

DECONSTRUCT TO RECONSTRUCT:
REBUILDING DANCE CURRICULA

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The history of dance education in high school, college, and professional training programs in the United States, which is based on Eurocentric origins, has created numerous biases and inequities. These origins and teaching structures often disregard the relevance of dance traditions and forms from other cultures creating an imbalance that mainly focuses on ballet and modern dance. However, some dance courses studied in today's curriculum, such as jazz and tap, are rooted in Black tradition. Nevertheless, dance curriculum often overlooks and sometimes rejects the diversity of dance forms in America, particularly Black dance, in favor of Eurocentric forms. Omitting Black dance from curriculum perpetuates systemic racism in that it denies, erases, and overlooks a significant portion of American culture (Gottschild 16). Even when Afrocentric dance forms are included in the curriculum, they are still upheld by Eurocentric standards and not given the appropriate credit, context, and acknowledgement of their traditional roots in dance education. A dance curriculum that includes Afrocentric origins and traditions will address and challenge systemic biases in teaching and administration and can be used as a tool to dismantle the inequities and racism within the art form. By acknowledging and challenging these systemic biases, dance educators and administrators can work towards creating curricula and teaching strategies that not only address the inequities but also becomes more inclusive of dance forms that are not based solely on Eurocentric ideals and practices.

For the purpose of this paper, Eurocentric will be defined as "focusing on European culture or history to the exclusion of a wider view of the world, implicitly regarding European culture as preeminent" ("Eurocentric"). Arts education often reflects societal norms that favor

Eurocentric origins. In the chapter “The Arts as White Property: An Introduction to Race, Racism and the Arts in Education,” authors Carpenter, Gaztambide-Fernández and Krache state:

Whiteness is an ideological construct, enabled through specific social, cultural, economic, and legal arrangements, to secure the positioning of certain subjects as well as ways of being in the world, values, and tastes that are deemed “naturally” superior to others. These markers are embodied through phenotype and skin color as well as bodily gestures that index racial categories. Whiteness frames subjectivity and prescribes what is sayable, shaping affective structures and behaviors in ways that become encoded in the body. (9)

The complexities of Eurocentric superiority and racism in the arts and arts education curricula can be dated as far back as the Enlightenment (Gaztambide-Fernández and Travis 35). This racism continued into modern art, in which artists such as Claude Monet and Pablo Picasso created works that were appropriations of African and Asian cultural expression (Carpenter et al. 1-2). In dance, ballets such as “The Nutcracker” and “La Bayadère,” choreographed by Marius Petipa, appropriate cultural and traditional dances from China and West India (Carpenter et al. 1-2).

Dancer J. Bouey argues that Eurocentric art forms set the standards and expectations of what is considered common practice in the dance world (Etienne). When the word ‘technique’ is used, there is a presumed understanding that dancers are speaking of ballet vocabulary, which is intended as the norm (Etienne). However, claiming that a student must learn ballet technique to become proficient in all styles and techniques of dance is misguided. There are many non-European cultural dance forms, such as West African dance, that have been around

much longer that are premised on relationships between the body, the earth, and the community. These forms predate European styles such as classical ballet which is light and airy in movement quality and originated as an exclusive form of entertainment for the aristocracy in the late sixteenth century in France (Carpenter II et al. 2). All forms of dance require a proper technique to execute movement, but Eurocentric guidelines and methods unintentionally and intentionally set up a narrative of cultural and artistic dominance that is deeply rooted in racism. In an effort to preserve these traditional ideas, these standards create biases, practices, and barriers in dance and dance education. For audiences, ballet may seem unrelatable and unengaging because there is an established hierarchy that demonstrates exclusionary and offensive colonial politics such as the usage of blackface in the ballet "Petrouchka" or the racial stereotypes in the Chinese and Arabian variations in "The Nutcracker" (Carpenter II et al. 3). For dancers in Western concert dance, these biases materialize in matters concerning gender roles and the internalization of body images deemed more suitable for ballet and modern work ("Decolonizing" 19:48-20:48). These barriers cause inequities and a lack of accessibility in dance education and performing opportunities ("Decolonizing" 19:48-20:48).

While many in the arts world are currently addressing the barriers, inequities, and lack of diversity within the arts education system, it becomes difficult to make changes in the curriculum when educators fail to see the inherent biases and racism that are built upon European cultural norms. Anthropologist Joann Kealiinohomoku investigated the works of dance educator and critic Walter Sorell, stating:

Despite all anthropological evidence to the contrary, however, Western dance scholars set themselves up as authorities on the characteristics of primitive dance. Sorell

combines most of these so-called characteristics of the primitive stereotype. He tells us that primitive dancers have no technique, and no artistry, but that they are "unfailing masters of their bodies!" He states that their dances are disorganized and frenzied, but that they are able to translate all their feelings and emotions into movement! (33)

Despite the conclusions of cultural historians like Sorell who cleave to outdated constructs, many educators and organizations such as the National Dance Education Organization and Dance/USA are moving ahead in order to counter racism and colonialism with conversations and processes to update curricula, hire diverse faculty, and change how these classes are being taught. Administrators and educators are also looking introspectively at the existing hierarchies, through professional development, to create meaningful and equitable changes in the dance education system. This paper will analyze the current structures and practices in dance curricula at the university and professional training levels, followed by an examination of Eurocentric and Afrocentric dance forms which will identify the ways in which the American dance education system has embodied and embraced European traditions. The next section will explore possible teaching strategies that can help neutralize and create a starting point for more inclusive dance education curricula that blend and value the broad spectrum of dance traditions to combat white supremacy, biases, and inequities. Lastly, this paper will examine how dance educators and administrators must look introspectively at their own implicit biases and how that affects dance curricula.

Dismantling and Rebuilding the Dance Curriculum

Activism movements such as Me Too and Black Lives Matter have brought conversations around diversity to the forefront, forcing educators and administrators to look at how to

dismantle and rebuild the curriculum so that it becomes more equitable and inclusive. While many education programs have added courses, such as West African dance and hip-hop that extend beyond the more traditional Eurocentric dance forms, creating a curriculum that includes Afrocentric dance forms will not be enough to change the racism built into the education system. To reshape the current curricula, educators and administrators will need to look beyond what is being taught. They will need to carefully explore why their programs offer the courses they do, how these courses are taught to students, and how they are credited and valued within the curriculum.

The “Why” Will Guide the “How”

Dance educators already take into consideration what movement they teach and the mechanics regarding how to perform that movement, but they also need to understand and evaluate why they are choosing to teach specific historical and foundational movement in their teaching practices. Courses such as psychology and social foundations explore and identify the relationships between education and culture and how they are affected by cultural beliefs, societal norms, values and traditions, race, ethnicity, gender, and class (Barr and Risner 138). Dance educators and administrators can intertwine these courses that address social issues, policies, and history to move in tandem with dance pedagogy in order to improve courses that are already in the dance curricula. Dr. Doug Risner, the Director of Graduate Studies of Theatre and Dance at Wayne State University, conducts research and uses principles of sociology and social foundations in his dance training and education courses. Social foundations in education calls for students and educators to use “critical judgment to question educational assumptions and arrangements and to identify contradictions and inconsistencies among social and

educational values, policies, and practices” (“Social”). In “Weaving Social Foundations Through Dance Pedagogy,” Risner and Barr introduce social foundations in a dance education and history unit. One assignment asks for students to select an essay focusing on different dance pedagogies and to articulate the author’s perspective on education. The students are then asked to examine problems and create solutions from the reading (140). Assignments such as this question why these teaching methods exist in the first place within a cultural context and challenge accepted societal norms and values. These courses can help not only educators and administrators but also students to understand the purpose of why something is done and who benefits from these teachings, which can centralize diversity and equity within the studio. Once educators and administrators can address why courses are taught in a particular way, they can adapt course content and teaching methods to become more inclusive.

Many dance educators and administrators are aware that students have different ways of learning information, but they often use teaching practices that are based on ballet training when teaching other forms of dance which is problematic. It is rare that other methods are used to deliver content in the studio, as the more traditional teaching ideas are familiar and therefore accepted by other dance educators and institutions (Davis 121-122). Educators and administrators often utilize Mosston’s “Command Teaching” approach, or method-based learning, where they make all decisions, direct the pace at which the class moves, and are the only voice in the room (Mosston and Ashworth 30). Teachers stand in the front of the studio and demonstrate classwork, and the expectations are that students will reproduce the movement. Although this can be effective, this method of teaching ignores an individual’s needs and personal relationship with learning and comprehension (Barr and Risner 138).

Culturally responsive or relevant teaching encourages educators' ability to adapt their teaching practices based on course content and who they are teaching ("Culturally Responsive"). This allows for educators to actively motivate and engage their students while establishing a stronger teacher-student relationship where everyone, including the educator, becomes a learner. The hierarchy becomes a little blurred and the space becomes a community-building tool where all bodies can contribute to the learning process. In ballet and modern courses, the overfamiliarity with existing teaching methods can discourage creativity and create habitual repetition in the studio. Culturally responsive teaching is one way for educators and administrators to create new structures that work best within various learning environments. Courses such as Laban or somatic-based movement use teaching frameworks that are adaptable and cognizant of the different ways in which bodies can move in space. Higher education programs such as Rutgers University and the Peabody Institute of The Johns Hopkins University use Laban or somatic movement, which applies kinesiology, anatomy, and psychology to explore movement awareness in all dance forms ("Bachelor of Arts"; "Program Highlights"). Laban courses are integrated in the curriculum to immerse students in the critical study of movement, bodies, and society which accounts for historical and socio-cultural tensions (Konie). "Each human being combines these movement factors in his/her own unique way and organizes them to create phrases and relationships, which reveal personal, artistic, or cultural style" (Konie). Laban movement uses Mosston's "Guided Discovery" teaching method, which has educators set the task within the class but allows students to explore and arrive at solutions with feedback given from the teacher (Mosston and Ashworth 30). For educators, the outcome is more focused on the creative process and less on the ending product. This allows

educators to be more flexible and open-minded when teaching course content and helps avoid personal biases that may determine evaluation of student growth and exclude the personal and cultural experiences of each individual student.

Valuing Cultural Traditions

The cultural experiences of Black and White students, educators, and administrators often differ due to socioeconomic and cultural factors such as beliefs, language, and traditions (Davis 121). These factors can greatly affect one's learning environment. It is important for administrators to assess the needs of the students and to have course offerings that reflect the culture of the student population. This means not solely basing the curriculum on Eurocentric ideals and structures thus neglecting marginalized groups. "One cannot welcome students into the classroom and ask them (often in some subliminal way) to leave their culture outside" (McCarthy-Brown, "Decolonizing" 125). Many ballet and modern classes repeat daily course content and practices but do not consider all the bodies in the studio and their cultures throughout the learning process. Contrarily, these courses can unintentionally discourage and devalue non-European traditions and present the art form as exclusive to a particular population. This exemplifies why many marginalized groups often feel a disconnect to the art form and those who do engage in ballet feel their experiences are hindered by institutionalized racism and implicit biases. Institutionalized racism within ballet is less about what happens to a dancer and more about what does not happen such as casting and performance opportunities for a variety of principal roles based on skin complexion. As a result, non-White students often feel pressured to ignore their culture and traditions to adapt to more Eurocentric structures, causing a disconnect in their learning environment that can inhibit social and emotional growth.

In the article “The Need for Culturally Relevant Dance Education,” McCarthy-Brown says, “Learning is stifled in a space where individuals do not feel welcome. Meet the students where they are—accept their movement vernacular; accept their culture; accept them” (122).

Many educators are incorporating creative approaches and methods of engagement recognizing the importance of culture when teaching dance courses. Cara Hagan, a dance educator at Appalachian State University, has created projects that can help dance educators and administrators include diversity and cultural sensitivity into their course work by highlighting the cultures, experiences, and voices of color. One such project, a dance family tree, is a way for students to investigate and dialogue about different dance forms. The project allows students to see how Western culture is considered the norm and how students may overlook this because these ideas are systemically built into all aspects of their lives. The family tree allows them to reassess and redefine what American culture includes by having them look at dance from a global perspective (Hagan 116). Hagan also teaches a tap course that is designed to look more closely at the technical and cultural perspective of the art form while “decentering” whiteness, as it is often imposed upon dance forms rooted in other cultures. While most dance courses are spent in the studio, this course is split between dancing and lecture discussions that open up conversations about the origins and practice of tap dance (Hagan 118). These types of projects are beneficial because they initiate conversations around race, class, and gender; allow for students to celebrate their heritages as well as the heritages of others; and can dispel stereotypes of other cultural traditions. Projects such as the family tree can be incorporated into any dance history course to reframe and highlight how all dance

forms can be viewed as an ethnic or cultural dance decentering the dominance of European culture.

Arneshia Williams, an educator at St. Olaf College in Minnesota, created the Interdisciplinary Movement, a project that “centralizes movement and day-to-day knowledge from communities of color as a gateway into diverse modes of physicality” (127). This course emphasizes the experience of culture and helps inform students that there are diverse ways of learning; for teachers, it emphasizes that students of different cultures may learn differently than students with European cultural backgrounds (Williams 127). In dance education, this includes diversifying and expanding historical assignments that integrate African and African American perspectives and experiences. Most dance curricula acknowledge the work of dance artist and choreographer Alvin Ailey, but it is important to acknowledge that his dance training was also based on Western concert dance, as he studied with modern dance choreographers such as Lester Horton and Martha Graham (Wright). While programs address cultural diversity within modern and ballet, this does not mean curricula embraces cultural diversity through presenting history and practice of a variety of dance forms. Including other African and African American dance pioneers when teaching modern dance courses such as Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, and Edna Guy would highlight the contributions and perspectives of other Black artists, the ways they impacted the dance world, and why they are important in the construct of diversity within the field. This also allows for educators to address the need for inclusion while working within the current limitations of a predominately Eurocentric-based institution. For educators and students, it is important to recognize and introduce the origins and the

cultural context of dance history and movement so their significance and value are highlighted, and inclusionary actions inside and outside of the studio can occur.

Course Value, Credit Value and Evaluation

To encourage cultural diversity and inclusion in dance education programs, as is promoted in many mission statements, institutions must explore ways of restructuring curricula to be more reflective of diverse dance forms. The curricula in dance education programs are historically centered around ballet and modern dance. Many of the top college programs such as the Julliard School, Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, and the Ailey/Fordham dance program, which predominately has an African American population of students and administrative staff, all have curricula where ballet and modern are the foundational courses for their programs (“Best”). Dance education programs across the United States are making efforts to expand and promote diversity and inclusivity by adding more Afrocentric classes to their programs; however, teaching courses in world dance would be more effective if they were taught with the same significance and value as Eurocentric dance forms. Currently, Western standards are used as measurements to define what is acceptable and appropriate for concert dance and the dance curriculum. Dismantling this framework would establish a new construct that includes Western concert dance as another form of world dance, leveling it with other dance forms (Kerr-Berry, “Progress” 4). Anthropologist Joann Kealiinohomoku states, “By ethnic dance, anthropologists mean to convey the idea that all forms of dance reflect the cultural traditions within which they were developed” (33). Kealiinohomoku argues that ballet is a form of cultural dance, stating, “In the generally accepted anthropological view, ethnic means a group which holds in common genetic, linguistic, and cultural ties, with special emphasis on

cultural tradition. By definition, therefore, every dance form must be an ethnic form” (39). One danger of institutionalized racism is the idea that Eurocentric structures and practices are the norm, and that White American and European culture is not, in itself an ethnic category. In actuality, the cultural impact of Western and European traditions is very evident in dance forms such as ballet and modern. From the staging where dancers perform for an audience, to the structure of acts, to the final curtain calls, these theater traditions are all tied to European culture (Kealiinohomoku 40). If the dance education system were to look at all dance forms as cultural dances, it would be easier to give all courses equal value.

In many dance programs and curricula, classes such as jazz, tap, hip-hop, and West African dance are often designated with less credit value than classes such as ballet and modern. These standards continue to preserve the Eurocentric hierarchy and structures in dance. In the article “Moving to Center: A Reflection on Focusing Knowledge from Communities of Color in Dance,” Williams states, “What and how we teach in dance academia reaffirms what and how we value knowledge. It also reaffirms whose knowledge we value” (127). To dismantle the racism and implicit biases in the current curricula, all classes and forms of dance need to be considered of equal value (McCarthy-Brown, “Decolonizing” 126). This would result in programs offering Afrocentric courses as a requirement for all students rather than as electives, which designate these dance forms as optional or supplemental coursework.

Some institutions have already made changes to their curricula to create more equality, diversity, and inclusion within their programs. College programs such as the University of Colorado in Boulder and Columbia College in Chicago, Illinois, give the same credit value to all their dance courses. The University of Colorado is also one of the few dance education

programs that offer a graduate certificate in hip-hop studies, which aims to educate students in hip-hop practice and theory. Similarly, Columbia College offers a minor in hip-hop that explores hip-hop history, culture, theory, and practice (“CU Boulder”; “Hip-Hop Studies”).

Not every institution is equipped to add new programs right away, but small changes to curricula can ultimately result in more equitable programs. For smaller programs, this may mean adding one course in hip-hop or West African dance and then slowly developing the resources to build upon those. For larger programs, this may mean offering Afrocentric courses year-round instead of occurring only during a particular semester or offering more than one or two levels. While this alone does not dismantle racism in the education system, it does provide the early stages of a solution.

Another area where Western standards affect the dance curriculum is in the evaluation process. When Afrocentric courses are included in the dance curriculum, they are evaluated by the currently existing grading structures. The guidelines and grading rubrics are based on Eurocentric standards that universally evaluate all dance forms without considering cultural context, cultural traditions, movement quality, and the diverse group of bodies performing the movement. This not only diminishes Afrocentric-based movement but also devalues and ignores the culture, history, and tradition that goes along with it because those elements do not align with the aesthetics and creative process of Western culture (Davis 122). Educators and administrators set students up for narrow-minded thinking when all dance forms are evaluated by one set of standards. One example of these educational standards is the National Core Arts Standards, which provides educators and administrators with a unified outline for arts learning for pre-kindergarten through high school. The outline is broken into two sections: artistic

processes, which is the cognitive and physical actions by which arts learning and creation are emphasized, and anchor standards, which describes what is being taught and the skills that students are expected to demonstrate (“National Core”). While these guidelines allow for educators and administrators to evaluate a student’s work in class, they do not consider the cultural context and traditions that are conveyed to students when all dance forms are evaluated with the same language and aesthetic standards. Afrocentric and Eurocentric dance stem from different traditions and cultures, so creating evaluation methods designed for each specific course would allow all dance forms to be assessed against the backdrop of their relevant cultural history and artistic languages.

Hiring Practices

In addition to changing evaluation methods, institutions also need to reevaluate and transform their hiring practices. Institutions often hire educators whose teaching methods and credentials resemble their own, which are frequently based on Eurocentric standards and ideas (Davis 121-122). As a result, dance education programs lack representation of educators whose teaching practices are based in more Afrocentric dance forms. At a university dance program in Virginia, the director, who wished to remain anonymous, stated:

The program has been hampered by strict ‘standards’ for approval, which are set by the accrediting body SACS, The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. When attempting to hire adjuncts for classes such as African dance, urban dance, hip-hop, jazz, and tap, perfectly wonderful teachers are disqualified because they lack the degree or alternate credentials such as a certificate.

Within the last few years, dance education programs have actively added Afrocentric courses to their curricula, but most of these programs offer them as electives. Therefore, there are limited opportunities to earn a certificate or degree that would be required for teaching positions in higher education. Consequently, these teaching artists are hired as guest artists instead of having permanent positions on staff. Institutions and administrators need to explore hiring practices that allow educators who are proficient in non-Western dance forms and training to be offered the same hiring opportunities as those who are trained in Western dance forms (Davis 122).

Large universities also face dilemmas when conducting national searches for full-time dance faculty. Oftentimes, upper administration has the intention for dance programs to prioritize minority candidates, but those hiring are not allowed to identify anyone by race (Wright). “The suggestion seems to be, ‘well then make the job description to include proficiency in subjects or dance styles that would most likely be taught by minority candidates’ but that assumes that minority candidates would only be interested in teaching certain styles” (Anonymous). This assumption about Black dance educators comes from a lack of understanding artists of color, different dance forms, and art in general. Instead of searching for Black teaching applicants or hiring based on degrees, institutions must look at the different dance forms and hire faculty based on their knowledge of those dance forms. Hiring structures can begin by writing more inclusive job descriptions that reflect the needs and skills required to teach a particular course. Administrative staff need to use language that makes sense to anyone who may not have formal dance education training to reach a more diverse pool of applicants. It is also important to consider where job descriptions are being posted.

Organizations such as the National Dance Education Organization and Dance/USA have recruitment websites for institutions to utilize but if a potential applicant is not aware of these organizations, the opportunity to have a very qualified educator can go unnoticed. Posting job descriptions on social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn are a great start but networking through community groups that work with under-represented groups may create accessibility and opportunity for applicants who may not typically match up with current hiring practices. The shift of hiring structures must transform to disrupt and decenter Eurocentric structures to allow for more diversity and inclusivity. It is then that dance educators and administrators can appropriately deliver dance content to their students.

Merging Two Teaching Structures to Deliver Dance Content: Counterstorytelling and Community-Based Learning

Dance and arts education reflect the complex history of the United States. Educators frequently teach from their own cultural experiences. These cultural experiences often go unquestioned and allow educators and administrators to continue creating the conceptual frameworks for curricula and hiring and teaching practices that reflect only their experiences. However, there are many ways in which dance educators and administrators can become more inclusive of other cultural experiences when teaching dance and dance history. Counterstorytelling and community-based learning are two effective teaching methods that can help educators and administrators deliver dance content while disrupting and challenging Eurocentric superiority in the dance education system. Both teaching methods emphasize the importance of contextualizing movement and the history that supports it. While both strategies are inclusive, counterstorytelling challenges the ways in which the dance community is

perceived as elitist and exclusive by sharing the narratives of minorities (Kerr-Berry, “Counterstorytelling” 140). Community-based learning takes a different approach, encouraging all participants to learn through purposeful community engagement with guidance and reflection (“What Is Community-Based”). While these teaching methods can be used separately in the classroom setting, they are more effective if they are used simultaneously.

In many cultures, dance is inherently inclusive, but to disrupt Eurocentric dominance, it must be taught as such. Counterstorytelling is one method that can work toward that disruption. Counterstorytelling can be used to create a dialogue and challenge the ideas of race and racial superiority through examining the multifaceted origins of movement and investigating the exclusionary history of dance in this country. Daniel G. Solórzano and Tara J. Yosso, graduate professors at the University of California, Los Angeles and Riverside, define counterstorytelling as a method of storytelling that elevates unheard voices and various cultural experiences (Negron). It originates from Critical Race Theory, which addresses racial inequality in the current societal structures, including the education system (George). In dance education, movement-based and history courses can use counterstorytelling to connect historically Black and Afrocentric dance to Western dance, allowing students to become more conscious and identify the “blackness” in current dance practices (Kerr-Berry, “Counterstorytelling” 151). It brings forth the layers of cross-cultural references within these art forms, which are often recognized or labeled as Eurocentric. For instance, educators teaching a jazz course can examine the fundamentals of jazz such as quick weight shifting of the body and the usage of syncopation and complex rhythms and show video footage of traditional West African dance to reveal the similarities of the two dance forms. Counterstorytelling can also

reveal the counter-narratives and cultural experiences of Black voices and how they have been excluded. This in return can begin thoughtful dialogue, challenge the status quo, and reevaluate teaching methods that are often rejected or seen as less effective because they do not align with Eurocentric standards.

One way that counterstorytelling can be effective is to focus on the movement of the dancer's body in order to disrupt notions that the physical forms are innately Western. In a movement-based dance course, examining movement can reveal cultural roots and aesthetics in both Eurocentric and Afrocentric dance forms. In classical ballet work, the spine is erect, the legs and feet are rotated out from the hip sockets, and there is symmetry created within the body that is executed with a lightness and airiness (Kerr-Berry, "Counterstorytelling 147). In comparison, Afrocentric-based movement allows more freedom and suppleness in the spine, legs that are parallel and do not outwardly rotate, and asymmetrical shapes of the body that are more grounded or earth-bound (Kerr-Berry, "Counterstorytelling 147). These traits are still exemplified in classical ballet and traditional African dance. Counterstorytelling allows students to identify and make connections to Afrocentric culture and art forms in Western concert dance and dance history that are often overlooked.

Without the inclusion of cultural context and origin, the cultural weight of movement is diminished (Mabingo 132-133). For example, choreographers such as George Balanchine, the founder of New York City Ballet, or modern pioneer Alvin Ailey show clear traits of both Eurocentric and Afrocentric dance in their works (Kerr-Berry, "Counterstorytelling 148). The ability to break down movement and recognize the differences between the two movement histories essentially challenges and highlights how both have been used in concert dance but

how institutions only acknowledge the Eurocentric origins. Moving forward, including the cultural context and history when teaching movement-based courses will allow Afrocentric aesthetics to be recognized and valued just as much as Eurocentric ones. Also, dance forms rooted in Afrocentric cultures must be centralized and become a part of the story because it plays an integral role in dance culture in the United States.

It is also essential for educators to understand and teach the cultural traditions and history of movement by examining ways in which Black bodies and voices have been excluded. This notion challenges the idea that Eurocentrism is the only valid perspective and voice in concert dance by examining the injustices within dance history. An in-class examination of these exclusionary and racially prejudice practices can demonstrate how these actions preserve and protect Eurocentric standards and elitism in dance institutions while limiting the voices and accessibility of dance for Blacks. It also can allow for healthy discussion in which students, educators and administrators can investigate new ways to make a more inclusive future for dance. For example, in a ballet course, educators can examine the history of George Balanchine's company, New York City Ballet and his choreographic works. Balanchine did not employ African American dancers for his company until 1955 with the hire of future Dance Theatre Harlem director, Arthur Mitchell (Kerr-Berry, "Counterstorytelling" 149). Though he worked with Black dancers, there was an emphasis on the usage of white bodies, even though he often appropriated Black dance aesthetics such as the "Cakewalk" that appears in his well-known ballet *Jewels* (Kerr-Berry, "Counterstorytelling" 149). This exclusion is so ingrained that it is not even limited to predominantly white companies. The ballet company Dance Theatre of Harlem, which mainly consists of African American dancers, has been criticized for its practice

of colorism and only casting light-skinned dancers for leading roles (Perpener, “African”).

Exposing these exclusionary practices in dance courses could facilitate conversation on race and implicit biases in the current narratives and practices that occur in the studio, how to challenge them and how to create new ones.

Though counterstorytelling is an effective teaching method, it can be met with some resistance. Kerr-Berry states, “When White students resist learning, they may push back and search for ways to disassociate from the subject matter. They may blame the professor because of what they perceive as a faulty portrayal of content. They may resort to misconstruing a professor’s approach as being too Black” (“Counterstorytelling” 151). For this reason, supplementing counterstorytelling with learning methods that are more inclusive in the physical space, such as community-based learning, can destabilize Eurocentric superiority by creating a space for multiple viewpoints in the dance classroom.

Community-based learning is motivated by the belief that “all communities have intrinsic educational assets and resources that educators can use to enhance learning experiences for students” (“What Is Community-Based”). It stands in contrast with Eurocentric art forms that often have the teacher standing in front of the classroom as students replicate movement demonstrated by the teacher (Davis 121). The hierarchies created by many classical art forms contribute to the disconnect with who is invited and who can participate. On the contrary, West African cultural dances often have teachers and students learning movement in a circle, which removes the hierarchy of the teacher and student and views adults and children as equals (Mabingo 134). This learning environment asks for active participation, random communal imitation, communal guidance, and creative imagination—which are essential for

the arts. Community-based learning disrupts the Eurocentric structures both by its inclusiveness which welcomes all but also by being more akin to the learning structures of Afrocentric learning traditions and breaking with the European instructor model. Many higher education programs do not take this approach in teaching because it can be viewed as unconventional and undeveloped based on European societal norms. However, this learning environment does not diminish the cultural context of dance forms being taught. Dance education programs considering a more inclusive teaching and learning environment should embrace practices and structures that emphasize community as a building tool as many cultures learn dance within a communal space.

Both counterstorytelling and community-based learning are effective teaching tools separately, but the inclusivity of community-based learning balances the focus on different cultural narratives that are shared through counterstorytelling. Allowing these teaching methods to work together by introducing more counter narratives while also engaging and encouraging students to make their own personal connections through communal interaction in the classroom environment can be paradigm shifting. In a dance course such as ballet and modern, this may mean navigating more open discussion once counter narratives have been introduced and allowing more feedback from students during instructional time instead of the repetition often produced in more movement-based classes. Educators and administrators can use these tools not only in teaching practices but also when thinking about hiring practices and creating curricula that are more diverse and inclusive for all who choose to participate.

Looking Introspectively

Many institutions and educators have made efforts to overcome racial barriers in dance by adding more Afrocentric dance forms to curricula and programming. As a result, some educators feel that race may no longer play a huge role in erecting barriers in this art form (Perpener, "Dance" 68). However, some teachers acknowledge that the real work of dismantling and rebuilding dance curricula begins with the educators and administrators who reinforce learning structures and the institutions that create them. Current curricula, teaching methods, and hiring practices need to continue to be closely reexamined and redefined, but educators and administrators should also look to self-exploration to get to the root of some of their own implicit biases. These biases as well as systemic biases are extremely significant in shaping the frameworks in dance education. Educators may not even realize that their biases affect their teaching methods and their analysis of dance, but they unconsciously act upon and reproduce white authority and superiority, regardless of the educator's race or ethnicity (Davis 122). Professor and former dancer Crystal Davis argues, "One small way to make these issues visible is to speak explicitly to one's positionality as observer. Positionality developed through the privileges, oppressions, and interpretations of each individual's life experience can potentially reinforce racial biases" (122). The more knowledge that is brought to the forefront from marginalized educators who do not experience these privileges, the easier it is to point out what these privileges are, and the implicit biases established by European culture. Doing so will allow all educators and administrators the ability to question and improve upon teaching methods while having an increased awareness and understanding of social and cultural issues that are built into and affect the education system. Without educators and administrators

having an awareness and the ability to name Eurocentric aesthetics as just that, they will continue to be taught as the norm and alienate certain styles of dance, courses, and bodies that are not of Eurocentric origins.

Many organizations such as the National Dance Education Organization, Dance/USA and Dance/NYC offer professional and programmatic development courses and workshops that focus on anti-racism education in dance academia. This allows educators to see how their biases affect what they place at greater value regarding the curriculum and teaching methods (Walker 165). This type of introspection can reveal the ways in which personal biases stem from the larger systemic injustices. While working on the self-reflection process, it is extremely important for educators not to place the blame on themselves or have a colorblind approach, which places the blame on the individuals experiencing the inequities once biases are acknowledged. Monroe states, “The fault does not lie in individuals; instead, it lies in institutions and infrastructures that reify monolithic ideals” (42).

Once educators and administrators recognize, challenge, and dismantle their personal biases, they can work toward creating practices and curricula that are more inclusive and equally value all dance forms. It will be up to educators and administrators to use their voices to dismantle what is currently put in place within the dance education system. Remaining neutral is a dangerous position because it silences the voices of those oppressed, allowing for minimal change. Educators and administrators play a pivotal role in changing the way dance is taught because of their positions of power and influence. They can strategically shift the current standards and structures of the education system, but it must start with being able to recognize and address systemic biases and implicit biases within their own minds. The role of

educators and administrators is not to simply perform but to actively work to restructure the common human experience and the understanding of society and community.

Conclusion: The Next Steps

With many in the arts community rallying against racial injustices and inequities, persistent focus and meaningful dialogue can lead to changes that uproot current curricula, teaching practices, and administrative policies that allow Eurocentric standards to maintain their superiority and authority within the field. Fundamentally, as long as ballet and modern are considered as techniques and valued more than Afrocentric forms of dance, no matter how much educators and administrators try to navigate and change the course of learning, students will continue to view Eurocentric dance forms as superior to others. As a result, this will continue the cycle of training students and future teachers who will prioritize Eurocentric structures and dance forms. To break this cycle, current educators and administrators must focus on teaching structures that do not focus solely on Eurocentric standards. Furthermore, dance educators and administrators need to make an honest and critical assessment of how systemic and implicit biases affect their students, other educators, other administrators, spectators of the art form, and themselves. They must take an intersectional approach and carefully listen to the experiences and perspectives of those who are often excluded to make meaningful change that reconstructs the field so that it can become more inclusive of all voices and bodies. It is after this careful and thoughtful examination that educators and administrators can begin dismantling current structures and practices and rebuild dance curricula that expand beyond Eurocentric dance forms and place equal value on all styles of dance. Systematic changes in dance education that promote diversity would not only challenge systemic biases in

teaching and administrative practices but could significantly change the perception of dance and art inside and outside of the education system. Current structures have caused the arts to shift from something that is beneficial to the community to a luxury item due in part to the education system. These structures have created inequities that make the arts inaccessible and unrelatable. Moving forward, it will be crucial to deconstruct the definition of classical art and reframe arts and arts education as the reconstruction and rebuilding of the community and the inclusion of all cultures. Only by dismantling the current biased structures can we rebuild a more inclusive and diverse arts education system that can enrich communities of students and return the arts to one of their most valuable roles—allowing societies to see and heal themselves.

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