

Boys Need Dance: A Balance of Strength and Grace

By Anne Green Gilbert, Founder and Director of Creative Dance Center



Looking though the current registrations I am surprised by the small number of boys registered at the Creative Dance Center. You probably are surprised that I am surprised because everyone in America knows that boys don't dance! However, CDC has always had a high proportion of boys in classes because, in fact, boys LOVE dance – especially the way we teach it at CDC. I was so hopeful that in the new millennium we would witness a change of attitude about men and dance – after all we are a much more global society and men in other cultures do dance!

Parents sometimes ask me if I would teach a Just Boys class which might encourage more boys to discover the benefits of dancing. But doesn't that discourage the important social aspects of boys and girls learning and collaborating together? Should we continue to alienate and divide the sexes? Besides, I would teach a Just Boys class exactly as I would teach a coed class. Both boys and girls need to explore a variety of movements: smooth and sharp, slow and

fast, strong and light. They need to feel the differences between these movements, to reflect on those feelings, and to relate those feelings to real life experiences. Why do we expect girls to be graceful and boys to be strong? Shouldn't both girls and boys have strength and grace?! Aren't both these traits necessary for a balanced human being?

William Pollack in his book, *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myth of Boyhood*, discusses the problem we have in America of not allowing our boys to cry, to show tender feelings or discuss emotions. These boys feel alienated from society and are unable to share their problems with others which leads to confusion, anger, and often violence. Daniel Goleman in his book, *Emotional Intelligence*, talks about the importance of understanding and using our often ignored emotional intelligence. Current brain research shows that "the affective side of learning is the critical interplay between how we feel, act, and think. There is no separation of mind and emotions; emotions, thinking, and learning are all linked." (Jensen 1998). Emotion and reason are not opposites. While our logical side tells us to "set a goal", it is our emotional side that gives us the passion to achieve that goal. When children explore a wide variety of movement concepts and reflect upon them, they develop a healthy sense of self.

One of my student's mothers was telling me a story about her daughter's soccer practice. The coach was trying to describe some complicated plays when finally my student said, "Oh! You mean we move through the general space in a curvy pathway and then we hold our position in self space." The coach sort of looked at her and said, "Yeah,

I guess that's right." Whereupon all the little girls executed the play correctly. My student had a movement vocabulary learned in dance class that all the children readily understood. She also has lots of practice moving her body in many different ways that complement and reinforce her soccer skills. She is already a step ahead of all the boys who haven't danced! Taking appropriate creative dance classes only enhances all the other physical activities one does in life.

If you look at the great sports stars such as Michael Jordan, Ken Griffey, Jr., and John Elway, you will see that they use all the movement concepts we teach at CDC in their sports. These three men are great creative dancers. They have gone way beyond their sports training into the realm of improvisation and choreography using levels, pathways, energy, and rhythm to outsmart their opponents. Their ability to use all the movement concepts in creative ways has enabled them to shine in their chosen profession.

Whenever Kaleidoscope Dance Company performs in public schools, many boys ask how they can join the company. Unfortunately, most of these boys' parents will not allow them to dance. What many parents of boys do not realize is that many boys want and need an alternative to high-pressure competitive sports. When a person is under stressful situations the brain releases excessive amounts of a chemical called cortisol. This chemical damages brain cells. However, when a person moves with

ease and joy, the brain releases serotonin, a chemical that produces a feeling of well being and self-confidence!

On a personal note, my two sons danced from birth on. They took classes at CDC, performed with Kaleidoscope and continue to dance today. They also were successful at playing baseball and basketball and continue to enjoy playing sports. They are both caring, loving men who have healthy relationships because they **can** share their feelings!

Exploring movement concepts, creating dances, and working collaboratively with a diverse group of people has a very humanizing effect on our students. Creative dance brings balance to a child's life and schedule. It doesn't matter whether that child is a boy or a girl. The very positive effects are the same! How do you want your child to grow up?



Goleman, D. (1995) *Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books

Jensen, E. (1998) *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*. Virginia: ASCD

Pollack, W (1998) *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myth of Boyhood*. New York: Random House

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