

# The unexpected scholar

Business



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

We often fail to think of dancers as intelligent. They're sort of artists in leotards—not at all as brainy as Leonardo da Vinci or Shakespeare, for we somehow think that creating art with a pen or a paintbrush is superior to conveying stories with our bodies.

We didn't always think this way. The ancient Romans knew that developing both the mind and the body were crucial in maximizing our well-being, and even the *New England Journal of Medicine* reported that because dance requires split-second decision making and engages kinesthetic, rational, musical, and emotional intelligence, it reduces dementia risk by 76% and increases cognitive acuity in all ages. Somehow, this idea has been lost in our Industrial Age school system. In his seminal TED talk, Sir Ken Robinson points out that our global education system has the same hierarchy of subjects, with math and language at the top and dance at the bottom. He says that “ as children grow up, we start to educate them progressively from the waist up.

And then we focus on their heads. And slightly to one side.” I have had a different experience. For me, dancing is communicating without saying a word, and on stage, the lights are so blinding that the whole world disappears as I tell a story. Others may fear stage fright, but for me, the stage possesses the intimacy of a womb. There, I can share with the world my feelings about love, loss, and hope to help them see that they are not alone.

As I leap across the stage and whirl into a pirouette, I dance what it means to be in love again. A deep lunge with outstretched arms reaching into the

ether portrays unrequited longing. I dance a lifetime in three minutes, feeling the audience breathe with me as I guide them through the pinnacles and troughs of life. Across cultures, dance used to be a part of daily life. We would dance our hopes and fears around a roaring fire, but nowadays, our bodies are transport vehicles for our heads.

Perhaps it is time to tap our feet again.