

# Excellence in Teaching

## Susan McFadden

### Dance



#### What I believe

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I believe I should ask of myself as a learner the same as what I ask of my students as learners. Teaching is a reciprocal art so in each class I facilitate I must function as fully as a learner as I function as an instructor. I believe teaching is, as Professors James M. Balner Jr. and Harold C. Cannon stated in 1997, "always an act of faith." I share the view of educator Dorothy Heathcote and daily attempt to embody better. Her words, below, resonate within me.

"I ask of you that ...  
You will neither judge all nor believe all ...  
But rather that you inquire, as a man going into a labyrinth, ...

(So that things may come to you)...  
Or you stumble upon them almost by chance when turning  
round a corner.

I ask this because I would wish my mind and yours to meet  
here

Not as opponents who might clash  
or friends who greet each other's wisdom,  
but rather as persons who eye one another from the place  
we fit;

and out of the eyeing,  
we are surprised into new understanding. . .

I will try to remember you can meet my mind only out of  
your experience  
attitude and being.

So please treat my thoughts as I do -  
a compound of knowing and not being certain.

Dorothy Heathcote, *Of These Seed Becoming* (in Educational Drama for Today's Schools, R. Baird Shuman, ed. Metuche, N.J. & London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1978)

#### Where I find inspiration

I also find inspiration in the words of Harold Best and Lily Tomlin:

Harold Best: "Excellence is the process of becoming better than I was yesterday. Excellence is not being better than someone else; it is not even being like someone else. Excellence is a personal sojourn for which everyone, irrespective of ability, is accountable. Community, then, is the context in which excelling takes place. That is, each member of the community is engaged in the process of becoming better than he or she was, while in company with others. And it is the communal aspect of excelling by which we draw from each other, by which we are mentored, stretched and corrected."



Lily Tomlin:  
"If you have creative people around you, they'll feed you the input you need. They'll say something by chance which will give you a new idea, or crystallize a half-formed one. I'm lucky in selecting the right people for input and in selecting the right things from what they offer me. Everything I've done is collaborative."

#### What my students have accomplished

Finally, I believe what students "produce" in classes should be as relevant to their life goals as is possible. In several instances I have been able to see a connection occurring as evidenced by the following:

1. In Winter 2003, after writing a research paper on David Parsons in my Fall 2002 Evolution of Modern Dance class, **Naomi Miller**, B.A. Dance 2004, provided the pre-show lecture and power point presentation on the *David Parsons Dance Company* who performed as part of the 2003-2004 Smith Fine Arts series.
2. In January 2004, after pursuing an independent/special studies class with me on the Theatre company *Imago*, **Andrea (Vandenbos) Lawhead**, B.A. Theatre 2004, facilitated the pre-show discussion on *Imago* when the group performed as part of the 2004-2005 Smith Fine Arts series.
3. **Erin Shute**, B.A. 2005, attended a summer 2005 dance institute with Randall Flinn after investigating and researching Flinn's modern dance work for a final paper in my Winter 2005 Evolution of Modern Dance class.
4. **Corale Lamont**, senior dance major, profiled Rainbow Dance Theatre as a research project for my Winter 2005 Evolution of Modern Dance: Corale has danced as a member of the WOU affiliated company throughout her academic career at WOU. The Rainbow Dance Theatre experience with Darryl Thomas and Valerie Bergman has had a huge impact on Corale's development as a dancer and that opportunity was profiled in her Winter 2005 paper.

#### What students say about Sue:

"She helped me think outside the box." Jena Rennick (WOU class of 2005), co-owner, Premiere Academy for the Performing Arts, in *Leading by Degrees* (February 2006).