

ASKING NEW QUESTIONS: GENDER INEQUITIES IN DANCE EDUCATION

Doug Risner, PhD, MFA
Wayne State University
drisner@wayne.edu

TAKEAWAY ONE: There is no one fixed, uniform male dancer or male student of dance. Taken together, research over the past two decades clearly shows us this. Boys and males are diverse, dance for different reasons, and study a wide range dance genres, forms and styles.

TAKEAWAY TWO: Learn more about males in dance by learning from the males in our own programs, schools, and studios. The experiences of these boys and young men are likely your most effective way to informally research why boys dance in your particular setting and location. By doing some informal research each year, everyone can learn a tremendous amount from their male students---why they dance, what dance means in their lives, and why they continue dancing. Share what you find out about males in dance in a newsletter, blog, a conference presentation, or a journal article in *Dance Education in Practice* or *Journal of Dance Education*.

TAKEAWAY THREE: Start asking new questions about gender equity. We have been asking the same “how do we attract more boys to dance” questions for over 40 years. In today’s world of inclusion and diversity commitments, we can collectively turn the page on this part of dance education history. The dance field needs to hear and pursue new questions with discussions rich in fresh lines of inquiry about all genders and dance.

Some questions to get everyone started might be:

- How does my own teaching promote gender equity for both boys and girls?
- What can I learn about gender inequities from both boys and girls in my school, studio, or program? Current students are our greatest resources.
- How does my program, studio, or school address gender equity and fairness in curriculum, policy, and pedagogy?
- How do “millennial” moms, dads, and guardians encourage or discourage their child’s dancing? What can engaged parents, guardians and caregivers do to support gender equity initiatives? How can they become involved with my program, school or studio to promote boys and young males participation in dance?
- Knowing that adolescent boys and young males report the most significant persons supporting their dancing is their favorite dance teacher, followed by their dance school director, and then their mother, how can you develop or supplement your role in supporting boys dancing?

I also encourage everyone to think about creating a *Culture of Gender Equity in Dance Education* and what it might look like. Here are some starting questions:

- How is a Cultural of Gender Equity cultivated and nurtured in my classroom, studio, school or program?
- Who are important stakeholders, partners, and collaborators in a gender equitable culture?
- How does my own informal research contribute to building a Culture of Gender Equity? With whom might I partner within my school, program and community?
- What professional contacts and relationships can I develop in my community?

Please take every opportunity you can to advance gender equity and fairness in dance education.