

An Introduction to Community Dance Practice

Edited by Diane Amans, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008

Age and Dancing: Older People and Community Dance Practice

Edited by Diane Amans, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013

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Both of Amans' books which will be reviewed here discuss community dance practice. But first, what does community dance mean? It is a dance profession and a dance sector which is based on the notion that participatory dance is a useful and accessible activity for many different populations, and that it is an activity which has myriad social and health benefits. The first community dance training programme was set in London, Laban School, about 40 years ago, and since then there have been many academic as well as non-academic training programs in Europe and America.

'An Introduction to Community Dance' is the first text book to focus on its subject, and as such, it defines values and characteristics and it identifies various contexts of the field. The many writers of the book introduce theoretical discussions on subjects such as the myth of a 'real' dance (chapter 9) and the challenge of trying to define community dance without marginalising amateurs as second rate to professional dancers (chapter 2). Furthermore, the book presents case studies and interviews of artists and participants which report on their ways of coping with issues such as stereotypes of each age group (chapter 3) and expectations from dancers with different abilities (chapter 5).

Apart from the theoretical sections, the book 'An Introduction to Community Dance' is also a practical

guide which includes lesson plans, music play lists, evaluation forms and more tools which are highly applicable in dance projects for different needs. Among the populations that are mentioned in the book, there are inter-generation groups, people with special needs, older people, children in risk and youth.

The main notion on which community dance practice is based on is that dance is a birth-right and the potential of every person. But in the reality of modern Western society, this basic human ability is often undervalued and unavailable. The writers in the book present community dance practice as an opportunity for correcting this unbalanced situation by bringing dance back into our daily life.

'An Introduction to Community Dance Practice' is written for people who are interested in dance – whether they are teachers, therapists, researchers, dancers or dance lovers – and as such it can be useful for dance- therapists and future dance-therapists who would like to expand their therapeutic 'tool box'. Furthermore, it seems important that psychotherapists in general and specifically arts- therapists become familiar with the theory and practice of community dance, which handles subjects that are relevant for therapists: such as self- image, sense of belonging and sense of ability. Therefore, the book is an opportunity for therapists to re-think about familiar subjects in a

new, non-therapy way, which is different from the way they might be used to. Moreover, being familiar with community dance practice is an invitation for anyone, including non-dance therapists, to be reminded of the basic and ordinary ability to experience in firsthand the healing potential which is gained in simple movement.

The second book I chose to review – '**Age and Dancing: Older People and Community Dance Practice**' – also belongs to the community dance approach but focuses on old age. Amans edited this book as well, and she presents the book as a companion to her first book 'An Introduction to Community Dance'. The context of the book is recent years' demographic changes, older age population is on an increase and there is more awareness to the importance of active ageing. As a result, there is a growing need for knowledge and resources that will support initiatives in this developing field of dance for older adults.

Like in 'An Introduction to Community Dance', 'Age and Dancing: Older People and Community Dance Practice' also presents a wide frame of both theoretical and practical aspects of the field, side by side: For

example, the theoretical debate on the terminology we use to describe old age (chapter 1), a comparison between ageing in different cultures (chapters 2-4) and physiological knowledge about the medical conditions that may affect older people (chapters 9-10). On the other hand, there are practical lesson plans and choreography ideas that are designed to suit different abilities and common diseases such as Parkinson's disease and dementia (chapters 11-12), case studies that illustrate challenges that dance leaders for older age often face, such as the wish to create a playful environment for the participants but the danger of being seen as patronising (chapter 14) or the subject of touch in movement groups (chapter 8).

This special book is mainly intended for dance practitioners but can be beneficial to anyone working with older adults who wishes to extend their therapy possibilities with this population. I hope that these important books will not only help in explaining what community dance is, but will also assist in bringing dance back to the everyday life of all of us, and especially to the everyday life of those who are mostly in need of it.