The Educational Principles of Mary Wigman

Their Application to the Rôle of the Dance in Modern Education

By

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MARY WIGMAN has been called a pioneer of the modern dance. Her advances, however, have never been confined to the mere invention of novelty in technique. She believes in the privilege of the artist and teacher to communicate her experiences in movement to all who would share them with her. It is this belief that has inspired Mary Wigman to dedicate her art "not only to the artists of today and tomorrow, but also to all those the world over who are moved by the wonder and excitement of living, and who would enrich their lives to the furthest reaches of their being. The dance in this sense is not only an art, but also a deeply educational medium; a doorway to a more intense and fuller life."

The Dance in Education

DANCING has played many roles in the history of the human race—and its present part in the educational programs of schools and colleges is one of its most recent and most interesting developments. Only a few years ago the inclusion of dance training in a curriculum would have been the occasion for ridicule, censure, and protest. Today it is accepted and recommended by progressive educators as a matter of course. How has this complete change of attitude come about; and more important still, what is the significance of this development in the dance itself, in the general theory of modern education, and in the relation of these two factors to each other?

If we pause a moment to consider the history of the dance in different eras of cultural development we may be able to secure a perspective that will illuminate the present status of the dance as an educational medium. In a review of this nature we are forced to use such terms as "primitive," "classical," and "modern" in defining the dance of different ages and peoples. We know, for example, that dancing has a certain place in the culture of primitive peoples; that in what we may call the classical civilizations the dance has an entirely different meaning and character; and we must realize, if we are attuned to the more recent developments in modern life and art, that a still different evaluation of the dance is rapidly emerging. But the terms "primitive," "classical," or "modern" are frankly inadequate in themselves, and can be used only within recognized limits. In this case the terms have absolutely no reference to style or technique in dancing, but only to the spirit characterizing the dance in relation to life.

That is to say, when we speak of the "primitive" dance we refer in this instance to a culture wherein dancing is not an art divorced from daily life. In the primitive dance then, there is no division between artist and layman, professional and audience. The primitive dance is an intrinsic medium of human expression inseparable from the masses and the environment from which it springs.

THE dance in this state has never entirely disappeared. In African and Asiatic tribes, for example, and in the folk dancing of European countries the dance in its primitive state survives. But for most of us the dance of the recent past had an entirely different connotation. The dance as we knew it had become a beautiful, intricate, minor art serving as a pleasant diversion and as light en-
intertainment. Perhaps inaccurately, we call it the "classical" period—chiefly because the delicate, unreal artifices of the classic ballet most completely epitomize its spirit.

The ballet in its inception was, of course, a product of its period, and a legitimate expression of its time. But in its evolution, the ballet strayed into the bypaths of technical virtuosity, and was prolonged long after it had ceased to have a bearing on contemporary life. The dance in this sense was purely professional in character. On one side of the footlights were the glittering ballerinas who had devoted years to arduous technical training and artistic discipline, and in the pit and stalls were the lookers-on, enthralled and agape, but completely untutored in the intricacies, and even frequently in the meaning, of the ballets they applauded. In a word, the "classical" dance became an artistic but out-moded by-product of life rather than a fundamental concept in the pattern of contemporary life; ornamental rather than organic, and individual rather than communal in inspiration and expression.

Obviously dancing of this character had no part in the education of the layman. In the first place, its technical basis was so divorced from the natural movements of daily life that it was necessary to spend years acquiring a sufficient technical mastery for the expression of ideas and emotions. In the second place, the classical ballet did not spring so directly from the universal need for emotional expression, but rather from a love of form for form's sake and a virtuoso devotion to elaboration of detail and pure ornament. This does not mean that the classical ballet was artistically invalid or false, but only that it is an expression of a period and a culture diametrically opposed to modern civilization. It is of course possible to create artistically without regard for the present, but it is not until an art—or, for that matter, a science or handicraft—becomes accessory to better living, until it is meaningful and important to the layman of its era, as well as to the professional, that it merits a niche in the halls of general education.

The dance today has come to have this significance. With the birth of the "natural" dance, educators recognized the human body as a medium for expression which did not require the long and arduous training previously demanded of the dancer. In other words, it became possible for the amateur, the layman, to enter a field previously limited to professionals. And not only did a change in the technical basis of the dance occasion its inclusion in educational programs, but the change in spirit of the dance was an even more fundamental factor in this development. The theory and practice of art today is based on a consciously intimate relationship between life and art; between the artist and the inarticulate masses from whose depths and for whose fulfillment he creates. Here we find the elements of the primitive

German girls engaged in a "Motion Choir" performance, a form of spontaneous mass dancing developed by Mary Wigman, as seen in her famous Dresden school whose only American counterpart is situated in New York, under Miss Wigman's leadership and a faculty imported from Dresden.
and the purely professional classicists united in a new philosophy of art that includes both the release and fulfillment of the layman, and the specialization and finesse of the artist. And with this new spirit there is arising an entirely new class of creators that marks also a return to the universal creation of primitive culture. The educational significance of this development is extremely important.

Primitive man found in every phase of his existence some active outlet for his emotions and creative impulses. But we are all aware of how the complexities—even the very facilities of modern life have served to hamper and often to destroy the innate desire to make things, to express spontaneously and directly our feelings and impressions. And this constriction in expression, and its consequent deadening of sensitivity to external impressions and inner impulses, have at last been recognized as psychologically unsound, and detrimental to the free development of the individual. In an effort to combat this, and to reinstate some of the healthier, emotional habits of primitive peoples, progressive educators everywhere are advocating instruction in some branch of art as a necessary element in every educational program. The purpose is not, of course, to develop a race of artists, but rather to give to everyone some medium through which his emotional impulses and impressions can find release in creation. The dance is particularly suited to this development of freedom of expression since it employs as its medium the human body itself—a medium available to all, and needing only deliverance from bodily inhibitions and habitual movements to sound all the tones and variations of human feelings and desires.

It is the realization of this problem, and an intense belief in the promise of the dance in the daily life of each of us that has prompted Mary Wigman to dedicate her art to the layman as well as to the artist of today and the future. Wherever there is the desire to deepen and broaden the experiences of being, wherever there is a search for a gateway to emotional release and freedom, there we can bring the promise and the fulfillment of the living dance.

Mary Wigman herself and her teachers and co-workers believe in this promise. But how can it be, how has it been consummated in reality? In Germany, the dance has already liberated great numbers of office workers, factory workers, and housewives from the monotony and sterility of their narrow daily tasks. In America, it seems more likely that this liberation will begin in the schools and colleges before it reaches the working classes. But in each case the potentialities and aims are similar. In each case we ask that the dance reveal itself as a means of counterbalance against the narrow limits of daily physical and mental habits, and that it be the medium through which the individual and the group may achieve a new freedom in expression.

If this is the goal of the dance in education—and I believe that this goal is in reality the ideal of those educators who would use the dance in an educational program—then the method of the dance must conform to and fulfill this goal. The field of physical education was perhaps the first in America to recognize the educational value of the dance. But we must not be misled by this to limit the dance to the field of physical education alone. Hygienically and physically, rhythmic exercise has certain advantages and values that are lacking in purely gymnastic training. But the dance is not only a medium for physical education, but also a medium for education in a much broader sense. The
The special value of the dance in education is in the very fact that it provides a simultaneous development of the physical and creative faculties of the student. The dance in this sense is unique in physical training and in what we may call cultural development. To deny this possibility is to forfeit the very qualities that make the dance educationally of special value. If we do not realize the full scope of the dance in education, we have been false to the ideals of the dance and to ourselves as well.

Actually, what is the process by which this promise can be realized? The method to the dance as it is conceived by Mary Wigman can be divided theoretically into two composite parts: the actual physical training of the body and the creative development of the individual. In practice these two elements must not, and cannot, properly, be isolated. They must be present together from the beginning and fuse inevitably into a harmonic whole. But for analysis, it will be necessary to speak first of one, and then of the other, of these two phases of training.

The physical approach to the dance of Mary Wigman is through natural movements developed in relation to the physical world in which the dancer must move. It is not a "system" of exercises applicable like a formula on all occasions, but a method of approach to the liberations of the body for freedom in movement. The sequence, proportion, and direction of this physical training vary with the needs of the individual pupil and the group. The medium, which we call "dance-gymnastics," is based on a knowledge of the structure and function of the human body and its relation to time, space, and energy.

We know, for example, that the body functions in movement through the aid of the joints, the muscles, and the organs of respiration. Actually, of course, the entire metabolism of the body is concerned in all physical and emotional activity, but for our immediate purposes an understanding of the nature and possibilities of these three elements is sufficient.

For the amateur and the professional, then, the initial approach is through the dance-gymnastic. In this we include the elementary body training in relaxation, tension, and swing. As the body becomes more and more pliable in function, we progress to movement in space, which introduces endless subtleties and difficulties. We come also to a consideration of the element of time, and specifically to (Continued on page 60)

A choric study of Wigman School pupils in a movement of "relaxation."
Hot Lunch for Children
(Continued from page 28)

Two cents was found to be adequate and so the practice continued throughout the year. A school treasurer was appointed and acted as cashier each day, making a report each day to the school bookkeeper. The bookkeeper's duties assumed major importance. He had to check on the kind, amount, and cost of all food and equipment. In addition he kept a record of all visitors, all donations, and the number served each day. Donations not only consisted of food but took the form of clothes and articles for needy children. The boy selected was very accurate and careful to account for every item that came into his possession. The book was neat and fairly well arranged. The summary of his figures are shown as follows:

Receipts.
3472 servings @ 2c $69.44
Donations 14.20
Total $83.64

Expenditures.
Food $68.50
Equipment 7.55
Fuel 6.59
Labor 1.00
Total $83.64

Number servings and cost.
Servings paid for 3,472
Free servings 1,053
Average number per day 4,525
Average cost per serving 1.8 cents

<table>
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<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>NUMBER SERVED</th>
<th>MENU</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mon. Feb. 1</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Rice and milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues. Feb. 2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Baked beans and chocolate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed. Feb. 3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Vegetable soup and milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thur. Feb. 4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Baked macaroni and chocolate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri. Feb. 5</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Baked salmon and milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon. Feb. 8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Beans and milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues. Feb. 9</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Escaloped potatoes and milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed. Feb. 10</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Baked macaroni and milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thur. Feb. 11</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Chocolate and milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri. Feb. 12</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Spanish rice and milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon. Feb. 15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Beans and milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues. Feb. 16</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Beans, escaloped potatoes, and milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed. Feb. 17</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Shelled macaroni and milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thur. Feb. 18</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Chocolate and milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri. Feb. 19</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Cookies, custard and milk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon. Feb. 22</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Chocolate and milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues. Feb. 23</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Vegetable soup and milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed. Feb. 24</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Macaroni and cheese-milk</td>
</tr>
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<td>Thur. Feb. 25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Vegetable soup and milk</td>
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<td>Fri. Feb. 26</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Noodle soup and milk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon. Feb. 29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Spinach soup and milk</td>
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</table>

The above figures are fairly accurate. In one or two instances chicken soup was furnished by a loyal patron, and was not included in the total cost. Such contributions would not exceed two dollars and the bookkeeper did not know how to evaluate the same. If all meals or servings had been paid for at the rate of two cents each, a total of $90.50 would have been handled, and a profit of $6.86 been realized. This project was not, however, started as a commercial enterprise, and the teachers and pupils were well satisfied when they realized that it had been self-supporting and that many hungry mouths had been fed.

When the increase in weight and height had been tabulated toward spring the children were delighted to find that 358 pounds of avoirdupois had been acquired in less than six months at an average increase of slightly over seven pounds per pupil. Better still, one underweight girl had gained twelve pounds, and another, nine pounds.

Perhaps no activity of any other sort could have created better social values. Manners of eating were cultivated, speech courtesies were acquired, and consciousness of the welfare of others was another of the social virtues developed. Such values are important but very hard to measure. While a few difficulties were encountered, the activity as a whole was a success.

Wigman Dance Principles
(Continued from page 10)

movement in dance rhythm. The dance, we learn, has its own laws of space and of rhythm that are not identical with geometric or musical formulae and which, though it may use them, must not be bound down or limited to these formulae.

We learn further that movement is more than mere function, that it can be an emotional and physical state as well. That is to say, swing, which is based functionally on the rotation of joints and the force of gravity on a relaxed arm, for example, can transcend this simple pendulum swing and become a state of movement produced by an inner experience of swinging. This state of swinging may be compared in some respects with the endless, organic movement of the particles of water in the ocean. Like the state of vibration—similar to the constant pulsation of the span of a bridge under the ebb and flow of traffic—this inner swinging will produce in the dancer a flow of instinctive, almost unconscious, motion that is the essence of all dynamic movement.

Perhaps these suggestions of dance experiences and possibilities will give you some idea of the vast field of physical movement and sensation to be traversed by the student of the dance. Naturally, the professional can, and must, give the time and devotion necessary to explore this field as widely as his capabilities permit. But the capabilities and the interest of the professional and the amateur are very different in this respect. For the amateur, technique is only a medium for the deliverance of the body, and through the free body, of the spirit itself. Subtleties and complexities that are a fascinating challenge to the professional, are not important to her—nor are they necessary.

This means, pedagogically speaking, that it is necessary to teach the lay dancer only those fundamentals of dance technique that she requires in the expression...
of her desires and ideas. Technique is a necessary factor in any medium of expression, but technique beyond the creative need of the individual serves only to confuse her expression and to dull her enthusiasms. We must be careful, however, to be ready to give to the exceptional or unusual individual any further training and encouragement that she may require. We must remember that the duty and the privilege of the teacher is in her knowledge of what doors to open, and at what time, and how, they can best be disclosed.

But it is not adequate to isolate the physical and functional advantages of dance gymnastics. We believe that the dance has a purpose in life too great to be fulfilled by its physical aspects alone. With the gradual freeing of the body from the constraints of habitual movement there should come at the same time a gradual liberation of restricted mental and emotional habits. With increased experience in movement there must come a widening of horizons in the inner life of the student. Even the simplest functional exercise, for example, if it is presented as a beginning rather than as an end in itself, possesses almost unbelievable possibilities for individual variation and expression. Exercises taught in this way are the foundation for all subsequent creative development.

From this elemental beginning the emotional experience and expression of the individual is developed further through solo and group improvisation. Improvisation, which is the spontaneous reaction in movement to suggestion through music, atmosphere, or idea, is used by the Wigman teacher as an index to the possibilities and problems of the individual pupil. This insight is a guide to teaching, and at the same time an incentive to the student to face and overcome her difficulties, and to realize a free natural expression for her personal ideas.

But solo improvisation is not the only medium of developing and encouraging sensitivity to external and inner impressions and emotions. In addition, we can give to the student a knowledge of the give and take necessary in group or mass dancing; of the differences in dynamics of movement and mood that distinguish mass dancing from solo dancing. And as an educational medium in the broadest sense of the term, this experience in social consciousness is fully as important.

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Social Leadership

I think of two illustrations of the thing I am trying to explain to you; two people who gave more to their communities in actual service than falls within the opportunities of most of us.

The first was a woman principal of a school in a poorer district of one of our large cities. Through her teaching she became so interested in the people in her school district that she moved her home to this quarter of the city and lived among them. She became the friend of all in the district and gave freely of herself and her money in helping to relieve their poverty and distress. I have no doubt that she herself received considerable satisfaction and pleasure from her activities—possibly this was her hobby or her leisure-time activity—and that she was much happier for having done it. When she died, the ovation which these people gave her might have been for someone of much greater eminence and fame.

The other illustration is that of a young man who was a teacher in a very small town in one of the rural districts of our state. I rather expect that when his daily tasks were over he had to look around sharply for something with which to occupy himself. He probably found the children of the town in much the same position. So the first thing he did was to organize a club of boys which met two evenings a week. He obtained the use of the schoolhouse for their meetings. Within a year or two this one club grew into several, always at the request of another group of children who envied the good times of their brothers or sisters. As the older group graduated to high school in a nearby town, they still wanted to keep up their club meetings at home. When I visited this particular school, the building was being occupied the first four evenings of the week for regular club meetings, while Friday evening was saved for special parties of the children and adults. The children were busy and happy and the parents appreciated it. I would be willing to say that the children of that community would go forth in the world better equipped in every way than if their spare hours in youth had been spent on the street corner.

I would like to mention the strategic place I believe we hold in relation to social dancing. No doubt you have often heard a man or woman say, "I wish that I had learned dancing when I was younger. I would give anything to be able to dance." There will probably always be some boys and girls who will not go to dancing school when they are young. We are the logical people to teach it in the schools so that all may have an equal opportunity. We cannot do a thorough piece of work in teaching leisure-time activities unless we include one of the most popular of these for all ages—social dancing.

All teachers are growing more and more to think of their work in terms of its social meaning, and of their