



DA:NCE: Educational or Sexualized?

I was 4 years old when I remembered a family tradition during the first night in a new home. If I woke up facing one of the corners of my bedroom, my older siblings told me that it would make the next day especially lucky. Specifically, I'd make lots of new friends at the new school and the new neighborhood (so guess who made sure to face a corner when she woke up?). Kristin, John, Beth and I followed this pattern because our family moved 6 times in my first 12 years, and all along the way, I pestered my mother and father for one thing. I wanted to enroll in dance classes.

I never thought about why. I just knew the longing started at an early age. In fact, during second grade, I created a 'swan dance' to Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake as part of a school program. Finally, perfect timing led my parents to say *yes* to dance class when I was in 6th grade. Inside my heart, the wait had seemed like an eternity but it was worth the dive. The safety, creativity and freedom of dance classes connected my head to my heart and to my body. I was a new creature present to myself in a new way.

Movement class became a happy refuge for my mind, body and spirit. At that time, I didn't know how to articulate the interior experiences that flowed out of me from soul to sole. By the time I was 15 years of age, Jesus had entered my heart, I became a new creature in Christ (2 Cor 5:17), and I felt a call to dance ministry. As the Holy Spirit drew me to realize the power and intimacy behind movement, I began to worship God with all of me activated; faith embodiment within the dance studio became a harbor that channeled healthy choices. That solid foundation flavored my desire to earn a BA in modern dance and a MA in worship with a [spirit-led entrance into church dance ministry](#).

As my faith journey deepened, I understood that as Lord of the Dance, Jesus authored healthy, age-appropriate dance and movement design. It produced a wonderful, positive, environment! On the other hand, journeys can change and unfortunately, they have. In the 21st century, the secular dance culture has morphed into 2 distinct options for children: healthy, educational dance versus unhealthy, sexualized dance.

I first began to notice the distortion in dance almost 20 years ago. A young woman invited me to a university dance concert. I knew her as a little girl and I went to support her. But the concert was troubling. There was a lot of sexualized movement accompanied by a lot of hooting and hollering from the audience during the dance presentations. I bought a ticket for the same event the next year and the objectified choreography was even worse. But at least the participants were adults making adult choices. That all changed when I began to see adult choreography, music, and costumes in some dance studios for children under 12. When I attended dance recitals to support the young dancers in the Christian dance ministry I direct, I began to see more and more sexual movement and less and less creative art.

But let me clarify and remind you that I'm a cheer-leader for movement. I love dance and I'm happy to say that there are lots of healthy dance educators. In fact, I've encouraged my own two granddaughters to enroll in a wonderful dance studio staffed with committed dance educators who engage children with plenty of age-appropriate creativity. On the other hand, I have described unhealthy dance options that twist movement into sexual objectification. That's why I need your help to educate others about the hyper-sexualization of children in dance.

What you can do

I'm inviting you to be part of a newly formed national [DA:NCE](#) (dance awareness: no child exploited) team to protect children from an unsafe dance environment. There's no membership fee, only protection for children who cannot speak for themselves. You can be on the [DA:NCE](#) team because most of you know children or teach children in your community, at your church, in your neighborhood, your school, or in your family. And if that's true, I'd like to present you with research materials that show the differences between healthy dance and unhealthy dance. Last year my website (www.soultolecholeography.org) released the following free materials providing these educational tools for the [DA:NCE](#) team:

1. [A 4 minute video](#) showing the problem of sexualization in children's dance.

(Scroll down about 1/3 of the page down to find the link). *Please share with others.*

2. A PG research-based [17 minute video](#) or a [R 30 minute video](#).

(Scroll down about 1/2 of the page to find the R rated one followed by the PG version.) This video has been designed to bring awareness and education to adults and dance studios so that children are not exploited.

Since most of you are a dance ministry or studio teacher, I would encourage you to share the [R rated 30 minute video](#) with ALL of the parents in your studio/ministry. The video is research based and will arm you and other adults with information to educate others on the hyper-sexualization of children in dance.

I would also invite you to join the [dance coalition](#) at soultolecholeography.org

3. [A slide share powerpoint](#) that anyone can use online.

(Scroll down to the bottom of the link to access it.) Use these slides give a live presentation on this topic wherever you live.

One more encouragement: **Join [YPAD](http://ypad4change.org) (ypad4change.org)**. Youth Protection Advocates in Dance is a USA organization that is working to certify dance studios with healthy movement criteria (appropriate music, costume companies signing on to age-appropriate standards, resources of all kinds, dance studio certification and so much more). Yea YPAD! Go, go, go...

So [DA:NCE](#) team members, let's network!

All we have to do is to give the gift of educational information to local circle of friends, neighbors and family members. Most importantly, please share the [4 minute video on Facebook](#) with a nudge to use the educational presentations on [DA:NCE](#) so that others can speak educationally to local communities. All caring adults love children and want them to grow up in a protected and nurturing world.

Finally, as I close, remember this truth. Sexualized dance for children disfigures age-appropriate movement options. It distorts the beauty of healthy dance that worked so powerfully in my childhood. I want every child in the world to experience the beauty of movement as I did. In the dance studio, I was safe. I could create and express my feelings through healthy movement choices. Dance class integrated my mind, body and spirit with joy and started me on the road to become comfortable with me. That journey led me into dance ministry. Today, I want every child's personality to embrace that same truth (founded in God's truth: "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." John 8:32).

Finally, I'd love to hear from you with personal stories about your love of dance as well as your experience with the damage done to children who are hyper-sexualized (mary@soutsolechoreography.org). That's what led me to create DA:NCE, to design online resources, and to write this article. So join the DA:NCE team and remember this quote from a Christian martyr I deeply admire:

"The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world that it leaves to its children."

[Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#)



Above: Mary Hoefs Bawden (age 16)