

DANCERS ARE

by Nicole Perry (she/her)

In December 2021, when we scheduled our Trauma-Informed Creative Practice workshop (with Molly W. Schenck of the [GreyBox Collective](#), who I cannot recommend strongly enough!) for [Momentum Stage](#), a non-profit arts education organization that I run, it seemed like a useful tool for the dance and theatre educators and makers that frequent our space. What we didn't know was that when it came around on February 26, 2022, it would feel so incredibly necessary.


Our group was international. All of us were feeling the sadness and fear of Russia invading Ukraine, especially our participant in Finland, whose country had just been threatened by Putin. Many of us in the US were feeling additional stress and fear because of the changing CDC guidelines regarding mask-wearing. I noted a sense of impending doom as Florida's "Don't Say Gay Bill" passed the House. I knew my colleagues in Texas were experiencing it as well, as a bill there now meant parents of trans kids could be reported for child abuse, and teachers may be expected to be reporters and/or witnesses. As I looked around the virtual space, I noted only one Person of Color, who may have been wondering if she would experience trauma instead of learning about it.

We all came to learn, but the questions loomed large for us that Saturday. Why are we making art? Does it matter? Why are we focusing on healthy ways to play when so many are only just surviving? Why are we making art right now?

I must remind myself and those around me that we, as artists, have the power to create something new. Even if all we do is create something new in a classroom or rehearsal room, we prove that change is something we can make together. We no longer create art; we create the future.

The following is my list of things that I do in the dance spaces to help bring that new future into the now. Consent-based, trauma-informed work is not how the dance training world has operated for nearly 500 years. The dance industry punishes bodies, objectifies bodies, and treats bodies as tools rather than people. To change these things will take time and a radical shift in priorities from all sectors of the dance world. But, I believe it is possible.





These are the values that I
hold in when teaching and
creating dance, that also create
new possibilities, new futures:

- Dancers are collaborative.
 - We invite everyone's strengths, talents, and contributions.
- Dancers honor consent and personal agency.
 - We uphold the boundaries and choices of ourselves and others.
- Dancers care more about the people, than the product.
 - We do not harm ourselves, our collaborators, or our audiences in the name of art.
- Dancers share and celebrate our cultures, stories, differences, and connections.
 - Context matters, and we acknowledge the history and creators who make our work possible.
- Dancers question our preferences and challenge our assumptions.
 - We get more creative with a "no", or when something doesn't work the way we thought it would.
- Dancers focus on meaning-making.
 - We create, express, and engage in dialogue around who we are and what we want our world to be like.
- Dancers are better citizens.
 - Because we are willing to collaborate and appreciate each other's humanity, we are actively engaged in our world.
- Dancers are visionaries.
 - We don't just create art; We create the future. What world are we making today?