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EcoJustice Approach to Dance Education

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ABSTRACT

Heatwaves, extinct species, and broadly polluted areas worldwide are apparent signs of the human-caused ecological crises. Scholars agree that a collective ecological change is needed to save the Earth. Thus, we must critically reflect how we, as dance educators, are dependent on how dance is defined, and how its educational aims and practices are justified in the era of ecocrisis. In this article, we suggest an EcoJustice approach to dance education. This theoretical study is based on the EcoJustice education framework but draws from our practices as dance educators and the directors of community dance projects. In this article, we open up a discussion on the ways that the processes of dance education can lead to an ecosocially informed paradigm shift. We will suggest three aspects considering the three aspects of an EcoJustice approach to dance education: 1) celebrating diversity, 2) recognizing the lived body, and 3) practicing co-creation.

KEYWORDS

Community dance; diversity; EcoJustice education; environmental crisis; lived body

Dance education does not happen in a vacuum. Its previous practices define what we perceive as “dance” and how we interpret its current and future forms. Furthermore, dance education reflects the more general practices and values of society. Our bodies, perspectives, social norms, and power hierarchies are negotiated in and by education, and therefore education is never neutral (Giroux 2010). The education process means transmitting—or transforming—the values of the dance field and also the politics of its esthetics to future generations (Parviainen 1998). Since the 1960s, contemporary dancers and choreographers have extensively challenged the ideals of dancing bodies to be more open to diverse bodily and movement abilities (Herman and Chatfield 2010). In recent years, ethical considerations have started to interest dance scholars, and there have been studies of dance education, for example, from the perspective of race (Prichard 2019; Calamoneri, Dunagan, and McCarthy-Brown 2020), disability (DiPasquale 2020; Suppo and Swank 2020), and the elderly (Lehikoinen 2019).

In recent years the connection between the questions of social justice and ecological awareness has become a popular topic in social and educational sciences too. Due to the visible results of ecological crises all over the world, the interdependence of humans and the rest of nature has become clearer for many. The human-caused climate change, mass-extinction of species, and broadly polluted areas have slowly started to convince a growing number of scholars from diverse fields and the general public that a collective ecological transformation is needed

(Salonen and Åhlberg 2011). Every sector of society—including the dance field (Barbour 2008; Foster 2016, 2019; Hannus 2018; Buckwalter 2019)—must take part in the change.

In this paper, we suggest an EcoJustice approach (Bowers 2006; Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci 2015; Foster, Martusewicz, and Mäkelä 2019) to dance education. By dance education, we refer here to dialogical and creative movement-based practices (see Anttila 2003; Foster 2012) and community dance projects with diverse groups. By using the word EcoJustice “approach,” we want to stress that our focus is not solely on dance projects and activities that handle environmental issues, but rather on an approach that aims for the transformation of people’s values and worldviews toward ecosocially sustainable life orientation (see also Foster, Salonen, and Keto 2019). Furthermore, we want to highlight that both social and ecological problems have the same roots in modernity (Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci 2015); thus, in EcoJustice dance education we do not separate the social issues from the ecological concerns, but in contrast, we are committed to taking part in transformative actions regarding both.

Even though we present here a theoretical suggestion of an ecosocially informed education, we are drawing the ideas from our practices as dance educators and the directors of community dance projects. We have experience in working with diverse groups of participants and audiences as well as creating multidisciplinary works in

various environments in Finland and also in other countries around the world (see personal websites raisafoster.com and nellaturkki.com). Turkki has investigated climate change distress and relationships with nature with diverse and cross-generational groups in her dance projects such as *#Luft* in Herne, Germany 2019 and *ILMA* (“Air” in English) in Helsinki, Finland 2020. In her multidisciplinary and autobiographical ways of working with diverse groups, Turkki draws from her broad background in the fields of theater and dance and combines elements of the body, movement, and theatrical techniques as well as autobiographical writing in her projects and teaching. Foster has been focusing on the questions of otherness and eco-social justice (including gender identity, (dis)ability, and interspecies empathy) in her multidisciplinary art and research projects in the past several years. Originally a dance practitioner, Foster combines her expertise in body and movement with novel possibilities of digital media. In her movement-based workshops and site-specific participatory performances, such as *The Work of Art in the Time of Non-Production* (2018), she is particularly interested in exploring sensory perceptions and mindful presence. We both recognize our positions as European, White, and abled female bodies.

Scientists all over the world have warned about the ecocrisis, but still, the political decisions and the everyday habits of people do not seem to change. There is an urgent need for ecologically aware transformative pedagogies (Värri 2018). Thus, in this article, we open up a discussion about how dance education can take part in leading to an ecosocially informed paradigm shift. We will first outline the framework of EcoJustice education (Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci 2015). Then we will move on to our suggestion of three aspects considering the EcoJustice approach to dance education: 1) celebrating diversity, 2) recognizing the lived body, and 3) practicing co-creation.

The Framework of EcoJustice Education

EcoJustice education (Bowers 2006; Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci 2015; Foster, Martusewicz, and Mäkelä 2019) is a framework that shifts the primary focus on education toward sustainable life orientation (see also Foster, Salonen, and Keto 2019). It highlights the importance of fostering all life forms. EcoJustice education starts from the principle that both social and ecological problems, for example, racism, sexism, and climate change, have the same roots in modernity. By modernity, we mean (post)industrial societies and the particular socio-cultural practices and values of these civilizations stemming from the Age of Enlightenment,

for example, the emphasis of autonomy, free will, consumption, and continuous economic progress as sources of welfare. Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci (2015, 224) describe how the Enlightenment thinkers limited what it means to be fully human by just replacing “conceptions of ‘Divine Will’ with notions of ‘Reason’ and ‘Free Will’ as essential human characteristics.” Also, the Enlightenment thinkers’ and their inheritors’ view of “living things as machines helped to see life as having understandable, predictable processes, rather than seeing them as mystical, unknowable, or having a ‘spirit’” (Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci 2015, 75). This idea of life as a machine radically changed behavior toward control over what is now termed “nature.”

In its criticism of modernity, EcoJustice education leans heavily on ecofeminism (Plumwood 1993, 2002; Mies and Shiva 2014), and it often uses the method of discourse analysis in its studies. Ecofeminism, as the name implies, combines feminist and ecological themes. Its main research interests include a critical interpretation of the culture-nature dualism caused by the patriarchal worldview. According to ecofeminism, abuse of both women and animals is due to a hierarchical dichotomy between culture and nature (Plumwood 1993, 2002). Ecofeminism can also give performing arts practitioners theoretical tools to understand not only textual but also visual and performative discourses of power regarding the human-nature split. For example, dance may be elevated (to a significant form of culture) when “rationalized” by focusing on its “pure” form performed in studios and stages instead of approaching dance as a “messy,” organic expression that could be part of everyday communications between human animals (as part of nature). Dancing bodies may also be “objectified” by reinforcing stereotypical gender roles and by accepting only the “ideal” body shapes. For example, female dancers have often been treated as (male) choreographers’ muses and instruments that are only passive objects to be molded and moved around (Stinson 2005). Similarly, we look at other (inferior) animals and plants as only resources for (superior) humans.

By combining ecophenomenology (Abram 1988, 1996; Brown and Toadvine 2003; see also Merleau-Ponty 1968, 2003, [1945] 2008) with ecofeminist perspectives, EcoJustice education can both reveal the root metaphors of modern thinking and behavior but also guide us toward a necessary change (also Foster 2016, 2019). Ecophenomenology explores how rethinking the Western philosophical traditions can provide a basis for environmental ethics (Brown and Toadvine 2003). Like phenomenology, ecophenomenology is interested in the phenomenon of experience, but on the other hand, it seeks to challenge the human-centered and subjective

conception of experience (Brown and Toadvine 2003). The meaning of experience in ecophenomenology can be described, for example, with the concept of asubjectivity, which still acknowledges the subject as the one who experiences, but refers to a specific quality of a primary experience that appears in-between subjects and objects (Vadén and Torvinen 2014; Värrri 2018). For example, when dancing in contact with others, the dancer may feel the individual ego dissolving and experiencing unity with others (Foster 2012). Also, the atmosphere in a natural environment, for example in a forest, arises not only from the psychological contents of the human mind or objective characteristics of the forest, but rather from the immediate encounter between the self and the forest (see also Böhme 1993). Indeed, ecophenomenology can provide concepts, especially for the analysis of the body-environment relationship, both in terms of artistic work and pedagogical understanding (see also Foster 2016).

Stemming from various critical frameworks, such as ecofeminism and ecophenomenology, EcoJustice education has three specific strands: 1) revealing the modern assumptions that cause social and ecological destruction, 2) revitalizing the commons, and 3) imagining a responsible relationship with the Earth (Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci 2015; Foster and Martusewicz 2019). According to the theories of EcoJustice education, we should first critically reflect on the world in which we are living: the structures, customs, and values that cause damage in the environment but also suffering in people's lives. In other words, we must focus our criticism on modern assumptions, such as rationalism, individualism, instrumentalism, and anthropocentrism.

First, the modern worldview is based on dualisms such as mind-body, culture-nature, and human-animal (Plumwood 1993, 2002). The separation of the two is not necessarily a problem; however, the *hyper* separation is, and the fact that we tend to place these two entities in a hierarchical position. For example, human culture is often seen as primary, and the natural environment is only important if it has (instrumental) value for us (humans). Furthermore, certain features are linked together and given more value than others. For example, women are seen as more emotional and closer to nature, while men are commonly thought to be rational and the creators of progressive human culture (Plumwood 1993, 2002; also, Foster 2019). The inferior position enables misrecognition and exploitation. Ecological and social justice and wellbeing will not actualize until harmful power structures are questioned and dismantled.

Second, EcoJustice education focuses on protecting environmental commons and nurturing the cultural

traditions that help us to live in balance with our environment (Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci 2015; Foster and Martusewicz 2019). Clean water and air should be available to everyone and not, for example, owned by a private party. Like water and air, many sempiternal traditions, too, can be seen as “commons,” wealth that must be collectively taken care of. It is typical to take examples of a sustainable lifestyle from indigenous cultures (see Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci 2015; Foster, Salonen, and Keto 2019). However, no culture is entirely ecological or unecological. Instead, identifying the traditions of one's own culture that revitalize a natural connection can assist in securing a responsible and sustainable relationship with the environment.

The third task of EcoJustice education is to encourage the imagining of responsible relations with the Earth (Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci 2015; Foster and Martusewicz 2019); in what other ways could we live our lives? From an educational point of view, even when we are living in the time of ecocrisis, we must believe and trust in the fact that we *can* create a better future. Like the American poet and environmental activist Berry (2012, 15) says: “for humans to have responsible relationship to the world, they must imagine their place in it.”

The potential of art lies in its ability to generate awakenings to the new world. In other words, art can challenge our habitual ways of seeing and acting and suggest novel approaches to be in the world. If we only act in a way that we already know, nothing new can evolve (Varto 2008). Making and receiving art are both ways of participating in a space where alternative worlds are possible through imagination (Foster 2017; Foster, Martusewicz, and Mäkelä 2019; Foster, Salonen, and Keto 2019).

Celebrating Diversity

EcoJustice education recognizes diversity as “the condition of difference necessary to all life and creativity” (Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci 2015, 26). We suggest that the acknowledgment and celebration of diversity (also Østern and Øyen 2014; Urmston and Aujla 2019) should form the basis of socially and ecologically aware dance education. By diversity, we mean species diversity as well as human and cultural diversity that can be recognized and empowered by creating spaces that embrace different ways of being and acting in this world.

Australian philosopher and ecofeminist Plumwood (1993) argues against the “hyper-separation” of humans from the rest of nature. She offers a view that recognizes the interdependence between subject and object and

between human culture and natural environments. The “pathological” relationships, such as sexism, racism, and speciesism, can be revealed by identifying what Plumwood (1993) calls the “standpoint of mastery.” It is a set of views of the self and its relationship to the other originating from reason-nature dualism; the other—women, indigenous people, people with disabilities, non-human animals, and the rest of nature—are seen as radically separate and inferior to the superior self. So, Plumwood (1993) places human-nature dualism in the same category with many other gendered dualisms, such as male-female, mind-body, and reason-emotion.

Dance education has a long history regarding gender roles. Historically, but also today, many cultures divide dance styles or dancers’ roles as male and female. For example, the identification of ballet as feminine stays strong. Gender in dance has been researched extensively in the last thirty years (Hanna 1988; Thomas 1993; Tomko 2000; Stinson 2005; Lehtikoinen 2006; Foster 2019). Stinson (2005) speaks about the “hidden curriculum” of dance education. She argues that even though socialization into proper gender roles is not necessarily the explicit purpose for dance teaching anymore (as it was for the 18th-century dancing masters, see Posey 2002), we still teach gender unintentionally. Stinson (2005, 51) proposes that dance education “embodying unwanted gender messages can be changed through a process that begins with awareness and critical reflection.”

Contemporary dance has invited a shift toward recognizing the diversity of dancing bodies beyond the stereotypical gender roles and ethnic identities (Albright 1997, 2010, 2019). Traditionally, dance teaching has emphasized the technical progress of the student’s bodily control, and there has been little room for differently-abled bodies. However, in recent years there has also been a welcome change toward celebrating contributions to dance by performers with disabilities (Whatley 2007; Østern and Øyen 2014; Anderson 2015). The discussion of the body in the field of cultural and social studies has put pressure to further debate difference and diversity in dance. Thus, we argue that ecologically aware dance education must start from an in-depth cultural analysis that includes the critical reflection of the roles we associate with gendered, abled, and species bodies. At its best, socially and ecologically aware dance education can challenge *instrumentalism* and *ableism* in dance. In other words, sustainable dance teaching abandons the assumption that only a specific, “ideal” type of body can work as a proper instrument for a fixed and “correct” form of dance.

By recognizing the diversity of people’s bodies, abilities, emotions, and ideas, we can come out of our

habitual ways of thinking and our beliefs about the world. We have recognized in our community dance projects that dialogue between cross-generational, multi-ethnic, and diversely abled bodies can generate empathy toward others and hope for a sustainable future. We agree with Barbour (2008, 44) that “developing sustainable dance making would entail consideration of the creative and rehearsal processes so as to meet the needs of all involved.” Inclusive dance practice with diverse bodies requires deep reflection of one’s assumptions of dance education and asks for open dialogue within the group. The practice of recognizing and respecting diverse others—even with their contrasting ideas, beliefs, and abilities—is a skill that needs to be practiced just like any other skill. In Turkki’s community dance performance ILMA (“Air” in English), the cross-generational group of 14–85-years-of-age participant-performers started the rehearsals by watching each other’s dance improvisation with “accepting and appreciating eyes” and hearing each other’s thoughts and emotions (in this case about climate change). These were called “feeling-circles.” This practice created a safe and accepting atmosphere, where all individuals, their bodies and emotions, were recognized as they were.

We believe that especially body awareness tasks and dance improvisations (see Middelgouw 2019) that focus on connecting with one’s own body and the environment through senses and sharing of the experience with others can open up space for diversity in dance. When dance teachers or the facilitators of community dance projects give tasks for the dancers to react with their unique movements, the dance of each dancer is perceived as equally “good.” Then there is no need to evaluate the dance according to the traditional standards of beauty; instead, we can simply witness and enjoy the multiple interpretation and expressions of bodies in motion. In order to do this we must adopt the phenomenological attitude and stay open to new suggestions of the different bodies.

When phenomenology is true to its intent, it never knows where it is going, as Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 2008) describes. Through movement improvisations, which can be initiated by personal memories, sensory experiences, emotions, ideas, pictures, or music, we can slowly open up to explore the lived experiences of different people. The dance teacher who works as the facilitator of the movement improvisation gives space for the diversity of stories, emotions, and opinions to be experienced, expressed, and negotiated. This, of course, requires courage from teachers too. We must let go of the control and invite the unknown (see also Anttila 2003). The dance educator needs to be actively reflective of their own ideals since they are necessarily embedded

in their understanding of dance. Looking at each other and acknowledging the beauty in the uniqueness of each individual helps us to see others, including other living creatures, in a loving and empathic way (see also Aaltola 2018).

When applying an EcoJustice approach to dance education, there are no predefined goals or certain esthetic expectations of movements that the educator should know and determine in advance. Instead, the educator aims to create an open dialogue throughout the learning process. This starts by giving every individual a possibility to express themselves in their own ways and also to be heard with great respect. The educator can encourage the participants with sentences like “there is no right or wrong way to do these exercises” or “you know the best how it feels in your body.” The respectful dialogue also applies to the relationships between the participants. For example, the participants of the ILMA dance project could listen to and then improvise with the others’ texts, movements, personal memories, and thoughts about the emotions related to climate change. The stories of each performer were then worked toward scenes that engaged the whole group. Throughout this process, the multifaceted group of performers opened up their understanding of diverse emotions, and this created a bond and a sense of empathy toward others. Furthermore, when we learn to see and respect diversity in other people, we are more likely to also celebrate diversity in the more-than-human world.

Dance education that invites the diversity of bodies in dialogue initiates the celebration of multiplicity in life in general. As educators, we must fundamentally understand that diversity is not a problem or a burden but necessary for life that we could learn to celebrate. Thus, revealing the stereotypes that force the dancing bodies into “ideals” and rewriting the master identities that suppress alternative expressions is the first task we must adopt when applying the EcoJustice approach to dance education. It is also crucial to understand that to embrace multiple ways of knowing, creating, and sharing genuinely—and have it embedded into the means of working—both the teacher and student need to accept the un-readiness and unknown to leave space for ongoing transformation while learning. Here, the dance educator must create a space where everyone can feel welcomed like they are and encourage others to see the good in every human individual.

Recognizing the Lived Body

Berry (1996, 104) believes that the biggest problem in Western culture is “the isolation of the body:”

At some point we assume that the life of the body would be the business of grocers and medical doctors, who need take no interest in the spirit, whereas the life of the spirit would be the business of churches, which would have at best only a negative interest in the body. In the same way we began to see nothing wrong with putting the body—most often somebody else’s body, but frequently our own—to a task that insulted the mind and demeaned the spirit. And we began to find it easier than ever to prefer our own bodies to the bodies of other creatures and to abuse, exploit, and otherwise hold in contempt those other bodies for the greater good or comfort of our own.

Following the tradition of Cartesian dualism, we sharply distinguish not only the mind and body but also ourselves as humans from other living beings (Abram 1996; Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2008, 2003; Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci 2015). Phenomenology is a form of philosophy that has sought to overcome the erroneous structures of Cartesian dualistic thinking and the problems they pose to Western Science, but also for the modern daily lives and educational practices as well. In particular, the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty (1968, 2003, [1945] 2008) relies heavily on the criticism of the Cartesian tradition. It emphasizes our connection to the world by highlighting its non-conceptual and dialogic nature. According to Merleau-Ponty, it is our body that ties us to the world. In other words, for Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 2008), the *lived body* is at the center of our experience because the body understands and experiences the world rather than our minds. The concept of lived body ties together the body, mind, and spirit, which the specialization of modern sciences has separated, as Berry (1996) claims.

Many dance scholars have followed Merleau-Ponty’s and other phenomenologists’ theories of the body (Sheets-Johnstone 1980; Fraleigh 1987; Parviainen 1998; Rouhiainen 2003; Foster 2012). For example, Fraleigh (1987, 1991, 2015) has adopted the phenomenologist approach in her task of defining the phenomenon of dance: “When I make any movement truly mine, I embody it. And in this, I experience what I would like to call ‘pure presence,’ a radiant power of feeling completely present to myself and connected to the world” (Fraleigh 1991, 13). Similarly, Sheets-Johnstone (1980) says that to define dance, we must go back to the immediate encounter with it, to the heart of the

experience before any reflection takes place. In other words, the meaning of dance comes alive if we have lived experience of it; it is not the result of knowledge of it (Sheets-Johnstone 1980).

Dance has the potential to challenge both *rationalism*, mind-body dualism, and *individualism*, self-other dualism. Body awareness and open improvisations teach us to stay with the unknown and open-endedness state of in-between. We have noticed in our practice working with dancers that are new to dance improvisation that they may benefit from closing their eyes and being in silence (also Foster 2016); this helps to enter the affective and sensory stance toward the world instead of the hyper-rational and mechanistic worldview of the modern humanity (Foster 2016). We also prefer working in studios without mirrors because then the dancers can focus on the multiple sensibilities in their lived bodies instead of focusing on their outer appearance or correcting the assumedly “right” technique of the object body. This is also a widely adopted principle amongst the scholars and practitioners of somatics: “The focus is on the individual experience: how we feel as opposed to how others perceive or how we think we are being perceived” (Brodie and Lobel 2012, 6).

At first, those who have not practiced movement improvisation before, but have done more structured techniques of dance, may experience that one’s own body and moving may feel strange and find the whole activity bizarre (Foster 2012). The bodily practice that fosters diverse (sensory, emotional, rational) ways of knowing (Foster 2019) requires vulnerability (also Hast 2019); thus, sometimes it may bring up defensive responses, where the missing of “rational facts” are brought to the conversation. This can be related to the will to still hold on to the superiority of scientific information instead of opening up for senses and emotions (see also Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci 2015) and surrendering oneself to open improvisation.

We claim that breathing as a practice is especially important in an attempt to bring our awareness to the lived body (instead of the body as an object), including our vital connection to the broader ecosystem around us (see also Albright 2019). Clean air, like many other commons, is easily taken for granted in our everyday lives until something makes us notice its lack, such as pollution. Ecophenomenologist Abram (1996) says, too, that we tend to treat air as nonexistent because it is invisible. However, the air is the principal medium of exchange: what we animals breathe in, the plants breathe out, and vice versa; “this unseen enigma is the very mystery that enables life to live,” as Abram (1996, 226) describes.

The air also exists in every human move: “Breath lives in every gestured emotion, and casual step, in

every restful or stressful state, in every gasp and sigh” (Fraleigh 2015, 10). Therefore, somatic practices have extensively developed ways of working with breath (Fraleigh 2015, 10; also, Rouhiainen 2015). By drawing attention to breathing, we can acknowledge being alive and sharing space with other living beings. We have explored dance improvisation practices that first start by observing breathing and then moving with the breathing. These exercises help to focus on awareness of one’s bodily sensations and breathing as a constant action. They also encourage the dancer to focus on finding dance through sensations rather than looking for esthetic solutions. Thus, we believe that conscious breathwork can be an essential starting point for recognizing our interconnectedness with the world. However, it can also work as a reminder that clean air is a vital environmental commonality (see also Foster and Martusewicz 2019).

By taking dance out of studios and stages, we can connect with the more-than-human world through and in our lived bodies, and that way, also challenge the culture-nature dualism. We have, for example, taken our students and the participants of our community dance projects to parks and forests to explore their relationship with their surroundings. Different sensory tasks and improvisations with trees, moss, rocks, and sticks can shift our focus from our egos (also Foster 2012) to the sensory connection we have with the world. In Foster’s participatory performance, *The Work of Art in the Time of Non-Production* (2019), the audience is invited to dress up in blue overalls and then follow Foster in a slow walk for about 30–45 minutes. The participants are asked to be silent and simply focus on their senses. In this silent walk, Foster wants people to have a chance to attune to an experience of interconnectedness with the local environment. So, the main purpose of this event is not to “perform” anything, but only to allow time for people to perceive and simply be present in their bodies here and now.

The movement improvisations and performances in public spaces can also initiate passersby to reflect on their perception of dance and its status in society. Dancing on the streets may be considered as something strange; thus, dance in a public space can be a powerful tool to question cultural norms—especially the preference of language-based interactions—and open up a possibility to perceive dance as a vital form of expression in life. This is also beautifully described by the somatics practitioner and philosopher Hanna (1993, xii):

Beneath the level of our verbal, acculturated consciousness is a realm that we are only now beginning to

perceive and trace out. I call it the somatic realm – somatics because it sees the human being and all living beings not merely in terms of bodily structure but in terms of bodily function, namely, movement.

Practicing Co-creation

With the concept of *commons*, EcoJustice education (Bowers 2006; Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci 2015; Foster and Martusewicz 2019) does not just refer to the *environmental commons*, such as air, water, and forests, but also to the *cultural commons*, which include sustainable traditions, practices, and knowledge that support mutual wellbeing. Cultural commons are non-monetized forms of relationships and everyday skills that people in various cultures use to survive and take care of one another (Bowers 2006). The cultural commons that exist in every community “strengthen community self-reliance” but also “promote the discovery of personal talents and interests that are a community’s true source of wealth” (Bowers 2017, 54). So, what kind of dance education can revitalize the cultural commons that support sustainable social and ecological wellbeing? Furthermore, what kind of dance education can encourage us to imagine a responsible relationship with others, including both humans and the more-than-human world (Abram 1996)?

Barbour (2008, 2019; Hunter, Kloetzel, and Barbour 2019) has studied how the political, social, environmental, and educational understandings of *sustainability* can be applied to the creative process of dance making. Barbour (2008, 46) defines sustainability in dance as “practices that meet (or at least attempt to balance) the needs of all involved within the broad processes of dance making.” She stresses the importance of “positive dance experiences that foster community, empowerment and respect” (Barbour 2008, 44).

Based on our own experiences as dance makers as well as, for example, Barbour’s (2008) notions on sustainability, we suggest *co-creation* as a socially and ecologically just form of dance making. However, we must note that the co-creation in dance is interwoven with the principles of *diversity* and the concept of the *lived body* discussed in previous sections. In other words, successful collaboration requires the recognition of diverse bodies and their interconnectedness.

Dance education is not separate from a complex social system that includes practices of teaching, creating, producing, performing, reviewing, marketing, and financing of dance. Thus, it is essential to understand how our educational practices are informed by our hidden Eurocentric bias; for example, the curriculum of higher education in dance may reveal a hierarchy

between different forms of dance (Walker 2019) or an assumption of Whiteness (Walker 2020). Also, our appreciation of a specific body type and technical virtuosity in dance may unveil our mechanistic worldview and belief in continuous progress (Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci 2015). Furthermore, the praise of a choreographer as an individual genius reveals our attitude of dancers as instruments (Barbour 2008). Could we shift the role of dancers as instruments to dancers as co-creators?

In community dance projects, the co-creative process can generate material that the participants draw from their autobiographical memories, and which are verbally shared and then physically evolved throughout the collaborative dance-making process. On the other hand, the movement material can be created from the lived bodies of the dancers prior to any conscious reflection. Working directly from the experiences of diverse bodies may initiate a new understanding that we have not been aware of and which can challenge our previous beliefs (Foster 2014, 2016). Co-creation opens up a possibility to imagine how else we could live our lives, including, of course, new ways of dancing and teaching dance (also Barbour 2008). Here the imagining does not refer to something that is reaching toward a far-away future but understanding where one is *belonging* here and now.

Belongingness has been extensively studied over the last thirty years in dance (Parviainen 1998; Hast 2019). However, we want to extend the notion of belongingness from social relations to include the ecological sphere too (see also Foster, Salonen, and Keto 2019; Keto and Foster 2020). Concretely, we humans belong to the world by breathing the air that only exists on this Earth. On the other hand, we also belong to the world through history; we are always shaped by it (Parviainen 1998). Merleau-Ponty (1968) has used the concept of flesh (*la chair*) to describe the human’s belongingness to the world as the human body and the world originating from the same source, but they do not vanish into “sameness.” This is why, according to Parviainen (1998, 47), “belongingness to the world offers us opportunities to understand otherness.” Parviainen (1998) argues that a dance maker’s creation is, in fact, a manifestation of *longing* for connection with others.

As a cultural common, dance has been an essential part of rituals, entertainment, celebrations, and ceremonies across the globe and over a long time of human history (and perhaps even before humans). To revitalize dance as a cultural common, we must nurture its origin as a vital form of communication. Thus, we suggest that

ecosocially informed dance education start from exploring the connection to one's own body and other humans, but also to the more-than-human world. This happens through improvisation, which focuses on one's embodied, emotional, and sensory relations, daring to embrace contradictions, too. Improvisations can be done, for example, in parks, forests, or even parking lots or any other urban or natural environment. The venues can be new or familiar for the participants; however, the sensory movement explorations typically allow everyday environments to be seen in new ways. We have also noticed how in site-specific projects, the meaning of an artwork does not arise solely from the dancing body but in the meeting of the bodies, the weather conditions, and the architecture of the location. Time and space-specific collaborative body and movement explorations (also Foster 2019) can lead toward a deep reflection of how one is woven into the world and what kind of impact one's behavior and actions can have on others.

Instead of thinking about what a movement should look like, the ecosocially oriented dance educator encourages students to dance from their sensations, emotions, and embodied memories in spontaneous ways. The attitude toward dancing is like researching instead of adapting to the existing forms. The creative interaction may lead to a collaborative performance project; however, the emphasis is always on the process and in the immediate perceptions, rather than in the final artistic result (Kuppers 2000; Foster 2012, 2014). This is also an aspect that the scholars and practitioners of somatics have highlighted (Hanna 1993; Brodie and Lobel 2012). It is crucial to understand that learning happens through collective creative interaction where both the dance teacher and the students contribute to learning and teaching (Anttila 2003; Foster 2012). The task of the teacher is to act as a facilitator providing space and methods to the shared learning process more than a teacher providing correct knowledge and technical skills.

The inspiration for the dance improvisation and movement can, for example, be found in personal memories, narratives, thoughts, sensations, and emotions. So, the improvisations can start directly from the lived bodies, but also images, texts, sounds, music, objects, space, or any other source of inspiration. The sensory-inspired improvisation can also happen outdoors, for example, in and with a forest (Foster 2016) or water (Hannus 2018). Of course, it is also essential to understand that one is dancing in dialogue with the surrounding. Dancing on-site can disrupt human-nature dualism and suggest, instead, a continuum (Buckwalter 2019).

We identify three requirements of the co-creation process: time, collective commitment, and sharing. These conditions are, of course, closely tied together. Allowing plenty of time for single improvisation tasks, as well as for the longer collaborative processes, secures space for new things to occur and our preconceptions to shift. Furthermore, time allows “for relationships to develop, processes to be negotiated and trust between those involved to be nurtured” (Barbour 2008, 47). When dancers are focused on a common task, the “egos” are set to the side, and they feel “very much alive, inhabited in space and time” and “being intertwined with others and the world” (Foster 2012, 211).

Reflecting on and sharing experiences in verbal forms is also an essential part of the EcoJustice-inspired dance education because it fosters a sense of agency and thus enables better accessibility for diverse groups. This can be done in various ways, from group discussions to reflective writings on paper. We have used post-card-images to initiate reflection, and talking-sticks to facilitate everyone to take turns. It is essential to try out different ways of dialogue in diverse groups and to make sure that people work with as many group members as possible instead of working only with the person who feels the most familiar to them. Sometimes, it is also good to allow time for discussion in pairs and then ask the pairs to share some of their thoughts with the whole group. When hearing the reflections of each other's experience, the group members will also understand that there are multiple ways the same task can be done and experienced. This will also open up the understanding that there are countless ways of perceiving and thinking. In the time of polarization—of people and opinions—these kinds of encounters, where everyone is allowed space to be seen and heard as they are, can be essential.

Conclusion

Reflecting on how dance education might be undertaken in the time of ecocrisis, we have considered the potential of an EcoJustice approach. It stresses the importance of recognizing the interdependence of all lives, not just humans but also the more-than-human world. We suggested that socially and ecologically just dance should celebrate the *diversity* of bodies. Furthermore, dance should be understood as communication in and of the *lived bodies*, not as manipulation of an object body. We also argued for dance as a collaborative exploration where the traditional roles as student and teacher as well as dancer and choreographer shift to shared roles as *co-creators* in dance making.

In order to apply the EcoJustice approach to dance education, one must critically reflect on how dance education is dependent on (a) the ways dance is defined and (b) how dance's educational aims and practices are justified concerning the social and ecological sustainability demands in the time of ecocrisis. In other words, dance scholars and educators must understand their control over dance practices: the way we teach inevitably either transmits or transforms current ontological and epistemological beliefs. There is no neutral dance education since all our beliefs and actions as teachers are tied to more general practices and values in life. However, by adopting a critical approach, educators and scholars have the potential to break out from the practices that cause social and ecological degradation and act toward an ecosocially sustainable future.

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