

STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Virginia Freeman Dupont

My teaching philosophy is shaped by the belief that good technique is a foundation for the development of a great artist and that this process is important to the growth, humanity, and social consciousness of the individual. My richest source of information comes from my own body, experience, and knowledge. As a choreographer, performer, and lifelong student of dance practice and theory, I try to impart any wisdom gained from my own past experience as well as the issues that I may be currently exploring. I believe that learning occurs through practice and the process of moving from practice to performance. I am concerned that course members understand the emphasis on process rather than product and quality rather than quantity that is important to my courses. Through active learner-centered teaching, I strive to provide myself as a role model to learn from and the classroom as a safe environment to encourage a sense of community and risk taking.

My teaching area is in dance technique. While the majority of my teaching has been in ballet and modern dance, my own experience as a dancer, choreographer, and teacher encompasses many other styles. Therefore, my philosophy for teaching dance technique is style inclusive. I see dance as a metaphor for religion (a religion with the positive benefits of commitment, individual fulfillment, and belonging, but without the negative of hierarchy.....) and my role, as a teacher of dance, is similar to that of a missionary. It is my job to teach the fundamentals of this metaphoric religion, to help followers (students) use those fundamentals to make their own choices and deepen their understanding of themselves, to inspire a love for dance that students feel compelled to share with others. Therefore, I hope to create a sense that the technique class is a ritual to be treasured and shared.

In order to facilitate student motivation, I try to make myself available in and out of the classroom. In the classroom I strive to be an energetic role model and mentor that stimulates and excites students about the material at hand through demonstration and appropriate personal reflection. Out of the classroom I provide opportunities for individual conferences or meetings with students to discuss any ideas, issues, concerns, or questions they may have and am available as a source of support. To encourage the sharing of ideas it is important to me that students not view me as an authority, but rather as a source to be examined. It is my wish that through the sharing of my experiences and knowledge students can pick and choose what works for them

and begin to think about their own values and future plans. Further motivation is facilitated through communication about expectations and professionalism. It is important to me that I am clear from the first day of class that I have high expectations for each student to attend class regularly, dress appropriately, and perform well. I encourage hard work and best effort through positive reinforcement and praise.

Because I am a choreographer, the physical content of my courses is based on my personal movement explorations. Each class includes a warm-up, exercises, and combinations that focus on student goals of basic alignment, turnout, strength, stamina, flexibility, control, balance, and sequencing in order to safely prepare the body for more complex and/or vigorous combinations. My choreography is the source for these more complex combinations that encourage further student goals and artistic expression in musicality, spatial awareness, quality, dynamics, and presence.

It is important to me that course members learn dance theory in conjunction with technique in order to facilitate the growth of the individual as well as the artist. Cultural, historical, and social perspectives are woven into the course work in order to provide a framework that encourages critical thinking. Course members supplement their dancing with readings, writing (such as maintaining a dance notebook) as well as class discussions, observations, and collaborative work.

Through collaborative work a sense of community, cooperation, and the sharing and responding to of ideas are developed. This environment encourages students to feel accepted, safe to explore, experiment, and question their art form, and free to push beyond their comfort zones. In addition, it serves to respect the diverse ways in which students learn -- pushing them to learn in new ways and providing them with different opportunities with which to shine. It is my hope that students walk away from my class with lifelong learning goals of professionalism, commitment, and a sense of personal as well as social responsibility.

I keep myself mobile in class in order to see all students from all perspectives, give feedback through touch and verbal cues, encourage community and equality, and engage active learning in most, if not all, of the students. Individual feedback is also provided through private conferences and opportunities are given for peer and self assessment. In addition to providing general and individual feedback to the students, I formally evaluate their work in the form of a written assessment and/or conference four times throughout the dance year.

Learning is a process and my commitment to teaching is synonymous with my commitment to being a lifelong learner. I teach what I have learned from my past experiences and from my ongoing choreographic and performance research. Being a

good mentor and role model is an important aspect of my teaching and it is my fondest wish that students find in my class a place to study, to grow, to discover, and to excel.

© Virginia Freeman Dupont 2003