). This is not to say that bodily understanding is not a form of thinking or, even, reason but, rather, that it is not a form of cognition. Gardner continues, after this statement, to place his efforts on an analysis of tool manipulation in lower primates. This is also a curious choice given that, in the above analysis, tool manipulation does not count as an example of the intelligence. Tool manipulation is not directly an expression of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence (I am thinking here of inner attention rather than the outer ability to handle objects).

If bodily-kinesthetic intelligence is not related to cognitive skills or tool manipulation, then in what ways might we think of the evolutionary pattern of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence? In the light of the above discussion, it is the bodily capacities of a person to attend to her/his motion, itself, with or without tools. This ability can directly contribute to the ability of the species to survive. Human beings are weak in the usual hunting senses of sight and smell. Additionally, they are much less swift than their prey, as well as physically weaker. They needed other means for securing food. Development of the bodily-kinesthetic intelligence would lead to an increased ability, on the part of hunters, to focus upon their bodily motion so that they would not be seen by their prey, could physically understand their prey, could get closer to their prey, and, consequently, could kill their prey for food.

Further into the history of human beings, bodily art became equally important evolutionarily. Ellen Dissanayake,¹⁰ an anthropologist, has

argued rather directly that the production of art plays a biologically evolutionary role in the development of humankind. The arts have been around a long time, “[a]nd so have ideas of beauty, sublimity, and transcendence, along with the verities of the human condition: love, death, memory, suffering, power, fear, loss, desire, hope, and so forth.”¹¹ In place of a view of art as the making of nonuseful objects for contemplation (a rather recent development along with the notion of “aesthetics”¹²), she proposes a “species-centric view of art” that “recognizes and proclaims as valid and intrinsic the association between what humans have always found important and certain ways—called ‘the arts’—that they have found to grasp, manifest, and reinforce this importance.”¹³ Human beings have always found important major questions about love, death, and so forth. Dissanayake views art as a natural or “core behavioral tendency upon which natural selection could act.”¹⁴ For instance, physical adornment in the form of a highly decorated body, which in the West is often viewed as “superficial . . . nonessential . . . frivolous,”¹⁵ is, in the view of the Wahgi people of Papua New Guinea, thought to reveal, not conceal: “[A]n adorned person is more important and ‘real’ than an unadorned ‘natural’ person.”¹⁶ The Wahgi distinguish between an everyday and a special realm. In this way they use the arts to make sense of their experiences: “Beautification, such as the use of cosmetics or hair styling, can be regarded as a means to instill culture, to cultivate, to civilize. Some Temne hairstyles require several days to fashion and complete; such plaiting of the hair suggests the order of civilization, just as the cultivation of the land in fine rows indicates the refinement of the natural earth.”¹⁷ She names this kind of production “making special.” The enhancement of our world contributes to our understanding of that world.¹⁸

As one variant on that theme, the ability to know one’s own bodily motion aids the potter and the woodworker who make things from clay or wood in making things special and meaningful for her or his culture. Tool making becomes important not only for how it extends our bodies (Gardner’s focus) but for how it is, also, an extension of inner knowing (when the tool is both made and handled well). This enhancement or “making things special” might be understood in two ways: (1) as making things of use and beauty,¹⁹ or, (2) it might be a focusing of attention that makes even the smallest, most trivial motion become special because of our loving attention to it. Both kinds of making special contribute to our development, and this sort of making special shows a gradation of the ability to make special that is amenable to the educational project. We can teach people this way of thinking (bodily-kinesthetic intelligence must encompass a way of thinking or what would be the point of declaring it discrete?) with the hope that he or she will develop a deep understanding of him or herself as a bodily-kinesthetically intelligent being. When Gardner focuses upon great artists and when the culture will, generally, understand bodily-kinesthetic intelligence as an

ability to perform spectacularly, it becomes far more difficult to educate for that intelligence, as it becomes a distinction between those who are gifted (or can produce spectacular movement) and all the rest of us.

The Crux of the Problem: Gardner's "Genius" Criterion

Gardner's "genius" criterion presents two dilemmas. First, if Gardner is seeking, amongst his criteria, fundamental, biological bases (brain aphasia and evolution) for declaring an intelligence to belong to the list, by implication, these cultural exemplars are natively endowed with the intelligence. He seems to be saying that the acknowledged artists who gain a wide audience achieved their status through a sheer genius with which they were born and that this genius is bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. We will have to determine whether or not the people so designated have gained this distinction on the basis of biology or some other basis. Second, Gardner's specific choices to apotheosize this intelligence draws upon various great twentieth-century choreographers who have shown the ability to compose motion in new and inventive ways. This implies that the ability to compose such motion is part of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence.

The question is whether or not we can, for instance, declare George Balanchine's recasting of classical ballet vocabulary (prominently displayed in *Agon* and *The Four Temperaments*) and Martha Graham's invention of a contraction/release dance vocabulary as displays of this intelligence. I will argue that they are not. Balanchine's work, offered in another era, might not have been lauded and declared to be "genius" but rather might have been ignored as merely ugly. Graham was not the only person to work in the contraction/release area. Her one-time husband and dance partner, Erick Hawkins, also developed a contraction/release approach, and, yet, he was never declared a genius. There were other important modern dance forms—German expressionistic dance as developed by Mary Wigman and Hanya Holm, and fall/recovery as developed by Doris Humphrey—that were not given the same kind of star treatment. These people also displayed beautiful manifestations of dance (possessing, according to Gardner's criteria, the biological gift of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence), but for all that, they did not garner the kind of fame and accolades accorded to Graham and Balanchine. This suggests that "genius" is not necessarily a biological endowment (although it might have some biological component). If it is not purely biological, then how can we account for genius designation applied to these individuals? For instance, given that some car mechanics are gifted in their sensing of car engines—a seeming gift on the part of some—why would we not consider a "mechanic's intelligence" as one of the nominated intelligences? This is not a facetious example. We must seriously examine Gardner's selection of "geniuses" and note that he has privileged, in this case,

certain kinds of physical behavior and ignored others. It is not disingenuous to note that Gardner's list of intelligences and his lists of exemplars within intelligences are replete with high culture icons. This makes the genius criteria automatically suspect since he does not create it from a broad spectrum of cultural possibilities but, rather, echoes the prejudices of the culture.

Gardner appears, then, to be using the concept of "exemplar" as a form of cultural affirmation. This becomes more clear in his *Creative Minds* book, where he elucidates his intelligences and points out, in each chapter, exemplars of the intelligence. In the chapter on bodily-kinesthetic intelligence he chooses Martha Graham for his exemplar. A discussion of Graham will reveal, in more detail, the problematics of this attribution.²⁰

Graham began her career as a dancer with Denishawn, the modern dance company and choreographic/movement invention approach developed by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn. She became one of Denishawn's stars along with Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman. All three dancers eventually left Denishawn in order to pursue visions of the dance art that differed markedly from Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn. All three became well-known and well-respected practitioners of the emerging "modern dance." However, only Graham earned a world-wide reputation and the cultural imprimatur "genius." Was this because she possessed a special bodily-kinesthetic genius that eclipsed her contemporaries? The historical evidence reveals not so much that she possessed a special bodily-kinesthetic genius as a genius for finding financial support (finding wealthy and powerful patrons) and choreography. That is, if bodily-kinesthetic intelligence is one of bodily motion skillfully performed, then Graham's two forms of genius have no place in designating her as an exemplar of bodily-kinesthetic genius. She possessed great social and political acumen and a strong choreographic sense. This choreographic sense meant, in many ways, that Graham displayed more of the "spatial intelligence" in Gardner's list than bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. Choreography is clearly a motional art, but the great choreographers were as much about arranging motion *in space* as they were *inventors of motion*. That is, while choreography begins in motion, it moves toward motional design, which is a visual art as well as a bodily-kinesthetic art. Badly spatially organized motion will make the choreography muddy and unintelligible. Indeed, thinking of the concert work of Graham, one is immediately struck by the look of the space (the sculptures of Yamaguchi and the arrangement of bodies in the space), which delineates that space in amazing ways. The power of Graham's work often lies in the sculptural qualities of the dancing. This is also an example of spatial brilliance.

From this it appears that Graham's genius may have much less to do with bodily-kinesthetic intelligence than with other forms of intelligence that either do not make Gardner's list (political intelligence is never mentioned and, yet, her abilities to garner support are legendary) or come

from other areas of the list. Her renown is not based solely on her bodily technique (as important as it may be) but also on her business skills (ability to garner support for some fairly radical choreography, at least radical in the beginning) and her artistic eye (a form of spatial intelligence according to Gardner). Further, her ability to join her choreography to cultural currents is not mentioned by Gardner, and yet this is the aspect of her work that seems so culturally important. Her “American” work, for instance, forged a vision of the emerging new American self-awareness, and her “Greek” work was an attempt to make visible Freudian insights through the classic Greek tragedies and, thus, reveal the depths of psychology in an exciting new way.

The above description does not deny her bodily-kinesthetic brilliance. Rather, through this perspective I am questioning Graham’s designation as a bodily-kinesthetic genius, and I find that using her for an exemplar of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence seems beside the point as to why she is designated a genius by the culture. Perhaps Gardner needs a different kind of intelligence to account for art that gains great social recognition. Perhaps there is a discrete intelligence for being able to read one’s times and translate it into a legible art that moves the art forward. Further, Graham was not, at first, lauded for her originality. She drew upon her reputation as a Denishawn dancer to get provisional acceptance for her new work. She used her fame to forward her project. We may also ask whether or not this is a form of genius

Educational Considerations

The issue now moves from a biological one to a sociological one, enabling us to logically connect the preceding discussion with education thinking. Education is, like the genius designation, a sociological process, proceeding through human social interactions and intended, in one way or another, to affect the development of society. Development of any intelligence, including bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, is not for the mere purpose of its self-development. There are social outcomes and responses to consider. It is, then, to dance education issues for children that we turn because with this we might certainly agree: dance education (because it can focus most fully on the body) holds the greatest potential for developing bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. Although I will focus upon children, I hope the reader can see that these notions are useful for teaching dance at all age levels.²¹

Coupling genius thinking with education creates a difficulty in identifying a person who contains it. Taking Dewey’s notion of finding out what is geography (or dance) to the child and then teaching geography (or dance) to the child in the light of that finding suggests that the child has geography-like or dance-like questions and positionings that hold the potential for the mature form but are not yet the mature form.²² Dewey argues that the iconic

mature form is not where the child exists and is, for the child, only an inert, dead object lying there to be slavishly imitated. In using the mature form nothing of value is found out about the child's capacity for dance.

If dance is the art of paying attention to one's motion, then teaching dance ought to begin with paying attention and not being concerned with already created forms that one must learn and against which one's genius is measured. In the early Soviet Union of Nijinsky one was measured in terms of thigh size, femur length, build, etc., to determine whether or not one would be able to be allowed to dance. In England there is the Royal Ballet syllabus by which the adequacy of ballet students is determined and individuals are or are not offered subsequent dance opportunities. In the United States there was for many years the Graham technique. The Graham technique was built on Graham's idiosyncratic body, the strange structure of her hips, knees, and ankles. Very few could actually emulate her. The concept of contraction and release was instantiated in a particular way by her, but it was and is not the only way to dance out of that concept. Graham rigidly defined one way and only one way for contraction/release to be realized.

If dance were defined as paying attention to one's motion, then no matter what motion is being done, by paying attention to it one is dancing. There are, of course, differing capacities for attention. Merce Cunningham has talked about an appetite for movement.²³ This appetite is felt especially sharply by dancers, or at least some dancers. It does not mean the need to display oneself but rather the need to be moving, to feel movement, and to think movement. It does not mean that one always has to be moving but rather that one feels another's motion almost as if one were also moving. We call this the bodily-kinesthetic response, and some people may possess this responsiveness more than others. It is this responsiveness that might also be developed in people. This kind of "genius" is different from being a great artist. By using such great icons *as icons*, Gardner may be cutting off access to those many who might have talent but would never find it because they do not appear to measure well against them. Further, to call something genius (and that is how we know that it is real) is to already set up a barrier between the thing desired and the possible doers of the thing. It suggests that only some will really have this capacity and others ought not pursue it—we will know that ahead of time. Of course, we won't know it ahead of time. We don't know what contributions a person might make to that knowing that may only come across in time and through time. An after the fact designation such as genius ("Ah, I see she is a genius") makes it difficult to know ahead of time who will have that genius. It is easier, however, to see into an appetite for motion in which a person cannot seem to help himself or herself.

Remembering that dance vocabulary comes out of the everyday and is only an exaggeration of the everyday creates a continuum along which to

proceed as one begins to develop oneself as a dancer. This development can come through the encouraging eye and mover who is not looking for genius but only for attention and desire. Awkwardness, not usually associated with dance, might become a sort of beauty because the dancer was very aware of his or her awkwardness and attended to it in a strong way—was with it and with him or herself in such an appetited way that it becomes an appetizing thing to see.

Learning to dance and develop a bodily-kinesthetic intelligence is a *process* of self-actualization, not a product of self-actualization. Genius talk only communicates that not everyone can become self-actualized so why begin. One is immediately overwhelmed with inadequacy. If we take it that culture is a set of social agreements for living and thinking in particular ways, then Gardner is saying that there is a high amount of social agreement about this domain. But when we see what or who has been left out of this agreement, we can see that we have denied the culture a plurality of possibilities.

Finding the Democratic Ideal

There is a long tradition in dance education, stemming from the 1930s, making the argument that dance education can contribute to the development of democracy.²⁴ The democratic ideal involves an inclusion of multiple voices and possibilities, not exclusionary practices. It may not be the case that Gardner desires such exclusion. However, the ways in which he writes about this intelligence may lead in that direction. Jürgen Habermas has written, in the area of communication theory, about the ways in which communications among people are filled with distortions, due, in large part, to power differentials.²⁵ He has proposed the notion of the “Ideal Speech Situation,” in which multiple voices would not be distorted and would be heard. He recognizes this as a utopian aspiration but one toward which he is attempting to guide us (as a destination that we might not attain but gives direction to our efforts). In a similar fashion, an approach to educating for bodily-kinesthetic intelligence can eschew exclusion and find a way for participation that is legitimate and legitimated. But inclusion, in the present case, is not just about including people of all body types and capacities and their movement but, rather, in developing everyone’s capacity for paying attention.

This participation, based on the ability to pay attention, no longer discriminates between professional knowers of the intelligence and non-professional knowers. In my experience as a choreographer (and in my observation of other choreographers), my greatest successes have come with people who would not be deemed to possess this intelligence (in the normative way I have described it) and, yet, who were fully professional. These

people took the notion of “professional” to mean “to profess, or express, one’s belief with great conviction.” When they performed their movement, no matter how simple, in their dedication to that movement, in their intense focus, they could be perceived as beautiful. They were beautiful and exemplary not in any conventional sense but, rather, in the way of being so immersed that we, the viewer, could not but help to be immersed also. Did they display spectacular bodily-kinesthetic gifts in the usual way? No. Did they display something powerful? Yes. If the form of dance education they practiced paid more attention to codified mature forms of the dance art and less attention to the ways of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence and the act of dancing described above, then these individuals would never have found, for themselves, a level of personal knowledge and growth rarely granted to us. They would have been undemocratically discriminated against, some of them held back on the basis of conventional categories. They would never have danced, never would have explored their intelligence.

Education for bodily-kinesthetic intelligence requires departing from taken-for-granted paths to reach its fruition. The taken-for-granted response would move in the direction of conventional dance education. As the school or district might seek a dance person (educator or professional) to enable its students to develop this intelligence, it would probably give little consideration to exactly what would be taught. There would be an assumption that since Gardner has focused upon great dance art as the prime exemplar of the mature form, all they need is a fine dancer to help teach toward developing the intelligence. Indeed, that is the implication one receives from Gardner’s work. His notion is that students who show some nascent ability in this area ought to “apprentice” with someone who has already developed that intelligence. Given the conventional view of this intelligence, as discussed in this writing, it would be logical to employ a fine dancer.

However, based on the above descriptions of the intelligence and dance practice, education for this intelligence requires an approach quite different from merely studying with a fine dancer. It requires a focus upon the components as described. It requires an educator who will seek the potential in each person in the ways of paying attention and refining attention giving. It requires a labor bent toward each person engaged in finding him or herself inside motional activity. Given that we can never be sure who will blossom, who will make that “significant” contribution that we label “genius,” we may deny our community of even this possibility in not teaching in this way.

Yet more serious than the possible loss of “genius” is the problem of denial of access. Much of the history of the United States has been about the struggle for greater and greater access for more and more individuals and groups. To teach toward this bodily-kinesthetic intelligence in the conventional ways only perpetuates another area for exclusion and denial. In

so doing we will be denying the very potential of democratic expansion. To be clear, this is not an argument that through the kind of teaching described we will solve the ills of our society or that democracy will be healed. Rather, through a series of small interventions such as this, we have an opportunity to work toward democracy, building it from the ground up. Efforts are needed in many venues and through many activities, and the democratic education for bodily-kinesthetic intelligence ought to be a site for the expansion of the democratic ideal.

NOTES

1. Marc Bornstein, "Review of *Frames of Mind*," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 20, no. 2 (1986): 121; Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
2. Bornstein, "Review," 121.
3. Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 206. It must be noted that a review of Gardner's work reveals that he has not done work to rethink the original theory. He has done work rethinking the list of intelligences but not the idea of intelligence, the methods for determining the character of a particular intelligence, or the criteria for inclusion. Thus, although I draw heavily upon the original statement of the intelligence in *Frames of Mind*, this does not negate the activity of the rereading. The original statement remains the most substantive presentation of the theory.
4. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); *The Tacit Dimension* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1967).
5. This does not contradict the earlier point that the integration of attention toward movement and intention for movement transcend obvious thought processes. In the heat of the dance, for instance, the dancer might come to a moment when her/his movement moves through her/his intentions in such a way that the attention and intention fuse and nurture each other without mechanical separation.
6. Howard Gardner, *Creating Minds: An Anatomy of Creativity Seen through the Lives of Freud, Einstein, Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot, and Gandhi* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).
7. Marcia Siegel, ed., *Nik: A Documentary* (New York: Dance Perspectives, 1971).
8. See Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev* (New York: Atheneum, 1979), for a description of Nijinsky's performances.
9. Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 215.
10. Ellen Dissanayake, *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes from and Why* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995).
11. *Ibid.*, 41.
12. See Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1990).
13. Dissanayake, *Homo Aestheticus*, 41.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, 102.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, 105.
18. Dewey makes very similar arguments in *Art as Experience* in that the making of and encounter with art affords the opportunity to "know" something about our world that is unattainable through more "cognitive" means. It is also important to note that I do not use Dewey extensively here because, as I see it, his focus is primarily upon the taking up of already made art and my focus is on the art-maker. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934; New York: Capricorn, 1958).
19. See Thomas E. Barone, "Things of Use and Things of Beauty: The Swain County Arts Program," in *Aesthetics, Politics, and Educational Inquiry: Essays and Examples*, ed. Thomas Barone (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).

20. For historical/biographical information see Agnes DeMille, *Martha: The Life and Work of Martha Graham* (New York: Random House, 1991); T. Garfunkel, *Letter to the World: The Life and Dances of Martha Graham* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995); Don McDonagh, *Martha Graham: A Biography* (New York: Praeger, 1973); and Walter Terry, *Frontiers of Dance: The Life of Martha Graham* (New York: Crowell, 1975).
21. I also want to note that I am not referencing extant examples of the dance art that the reader might consider to be variants on these ideas (such as Liz Lerman's work). It is not clear that such examples are functioning from this very particular perspective on dance education. That is, even in the cases where the choreographer, such as Lerman, is using people of many kinds of capacities and physical limitations, it is not necessarily the case that the choreographer is working from this perspective. S/he may be honoring the state of affairs of various people, but this is not the perspective being offered. Much that passes for the offered perspective are really educative efforts toward having people look "dancerly." This is not the point. All movement is "dancerly," not just movement that is supposedly "dancerly."
22. John Dewey, "The Psychological Aspect of the School Curriculum," in *Curriculum: An Introduction to the Field*, ed. James R. Gress with David Purpel, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: McCutchan, 1988), 129-39.
23. Merce Cunningham, "Dance in America" [television series], directed by Merrill Brockway (1977). See http://www.merce.org:80/filmvideo_danceforcamera.html.
24. For instance, Margaret H'Doubler, *Dance: A Creative Arts Experience*, 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1940).
25. Robert Young, *A Critical Theory of Education: Habermas and Our Children's Future* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1990).