

Dancing with Diversity: Students' Perceptions of Diversity in Postsecondary Dance Programs

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In response to changing demographics in the United States, there has been a call from dance education scholars to reconsider what a college dance education should include in relation to cultural diversity and the shifting role of dance in contemporary society. Although research about cultural diversity in postsecondary dance major programs exists, it typically does not include students' perspectives. This chapter contextualizes and analyzes postsecondary dance major students' perceptions of cultural diversity using a mixed method research design to reveal what is working and what changes still need to occur to more fully embrace cultural diversity in postsecondary dance education. The data analysis concentrates on four interrelated areas: survey respondents' overall perception of if and how their programs value cultural diversity to better sense the "pulse" of cultural diversity; the titles of their dance history and content of their first creative-focused courses to gather information about if and how cultural diversity is present in both theory and practical courses; the dance courses in which they enrolled to illustrate the diversity of dance forms present in curricula; and their awareness of culturally diverse artists as a means to assess their knowledge of cultural diversity within dance. Because the data indicates that dance programs privilege modern dance and ballet but value cultural diversity, the chapter includes pointed questions for dance educators to consider as they continually refine dance curricula that reflects the cultural diversity of the US.

As scholar-artist-educators in the field, we, Karen Schupp and Nyama McCarthy-Brown, embarked on this research project out of a shared desire to better understand the landscape of 21st Century postsecondary dance education. We know each other through our separate but conversant research into postsecondary dance education and excitement about one another's research agenda, questions, and findings. Out

of this mutual respect and curiosity, we came together to investigate students' perceptions of diversity in postsecondary dance programs.

According to the United States Census Bureau, by 2044 more than 50% of Americans are "projected to belong to a minority group" (Colby and Ortman, 2015, p. 1). Although 2044 is nearly 30 years in the future, this demographic shift is already being experienced in postsecondary dance major programs¹ as student populations continue to become more demographically diverse. Postsecondary dance programs are gradually becoming aware of the need to embrace more culturally diverse curricula and content to prepare students for their futures and, perhaps more importantly, to more accurately reflect current society. As researchers, we are therefore interested in examining if and how current postsecondary dance major students, who will shape dance practices in 2044 and beyond, perceive cultural diversity in their dance programs.

In recent years, dance education scholars have considered how postsecondary college education can evolve in relation to both cultural diversity and the shifting role of dance in contemporary society. For example, in 2010, Doug Risner and Sue Stinson urged dance educators to question the assumption of "Western dance as 'normal'" and the study of non-Western dance forms as ancillary pursuits (Risner and Stinson, 2010, p. 5); in 2012 Julie Kerr-Berry, in her work investigating the problems of viewing contemporary dance education through a post-racial lens, called for dance educators to "critically examine how we enact whiteness [in dance education] within a larger system that already supports it" (Kerr-Berry, 2012, p. 52); and in 2014 McCarthy-Brown argued for the development of inclusive curricular structures that do not favor specific dance forms (McCarthy-Brown, 2014). Simultaneously, there has been a call to re-conceptualize dance major programs in relation to the shifting demands of the professional dance world. Simon Dove (2009), Jan Erkert (2014), Schupp (2014), and others recommend building college dance curricula that provide students the skills and competencies to proactively navigate the uncertainties inherent in an artistic career; to operate simultaneously as performers, choreographer, and educators; to be equipped to work in socially engaged ways; and to proactively seek and create opportunities as professionals.

Professional and accrediting organizations that directly and indirectly influence the curricula of dance programs and inform the practices of dance educators recognize the importance of cultural diversity in dance education. This is evident in the standards or recommendations for dance education content provided by the National Association of Schools of Dance (NASD) and National Dance Education Organization (NDEO), both which require students to gain an understanding of cultural contexts and culturally informed creative practices (National Association of Schools of Dance 2015 and Dance Education Organization, 2011).

As a result of the foundation provided by the previously mentioned scholars and practitioners, several postsecondary dance programs have made and continue to make changes to their curricula, student and faculty recruitment practices, and course content. Although research about cultural diversity in postsecondary dance major programs exists, it typically does not include students' perspectives. This chapter therefore contextualizes and analyzes students' perceptions of cultural diversity within their postsecondary dance programs to reveal and assess what is working and what changes need to occur as dance programs continue to evolve in response to shifting demographics.

As dance educators in postsecondary education, we have watched different departments, including our own programs, tackle the challenge of diversifying dance curricula and department culture in different ways. We have seen dance departments work to diversify programming through the following strategies: diversifying the four-year sequential curriculum; diversifying course curriculum, requiring culturally diverse readings; targeting diversity hires; diversifying movement styles assessed in the audition process; recruiting diverse students; diversifying students accepted into the program; providing need-based scholarships; and choosing demographically diverse guest artists. Through our own experiences and the research conducted for this chapter, we have come to see that there is no easy fix or sole solution. Just as diversity is fluid, so must be the approaches to embracing it. To be sure, it is the multi-pronged comprehensive approach that yields the most rewards for any community of dance learners.

Historical Background

Margaret H'Doubler established the first dance major program in the late 1920s at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. H'Doubler's program educated young women to be 'thinking dancers.' Highly influenced by John Dewey's educational philosophies, H'Doubler created a dance program where dance was a 'creative art experience' that prioritized self-discovery and movement inquiry as a means to educate the whole person (Ross, 2014). The technical mastery of modern dance, or any other dance form, was not the end goal of the initial postsecondary dance program. In the mid 1930s, Bennington College instituted a dance major geared towards the professional performance aspects of dance, specifically modern dance, cultivated through an active relationship with mid-twentieth century modern dance pioneers (McPherson, 2013). These models, one that educates the whole person through dance and one that trains people to perform a specific type of dance, are not mutually exclusive. Today's dance programs range from broadly focused liberal arts programs to conservatory programs where students select a

concentration within dance, and most, if not all, students have the opportunity to study modern dance² in their degree program.

It was a monumental achievement to get dance recognized as an academic discipline in the early twentieth century. Once established, growth was an uphill battle. Dance education pioneers prioritized curriculum development, scholarship, and advocacy, and their students were considerably less demographically diverse than today. When postsecondary dance programs first developed in the US, they were primarily white not only in faculty and student populations, but also in content that reflected dominant cultural values. In the US in the 1920s and 1930s, modern dance, largely performed and choreographed by whites, was emerging as an artistic dance form. With the establishment of the Bennington Dance program, modern dance found a place in postsecondary education. Contrastingly, black vernacular dance was already established as a means of entertainment in popular culture such as minstrel shows and Vaudeville when the initial postsecondary dance programs were founded. However, jazz and other dance styles that emerged from black vernacular dance did not find their place in the academy until much later. It would be many decades before dance as a field of study would be able to examine the social climate in which dance education was birthed, and the polemic stations of these dance cultures continues to raise questions about how they are engaged with in postsecondary dance education.

The frequent assumption that postsecondary dance major programs offer modern dance is historically rooted due to modern dance's early contributions to dance in academe, but that does not mean this assumption should go unquestioned or that studying modern dance serves all students. Dance education, like all education models, can either replicate the cultural norms or challenge cultural assumptions of the dominant culture. Multiculturalism, which honors the existence and inclusion of multiple cultural practices within a given community or society, is one way to create respect for diversity. Introduced in the 1960s and led by African Americans, multiculturalism was established as a significant factor in education by the 1970s (James, 2004).

Postsecondary dance programs were gradually altered as the importance multiculturalism emerged and gained momentum. Alma Hawkins, in 1962, constructed a dance program at the University of California, Los Angeles centered on creative practice and ethnic arts (now known as world arts).³ Hawkins was one of the first leaders in postsecondary dance education to advocate for the equitable inclusion of a broad range of dance forms a postsecondary dance curriculum. The inclusion of multicultural perspectives in postsecondary education has continued to grow since the 1970s. In 1976, the National Dance Directory identified over 50 dance programs out of 212 that offered dance forms other than ballet, modern, or folk (a staple at that time practiced in 118 programs) (Clemente and Kahlich, 1976). Today there are well over 600 postsecondary dance programs (Dance Magazine,

2015) and most offer at least one dance course outside of modern and ballet (McCarthy-Brown, 2011).

Since the introduction of multiculturalism, and often due to the progressive policies and standards of accrediting agencies, postsecondary institutions and dance programs have continued to diversify their educational content and demographics. Because diversity goals are often nebulous, this has been a great challenge. Diversity is often addressed with targeted faculty hires, student recruitment, and outreach programs (which do not address retention challenges and often low graduation rates for recruited students). These actions in isolation do not have an impact on the institutionalized white and Western-focused structure of departments and curricula. Similarly, changing a small amount of educational content such as adding a chapter on Alvin Ailey or a course on World Dance does little to shift the Western-centric mold that has shaped postsecondary dance programs.

Since the 1990s, a growing number of dance education researchers have written about the need to diversify dance content.³ In addition to dance scholars calling for a more inclusive approach to dance education in academe, professional organizations such as NDEO and NASD recognize the importance of diversity within dance education. Culturally diverse competencies are listed as requirements in both NDEO's Profession Teaching Standards for Dance Arts (National Dance Education Organization, 2011) and NASD's standards for liberal arts and professional dance major degree programs (National Association of Schools of Dance, 2015).

Perhaps to meet the call from dance and dance education scholars and to meet professional accrediting standards, in recent years many postsecondary dance faculty job postings have listed qualifications in global or urban dance forms. However, few programs position global or urban dance forms at the same level as ballet or modern dance in their curricula. Sequential four-year curricula that are dominated by modern dance and ballet requirements are standard in US postsecondary dance. Exceptions to the rule, like the University of New Mexico that offers a degree focus on Flamenco, or Columbia College in Chicago, Illinois that offers students the opportunity to concentrate on African-based dance forms, are anomalies.

Despite increasing demands for dance faculty who teach dance forms outside the dominant culture, there is a systematic problem that inhibits long-term solutions. The primary qualification for dance faculty in postsecondary education is the Master of Fine Arts Degree (MFA), a terminal degree. In the US, MFA dance programs primarily center on modern dance and or creative practice or choreography, which is typically based in Western concert dance devices and aesthetics. As a result, most who obtain a MFA and are thus qualified to teach in postsecondary education, do not study the forms that are now in high demand. This impacts dance education on multiple levels throughout the nation, as postsecondary

education institutions are responsible for educating and certifying teachers for K-12 dance education. If current and future dance educators are not taught to embrace and embody diversity and inclusion, they are not in position to teach these skills to their students.

Methodology

The research seeks to capture, contextualize, and interpret current dance major students' perceptions of cultural diversity in their degree programs. A survey containing quantitative questions and prompts with occasional qualitative follow-up questions and prompts was developed so that a composite description and specific examples of students' perceptions and experiences could be included. After obtaining Institutional Review Board approval, a link to the survey was sent to several postsecondary dance programs and distributed over various listserves in an attempt to include students from a variety of institutional types (e.g., liberal arts and research institutions) and degree programs (e.g., BA, BFA, and BS programs; dance and dance education programs).

Survey questions center around: if and how survey respondents' programs valued cultural diversity; the titles and content of their dance history and first creative-focused⁵ courses; their knowledge of culturally diverse artists; and the technique courses in which they enrolled. Survey information was gathered from a specific population at a specific moment in time, therefore a cross-sectional design (Edmonds and Kelly 2013, 108) and descriptive statistical analysis (an interpretive method that supplies an account of the basic components of the data) (Chambliss 2012, 159), is used to analyze purely quantitative questions. Data from the write-in responses, which served as an opportunity for students to provide examples throughout the survey, provide depth to the quantitative findings. Qualitative responses are coded based on emergent themes in the data (Creswell, 2013) that best encapsulated the breadth and depth of the responses.

One hundred and fifty seven people participated in the survey. Survey respondents self-identify as upper division dance major students, and although survey respondents are both male and female from various ethnic and racial backgrounds with diverse sexualities, the majority are heterosexual white women.

There are several limitations of the study. Although there are 157 survey respondents, it is a relatively small sample pool. Because the survey includes questions about students' experiences over a three or four-year period, we recognize that some students' may have been unable to recall certain aspects of their experiences. Additionally, because respondents come from various institutions across the US, there is no control for interpretation of concepts around

terms. For example, the term cultural diversity may be differently defined for each student.

Finally we acknowledge that like all research designs, the research questions are influenced by our educational backgrounds and experiences as researchers, educators, and artists. We sought to create a study that would produce data on challenges we identified in the field. To be sure, two individuals who are concerned with the diversification of dance education wrote and structured the research instrument for this study and analyzed the data. Additionally, author one came to the study with assumptions about the implicit and explicit predominance of Western concert dance aesthetics in postsecondary improvisation and choreography courses. Author two came to the study with the assumption that many students of color feel cultural diversity is not valued in their dance program. Author two came to this assumption through numerous instances when students of color communicated to her that they felt the pressure of enacting whiteness implicitly present in their daily class experiences and that cultural diversity was more of a public relations proclamation than an actual value. This assumption was not supported by the findings in this study. Data for the study came directly from survey respondents and were not completely aligned with the researchers' initial presumptions.

Presentation of Data

After examining the data, the central issue to emerge was: What are the most effective ways to diversity dance curricula and programs? Of great significance are the forms of cultural diversity that survey respondents identified as most beneficial or worthwhile. To that end, the data analysis concentrates on survey respondents' overall perception of: if and how their programs value cultural diversity to better sense the "pulse" of cultural diversity; the title of their dance history and content of their first creative-focused courses to gather information about if and how cultural diversity is present in both theory and practical courses; the dance courses in which survey respondents enrolled to illustrate the diversity of dance forms present in curricula; and survey respondents' awareness of culturally diverse artists as a means to assess their knowledge of cultural diversity within dance.

Survey respondents were given the following statement: "My program does a good job of providing me with a range of cultural perspectives on dance." They were then asked to select one of the following answer choices: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, or strongly agree. There were 120 responses to this question. This question was asked to get a general sense the students' perspective on how dance programs communicate values of cultural diversity.

Table 1. *“My program does a good job providing me with a range of cultural perspectives of dance.”*

Answer Choices	Percentage out of 121 responses
Strongly Disagree	5%
Disagree	10%
Neutral	17.5%
Agree	50.8%
Strongly Agree	16.6%
Total	

Second, survey respondents were asked to “Provide an example of one way your program expressed a value of cultural diversity” and were then directed to rank their selection from the following five options (on scale of 1-5 with 1 being the most important): course offerings; diverse student body; diverse faculty; exposure to diverse guest artists, performances, and events; diverse course texts and resources. This question is integral to providing data on strategies that students recognize as effective in diversifying dance curricula and programs.

Table 2. *Students identified the following as being the most important way the value of cultural diversity was expressed.*

Answer Choices	Percentage out of 91 responses
Course offerings	13.24%
Diverse student body	28.87%
Diverse faculty	5.48%
Exposure to diverse guest artists, performances, and events	28.57%
Diverse course texts and resources	14.94%

Dance history is a course that has been identified as a stronghold of Western privileged course content. Yet over the past ten years, dance programs have reconsidered the course’s title and content to address some of the inherent cultural bias. Because the scope and content of dance history courses seems to be evolving, the survey included the question, “What is the title of your dance history course?” We wanted to examine how programs title this course to see if there is an acknowledgement of a Western focus in the title such as “History of Western Concert Dance in the Twentieth Century,” if the title signals a broad and inclusive course, or if the title maintains the more traditional choice of “Dance History.” The latter title is one that almost guarantees numerous culturally informed dance forms will be invisibilized due to limited time in a semester. Students who identify with

cultural dance forms that are not present in their dance history courses can interpret that exclusion as white-washing. The title “Dance History” implies that all histories of dance are included, which is an unrealistic goal for any course. Under such a title, it is reasonable for students to presume they will receive information that reflects their cultural heritage – as all cultures possess a history. To provide a monolithic offering under the course title “Dance History” can potentially be interpreted as discriminatory.

Seventy-six survey respondents provided the titles of their dance history course that were then sorted into five categories: 1) Ambiguous and subjective, courses with titles such as “Dance History” or “Dance History: Past and Present;” 2) Broad and inclusive, courses with titles such as “Moving Histories” or “Cultural Studies;” 3) By century or time period, course with titles such as “Contemporary Dance History” or “Dance History pre 1900s;” 4) Theme Specific, courses with titles such as “Dancing in the Past and Present: Romanticism and Beyond;” 5) Uncategorized (these student responses were incomplete).

Table 3. *Dance History Course Title Categories.*

Title Category	Percentage out of 76 responses
Ambiguous and subjective	77%
Broad and Inclusive	22%
By Century/time period	26%
By Specific Theme	5%
Uncategorized	5%

Note: some course titles fit more than one category. For example: “Engaging in Dances Past: Early Roots to Renaissance Dancing in the Past & Present” fits into both the theme and time period categories.

Similar to how the course title “Dance History” can mislead students to think that multiple histories of dance will be taught, the general terms choreography, improvisation, and composition can also be problematic. All dance practices have specific culturally-rooted approaches to devising and sequencing movement into dance. This means that students are exposed, implicitly and explicitly, to cultural values in their choreography, improvisation, and creative practice courses. Since most dance major programs require at least one of these types of courses, survey respondents were asked if their first creative-focused class addressed dance forms beyond ballet and modern dance to assess what specific dance cultures are represented in these generically titled courses.

Of the 79 survey respondents for this question, 57% reported that their first creative-focused class did not include dance forms outside of ballet and modern dance. Survey respondents who reported that their program valued cultural

diversity and that their first creative-focused dance class incorporated dance forms besides ballet and modern dance, indicated that a breadth of dance forms, selected from a list, were addressed in their first creative-focused course.

Table 4. *“Did your first improvisation, choreography, composition, or creative practice course focus on dance forms beyond ballet and modern dance?”*

Answer Choices	Percentage out of 79 responses
No	57%
Yes	43%

Dance forms beyond modern dance and ballet are often required or offered in dance curricula as a way to promote cultural diversity. As such, survey respondents were asked to indicate from a list the dance forms they have studied for academic credit. For the 77 survey respondents who completed this question, ballet and modern dance are the most often studied, followed by contact improvisation, jazz, West African forms, and Urban dance forms or hip hop.

Table 5. *Data on students’ course enrollment (dance forms that scored 30% or higher).*

Dance Form	Percentage out of 77 responses
Modern Dance	96%
Ballet	94%
Contact Improvisation	73%
Jazz	60%
West African Forms	40%
Urban Movement Forms or Hip Hop	30%

As the examination of educational outcomes related to cultural diversity is an aspect of the research study, we had to consider possible educational outcomes of a curriculum that values of cultural diversity. Knowledge of culturally diverse dance artists is one conceivable outcome. To assess this knowledge survey respondents were asked to “Name three dance artists of color or from culturally diverse backgrounds.” Responses to this question provide information about what kinds of dance artists (e.g., Western dance artists, artists from outside the mainstream, deceased artists, contemporary artists). Out of the 157 survey respondents, 88 skipped this question. Of the 21 survey respondents who identified as students of color, only one skipped this question.

Table 6. *Data on dance artists of color from culturally diverse backgrounds (artists with four or more responses listed).*

Artist Identified	Percentage out of 69 responses
Alvin Ailey	25
Misty Copeland	21
Bill T. Jones	13
Katherine Dunham	8
Pearl Primus	5
Kyle Abraham	5
Jose Limon	4

To gain a sense of how different dance forms and aesthetics are valued in dance programs, survey respondents were asked, “In your opinion is one dance form privileged over another in your dance program?” Eighty-six percent of survey respondents answered “Yes.” They were then asked to rank the top three forms privileged in their program. The top three privileged forms were modern dance (95%), ballet (90%), and jazz (32%). It is also critical to note that nearly a quarter of survey respondents (24%) limited their response to two forms, ballet and modern dance.

Interpretation of the Data and Findings

We began the research by analyzing how survey respondents perceive their program’s value of cultural diversity. In response to the statement, “My program does a good job of providing me with a range of cultural perspectives on dance,” survey respondents in general have positive views. This speaks to the diversity work that programs and institutions have done for the past few decades. Students’ views on cultural diversity have expanded greatly from twenty years ago, which has a great deal to do with the implementation of diversity initiatives—often motivated by accreditation standards that require diversity in educational programming. Yet, the privileging of ballet and modern dance, as reported by survey respondents, demonstrates how challenging it is to shift calcified structures. As we acknowledge growth in this area, we also note more work to be done.

Renowned sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) identifies the racial dynamics of our time as the “new racism” in his book *Racism without Racists*. He writes of the current politically correct culture where no one is racist. Further, it has become politically incorrect to bring up race. As a result, racist structures stand while it is deemed inappropriate to discuss racism. By eliminating discussions of race, those oppressed by racism are silenced and all action to dismantle racism is

nullified. Similarly, as reported in the survey responses, it appears that many dance programs value cultural diversity yet continue to privilege modern dance and ballet. This dichotomy between valuing diversity but prioritizing Western aesthetics is best illustrated through one survey respondent's answer to the question about what dance forms are privileged in your dance program. The survey respondent succinctly wrote, "Modern dance is highly privileged (but with good intent)." Within this new form of racism, one can appreciate this survey respondent's ability to acknowledge the presence of and desire for cultural diversity without integrating embodied traditions and contextual knowledge outside of ballet and modern dance. It is like having a potluck and celebrating the Irish Soda Bread prepared and brought by Irish neighbors, but never eating it, as your plate is filled with cultural staples from your own background. We, the authors, see the cultural diversity in postsecondary dance programs, yet curricula and educational outcomes remain tied to time-honored Western constructs of dance as art.

When survey respondents were asked to rank how their program expressed a value of cultural diversity, they were in essence stating what methods were meaningful and effective for them. As programs seek to offer quality educational experiences, understanding best practices is critical to student success and satisfaction. For survey respondents, exposure to diverse guest artists, performances, and events are the primary ways that programs expressed meaningful diversity. Knowing the complicated interworking of dance programs, we hypothesize that this is not necessarily where dance faculty and administrators place the most energy in promoting cultural diversity, but rather that these are significant and memorable aspects of programming to students. Exposure to diverse guest artists provides an experience that moves beyond required readings and is often quite interactive and personal.

At the same time, it is critical to investigate students' perceptions of cultural diversity in their day-to-day curricula to capture an accurate snapshot of cultural diversity in postsecondary dance education. It is encouraging that survey respondents recognize their programs' efforts and successes at incorporating diverse guest artists, performances, and events. However, attention can be given to how cultural diversity manifests in students' theoretical and practical experiences with dance, in relation to educational outcomes, course content, and course offerings.

Knowledge of Culturally Diverse Artists

Data on education outcomes was yielded with the prompt: "Name three dance artists of color or from culturally diverse backgrounds." It is significant that more than 50% of survey respondents (88 out of 157) skipped this prompt. This could suggest that over half of survey respondents were not equipped to answer the

question. Also of great significance is the remarkably high percentage of responses to this question from survey respondents who identify as students of color; 95% of survey respondents who identify as students of color (20 out of 21) answered this prompt. Several dance artists provided by students of color such as hip hop artists Willdabeast Adams, Storyboard P., Orlando Moreno, and Jesus Saldano were only identified by one respondent. Singular responses to this prompt could suggest that awareness of these artists came from survey respondents' personal interests and knowledge as opposed to information shared in their curriculum. That only one survey respondent of the 21 who identified as students of color omitted this prompt suggests that the information about dance artists of color or from culturally diverse backgrounds has value to students of color. Their ability to identify artists of color speaks to their desire to see reflections of themselves in their field of study and the need to understand the successes and contributions of those outside the dominant culture.

Survey respondents who identified as students of color were more knowledgeable about dancers outside of modern dance and ballet. For example, one interesting response came from an Asian survey respondent who listed Sergiu Brindusa-Moore, Lauralee Zimmerly, and Jesus Saldana. While this survey respondent did not identify any Asian dance artists, he/she demonstrates knowledge of and interest in artists of color outside of the modern dance and ballet canons. The awareness of dance artists of color outside of modern dance and ballet relates to educational research that has found that students of color achieve at a higher rate when content relates to their culture and world experiences (Gay, 2010). The survey responses indicate that students have the potential to be a great resource in identifying diverse dance artists with whom dance programs can engage in many ways. Lastly, there was a greater preponderance of African American dance artists than dance artists from any other cultural background. Among the top seven artists identified, six are African American and achieved their notoriety through Western concert dance forms.

Survey responses to the prompt "Name three dance artists of color or from culturally diverse backgrounds" reinforce the privileging of ballet and modern dance in postsecondary dance curricula. Of the seven artists who were listed more than four times, five of them, Ailey, Copeland, Jones, Abraham, and Limon, work in modern dance and or ballet. The remaining two artists, Dunham and Primus, worked in African diasporic dance forms where they made significant contributions; however their inclusion in many dance history texts tends to prioritize their contributions to modern dance, specifically "African-American Modern Dance." Survey responses indicate that Ailey is the most well known culturally diverse artist. Not only did Ailey generate the most responses, but several dancers affiliated with Ailey such as Judith Jamison, Dwight Rhoden, Desmond Richardson, and Alicia Graff, were provided as examples by survey respondents.

This is critical to note because although Ailey and the aforementioned dancers and choreographers are artists of color, Ailey's movement vocabulary is steeped in Western concert dance aesthetics. Survey responses indicate that dance programs are addressing cultural diversity within modern dance and ballet, which is different from embracing cultural diversity through presenting the history and practice of a wide array of dance forms.

When asked to identify dance artists of color or from culturally diverse backgrounds, students of color brought in a myriad of responses that reflected contemporary dance arts outside the mainstream. This data reminds us of sound dance teaching practices known in the field—mine students for knowledge that can be used as resources to make curriculum more relevant to the lives of students. Students are sitting on a wealth of knowledge that if utilized, could diversify content and promote investment from students.

Cultural Diversity and Dance History

Although students are introduced to dance artists in various parts of their curriculum, historical and contextual courses provide an in-depth investigation of the people and practices that shape a dance form. This makes dance history courses (typically a required course in dance major programs) an integral part of cultivating cultural diversity. Countless programs have created course titles that delimit course content in a concise and transparent manner. However, survey responses indicate that most dance programs utilize ambiguous and subjective titles like "Dance History." Ambiguous and subjective titles provide professors with the autonomy to teach to their specialty. These courses titles inspire a breadth as opposed to depth approach and ensure that a great deal of content will be left out. Selection and the resultant omission of content is a reality of curriculum design; it is impossible for a professor to teach the entirety of any subject in one course. However, if content that is culturally relevant to students outside the dominant culture is consistently left out of a course, it sends a hazardous message of exclusion. Additionally, if the course content always reflects the dominant culture, the absence of culturally relevant content can send and reinforce the dangerous message of white supremacy: the dominant culture is of greater significance than those excluded. However, there is a noticeable and growing number of course titles that include a specific dance form and or time period such as "Engaging in Dances Past: Early Roots to Renaissance Dancing in the Past & Present." Although more research is needed in this area, the range of titles offered by survey respondents indicates recognition of the need for both breadth and depth with a consciousness of cultural diversity in dance history courses.

Cultural Diversity and Creative-Focused Classes

Addressing, honoring, and including cultural diversity is a shared responsibility, making it critical to examine cultural diversity beyond historical and contextual dance courses. What students bring to dance, regardless of their cultural background, needs to be respected in all areas of their studies. While it is beyond the scope of any dance educator and dance curriculum to address the myriad of ways that dance can be composed, improvised, or designed, attention can still be paid to accurately naming the methods at use in creative-focused courses. There is a difference between teaching “improvisation” and teaching “improvisation from a postmodern perspective” or teaching “freestyling.” The first term omits Western cultural constructs and values, making them an implicit or a “given” aspect of an “improvisation course.” While creative-focused classes, as all dance classes, are places where students are expected to “think outside of the box,” students need to feel that their box, the dance experiences and cultural values they bring to class, is appreciated and that the course content is relevant to the dance forms they are passionate about. Although 57% of 79 survey respondents to this question said their first creative-focused class did not include dance forms outside of modern dance and ballet, 43% reported that they did learn about dance practices outside of these forms, which is encouraging. The data collected about students’ experiences in their first creative-focused course suggests that there is a direct correlation between how students perceive their programs’ valuing of cultural diversity and what is offered or suggested in their first choreography, improvisation, or creative practice class. This points to the importance of introducing students to culturally diverse creative practices and revealing cultural assumptions about creativity. It implies that dance programs are starting to question the presence of unstated dominant cultural values and practices in creative-focused courses by expanding the dance making practices they introduce to their students. Dance educators can continue to interrogate whether the compositional tools they offer honor and challenge the experiences of the students in their class and the dance forms their students practice.

Cultural Diversity and Course Selection

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the data points to a correlation between the dance forms students study for academic credit and their perception of the valuing of cultural diversity in their dance programs. Of the 76 survey respondents who felt their program values cultural diversity, more than 40% of them studied forms beyond ballet and modern dance including contact improvisation (79%), jazz (63%), and West African dance forms (42%). For those who responded that their program does not value cultural diversity, the only dance form outside of ballet and modern dance to receive a ranking above 40% was contact improvisation, a dance form that although is a distinct dance practice is strongly affiliated with Western-based,

postmodern dance. It is also revealing to note the statistical differences in the enrollment of students of color and white students in dance forms outside of ballet and modern dance. As examples, consider that 50% of survey respondents who identified as students of color vs. 22% of survey respondents who identified as white enrolled in an urban dance forms class, and 9% of survey respondents who identified as students of color vs. 2% of survey respondents who identified as white enrolled in a Bharatanatyam class. Survey responses suggest that students of color are more likely to enroll in coursework outside of ballet and modern dance if available to them.

The research indicates that major strides in diversifying postsecondary dance major programs have been made. However, aesthetic values that privilege Western dance forms remain entrenched. Data suggests that while survey respondents have benefited from multiple forms of diversification, experiences with artists outside the mainstream hold great significance in broadening their perspective and ability to see beyond their own cultural background. The data indicates that access to studying a range of dance styles beyond ballet and modern dance is relevant to survey respondents and is a critical component in how they perceive cultural diversity within their dance programs. Further, survey respondents who identified as students of color in particular have knowledge about diversity in dance beyond modern dance and ballet; this knowledge can be mined and utilized to demonstrate respect for the experience students of color bring to their programs as well as cultivating values of cultural diversity.

Further Thoughts for Consideration

To be sure there is a growing and established awareness of diversity and an understanding that moving into the 21st century, society must incorporate and embrace cultural diversity or be left behind. Yet, there is a stark difference between inviting someone to join your dance and co-creating a new dance designed to hold the vision of all participants.

Bell Hooks (1994) reminds us that the classroom can be a place of possibility and liberation if educators are willing to devise ways to move beyond the stated and unstated limitations or borders of our reality; through this cycle of reflection and action, education becomes transgressive. Although hooks is speaking of education in general, her work has particular relevance when addressing cultural diversity in postsecondary dance major programs. As US demographics become more diverse and dance programs continue to evolve and become more established in academia, it is time to question assumptions, to better understand and reveal unstated limitations, and to devise strategic ways to transgress. Doing so is critical

not only to dance within academe, but to strengthening and honoring the role of dance in communities outside of the university.

Several questions emerged in this study that can have multiple answers. As an academic discipline, it is expected that each dance program will face unique institutional challenges and pressures. Therefore to conclude this chapter, we offer several questions for further consideration instead of answers. Our hope is that dance educators and administrators will deliberate on these questions as they continue to develop and refine their dance programs.

The first question that emerges from this study regards the assumption that dance programs should focus on modern dance and or ballet and how that relates to the values and goals of a given dance program. If the goal of a dance program is to specifically train dancers to perform solely in modern dance or ballet contexts, then by all means, that should be the central emphasis of the program. However, if the values and the goals of the program are wider than Western concert performance, it could be constructive to consider what other dance forms could serve their goals. For example, do all future dance educators need to be qualified to primarily teach ballet and modern dance? How would widening the canon of dance forms credentialing programs offer change who has access to dance in degree programs and beyond? Even programs that are focused on performance and choreography should contemplate how the dance forms they privilege reflect the institutions' local community and students' experiences and goals. While we are not advocating that all dance programs offer all dance forms (an impossible goal), we encourage dance educators to carefully consider why their programs offer the dance forms they do. A more diverse offering of dance programs could radically change the perception of dance inside and outside of the academy by deconstructing notions of "high art" (i.e. those dance forms practiced in the academy) and "popular culture" or "ethnic" dance (i.e. those dance forms practiced outside of the academy in a variety of settings).

Although dance is a physical art form, a good deal of dance learning revolves around language. Just as providing a specific image helps dancers better embody movement, using precise language assists students in understanding what cultural values are embedded in their course work and the histories and practices of the dance forms they study. Some questions for dance educators to consider include Does the course title accurately reflect the course content? How can I bring more specificity to naming the exercises and devices I am teaching in my improvisation and choreography class to better situate the cultural contexts of the practice? What assumptions are built into my language and how can I, and my students, question those assumptions? These are not easy questions to answer, but deconstructing language is a key component to revealing the construction of whiteness in dance, in classrooms, and society. While it may seem like a small change to alter the name

of a course to better align with the content, doing so will reveal the cultural starting point of the course.

Within classes, dance educators can continue to assess the content they bring into class. Whether it is a reading, a choreographic work, or a guest presentation, dance educators can ask themselves: Am I including this content because it interests me or because it is culturally relevant to my students? Am I including diverse perspectives in my course materials? Am I selecting content that both honors what my students bring to class and moves them forward? Does the content I've selected reflect the diversity of cultural perspectives in the historical construction and practice of a given dance form? Often times, students view course content as the bedrock of their learning; if they read it, view it, or hear it from a teacher, it is inherently important. Examining content choices may reveal hidden biases or imbalances in perspectives. While revealing these biases may be surprising and uncomfortable, once revealed, dance educators can make proactive choices about how to create a more inclusive learning experience.

In conclusion, all of us can continue to grapple with the following questions as means to continually refine dance curricula that reflects our current world:

- 1) Who does the department/program serve?
- 2) Does the curriculum, reflect and relate to all students in multiple aspects of programming?
- 3) Does the curriculum provide students with information and resources to relate to members of the greater community in which this institution sits?
- 4) Have faculty members found ways to engage students and artists from cultural backgrounds other than their own, modeling skills of inclusion?
- 5) Can students be successful in this program without deepening their understanding of culture as it relates to the arts, and valuing physical practices beyond those historically privileged within the United States?
- 6) Does the program prepare students to be creative, active artists in the diverse and global society of the twenty-first century?

Notes

¹ In this chapter, “dance major programs” refers to academic programs offering a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, or Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance, Dance Education, or a specific concentration within dance (e.g., choreography).

² “Modern dance” is used as an umbrella term to include specific forms of modern dance (e.g. Cunningham Technique, postmodern).

³ The department evolved and today serves students and the field as the Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance; ethnography, activism, and cross-cultural study are all situated as integral components of study.

⁴ Alma Hawkins identified modern dance and global dance forms as the bedrock of dance education (1964). Peggy Schwartz (1991), Judith Hanna (1999), and Pegge Vissicarro (2004) contribute a great deal on multiculturalism in dance. In pointed studies of where and how embodiment meets theory, Sherry Shapiro (1998), Doug Risner, and Sue Stinson (2010) examine dance through a critical pedagogy lens. In the US, likely due to our social constructs and racial challenges, there has been an effort to integrate and recognize African-derived dance forms, with scholarship from Julie Kerr-Berry (2010), Brenda Dixon Gottschild (1998), Takiyah Nur Amin (2011), and others. Danielle Robinson and Eloisa Domenici (2010) bring forth a global perspective (Canada and Brazil respectively) on the challenges of diversifying dance programming in higher education. Their article, “From inclusion to integration: intercultural dialogue and contemporary university dance education,” shines a light on the lack of resources that provide educators with “how” to diversify curriculum. Robinson and Domenici note that African Americans’ influence on American concert dance has been advocated for and perhaps integrated; yet best practices on how to integrate remain indeterminate.

⁵ “Creative-focused” is used as an umbrella term to include choreography, improvisation, composition, creative process, and creative practice courses.

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