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Editorial

Dance Education Throughout the World: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Racial Justice Reckoning

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Introduction

The years 2019–2020 and beyond were like no others, as we encountered the colliding issues of the global COVID-19 pandemic and a global reckoning with racism. Dance educators, performers, choreographers, and many others were impacted by these monumental events and concerns. Along with fellow members of the Board of Dance and the Child International (daCi), Jeff Meiners, Nicholeen DeGrasse-Johnson, and Lisa Wilson, we initiated a series of online meetings when faced with major shutdowns of our professional practices due to the global pandemic. Through these meetings, organized to check on the health of the organization and its membership in this time of international crisis, we recognized that children especially were severely limited in their ability to access dance and that many access-related issues that had long existed in dance became uncovered by the current global events.

The pandemic and racism both focus on our lives as fueled by our breath. In dance and movement, we need to breathe. We all need to breathe to live. Yet these two issues, George Floyd's murder and the global pandemic, were connected by breath. As George Floyd was being murdered, we hear him say: "I can't breathe." One of the devastating effects of COVID-19 is that it affects the lungs and severely limits lung capacity, sometimes leading to death. Lives have been suffocated by racism. Lives have been suffocated by a devastating disease. Dancers cannot ignore this intersection.

Though several years have passed since the height of these events, it is now clear that their lasting and lingering effects will be with us for a long time. In fact, many of us, regardless of the setting, have fundamentally changed our practice to incorporate new learning and new ways of teaching and working with students. We have opened possibilities in teaching, content, awareness, and manner of engaging with students. Additionally, we recognize that this is not a temporary shift, but rather a shift in approach that is constantly evolving and never in a fixed position.

Dance and the Child International (daCi) has always advocated for everyone's right to dance, regardless of ethnicity, location, or background. Our vision states:

Every child has a right to dance. We believe that all children and young people should be able to express themselves through dance. Our aim is to create possibilities for children and young people around the world to experience dance as creators, performers and spectators. Through dance they can be physically engaged in the world and connect with others across boundaries of culture, language, age, or socio-economic status. (Dance and the Child International, n.d.)

The online daCi meetings, therefore, started to focus on and discuss two areas of limitation in dance education during this time: racial inequities and lockdowns due to the pandemic. Following discussions and presentations framed as “A Pathway to Understanding and Healing: Exclusivity and Racism in Dance,” among daCi, we recognized and acknowledged that racism and accessibility are international problems that have existed in dance globally for a long period of time. Our decision to formalize these discussions and workshops led to this special issue of IJEA. In our call for papers, we focused both on the immediate concerns and on root issues that have been present for much longer in the field of dance. The accepted papers presented here in this special feature provide insightful commentary on the dual pandemics of COVID -19 and racial injustice that have occurred throughout the world. We gain knowledge about racial injustices in Australia, the United States, Uganda, and South Africa, with specific suggestions for transforming dance education toward a more just and inclusive learning environment.

We also gain insight and knowledge about specific ways dance educators have taken advantage of this pandemic moment to change the ways in which teaching, learning, and performance take place. The papers in this section are based in Slovenia, Jamaica, and the United States. Each paper provides strategies for creating, sharing, and learning about dance, prompted by the colliding issues of the global COVID-19 pandemic and a reckoning with racism.

Although the first set of papers focuses primarily on racial justice and dance and the second group of papers focuses on dance learning during COVID-19, the colliding issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and racial justice movements crossover in all papers. It is our hope that these essays will provoke, inspire, and awaken new waves of critical engagement and creativity within the pedagogies and artistic practices of dance practitioners across the globe. As members of daCi and dance educators throughout the world, we hope to contribute to the constant evolution of dance education and to continue to learn from each other.

Section One: The Impact of the Racial Justice Movement on Dance Education

The four articles in this section focus predominantly on racial issues that received renewed focus following the Black Lives Matter movement. This movement had been in place before George Floyd’s murder (in the United States) and had reverberations throughout the world, wherever systemic racism was perceived. There are many forms of racism within dance education. These four articles discuss racism as represented in four different countries and in very different forms.

In *First Nations Dance in the School Curriculum* from Australia, authors Kerrin Rowlands, Belinda MacGill, and Jeff Meiners focus on unpacking the complex issues built over time

through the marginalization of indigenous dance practices within the curriculum in Australia. Colonialism has suppressed indigenous voices in the arts and every discipline, which became systematized through government and curriculum documents. This article explores those histories and current events that aim to now undo the injustices of the past.

'African dance': The Dangers of a Homogenizing Label by Alfdaniels Mabingo (Uganda) focuses on dances from Africa that are taught and performed in the western world. He posits that by calling every form of movement that originated in the African continent 'African dance' is reductionist and perpetuates both colonialism and racism. Though 'African dance' has been introduced in the west with the misperception that it is decolonizing or equalizing the curriculum, it has the opposite effect by being reductionist and patronizing.

Focusing on the United States, Deanna Lynn Martinez discusses the curriculum of American modern dance that has traditionally been taught in U.S. public schools and colleges. Writing *Redefining American Dance in the Classroom* focuses on groups that feel excluded by the decidedly Western and white perspective of the traditional modern dance curriculum. She posits that the traditional American dance legacy is filled with inherent racism and, by extension, excludes students of color.

This section concludes with *Dancing Under the Weight of Racism* by Lisa Wilson (South Africa). Wilson begins with a personal narrative from the perspective of being raised in Jamaica and now working in South Africa. The racism that she and her students in South Africa feel and have been subjected to in the past began before the murder of George Floyd in the United States, but has been brought to the forefront with that murder and the subsequent worldwide protests. As in the articles from Australia and Uganda, the racism present in dance education initiated in colonial times and has taken different forms in their current iterations. All the articles in this section share the recognition that the Eurocentric canon in dance education needs to change in meaningful ways.

Section Two: The Impact of COVID-19 on Dance Learning Practices

The second section focuses on the issues present in dance learning practices caused by the shutdowns and limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a qualitative study presented in *Dancing on Zoom*, authors Urša Rupnik and Vesna Geršak (Slovenia) discuss a creative movement unit for fourth graders in Slovenia. Data from interviews with the students, parents, a teacher, and the teaching artist revealed that the students were not only engaged with a movement practice mediated through Zoom, they also remained socially engaged.

In *Online Programming for Dancers and Dance Educators*, authors Erika Gould Brown, Teresa Emmons, Lynnette Young Overby, Kimberly Schroeder, and Joan Warburton-Phibbs

discuss an online program that they created through a dance education organization in Delaware, in the United States. This program, in several parts, encouraged dance educators to keep students engaged and created an organized creative process including the platform for presenting the student work.

The final two articles in this section specifically discuss both the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic with existing issues of racism. In *Screen Past Flesh Goin' On to Bone: Musings on Jamaican Tertiary Dance Education Beyond the Time of COVID-19*, author Neila-Ann Ebanks from Jamaica discusses embodiment and all the issues surrounding it. The tertiary institution she discusses in Kingston had a mediated online platform that brought to focus racism issues of the body which have survived in Jamaica.

Discussing *Social, Emotional and Cognitive Engagement in Dance for Children*, author Miriam Giguere (USA) brings the two issues of online engagement during COVID-19 and racism in focus with each other by examining “the social, emotional and cognitive benefits of embodied group creative process in dance and how these areas, when viewed from a lens of social justice, may promote inequity if not fully reexamined (p. 2).”

Conclusion

All the articles presented in this issue have highlighted issues that were brought to the forefront through traumatic events and necessitated focused and thoughtful responses and change. The changes discussed in these articles have either been suggested, enacted, or both. However, regardless of the implementation, these are clearly changes that are not momentary and, in many instances, have been or will be institutionalized. This is how a profession moves forward. We are not educators in a vacuum and must be both proactive and responsive to the world around us. With global perspectives presented here, we can consider ideas and continually work toward the betterment of all through dance education.

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