

Touching & Gesturing: Dance Contributions to Teen Development

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In the following lecture I will present a project that I have worked on for a number of years called SalsAmigos. It is the teaching of *rueda de casino* to youth, usually high school age. In this lecture I focus on touching as an essential element in the dancing and how touching is important, even essential, to teen education and healthy human development.

I want to add something here that will help you see also how these gestural/touching patterns have been used to introduce change to societal conventions. Since *rueda* is a partner dance with leads and follows, the societal convention is that guys lead and girls follow. Interestingly it has been occasionally acceptable for girls to also lead, but this is a gestural adjustment to the societal values that guys don't dance and the resulting imbalance between the number of girls and guys available for dancing.

In my development to teach *rueda* to high school students I developed on the gestural/touch patterns by introducing a gestural sequence that results in the change of leads to follows and follows to leads in the course of the dance. The result is that every dancer is equally skilled at leading and following. The dance gestural patterns also require frequent changes of partners. I never distinguish gender as part of the dancing with the result that everyone dances with everyone else without regard for gender. It is clear that these gestural patterns are on the order of social engineering particularly with respect to gender roles and the encounter of other youth through touching.

I also have developed the dance to add a gestural sequence that turns the circle from an inward centering to the outside. This accomplishes a number of things. It makes the dance more accessible to an audience. It introduces another orientation to other dancers and results in creating the space differently. It offers an additional axis of ambidexterity which is highly valuable from a neurophysiological perspective. So as you experience the next lecture, keep these things in mind.