



## Practical Resources for Dance Educators! NDEO Priorities for Dance Education: Our Call to Action

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To cite this article: Susan Gingrasso (2017) Practical Resources for Dance Educators! NDEO Priorities for Dance Education: Our Call to Action, Dance Education in Practice, 3:1, 6-11, DOI: [10.1080/23734833.2017.1269556](https://doi.org/10.1080/23734833.2017.1269556)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23734833.2017.1269556>



Published online: 21 Feb 2017.



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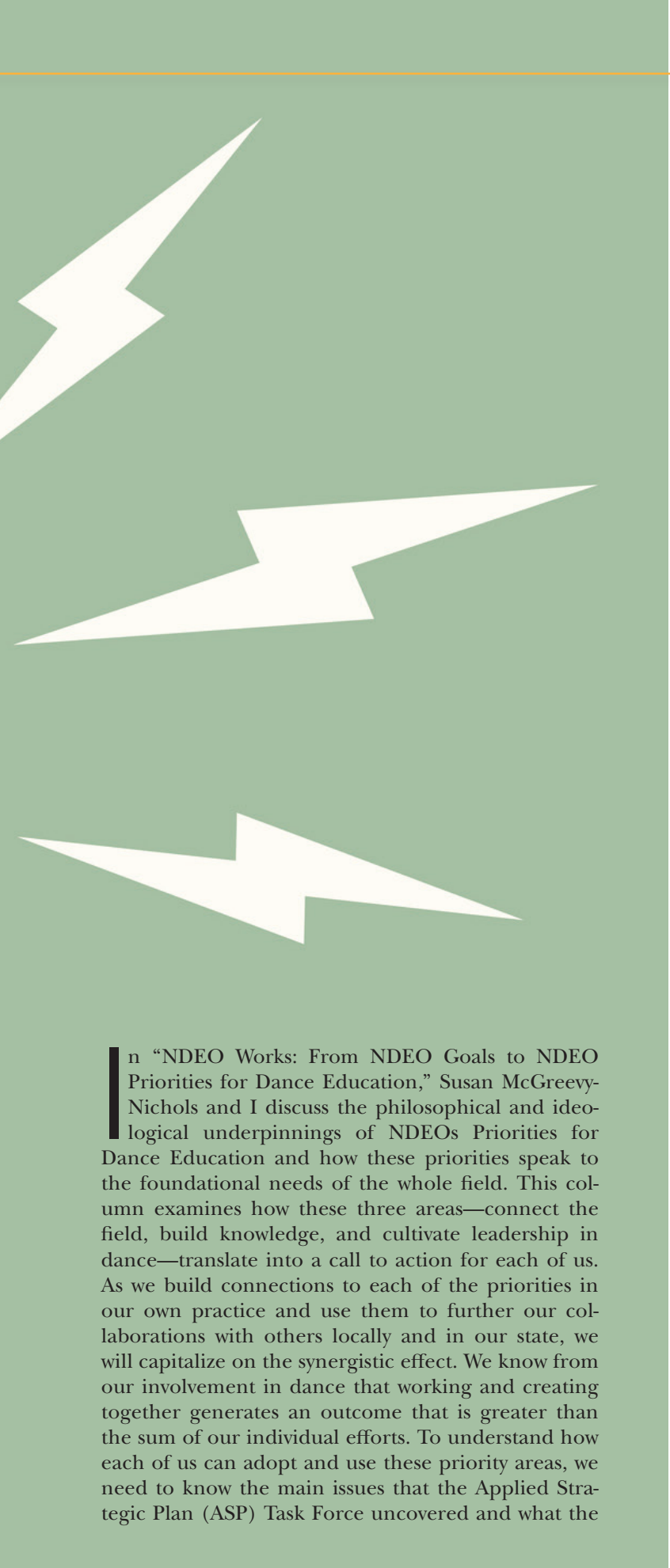
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# Practical Resources for Dance Educators!

## *NDEO Priorities for Dance Education:*

*OUR CALL  
TO  
ACTION*





August retreat subgroup ultimately used to form this field-wide framework for planning.

## THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM INFORMATION GATHERING

The ASP retreat subgroup consisted of Jane Bonbright, Patricia Cohen, Frederick Curry, Suzie Henneman, and Susan McGreevy-Nichols. ASP co-chair Rick Southerland and I planned and moderated the 2.5-day retreat. We used the information gathered by the whole Task Force from December 2015 to May 2016 along with essential statistics about NDEO beautifully organized and presented by Managing Director, Melissa Greenblatt. Our discussions were also informed by the National Education Association's *Defining Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity* ([www.artEquity.org](http://www.artEquity.org)), NDEOs *Evidence: A Report on the Impact of Dance in the K-12 Setting* ([NDEO.org/evidence](http://NDEO.org/evidence)), the Dance 2050: The Future of Higher Education ([http://www.ndeo.org/content.aspx?page\\_id=22&club\\_id=893257&module\\_id=172476](http://www.ndeo.org/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=893257&module_id=172476)), and Watson's "Values-Based Leadership: How Organizations Work" (<http://www.okstate.edu/ceat/msetm/courses/etm5111/CourseMaterials/Values-Based%20Leadership.doc>). On the second day, we uncovered important information about the field through a SWOT analysis. Listing and discussing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats from the perspective of the entire field enabled us to group our previously gathered information and resources into one of the three areas: connect the field, build knowledge, and cultivate leadership in dance. Refer to Figure 1, NDEO's Strategic Agenda Planning Cycle, to see how we envisioned the process. Before I present themes from our retreat for each of the priority areas, I want to convey that we recognize the quality and quantity of initiatives and member services NDEO has developed and implemented since 1998. We know that NDEO "lives" in two worlds. In the "member service" part of itself, NDEO has developed innovative services that connect us across geographies, interests, and sectors. As the "national voice for dance education" part of itself, our Executive Director, Policy and Advisory Boards, staff, state affiliate boards, and many individual constituents have forged amazing relationships with other arts education organizations, policymakers, and one another, and through our 16 state affiliates and our growing number of NHSDA Junior, Senior and Collegiate chapters, which totaled 555 in August. Everything that NDEO does in these two worlds enhances the value of our practices.

In "NDEO Works: From NDEO Goals to NDEO Priorities for Dance Education," Susan McGreevy-Nichols and I discuss the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of NDEO's Priorities for Dance Education and how these priorities speak to the foundational needs of the whole field. This column examines how these three areas—connect the field, build knowledge, and cultivate leadership in dance—translate into a call to action for each of us. As we build connections to each of the priorities in our own practice and use them to further our collaborations with others locally and in our state, we will capitalize on the synergistic effect. We know from our involvement in dance that working and creating together generates an outcome that is greater than the sum of our individual efforts. To understand how each of us can adopt and use these priority areas, we need to know the main issues that the Applied Strategic Plan (ASP) Task Force uncovered and what the



**Figure 1.** NDEO's Strategic Agenda Planning Cycle.

### Themes That Inform Priority 1: Connect the Field

- ◆ *The “who” of dance education.* Dance artists and educators are passionate, dedicated, and resourceful; they act as standard bearers for the art form. They come from a wide range of cultures, backgrounds, dance genres and styles, and abilities. Our membership needs to reflect this range as well as the social and cultural diversities in our country so we can connect with and meaningfully support all dance educators.
- ◆ *The “where” of dance education.* We know that dance education programs tend to cluster in urban areas; we have less information about those that exist in rural areas. We also know that programs exist to serve a variety of needs in ways we might not know about and have yet to identify. If we want to increase the capacity of the field, then we will need to find and connect with programs outside of our own cultures and geographies.

- ◆ *Our national and international span.* NDEO was formed with the concerns of a national membership in mind. However, our vibrant and growing international membership provides opportunities to further the sharing of discoveries, practices, and concerns. Connecting dance artists and educators and programs within our own hemisphere or across the globe would benefit us all.
- ◆ *Assumptions about dance education and dance educators.* Dance and dance artists and educators are saddled with ingrained and culturally reinforced assumptions and stereotypes. Arts education in general and dance education specifically suffers from a lack of political, economic, and social support.

### Themes That Inform Priority 2: Build Knowledge

- ◆ *Discipline-specific knowledge supports growth in the whole field.* Dance artists and educators need content knowl-

edge, pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge about the cultural norms of the students and clientele with whom they work. Although NDEO offers many ways to share this knowledge at conference, through the forums, special interest groups (SIGs), and the two professional journals, *Dance Education in Practice* and *Journal of Dance Education*, we need to be able to more readily share knowledge we generate in our practices with one another.

- ◆ *Knowledge needs in the field.* The range of programs and constituencies in the field has overlapping and different knowledge needs. Whereas we have considerable information about content and pedagogical knowledge in some sectors, we have less in other sectors, particularly from cultures and geographies we have yet to reach. Meeting the range of knowledge across all sectors becomes essential to expand and connect the field.
- ◆ *Insufficient data.* The field suffers from a lack of research data, particularly quantitative studies, as well as research-based information we can bring into our own practices. Although we “know” and experience many of the benefits of dance education in our own practice, we need the data to support our practices and to present in meaningful ways to the public.
- ◆ *Promote model and thriving programs across all sectors.* Thriving model dance education programs exist in many places: private studios, community centers, public and private Pre-K–12 schools, postsecondary professional and academic institutions, performing arts organization outreach, eldercare facilities, and more. We have much to learn from each of them about program development, growth, and sustainment.

### Themes That Inform Priority 3: Cultivate Leadership in Dance

- ◆ *From “other” to leader through dance.* As dance educators, we are a culture of “others.” We have to deal with being the outsider constantly turning our minuses into plusses. Remember Bob Fosse, who turned his “lacks” into a sought after and widely imitated style. How do we use our “otherness” to our advantage, transforming our place on the fringe into a powerhouse of leadership locally, at the state level, and nationally?
- ◆ *Dance educators are leaders.* We have amazing leadership, organizational, administrative, and managerial abilities. We have to be exceptional communicators and behavior managers. We cultivate the habits of mind (Costa and Kallick 2016) in ourselves and in those with whom we work. The values we model in and through dance provide a “motivational approach to leadership that inspires people to do their best for the common good” (Watson 2016). We are also quite humble and rarely value all that we do and the extent of our reach through our practice. It is the “air we breathe” so to

speak, that makes owning and capitalizing all of the different facets of our leadership abilities a bit tricky. We each need to practice and own our leadership skills and capabilities.

- ◆ *Leaders come only from certain sectors.* We have a perceptual issue that state and national leaders in our field come from particular sectors. Many NDEO leaders have come from postsecondary institutions, as faculty are encouraged or required to do service work in state and national organizations. To shift that dynamic, NDEO has provided and will continue to cultivate ways to become involved in service opportunities that bring constituents from different sectors together for a limited term project. We need a range of opportunities nationally, at the state level, and locally to grow our leadership base.

## MAKING THE PRIORITIES COME ALIVE

### Connect the Field

The overview of the current issue of the California Dance Education Association (CDEA) newsletter asserts, “There is power in connection. In seeing one another. In hearing each other’s stories. CDEA thinks we should build connections now more than ever before ... we share this information so that it can connect all our membership in our common goals and aspirations” (CDEA 2016, 1). Connecting the field is in the air and helps reduce the feeling of isolation that many experience. Here are my suggestions along with ideas that Susan McGreevy-Nichols has presented at state affiliate conferences, and offered in a 2015 NDEO Works column for the *Journal of Dance Education*.

- ◆ Bring a range of dance programs together to create a concert or a festival for surrounding communities.
- ◆ Create and present an intergenerational dance project for the city or town during an arts event.
- ◆ Reach out to dance educators whose work originates from cultures and abilities other than your own to share common ground.
- ◆ “Facilitate a culture of respect among dance professionals across practice areas.”
- ◆ “Develop mechanisms for sharing dance experiences and expertise within and across teaching and learning environments.”
- ◆ “Encourage intergenerational teaching and learning in dance.”
- ◆ “Cultivate and maintain relationships with potential partners in the field” (McGreevy-Nichols, 2016).
- ◆ Join forces with all of the dance programs in the area that have high school juniors and seniors to host a college expo to acquaint and connect high school graduates with postsecondary dance opportunities (McGreevy-Nichols and Dooling 2015).





Rick Southerland and Susan Gingrasso.

## Build Knowledge

In “Why Do We Experience Awe?” Professors Piff and Keltner (2015) asserted that, “awe is the ultimate ‘collective’ emotion, for it motivates people to do things that enhance the greater good” (1). Those “a-ha” moments of revelation that give you goosebumps might occur when you realize something you have discovered, experienced, observed, or finally understood. These moments become the seeds from which we can build knowledge to expand our field. Building, sharing, and using discipline-specific knowledge is, in many ways, the glue that holds our discipline together. Each of us has the capacity to contribute to the knowledge base of our discipline, on which others can build on and expand. Use one or more of these opportunities to share your wealth of experiences and knowledge:

- ◆ “Raise the visibility and credibility of dance as an art form and academic discipline with discrete content,

skills, and knowledge to be learned” (McGreevy-Nichols 2016).

- ◆ Share your discoveries with your students, clients, parents, and others, through postings on the studio walls, an in-house newsletter, a blog, or a website.
- ◆ Collaborate with other dance programs in your community or region to share critical teaching and learning moments.
- ◆ Use the NDEO forums and SIGs to share your ideas, ask questions, and pose problems to solve.
- ◆ Submit articles about your work to your state affiliate to publish in the newsletter or post on its website.
- ◆ Form your realizations into articles to submit to the *Journal of Dance Education* or *Dance Education in Practice*.
- ◆ Invite community leaders, other teachers, city council members, and board of education members to informal showings where you, parents, and students speak about the connections between dance and life.

## Cultivate Leadership in Dance

Cultivating leaders across the generations has enormous potential to push our field forward. In “What Do Arts Leaders Really Need?” John McGuirk summarizes the importance of cultivating leaders from multiple generations. In-depth interviews with California and national arts leaders found that, “Members of younger generations often see leadership as the fostering of a culture of connectedness, collaboration, and change—they believe leadership is rooted in the efforts of many” (1). As dance educators, our leadership values are rooted in developing and valuing our own and our students’ or clients’ capacities and abilities as people and as dancers. Here are a few ways we can expand our reach as leaders through developing leadership potential in those with whom we work.

- ◆ “Recognize, celebrate, and cultivate the diverse leadership across generations and constituencies in your practice, your community, in your state.”
- ◆ “Guide and empower emerging leaders to promote diversity and longevity in the field” (McGreevy-Nichols 2016).
- ◆ Provide multiple service and mentored leadership opportunities for your students.
- ◆ Support students organizing a production team to direct student-choreographed showings or concerts.
- ◆ Begin or further expand a mentorship program for emerging leaders in your own practice and in the community.
- ◆ Share your discoveries to build knowledge about leadership in dance with your colleagues!

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The NDEO Priorities for Dance Education brochure that we distribute during the San Antonio conference rollout will provide us with a public face for our field. We will have a tangible advocacy piece to hand directly to parents, teachers, administrators, patrons, school board members, city council members, and state and national legislators that presents the priorities for our field in everyday language. Use this brochure as a conversation starter for why dance education matters to everyone. Ultimately, the success of any endeavor, and bringing these Priorities for Dance Education to life, depends on our shared responsibility. Although McGreevey and Dooling (2015) were writing about the synergy produced by the National Honor Society for Dance Arts, their words also apply to these priorities. As NDEO members, our “grassroots efforts provide some of the best opportunities to advocate for and advance dance education centered in the arts. As we strive toward our shared vision, honoring the synergy of NDEO and our membership helps us to see beyond our differences and unite in our commitment to making a difference through dance education” (46).

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