

PART I. HOW TO CREATE A CULTURALLY RELEVANT CLASSROOM

One

What Is Culturally Relevant Teaching?

The Problem

Imagine you are ten years old and just enrolled in a dance class at school. You are excited because you know how to dance. This is one class you know will be fun and you can walk in the door with confidence. You arrive on the first day with a wide smile. To your surprise, you are told that your idea of dance attire is ... different. Your idea of talented dance movement is ... different. Your idea of musical accompaniment is ... undeveloped, and your current dance ability is ... at level one. You are told that the dances you know are "great, fun, and cool" and are encouraged to practice these dances at home or on the playground as you will not be able to practice or perform them during class. On the other hand, you will be learning dances that are highly valued and appreciated in the dance world. And, if you work hard, you may even earn the privilege of performing these dancers for your family, school, and community. Although these dances will be new to you, and do not reflect your culture, they will enhance your dance skills and give you legitimacy as a dancer. Now, aren't you excited to learn?

This book is a response to the scenario outlined above, one that has been and continues to be manifested in a multitude of ways throughout this nation and the world. To give just one example, I learned of a similar story when conducting research at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. There I met a South African teacher of dance who told me that he was spotted in his rural community "dancing in the bush." He was subsequently given opportunities to learn Western dance forms. After being appropriately trained in Western contemporary dance, he was then told,

"Now you are a dancer." He was so insulted by the notion that he was nothing up until he was taught the white man's dance aesthetic that he quit contemporary dance completely.¹ Similarly, I can recall numerous times when I have been made uncomfortable by comments friends and colleagues made while watching a dance concert, and singling out African American males, gifted in vernacular movement: "Look at him dance, all he needs is some technique, I wish I could get him in a ballet class." I interpret these comments as "If I could teach him a more legitimate form of dance, one that is aesthetically pleasing to me, then he would be more valuable." In contrast, I cannot recall one instance where a ballet or modern dancer was evaluated and noted for his or her lack of an Asian or African dance form. The hierarchy of dance is clear.

As dance educators who seek to build multicultural communities and embrace pluralism, we cannot risk our students thinking that we seek to de-legitimize their cultural aesthetic. This text exploring research, theory, and practice of culturally relevant teaching can be a resource for all dance educators who wish to counter such hubris.

Dance, Social Constructs and Privilege

Dance is a cultural experience. It is a racial experience. It is a gendered experience. It is a kinesthetic body experience. All of this is to say that one's experience in dance is reflective of his or her demographic and dance environment. When I walk into a dance class I am immediately aware of my culture, race, and, at times, depending on the class, my age. I presume men have a heightened awareness of gender within most dance classrooms. Gay, transgender, and queer people have a heightened awareness of whether or not the space is welcoming or hetero-normative. In order to be successful in any given environment, one has to find ways to communicate—to understand and be understood by those in power. For some individuals this is an easy process of assimilation, for others it is a matter of "code-switching," and for still others it is a challenging puzzle that never fits together. To be sure, those outside the dominant culture have a heightened awareness of their differences and know the embodiment of their culture(s) will call attention to their differences.

Students outside the dominant culture find ways to navigate their journey, as do the departments that serve them. As an African American woman, I have been privy to a number of conversations with African American dancers expressing challenges they have met in mainstream Dance

Education. I have also noticed that in most of the dance departments I encountered throughout my experiences in higher education, there was a scarcity of African American dancers, yet, at the same time, the schools boasted an African American dance group of some kind. In further investigation of this phenomenon, I learned that many African American dancers feel marginalized and undervalued in the larger dance programming of the dominant culture. Culturally focused dance organizations often develop in schools where there is a lack of culturally relevant dance offerings.

I interviewed a graduating senior who explained that she directed her energy away from the mainstream departmental programming and toward an African-based dance company throughout her four-year experience. She sought mentorship from African American female graduate students in the company, recognizing that these individuals would be her lifeline throughout her undergraduate experience. She noted that when she talked to her African American undergraduate peers who were not in the African-based dance company, they spoke of feeling alienated, excluded, and marginalized by limited performance opportunities in the department. She did not share their experience. She attributed her different experience to the mentorship of the African American graduate students in the dance company to whom African American students outside the company did not have access. She also spoke of her own cultural, ethnic, and racial challenges when performing in department dance concerts that were separate from the company. She was not equipped to do her makeup and described often feeling “discarded” when she did not know how to apply makeup. Not surprisingly, her white counterparts were not equipped to assist her. Although similar experiences of being at a loss in connection to hair and makeup existed when performing with the African American company, those were less embarrassing and somber because she did not feel as isolated. She was not the only one who needed assistance. Equally relevant, she was not singled out as different because of the make up needed to flatter and enhance a darker complexion. Finally, there was no awkward silence around what to do with her hair.

I share the above anecdote to draw attention to the need for culturally relevant and sensitive experiences in dance and to bring attention to the types of privilege white students have backstage. To not have to worry about whether you can find the right foundation color for your skin is a privilege. To know that your castmates, teachers, and backstage helpers will be equipped to help you with your hair is a privilege.

What Is Culturally Relevant Teaching and Critical Dance Pedagogy?

Theoretical Frames and Historical Background

The discussion of teaching approaches in this book reveals a transdisciplinary approach to the multifaceted practice of teaching dance. Menah Pratt-Clarke defines transdisciplinary as “the use of multiple theories, methods, approaches, frameworks, and disciplines to understand, strategize, and implement transformative initiatives in society.”² This explanation becomes a framework for the chapters in this book by which the contributing authors examine and explore pedagogical questions of power. While culturally relevant teaching, in tandem with critical dance pedagogy, are the focus of this text, a transdisciplinary ethos highlighting critical theory, critical race theory, critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, gender studies, and social justice is also embraced. With each particular theoretical lens, the questioning of power in classrooms is evidenced throughout, as each author approaches this questioning from her own particular perspective. Power, however, is key: power in the classroom, power in the school, power in the community. And, finally, who has the power; how is it being used; who are the powerless? These frames come together to best identify, subvert, and dismantle oppressive systems of education by questioning power structures, a query that undergirds social justice in education.³

The frameworks featured in this book may ensure that students historically marginalized by way of culture, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, or limited physical abilities are empowered and not oppressed through education. These frameworks recognize the systems of power that govern educational settings in the United States and understand that these systems do not support all students. Traditional teaching methods, identified by Paulo Freire as “the banking model,” where the all-knowing teacher deposits information into the student, must be questioned.⁴ Notions that students will “wear” the movement of their teacher encourage a disembodied and inauthentic learning experience. Ultimately, the scholarship highlighted in this text is committed to power shifting and empowering students who have been relegated to the margins.

Culturally relevant teaching, a term coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings in the 1990s, is a method of teaching that relates to the cultural background of students while also going beyond using content to which students can relate.⁵ The concept is featured throughout this text because of its accessibility and focus on application. Culturally relevant teaching embraces a

teaching method that relates to students' communication style and tone, learning style, and cultural beliefs. Ladson-Billings discusses the term as a pedagogy that "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes."⁶ As scholarship on it has flourished, so has its descriptive terms. For example, these methods are also referred to as culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching.

Culturally relevant teaching was initially developed in response to education researchers finding consistent patterns of lower performance for students of color than for those students from the dominant culture.⁷ Culturally relevant teaching and culturally responsive teaching were developed to address the needs of underprivileged students who were not achieving on the same scale as children who identified with the dominant culture. Multicultural education specialist James Banks articulated the need for culturally relevant teaching in his seminal work forty years ago when he wrote: "[E]ducators should respect the cultural and linguistic characteristics of minority youths, and change the curriculum so that it will reflect their learning and cultural styles and greatly enhance achievement. Minority students should not be taught contempt for their cultures."⁸

As the need to relate curriculum to students remains pedagogically pertinent, Banks' scholarship continues to hold relevance today. One reason for the disproportionately low number of students of color in mainstream dance programs is culturally alienating teaching methods. Culturally relevant teaching helps to combat such alienation by building student confidence and self-esteem. Without culturally relevant teaching and diversified curriculum, students experience cultural deprivation, which also can be an overwhelming obstacle for students feeling alienated each day of their schooling experience. Educators need to consider the often irreparable damage done to students' esteem of their culture and self when both are diminished through an educational approach that fails to value them.

Geneva Gay, a prolific education scholar specializing in culturally responsive teaching theory and research, highlights the ongoing poignancy of these challenges in our educational systems. She has characterized the attributes of such pedagogy as follows:

1. It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.

2. It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.
3. It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.
4. It teaches students to know and praise their own and one another's cultural heritages.
5. It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools.⁹

Within this structure of culturally responsive teaching, students can be affirmed in their culture and learn how to affirm others in theirs. Dance educators, as teachers in the arts, have an opportunity to make a significant impact if we value the artistic and cultural expression of students—and utilize their cultural knowledge as a conduit for learning.

Critical Dance Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is an activation of critical race theory in systems of education and is conversant with culturally relevant teaching. As Barry Kanpol states: "Critical pedagogy is a cultural-political tool that takes seriously the notion of human differences, particularly as these differences relate to race, class, and gender. In its most radical sense, critical pedagogy seeks to unoppress the oppressed and unite people in a shared language of critique, struggle, and hope to end various forms of human suffering."¹⁰

For the purposes of dance educators, I submit the term critical dance pedagogy (CDP): an application of critical pedagogy (teaching approach that examines systems of power) to the dancing body. Thus, CDP examines who gets to dance, in what spaces, with particular considerations of race, class, and gender. Unlike culturally relevant teaching, which was designed for students of color, CDP is a pedagogical approach that works well with various demographic configurations, including the homogeneous. Students are challenged to investigate power systems, structures, and relationships as they impact dance, dancers, and dance forms. Admittedly, white students often resist such examinations of power structures because they are often faced with the unpleasant realities of privilege.¹¹ I have found that it is important to highlight the opportunity those with privileges have to make significant change and highlight some of the changes that have been made historically due to those with power widening spaces for those without.

Issues of social justice are at the heart of culturally relevant teaching and critical dance pedagogy. In 2009, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan proclaimed education as a fight for social justice in a speech at the University of Virginia: "I believe that education is the civil rights issue of our generation. And if you care about promoting opportunity and reducing inequality, the classroom is the place to start. Great teaching is about so much more than education; it is a daily fight for social justice."¹²

Understanding that education is an issue of social justice that goes beyond the rights of access and extends to content and delivery is not new. Editors of *Rethinking Our Classrooms* describe a social justice classroom as "grounded in the lives of our students; Critical; Multicultural, anti-racist, pro-justice; Participatory, experiential; Hopeful, joyful, kind, visionary; Activist; Academically Rigorous; and Culturally sensitive."¹³ Thus culturally relevant teaching and critical dance pedagogy are components of a social justice educational framework.

Culturally relevant teaching was designed for students whose cultural background is not aligned with the dominant culture. Thus this approach works best when serving students of color.

Diversifying content is a great approach that expands the educational experience for all children. Similarly, critical dance pedagogy is amenable to all demographic class configurations. The latter two methods do not depend upon utilizing student culture when delivering content.

Student-centered classrooms remain a tenet in all of these approaches.

In opposition to culturally relevant teaching, many dance educators feel that dance is open, welcoming to all, and, by its creative nature, relevant to all humanity. I argue that social constructs of race, class, and gender permeate all aspects of society, including Dance Education, and must be challenged consistently, with all resources possible. In addition, I have met many people outside the dominant culture that felt uncomfortable, devalued, and rejected within Western Dance Education programs. The difference in experiences, between those who have a vested interest in maintaining the system and those alienated by it, draws attention to the Western culturally informed structure of Dance Education in the United States. This is demonstrative of how privilege often goes undetected by those who hold it.

From a historical standpoint, education theory, research, and practice

that is culturally relevant has been developing in general education (K-12) for decades.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the arts, and more specifically dance, has taken limited interest in this pedagogical approach. For decades dance educators have exalted theories and ideas of inclusion and acceptance of all individuals. Dance education pioneers like Alma Hawkins, Margaret H'Doubler, Richard Kraus, Sarah Chapman, Brenda Dixon Gottschild, and Judith Hanna have all written about teaching culture through dance in some configuration. Yet these scholars did not address these issues in their teaching methodologies. In 1992, dance educator and scholar Sarah Hilsendager presented this issue at a National Endowment conference, stating: "The majority of university programs emphasize ballet and modern genres, 'which are Eurocentric in both content and teaching approach.'"¹⁵ Although her statement demonstrates an understanding and recognition of a problem that existed more than twenty years ago, the issue of diverse content continues to be a point of discussion in the field of Dance Education because little attention has been paid to developing teaching approaches to meet the needs of students from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

Folk, ethnic, world, and global dance forms have been present in dance departments in higher education since the 1960s.¹⁶ However, such diverse dance forms are typically positioned on the fringes of the curriculum, utilized as supplemental material content and rarely substantial. The inclusion of diverse dance cultures has been invaluable to the dance community. But the purpose of culturally relevant teaching is to serve students from culturally diverse backgrounds through the use of student culture as a teaching tool. Although diversifying content is very important, it does not address culturally informed learning modalities.

From a theoretical perspective, some dance scholars have taken on the task of expanding social justice dialogues to Dance Education. Critical race theory, feminist theory, gender studies, and critical pedagogy have informed the discourse of Dance Education through the writings of scholars such as, but not limited to, Sherry Shapiro, Sue Stinson, Doug Risner and Sherrie Barr.¹⁷ In their 2010 article "Moving Social Justice: Challenges, Fears and Possibilities in Dance Education," Risner and Stinson explore issues of social justice in Dance Education and identify student resistance to multiculturalism in the classroom.¹⁸ They present scholarship that exposes racist practices that support homogeneity in Dance Education. While Risner and Stinson make a compelling argument for calling out Eurocentric bias in dance and teaching students to seek diverse voices for an expansive understanding of dance, they also provide an applicable teaching model for dance educators.

The Body as a Carrier of Culture

Cultural clashes in the dance classroom are common. The body is our instrument, it identifies us and we identify with our bodies. Our body contains us, it is the package that holds us together for better or worse. But it also displays cultural signifiers such as age, race, gender, size, physical abilities and disabilities, and, at times, religion; all of these signifiers are inscribed on the body. Sherry Shapiro explains: “The body in feminist and postmodern theorizing comes to be seen as the personal material on which inscriptions or particular discourses of the culture have become embedded. To read the body in dance education is to see the values of the culture from whence it comes.”¹⁹

This way of seeing the body, as Shapiro notes, is in contrast to Western traditions of dance that focus on “size, shape, technique, flexibility and life (that is of the body).”²⁰ But in dance we cannot escape the body—our instrument—even though it can prompt personal and external judgment provoked by these inscriptions. Overcoming the marginalization brought on by social constructs and stereotypes often active in a subconscious realm of covert discrimination is challenging. Students who regularly experience discrimination have a heightened sense of awareness, i.e., students of color, LGBTQ students, and students with non-normative bodies. Negotiating discrimination is a component of their daily educational experience and becomes a part of their identity.

The desire to homogenize persists and easily extends to our gender norms and hetero-normative society. I often have heard whispers along the lines of “What a beautiful dancer, he just needs to butch it up.” In response, I ask: What if we presented a range of possibilities and interpretations of masculinity and femininity? What if we were not bound to the binaries of traditional gender constructs? What if the embodied cultural markers of students were embraced? Dance educators and dance makers often ask the dancer to come forward as a blank slate, free of movement accents. However, I believe that dance educators must recognize, honor, and uplift each student’s cultural embodiments as primary and significant, to be worked with, not overcome.

Culture and How We Make Sense of the World

All people have cultural backgrounds. Many people identify with multiple cultures, fluent in the cultural practices of several groups. Culture is

a collection of social systems, customs, rituals, traditions, and ordinances that groups of people practice, share, protect, and develop. As an individual from the United States, I practice a number of customs specific to this country. I live in a country with a representative government. "The Star Spangled Banner" is the national anthem. Public school education is an accepted component of this country's democracy. The United States is considered the home of apple pie, the lindy hop, jazz, and hip-hop. Although Americans hold diverse opinions on each of these various cultural signifiers, there is wide recognition of their existence and how they function in American culture. This cultural knowledge of signifiers provides a shared cultural experience.

Dance Culture

At the heart of all cultures are customs which people practice for the benefit of the community and historical preservation of the culture. Groups of dancers are no different as they also maintain cultures. Within traditional Western-based concert dance culture I understand that one should remove one's street shoes before entering the studio space. However, for members of a social dance community, this may or may not be the case. Traditional Western concert dance culture also has spoken and unspoken ordinances on attire, the appropriate time for talking, treatment of the space (i.e., no eating or gum chewing in the studio), and rules about use of equipment (such as "No leaning on the barres"). Yet cultures are not stagnant; they shift over time. For instance, the shoe rule, in many dance studios, has relaxed to make space for hip-hop dancers with sneakers. In this way cultural practices evolve to meet the needs of group members. That is to say, culture is everywhere and ever-changing.

"Dance, as an embodied understanding of ourselves, can connect to a moral and ethical pedagogy that not only honours the life of the child but also makes possible a new way to envisage being human"—Adrienne Sansom

The Application of Culturally Relevant Teaching to Dance

Culturally relevant teaching, recognizing and building on the cultural knowledge of students, is applicable to all subject areas, including dance.

Yet for this approach to be effective in dance, dance educators must be aware that all dance is culturally informed. Although the instructor may feel comfortable in a modern warm-up where dancers walk around the room and explore space, it does not mean students experience that same comfort level with this exercise. In instances where students are unable to see themselves in the curriculum content, they often feel as if they do not belong and disengage from their learning. There must be an awareness that what is ordinary for the instructor may be out of the ordinary for students. From that place of understanding, instructors can find ways to build bridges to their course objectives.

Culturally relevant teaching strategies are illuminated in the work of Mary Stone Hanley, in particular the pedagogy model Culturally Relevant Arts Education (CRAE).²¹ Hanley writes of this model as a form of social justice, the act of inclusion that counters the marginalization of minorities and embraces cultural diversity. Hanley provides the following examples of CRAE:

When activities are about the transformation of injustice and are arts based—such as films or plays generated by artists that address a community problem, adolescent spoken word poets who work with younger children teaching them to speak power through poetry, or muralists who record a community's struggles and triumphs or who remedy urban blight with color and form—the artists are engaged in CRAE.²²

Similar creative practices can be employed in dance. Choreographers can work with students to develop a piece that addresses a community problem; dance students can embody poetry that advocates for social justice; dance educators can select music from communities that are outside the mainstream and work with scenic designers and costume makers to develop culturally relevant art spaces. Such activities give voice to those with little agency to be heard. As educators, we decide what is important for students to learn. If we do not shine a light on the people and communities outside the dominant culture we fail our students and perpetuate a lie. It is a lie to think that only the dominant culture is worth our study and contains artistic techniques of value.

In her text *Culturally Relevant Arts Education For Social Justice*, Hanley explains that culturally relevant approaches “affirm the learner’s power to produce knowledge” and “challenges prejudice of any kind.”²³ She highlights the need for this type of instruction in the arts, where creative process often begins with the artists’ lived experience. Building on the scholarship of Diane Friedlaender and Linda Darling-Hammond (2007); Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009); and Geneva Gay (2010), which focuses on culturally relevant pedagogy, Hanley asserts, “artists are empowered by their cul-

tural knowledge, enabling ownership of learning, which stimulates intrinsic motivation, curiosity, and imagination."²⁴ She goes on to state:

Meaning making is the core of education, if it is to be relevant and useful; without relevancy and usefulness, learning is vacuous and alienating, and resistance becomes a factor as learners try to reestablish their agency.²⁵

Student dancers who currently do not see their culture reflected in the curriculum would experience a more affirming education if they understood and believed that the goal was to add to the cultural knowledge they already possess as opposed to trying to overcome or change it.

Cultural Relevance Informing Curriculum: Global Perspectives

International research on culturally relevant teaching has yielded substantial affirmative findings. The research indicates that student learning and creativity flourished when teachers were equipped with the skills to shape learning experiences in a culturally relevant manner.²⁶

In *African Dance Education in Ghana*, Ofotsu Adinku presents a conceptual framework for Dance Education and a proposal for planning curriculum.²⁷ Esteem-building is noted as an integral component of Dance Education in Ghana. Teachers are encouraged to build esteem through teaching content that connects to and uplifts tribal culture and tradition as well as national culture. Adinku's text succeeds in tapping into African principles of learning and is designed to meet learning objectives of a Ghanaian university dance department, an educational system that admittedly greatly differs from that in the United States. Insight into ways dance departments can be structured to honor cultural values in regard to dance, cultural heritage in the arts, and dance in particular, is embedded in the learning objectives. Within this system, recreational, ritual, and social purposes of dance are valued on the same level as theatrical performances with all forms holding significance for local communities.

In the late 1980s, the New Zealand physical education curriculum was reshaped to be culturally responsive to the Maori culture. The new approach was to engage physical activity through *Te ao kori*, a concept that frames how the Maori culture understands the world of human movement.²⁸ Traditional, sports-centered curriculum for physical education was dismantled and physical education goals were reconfigured to a *te ao kori* framework. The significance of culturally relevant teaching tools in physical practices is evident in these and similar dance research findings.²⁹

More recently in New Zealand, Elizabeth Melchior examined the shift in dance curriculum from a teacher-centered, disembodied approach wherein the teacher gives students specific movement vocabularies and technique to an embodied, student-centered approach that focuses on process.³⁰ Her research is supported by the scholarship of Kerry Chappell who writes, "learning is an active and social meaning-making process, rather than a transmission of activity."³¹ Melchior's findings also support Paulo Freire's anti-banking educational model. Moreover, data affirm that culturally relevant teaching positions teachers to provide students with a student centered, embodied movement experience.

Understanding the cultural kinesthetic orientation of students is a valuable resource for educators. Kyra Gaunt's *The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double-Dutch to Hip-Hop* provides insight into the kinesthetic cultural expressions of African American females.³² The cultural and gender-specific ways of knowing movement described by Gaunt can deepen the way educators understand African American female students, their body language, and the cultural foundations which inform the composition work of these students. The focus of Gaunt's work is music and body and connects directly to dance within the black community. Gaunt's multifaceted discussion of expressions of the black female body offer resources to dance educators in regard to sensitivity to cultural heritage and practices connected to kinesthetic ways of being and choices of movement. These factors are integral to the way that black students experience Dance Education and explore their fundamental knowledge of movement. In terms of curriculum design, these are issues of which dance educators and practitioners should be aware of, as this information opens up a context in which one can consider how all people encompass movement styles related to their culture(s). In learning more about students' kinesthetic cultural expressions, educators can find pathways to engagement and culturally relevant teaching.

The research on CRT in dance, although limited in quantity, supports my argument for these teaching methods. This pedagogical approach increases student confidence, engagement, and achievement.

Culturally Relevant Required Reading

One way to make curriculum culturally relevant and diverse is through required readings. In 2011, I conducted research on the effectiveness of culturally relevant and diverse required readings with college dance students.³³ The data emphasizes the value of students seeing themselves in the content,

being able to relate to course resources, and in turn having greater success in their educational experience. Students feel included not simply by the good intentions of the teacher, but through concrete examples and resources utilized to support learning objectives. The importance of students—in particular students who have been systematically and historically marginalized and excluded—feeling included in multiple facets of the course cannot be overstated.³⁴ Further, diversification of resources is of great significance to homogeneous learning communities as well. If we as a society do not want any single group of people to think themselves superior, then we must provide them with diverse resources and evidence of a wide spectrum of humanity in the world.

Culturally Relevant Teaching and the Teacher

Dance educators have an opportunity to forge a classroom culture that not only recognizes students' culture, but also incorporates such culture into the curricula. That means teachers develop customs, language, artifacts, and rituals that students can collectively experience as a springboard to create a culture within the dance class. It is likely that most teachers already do this in some form.

Although education is culturally informed, curriculum may not be culturally relevant if educators do not make a conscientious effort to make it so. One way of doing so is for dance educators to take an active role in adapting curriculum. In a 2011 study on diversifying dance curriculum, I found that many teachers and administrators had the desire to diversify curriculum, but lacked the models and resources to put action behind their good intentions.³⁵ Culturally responsive education scholar Geneva Gay asserts, "Intention without action is insufficient."³⁶ It is not enough to acknowledge that systems are unjust and discriminatory. Even though you may not have the power to make change on a national level, you can change the educational experience of students in your class. To be sure, students often do not have enough information about the field of dance studies to construct their own curriculum. Yet it is important to empower students whenever possible and work with them as partners in their own education.

Within the context of culturally relevant pedagogy, it is the teacher's responsibility to research students' culture and seek out resources to share with the class. The teacher may ask students from this cultural background if they feel what has been presented is accurate in their experience, or if they think something has been misrepresented or left out. Some students

like to share information about their culture and will feel valued at your request that they share and that you acknowledge that they are the expert of their culture. Others may feel that it is not their job to teach the class. Be prepared to move forward with the information you have gathered whether or not the students display an interest. Ultimately, students already know about their own cultures; this information is for you to use as a bridge to student success, while simultaneously sending a message to the class that the students' culture is valued and worthy of your class time.

When the class is composed of a white community, learning about other cultures is still important. In fact, it may even be more important. In these instances, diversifying course content or employing critical dance pedagogy would be good teaching approaches. Without engaging issues from multiple cultural perspectives, students run the risk of believing that their culture is the only culture that matters. Some or all of these students will move forward in life and come into contact with people from diverse backgrounds. They need to understand how to engage and interact with people who do not look like they do. While one could argue that this is not the job of the dance teacher, I would argue otherwise. Teaching students how to navigate their space in a diverse world is the task of all educators. Additionally, dance teachers have the special privilege of guiding students through an embodied learning experience that is non-verbal, body related, and can be transformative in its impact. This is a unique and personal component inherent in dance training.

Supporting Students' Culture in the Classroom

In the text "I Won't Learn from You," Herb Kohl explains not-learning—wherein a learner intuits that his or her personhood is at stake and sabotages an opportunity to learn. "Not-learning tends to take place when someone has to deal with unavoidable challenges to her or his personal and family loyalties, integrity, and identity. In such situations there are forced choices and no apparent middle ground. To agree to learn from a stranger who does not respect your integrity causes a major loss of self. The only alternative is to not-learn and reject the stranger's world."³⁷

Kohl's theory speaks directly to issues Ruth Gustafson describes in her research about African American students failing in music education and my personal experiences teaching Western-based dance forms in an African American community in Atlanta. In contrast, teaching methods that are designed with students' culture in mind, and are student centered, can empower educators with information that will maximize

learning and allow students to flourish within a context that honors their culture.

The issue of non-learning has also been a growing challenge for students from competition dance backgrounds, as many try to negotiate dance programs in higher education settings. Recognizing their dance community as a cultural group to which they are closely tied could be very effective in supporting a positive educational environment for these students.

Cultures bring people together, and the people who practice a given culture are often identified as a "community," such as the Jewish community or the gay community. A given culture may also contain sub-cultures. For example, in addition to my affinity to cultural practices of those from the United States, I am also connected to the African American community, the Generation X community, the feminist community, and the dance community. Within the dance community there are countless sub-cultures as well. I am a member of the traditional Western dance community as well as the salsa dance community and the black dance community. Membership to one community does not negate membership to another.

It is possible to develop a dance class culture and community that supports students' membership to multiple communities (dance or otherwise). Through the course of an individual's life there are some communities to which membership will be a constant. These communities will provide lifelong engagement, a means to connect and relate to other members and the world. Being a member of an ethnic or religious community is often a lifelong membership. Membership to the LGBTQ community is another example of membership to a group that is related to an individual's identity as opposed to a time in their life. Some communities only will be a part of people's lives for a limited period of time, like their high school community. That is not to say that high school culture is not important. On the contrary, it can be quite significant. No matter the length of time one is involved in a particular community, its culture should not alienate, marginalize, conceal, deny, or denigrate another culture from which students come, to which they will return, and of which they may always be members.

Cultural Diversity

Dance educators have the power to nurture and support students' connection to their kinesthetic cultural heritage in addition to teaching

Western dance or other dance forms; one does not have to displace the other. Diversity speaks to difference. Each person can bring difference to a class in some way; some differences are more apparent or significant than others. For most, diversity in skin color will have a greater impact on how one experiences life than diversity of hair color. Here, for the purposes of this text, the term diversity is specifically used to describe cultural diversity. A culturally diverse group is a group of people within which at least three or more different cultural backgrounds are represented (culture grouping extends to ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, competition dance, and so forth). Grouping is fluid, and students may belong to more than one group. Again, as an example, I am a woman, American, African American, White, Irish, German, Yankee, bi-racial, Christian, middle-class, and educated. Some group membership is monumental to the identity of a person, while other affiliations may mean little.

For some, ethnic identity is significant; this is more often the case with people of color whose daily experiences are often impacted by racial prejudice. For others, grouping by gender (male, female, transgender, or gender queer) or sexual orientation may be of greater importance. Still there are some who think of themselves as individuals, and whether they have cultural affinities or not, they focus on how they experience the world as individuals.³⁸ It is most important to consider how each student would like to be seen and acknowledged.

Often within a group of learners from the dominant culture, individual students may be uncomfortable with questions about their culture. Some feel as if they do not have a culture. It is common for people, especially those of the dominant culture, to feel as though their daily practices are just normal practices. The misconception that only people perceived as "others" possess "culture" must be challenged. Raymond Williams addressed this issue in his seminal 1958 essay, "Culture Is Ordinary." Although it's common to accept one's daily activities, tools of use, food, and technology as simply ordinary life and not as a "culture," this sensibility is a dangerous ideology. First, it is false because everyone holds a culture. Second, it falsely agrees with those who adopt the idea that their culture is the default and primary culture of significance with all other cultures being different and "other." Historically, separating a dominant group from a group of others has led to many incidents of discrimination against those categorized as other. A class with students from diverse backgrounds offers exciting opportunities for all present to learn from one another. I encourage educators to acknowledge and highlight the various cultures of all students.

It is important, in instances where the teacher is incorporating one, some, or all of the students' cultures into the course, not to expect or ask the student(s) to educate the class. I encourage teachers to research their students' culture. Pose general questions to the class about their culture, or ask them to fill out surveys or respond to written questions; however, do not single out students. It should be an opportunity for students to share, not a responsibility. If you do research on your own, you may ask students if, to their personal knowledge, your findings are accurate. This places the students in the expert position on the subject of their culture. In addition, it signals to them that learning about their culture is important enough for you to take the time to do the research.

Cultural Capital

Pierre Bourdieu's contributions on cultural capital are noteworthy for any dialogue centered on culture and education. In his theory of how inequity is reproduced, Bourdieu developed the term cultural capital to reference implicitly and explicitly learned skills that position people in a stratified society.³⁹ Implicit lessons take place in the home and directly impact how social class is replicated through each generation, whereas explicit lessons take place at school or in a structured educational setting. Implicit lessons are more powerful as these are often multifaceted and ever-present.⁴⁰ Over the past three decades Bourdieu's theory has been expanded and used extensively in education research with its focus on how stratified societies stay so because of inherited cultural capital that ensures one's boundless or limited opportunities that regularly appear in embodied, objectified, or institutionalized states. Today, cultural capital can be seen as the resources people are given to help them move forward in life. Cultural capital is essentially a survival kit and varies with each educational environment.

Cultural capital is something everyone possesses. Rachelle Winkle-Wagner describes cultural capital as a hand of cards. Different cards constitute a strong hand in different games, depending upon the rules of the particular game. Similarly, the cultural capital that may negate someone's success in one game or environment can ensure his or her success in another game or environment.⁴¹ Thus, cultural capital is contextual; what is valued as capital in one community may be worthless in another. When traveling to a new place and entering a new culture, adapting to that culture

is paramount to one's quality of life in the new community. In order to succeed in the environment one must learn the socially preferred tastes in music, art, and food.⁴² In the United States, most people who have cultural affinities outside the dominant culture will develop cultural capital in the dominant culture while they maintain their inherent cultural affinities. U.S. cultural capital is necessary to excel in the educational system or the workplace. Cultural currency, in any given community, allows one to "talk the talk and walk the walk." Without this ability an individual may find him or herself excluded by cultural power brokers from the inner circles of the group.⁴³

Cultural capital extends to dance, and can be readily evident in dance aesthetics. When students are evaluated through a Western-informed filter of what valued dance is, a Eurocentric hegemonic ideology is being applied. As a result, some students conclude that the embodied knowledge, the cultural capital that they possess, is not sufficient to move forward. What is challenging to grasp for many, students, teachers, and educational administrators alike, is that to relinquish or neglect one's own cultural capital has ramifications that impact their relationship with all those with whom they share culture. It is possible to negotiate cultural capital in multiple currencies. However, it is a challenging balance to achieve and maintain,⁴⁴ especially as advancement in socio-economic status is tied to the cultural capital of the dominant culture. It can be particularly difficult for young people who may not understand the complex and mutually exclusive cultural codes.

It is now painfully clear to me that my interest in attaining cultural currency in the dominant culture of the dance world alienated me from the black community. More specifically, my studies in Western dance techniques alienated me from African American vernacular dance, an embodiment of my cultural history and a means of relating to other members of the black community (particularly black people outside the world of dance). As a bi-racial woman raised by a white woman and treated by society as a black woman, my inability to relate to the black community was a loss for me. At times, I was unable to learn, thrive, understand, value, or share the treasures of my cultural heritage. On many occasions, I was excluded and unable to participate. Simply stated, I could not get out on the dance floor and "get down" with my people. Kinesthetic cultural experiences were uncomfortable to me and I was embarrassed regularly due to my inability to embody African American vernacular dance. It seemed that white, black, Hispanic, and Asian people all expected me to embody a kinesthetic prowess for African American vernacular dances. However, my ballet and modern dance teachers implicitly communicated to me that my cultural

dance affinities and aesthetics would hold me back if not shed. These teachers communicated this by uplifting students who embodied Eurocentric dance aesthetics and awarding such students all primary performance roles and scholarships. As a result of these loud but unarticulated messages, I lost cultural currency within my community in exchange for cultural currency in Western dance forms.

Dance Stereotypes

Just as societal stereotypes are present, dance stereotypes are active within dance schools, programs, and departments. There are assumptions such as all dance students need ballet; white students are more suited to ballet than black students; students of color are more suited to urban forms. Such notions often impact the dance forms students are encouraged to study and dance curricula designs at large. "All men in dance are gay" is a stereotype that serves to maintain a narrow and limited understanding of masculinity and male identity throughout our society. The stereotype that all black people can dance is alive and well, and not only is it untrue, it discounts the years of training that dancers invest in their particular dance form in order to be proficient. All of these ideas are stereotypes that impact, either subconsciously or consciously, the way we educate students and even the ways in which students learn. These stereotypes support a learning process constructed through a hetero-normative, dominant cultural lens that marginalizes and harms students.

Ballet is ensconced in American culture as high art. Ballet is not bad, but it has been used as a tool for white supremacy. I cannot count the number of students I have met who have been told, "You are a great dancer, all you need is technique," which is code for "ballet." What is actually being said is that they need to lay their artistic practice of dance aside and embrace a Eurocentric dance practice in order to obtain legitimacy in the world of dance. This ideology begs to be unpacked and hip-hop provides a way to do just that. The suggestion that a hip-hop dancer needs "technique" ignores the technical training and kinesthetic intelligence exhibited in this genre. Hip-hop technique is steeped in African dance aesthetics and African American vernacular movement. To suggest that such a dancer is in need of technique is to suggest that hip-hop is void of technical value. In addition, the inference that every dancer needs ballet training is as misguided as the suggestion that every dancer needs African dance training. Western-based dance forms can enhance one's dance skills, but the idea

that all dance hinges on any single dance form is inherently erroneous. If such a premise were true it would mean that Indian Classical, Polynesian, Irish Step, Middle Eastern, and Israeli dance (and the list continues) held limited learning value as a dance form.

If you see stereotyping among your students, consider it as a valuable teachable moment. Address stereotypes directly. Asks students to explain the stereotypes, how they operate, and if they can think of any examples. Challenge students to investigate how stereotypes can be harmful. Asks students to consider what happens when stereotypes go unexamined.

When we ignore the implicit micro-aggressions of prejudice we support systems of oppression.

Culturally Informed Assumptions

As humans we are taught to read other people. This can be a benign act of identifying a smile, or the pain in the eyes of a child who has fallen down. Our ability to read others helps us to understand others each day, and to be understood. Yet, it is all too common that someone misreads another person. While teaching at a private, predominately white school in New England, I found that a number of African American students would downplay their dance prowess to counteract being “read” and assumed to be great vernacular dancers. They shared concerns that in addition to the challenges of being accepted in a predominately white and intellectual community, now they would have to overcome being stereotyped as a dancing body—and possibly dismissed as less intelligent. To avoid such readings, some students would understate movements; choose not to dance full-out; or dance in a mechanical manner to avoid embodiment of an Africanist aesthetic “groove.” Instead, these students would exhibit a held upright orientation and movement that contrasted to earthbound bent knees. For the reader, these “readings” are ways of understanding the world; as one looks closely, it becomes apparent that readings are inherently culturally informed. To be sure, those outside a particular culture often lack the knowledge to read a person or situation. Misunderstandings can impact an educational process.

Examples of such misunderstandings can be found in education literature. In explaining the need for culturally relevant pedagogy, education scholar Lisa Delpit describes a scenario in certain Native Alaskan communities where children are taught not to speak to adults. Some teachers,

in an effort not to put pressure on these students, respond by not engaging them. However, within the context of mainstream education, Delpit documents how these interactions—or cultural clashes—have been misinterpreted as non-verbal behavior, addressed by placing these students in special education classes.⁴⁵ Ruth Gustafson also provides insights into such misinterpretations.⁴⁶ She discusses how often African American children perform poorly in music classes because of a disconnect between Western methods of music education that require the student to listen to music without kinesthetic response.⁴⁷ Within the African American culture, music and dance are often experienced simultaneously, and to disengage movement from music is problematic to learning for many of these students. These examples support my findings that culturally relevant teaching can make a significant difference in student success.

Conclusion

In considering the research, theory, and lived experiences of people outside the dominant culture, dance educators can reshape foundational dance pedagogy and curriculum to be more student centered and culturally relevant for the variety of educational environments where students learn to express themselves through kinesthetic movement.

Culture is a lifeline for all people. Meaning is made through cultural informants and reference points. These cultural informants act as building blocks that people use to develop an understanding of the world. Thus culture has a significant impact on the lens through which the world is seen and understood. Research findings indicate that students learn more when pedagogy practices are culturally relevant. Culturally relevant teaching values culture and is rooted in the belief that all children deserve to be educated through a lens to which they can relate. It is about being included, by way of cultural referents, rather than excluded. It is about valuing your students' cultural heritage and, therefore, valuing your students. The more educators know about their students the more effective they can be. Culturally relevant teaching expands the possibilities for dance educators to reach all students, and, in so doing, develop the creativity of students as well as their physical well-being.