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From Hierarchy to Equity: Reorienting the Foundation of Postsecondary Dance Education for the Future

Nyama McCarthy-Brown
The Ohio State University, USA

Karen Schupp
Arizona State University, USA

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Abstract

Postsecondary dance programs in the United States have been called upon to reconsider their curricula and pedagogical approaches in relation to racial equity. Historically students enter university with the belief that ballet is the foundation of dance, which is devaluing to dance forms outside ballet. As academia looks to build more inclusive world views of dance, how can dance curricula counter students' long-held belief that ballet is the foundation of dance? How can curricula expand students' understanding of dance to decenter a Eurocentric view? To investigate these questions, first-year students in two dance programs completed questionnaires asking for their perspectives on the relationship of race and dance education. The research sought to reveal if and how students' understanding of the operations of

racial hierarchy change or hold stagnant as a result of curricular interventions. This article contextualizes the research findings and outlines interventions for the continued decolonization of dance curricula.

Introduction

Across the United States, higher education has been called upon to reconsider their curricula, pedagogical approaches, and policies and procedures in relation to anti-racism and racial equity. This is seen as students call for a decolonization of curricula by writing letters of demands; as faculty urgently request anti-racist professional development programs; and as academic programs start or continue to develop courses and/or programing that make visible the contributions of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) scholars, educators, and artists. These movements towards anti-racism are needed if white supremacy is to eventually be toppled, yet they will only lead to sustainable and effective change if the underlying values reflected in curricula, pedagogy, and policies and procedures are revealed and interrogated. As such, interventions that require one to reflect on their learned assumptions in relation to their values and practices must be built into frameworks for imagining and building anti-racist educational spaces.

Dance and performing arts programs are not exempt from these calls to action. Historically students enter dance programs with the belief that ballet, a widely accepted Eurocentric Western dance form, is the foundation of dance. This belief is devaluing and alienating to dance forms outside the Western canon (see Amin 2016; Davis 2022; Hilsendager quoted in Hanna 1999; McCarthy-Brown and Schupp 2021; Risner and Stinson 2010). We have found parallel themes in other performing arts, where a Eurocentric informed technique or aesthetic is positioned as foundational to the discipline. We have seen Western Classical music centered as a gatekeeper for music programs (Koza 2008), and Shakespeare upheld in similar ways in theater (Little, Jr. 2022)—curricular centerpieces whereby students cannot attain advanced degrees without competency in these historically privileged “high art” forms.

As we look to a more inclusive and pluralist world view of dance, how can dance curriculum intentionally counter students’ long-held belief that ballet is the foundation of dance and expand students’ understanding of dance to decenter a Eurocentric view? This study seeks to understand students’ perspectives on the relationship of race and dance in postsecondary dance programming. More specifically, how do students understand operations of racial hierarchy upon entry into university programs, and how do perspectives change, or hold stagnant, as a result of curricular interventions?

As dance faculty members dedicated to developing curricula and pedagogy for maximum inclusion, and working in programs that are recalibrating for greater equity, we were curious about how first-year dance major students view ballet: do they see it as

foundational, and if so, how might that view change as they study a broader range of dance forms? Can inclusive dance curricula address issues of inequity that show up in traditional dance educational spaces? In this article, we share research findings from a study designed to learn how first-year university dance students understand dance hierarchies, particularly ballet's position in dance, in relation to our own experiences working for greater inclusion. The primary question of the study is: Do students affirm or challenge the following statement: "Ballet is the foundation of dance." This study sought an in-depth examination of this phenomenon. In what follows, we outline curricular interventions that caused students' perceptions of ballet to shift, widening students' understanding of dance forms and how whiteness operates in dance.

The Landscape of Postsecondary Dance Education in the United States

In the United States there are over 600 dance departments/programs. However, less than eight offer options to earn a degree in a dance form that is not centered on modern or ballet dance studies (Schupp and McCarthy-Brown 2018), and many are composed primarily of young white women (see HEADS 2021). Simply put, dance departments are not meeting the needs of our diversifying society (Amin 2016; Schupp and McCarthy-Brown 2018).

The assumption that ballet and modern dance, also of European and American origins, are the foundation of postsecondary dance curricula extends beyond campus borders. While modern dance may not be widely visible in U.S. culture, ballet is. Ballet is often incorrectly thought to be the basis of many dance forms regardless of a dance form's cultural origin (McCarthy-Brown 2017; Schupp 2020a). Because this message is ubiquitous in the U.S. cultural understanding of dance, many potential dance majors carry the assumption that ballet is the foundation of *all* dance. As a result, even in programs working to decenter Euro-Western frameworks, many dance majors arrive on campus fully believing that ballet is the foundation of dance—even if they are not invested or experienced in ballet.

Like U.S. higher education as a whole, many dance programs are grappling with how to retire long held assumptions that reify white supremacy. Yet the majority of dance major programs continue to privilege ballet and modern dance through mandating those styles as curricular requirements and relegating other dance forms, particularly those from BIPOC communitites and the global south, as elective or non-major courses (McCarthy-Brown 2014, McCarthy-Brown and Schupp 2021). Even in programs with decolonized curricula (i.e., curricula that offers a range of dance forms for equal credit), the aesthetics and pedagogical underpinnings of ballet and modern dance are often privileged in admission practices (Schupp, McCarthy-Brown, and Mejia 2020), the curation of works for performances, and how course content is determined for courses such as choreography and dance history (Schupp and McCarthy-Brown 2018). Programs that are designed to meet the needs of one racial group at the expense of communities of color and their culturally-informed arts are racist. When white bodies and white dance aesthetics are upheld as the

pinnacle vanguard – this is the definition of white supremacy. If dance programs are to achieve anti-racist praxes and curricula, the assumptions that unconsciously uphold white supremacy and inform decision making need to be exposed and interrogated.

Researchers' and Programs' Positionalities

Given that a person's positionality shapes their understanding of contexts and power, it is critical to describe our positionality as researchers. It is additionally important to articulate the socio-political values and contexts of our programs to understand both the specifics of each research site and to illuminate conversations happening within postsecondary dance programs at large. Herein, we offer our positionality as researchers and the positionality of our individual programs.

I (Nyama McCarthy-Brown) am a cis-gendered, non-disabled, African American, bi-cultural woman. I am an associate professor of dance with expertise in Afro-contemporary and dance education. My academic appointment at The Ohio State University (OSU) includes a designated focus on community engagement. OSU is a Carnegie classified Research 1 institution located in the Midwestern region of the United States. Like many dance departments, OSU's program is composed primarily of white, middle-class, young, female students. Historically students enter OSU with the belief that ballet is the foundation of dance. To address these issues, the department added African Dance requirements to the undergraduate curriculum. Over the last six years, our department has hired four tenure-track faculty with a primary or secondary research focus on dances of the African Diaspora, enabling the department to offer three levels of African Dance. In addition, as of 2020, the department has required an Africanist movement practice component of the undergraduate curriculum. The department offers BFA, MFA, and PhD degree programs that focus on performance, creative practices, and scholarly research in dance studies. The department is in the midst of change with the departure of nine long-time faculty and the addition of eight newly tenured and tenure-track hires in the past ten years. In the midst of transition, the charge of the department is to grow with our pluralist society; seeking more equitable ways to dance and meet the needs of our students, faculty, community, and the field of dance.

I (Karen Schupp) am a white, cisgendered, non-disabled woman with expertise in modern dance and ballet. I am a professor with an administrative appointment who has been actively involved in equitable curricular changes since 2008. I am a faculty member at Arizona State University (ASU), which is a Carnegie classified Research 1 institution in the Southwestern United States. The demographics of our campus are gradually changing to match the demographics of our state; as of 2022 we are a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). Our dance program includes undergraduate and graduate degree programs in dance and dance education. Our journey towards approaching greater equity started in 2008 when the faculty decided to stop requiring ballet and modern for all dance majors and continues today as we continue to assess our missteps, revealing opportunities for needed

change (Schupp 2020b). Our current undergraduate curriculum requires students to select one (or two) dance forms to study in depth. The choices are: Afro-Latin movement practices, contemporary ballet, Hip Hop, or postmodern contemporary dance. Additional curricular requirements include: a two semester “Dance Techniques” course where students are introduced to all four curricular dance forms; a course about the social and cultural foundations of these four forms; and selecting from a menu of contextual and historical courses that correspond to the dance forms offered. Content from each of the four curricular dance forms is explicitly embedded into creative practice and teaching methods courses, and guest artists from a range of dance forms visit the campus each term. Instead of participating in a conventional audition process, students gain entry to the program through our “Dance Admissions Day Festival” where they learn about our program and community prior to enrolling as a dance major student.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology/Intervention. This research was conducted through two theoretical frameworks. The first is critical pedagogy (Freire 1970), which seeks to examine and eradicate oppressive hierarchies. Freire’s educational theory includes critical awareness. This awareness is the necessary step before action; this awareness precedes action and without this awareness no action will ever be taken to work against inequity (Seal and Smith 2021). bell hooks’ description of engaged pedagogy additionally grounds the theoretical frame of this research. Engaged pedagogy endeavors to empower students and support democratic and liberatory ethos (hooks 1994). hooks’ (1994) conceptualization and practice of engaged pedagogy centers knowledge, relationships, and empowering students. As educators, we lean into these tenets through this work with our students. In keeping with the Freirean principle of critical awareness and hooks’ framing of engaged pedagogy, we are committed to comprehending how United States-based, socially constructed hierarchies have impacted the learning experiences of dance students. More specifically, we seek to understand if new curricular interventions to disrupt structures of whiteness are successful in challenging notions of racism deeply embedded in all facets of U.S. culture – including dance education.

To research how students understand the positioning of specific genres in postsecondary dance education, we began with our students. In Fall 2021, we approached first-year dance major students in our programs. Our programs, with goals of decentering Western-based movement practices, served as the methodological curricular interventions. After obtaining Institutional Review Board approval, a questionnaire with open and closed-ended questions was administered to survey participants who identified as first-year dance majors aged 18 years old or older. One questionnaire was given on the first week of classes in August 2021. The same questionnaire was given on the last week of classes in December 2021. We collected 39 surveys in August and 18 surveys in December. Because the survey was voluntary, we believe some students may have lost interest or felt the process would be repetitive.

As the survey results can only be useful if placed in context, we provide a short overview of the pedagogical interventions and teaching practices used in our programs. At OSU, the new BFA curriculum requires an equal number of West African and ballet classes, eight respectively, and sixteen credits of contemporary dance. Since students start the African dance curriculum in their first semester, we hypothesized that they would receive implicit and explicit messaging that West African dance and dances of the African diaspora are valued in their program. In addition, prior to the formal curricular change, African diasporic dances were gaining emphasis in the department, working in tandem with cultural shifts decentering Western-based dances as the program's nucleus. This shift included more African based course offerings, faculty hires with expertise in African diasporic dances, and the addition of musicians with expertise in West African rhythms and music. Additionally, in response to the murder of George Floyd, graduate students developed an active anti-racist working group, leading extensive anti-racist training, vigorously ever since. Thus, we anticipated these factors would have sensitized the OSU survey participants to talking about race.

In the first-year, exploratory African-based dance course, students experienced several guest teachers offering them different rhythms from the diaspora; learned of anchoring African-derived dance characteristics from which to examine movement forms; took a drumming class; and attended a West African class in the local community to better understand the movement practice in a community context. They were explicitly taught about the size and diversity of the African continent, rich with many countries and many more cultures and languages. They were taught that there is no such thing as "African dance," just as "European dance" is an inefficient descriptor. They were taught the significance of grounded-earthbound movement, improvisation, and the inseparable connection between the dance and the drum.

ASU dance and dance education majors engage with a range of dance forms and dance-making practices. Each term, students are required to select a full semester of study in one of the following dance forms: Afro-Latin Movement Practices, Contemporary Ballet, Hip Hop, or Postmodern Contemporary. In their first year, students take two semesters of "First-Year Dance Techniques," a course that explores the foundations of each of these dance forms. During the time of this research study, all ASU survey participants studied Hip Hop and Postmodern Contemporary dance through the Dance Techniques course and one additional dance form. Based on enrollment data, most first year students enrolled in Postmodern Contemporary Dance, followed by Afro-Latin Movement Practices, Contemporary Ballet, and then Hip Hop.

Pedagogically, instruction at ASU prioritizes learner-centered approaches and values of reflection, inquiry, empathy, and community, regardless of the dance form. With that said, the specific histories and practices of each dance form inform how dance learning unfolds in the studio. For example, in ballet, a barre and mirror are utilized and students reproduce

movement created by the teacher, each which can influence students to focus more on individual success and external reinforcement to gauge improvement. Hip Hop courses use cyphers, call and response, and freestyling, each which encourages communal connections and increased emphasis movement exploration. In this way, students are exposed to a range of culturally specific ways to learn dance.

Presentation and Interpretation of Data

Driven by our interest in assessing students' perceptions of ballet in relation to systemic racism in dance, we asked a range of questions about how students value ballet, and their perceptions of race/racism and white privilege in the dance. When reviewing survey responses, we were impressed with students' abilities to articulate their understandings and experiences. For that reason, they are shared with no editing. It seems critical to hear from students in their own words to fully comprehend how systemic racism operates in their lived experiences.

Ballet as the Foundation of Dance

Students responded to the question: What does the following statement mean (put the statement into your own words)? Is it accurate? "Ballet is the foundation of dance." In the August survey, just over half of the 22 respondents to this question believed this is true. Examples of students' rationale for why ballet is the foundation of dance include:

> *If one considers technique to be the foundation of dancing then yes that statement is accurate.*
>
> *Ballet being the foundation of dance means that it's the fundamental tool to get you to any style of dance. Having the basic foundation of ballet, helps you understand other genres more so it makes the original and foundation of all dance.*
>
> Five respondents believed this to be false, offering statements such as:
>
> *No it's a branch of dance not the foundation.*
>
> *The following statement means that ballet is the basis of all different styles of dance, and if one takes ballet they will be prepared to pursue all other styles. I do not think that this statement is accurate. I think that ballet is a very important style and the technique helps tremendously with classical styles of dance; however, African, hip hop, ballroom, and other styles have very different foundations and techniques behind the style.*
>
> Five respondents qualified how this statement was both true and untrue:

> *In my opinion, this statement is accurate. However, I do believe that there are many other cultural dances that are not influenced by ballet. I believe that ballet may be the foundation of Western dance, but not all dance.*
>
> *Ballet is the core of dance, what all dancing reverts back to. I would say this statement is not accurate because there are all kinds of dancing, most of which ballet is not even considered.*

When asked this same question in the December survey, nearly all respondents (12 out of 13) no longer agreed with the statement that “ballet is the foundation of all dance.” Their reasons for believing this statement to be false include:

> *This statement means that in order to be a successful dancer, one must have experience in ballet. It also means that all other dance forms are derived from ballet. I personally do not think that this statement is accurate. It is a statement that neglects to acknowledge non-western dance forms.*
>
> *I have been taught that ballet is a foundational class for all dances. I have been told that it helps with "technique" or the cleanest of a dance. This is what I have been taught but don't necessarily believe anymore though.*
>
> One respondent felt that the statement was both true and false, sharing:
>
> *I don’t think that’s true, but I do think every dancer who wants to be professional needs to take ballet. The alignment and musicality it requires are only some examples of important qualities in most dance styles.*

Overwhelmingly, respondents started college believing that ballet is the foundation of dance, yet by the end of their first semester they understood that ballet is only one of many possible dance techniques. Given the mythology around the idea that ballet is the foundation of dance, this is a significant shift. Many students, particularly those from dance competition culture, have been brought up to believe that “technique” means ballet and that ballet-informed technique is central and readily applicable to all dance forms (Schupp 2020a). That survey respondents were able to rethink the role of ballet in dance after one semester of engaging with dance forms beyond the Eurowestern canon is significant.

Race and Dance

To assess students’ understanding of how the construction of race influences their perception of dancing bodies and dance forms, we asked: “Is your body inscribed (marked and communicating stereotypes) by race? What does that mean for you as a dancer (explain either position)? Responses reflected a range of understandings and

communicated that respondents were still processing racial identity and how it operates in their education and employment experiences.

In the August survey, there were seven “yes” responses (out of 15), offering observations such as:

> *I think everyone’s body is inscribed by race. I don’t think it changes anything for me as a dancer because dance is a global sport and the greatest form of communication.*

Eight “no” responses were submitted, such as:

> *I don't like to stereotype by race because then I don't see the full potential of those who are not the first choice. Although I am white, I still see both Blacks and whites as equal and deserving of respect and validation.*

Two respondents indicated that they did not know, with one admitting:

> *I do not fully understand the question.*

When asked the same question in the December survey, there were six “yes” responses and six “no” responses, indicating that as a group, their responses did not shift much between survey points. Examples of “yes” responses include:

> *Yes, I think as a Latina a stereotype would be that I can only dance salsa or bachata.*

> *I think that as a white passing individual, many do not believe that I can do style other than Western styles of dance even though I have trained extensively in various hip hop techniques. I am very much expected to be good at styles such as ballet and contemporary.*

“No” responses include:

> *No, my race isn't communicating stereotypes, my race and my dancing should have no correlation, my dance is a portrayal of me as a person not my race.*

> *No, I am a white female and therefore I am afforded white privilege.*

Examinations of student perspectives of race and dance are not new. We point back to Raquel Monroe’s 2011 article, “‘I Don’t Want To Do African, What About My Technique?’: Transforming Dancing Places and Spaces in the Academy,” which gives

insights into how far the field has come in the last decade, or more saddening, to what extent we are in a similar state.

In her section, Black Girl Dance/White Girl Dance, Monroe dives into socially constructed, implicit messages of who gets to perform and practice what dances. Monroe shares numerous student comments that provide evidence that students were clear on what dances belong to which racial groups. One student shared: "In my earlier years of dance training I grew up with the idea that ballet was an American 'white girl' dance. It was almost portrayed that if you were white, American, and a girl that you knew how to do ballet" (43). Another student commented, "I hate it when people say I dance like a black girl. Or I dance good for a white girl" (43). A Black female student added, "Yeah, that's kind of true though, it is surprising when you see a white girl, well, dance like a black girl" (43). These statements give a sense of how polarized the dancing body can be among young dancers.

Survey responses indicate that despite shifting beliefs about the role of ballet in dance training, students either struggle to discern how systemic racism operates in dance or are not sure how to challenge stereotypical ideas about who dances what dance forms. This indicates that decentering ballet curriculum is only the first step in helping students achieve a nuanced understanding of how systemic racism functions in dance and how they can be active participants in shaping a more equitable future.

Felt Experiences in Dance

To capture the physical and emotional experiences students have across a range of dance forms, respondents were asked to share three words that describe how they feel after taking a class in African Dance, Afro-Latin Movement Practices, Ballet, Hip Hop, and Modern Dance. After reviewing all responses, we removed extraneous words (e.g., words used to set up their feelings, such as "after ballet, I feel") and then sorted the descriptors into three categories: positive, negative, and neutral. Positive descriptors are those that point to a growth mindset, accomplishment, inclusion, eustress, and connection with self or others. Negative descriptors are those that indicate rumination, discouragement, exclusion, and distress. Neutral descriptors are those that largely refer to the sense of physical exhaustion that occurs after most dance classes.

The positive and negative descriptions offered by participants are shared in Table 1: Students' Felt Experiences in Dance. Because no students were enrolled in Afro-Latin Movement Practices during the semester of this survey, no responses were recorded for that dance form.

Table 1

Students' Felt Experiences in Dance.

Students' descriptions of how they feel after class	Positive	Negative
Ballet August Survey	Accomplished (2 responses) Amazing At Ease Calm (2 responses) Empowered Elegant Exhilarated Fun Growth Happy (2 responses) Informed Love Motivated Powerful Proud Present Refreshed (4 responses) Relaxed (2 responses) Rewarding Self-empowered Strong (3 responses)	Angry Depressed Difficult Discouraged Embarrassed Excluded Frustrated Hate Stressed Relieved Over thinking Outcasted Self-analyzing Self-conscious Self-correcting
Ballet December Survey	Accomplished (3 responses) Challenged (2 responses) Determined Elegant Enlightened Good Graceful Motivated Passionate Privileged Refreshed Strong (2 responses)	Annoyed Confused (2 responses) Insecure (2 responses) Relieved (4 responses) Self-conscious Stressed Uninspired
Hip Hop August Survey	Chill Fun Free Loose Groovy Happy	

Hip Hop December Survey	Challenged Free Pleased Refreshed	Confused Judged Relieved Uncomfortable
African August Survey	Accomplished Aligned Alive Connected (3 responses) Confident (2 responses) Curious Educated Empowered (2 responses) Energized (2 responses) Enlightened Excited Eye-opening Fun Free Happy (3 responses) Informed Liberated Loose Motivated Pumped (2 responses) Rewarded Spiritual Uplifted (2 responses) United Well-rounded	Confused Self-analyzing
African December Survey	Accomplished Challenged Curious Elated Empowered Energetic (2 responses) Excited Good (2 responses) Happy (3 responses) Informed Inspired Strong Supported	Relieved

Modern August Survey	Free Long Loose Grateful Relaxed	
Modern December Survey	Challenged Loose Persistent Relaxed	Bored Chaotic Clumsy

While respondents described a range of emotional responses to each type of class, the most vehement descriptors spoke to experiences in ballet and African. It is revealing that many respondents shared exclusionary, negative descriptions of taking ballet class such as "excluded," "outcasted," "discouraged," "embarrassed," and others, despite initially believing that ballet is the foundation of all dance. This may indicate that respondents have an embodied awareness of how privileging ballet contributes to exclusion in dance, even if they cannot yet articulate that in words. Conversely, the positive responses to taking African classes point to inclusion, as respondents offer descriptors such as "empowered," "supported," "connected," and "liberated" among others. This may point to students' embodied awareness of the potential for broadening ideas about what dance forms belong in postsecondary dance education.

Discussion and Considerations

Although many respondents initially carried the belief that ballet is the foundation of dance, after engaging with African and African diasporic forms, they were more inclined to challenge the assumed centrality of ballet within dance training. Even though survey respondents indicated confusion about inscriptions of race in relation to dance, they did shift their ideas about ballet, signaling their capacity for understanding how bodies and dance forms are racially inscribed. They moved from a race-neutral or colorblind perception of ballet that reifies white supremacy in dance to embracing a race conscious understanding of dance. This shift demonstrates students' ability to think more deeply about how white privilege operates in dance. It also evinces a critical responsibility for equity-oriented dance educators: facilitating broader curricular engagement with dance forms to decenter the privileged role of ballet in postsecondary programs. In what follows, we outline considerations based on our findings and own practices for advancing racial equity in postsecondary dance education.

In the Studios and Classrooms

First-year college students may be unfamiliar with how bodies are inscripted by race (or gender, sexuality, or ability status). They may also be unable to readily grasp how conventional Eurowestern dance training colonizes dancing bodies or the need to decolonize dance education. Yet, first-year college dance students are intelligent

kinesthetic beings – they understand how ideas manifest through movement. Technique courses are reliant on embodied experiential learning – dancers learn how to dance through moving and dancing. Often these students do best when they “move first” and “discuss second.” For example, in a dance class, a student may need to first embody a movement or technical correction before they can analyze and discuss what has changed.

With this in mind, technique courses can become pivotal sites for introducing students to racial power dynamics in dance. Too often discussions about race, power dynamics, history, and context are relegated to “lecture” or “seminar” courses, which may make it initially difficult for students to understand how racism and power affect the dancing body on an embodied level. In this study, the intervention was deceptively simple: students were either equally exposed to ballet and African dance (OSU) or had a choice of Eurowestern and African diasporic dance forms to select from (ASU). When immersed in these curricular models, dancers were required to decenter ballet in their embodied movement practices (i.e., time training in dance forms). Over the course of the semester, they adapted to a range of coordinations and movement patterns, rhythmic phrasings, ways of relating to other dancers and musicians, and ideas about the purpose of dance. Their movement literally needed to change from form to form and their dancing became more open and adaptable. As students observe their peers succeeding in some dance forms and encountering challenges in others, they can start to see and feel that skills from one dance form do not necessarily translate to others. In other words, they start to embody the reality that no singular dance form is the foundation of dance.

To be clear, the inclusion of African Diasporic dance forms does not mean that faculty of Eurowestern forms are excused from advancing equity and inclusion. We have unfortunately witnessed instructors and programs who, intentionally or not, allocate “equity work” to courses outside of the Eurowestern canon and/or to BIPOC or LGBQTIA+ faculty members, reflecting trends across academe (Flaherty 2019). This mindset – the belief and practice that broadening inclusion of dance forms is all that is needed to achieve ethnic and racial curricular equity – is deeply flawed. In the case of the dance forms included in this study, ballet and modern dance are not exclusively in the realm of white artists. While conventional approaches to ballet and modern technique and history have tended to marginalize the contributions of BIPOC artists (Kerr-Berry 2018, McCarthy-Brown 2018, Schupp and McCarthy-Brown 2018), teachers of these forms are obligated to broaden students’ awareness of the numerous ways BIPOC artists have influenced and continue to shape these dance forms. When teaching ballet and modern, dance educators should prioritize inclusion of BIPOC artists and innovators on a regular basis. If videos or images are included as teaching methods, dance educators need to consider representation: what racial and ethnic identities are included in the visual media? What racial and ethnic identities are absent? And what does that say to your students about how bodies are racially inscribed in dance? (McCarthy-Brown and Schupp 2021; Schupp and McCarthy-Brown 2018). For courses that are reliant on reading materials, dance

educators need to make sure that both the authors and content represent a range of racial and ethnic positionalities. Pedagogically, dance educators should carefully consider how their teaching decisions relate to the students in the room and the intentions of studying a given form, rather than simply relying on conventional methods (Risner and Schupp 2020). For example, ballet educators can reduce the use of the mirror in class to help students rely more on somatic experiences, integrate communal or peer learning, and establish inclusive dress codes. No dance form nor dance pedagogy is static. If dance educators are truly invested in helping the next generation of dance artists and educators achieve a more just future for dance, they need to be willing to change their methods and content across all courses, including those that have a historical stronghold in postsecondary dance education.

In the Curricular Frameworks

When examining dance curriculum outcomes and student perspectives, it is critical to focus on the goal: What is the purpose? What is the goal of dance in postsecondary education where social hierarchies of race have seeped into the structure of programming? It is widely accepted that dance programs privilege Western based training to the detriment and exclusion of others; yet the larger question is: What, if anything, is being done by each department to upend the white supremacist model? To be sure, white supremacy is a loaded term that is triggering for many, but it is also integral to call out racism.

We have observed factions in the dance field, and one of those is the separation between the dance artist and the dance educator—as distinct professions. For many, this is an issue of wearing two hats, yet one can be both. However, it is imperative to recognize that dance artists and dance educators may have different goals. The dance artist seeks artistic expression at a level of excellence, which often surpasses the skill set of students. The dance educator seeks to support students to attain the competencies needed to pursue their individual career goals—which can vary. Many of our survey respondents point to the goal of becoming professional dancers. From the data collected, it is apparent that many have a monolithic idea of the dance profession, which may be underscored by their first experiences with dance programs.

To start, most dance programs hold auditions, establishing an understanding that students must possess embodied knowledge before starting a dance major. What is evaluated at these auditions? Do postsecondary faculty look at National Dance Education Standards for 12th grade and create a screening to ensure that all students who are competent at the 12th grade level are acceptable for admission? Typically, they do not. More often professors look for students they want to work with – students they want to develop choreography on. In this way many higher education programs align auditions more to professional dance expectations of the dominant culture than to the National Dance Education Standards. It is important to also note, even if dance departments and programs did align with national

dance standards, many students do not receive dance education in their local public schools. As a result, most audition models privilege students that have the financial means to study dance outside of school.

What Makes a Dance Professional, Professional? Consider the meaning communicated in the words: "professional dance experience required," a frequently included requirement for faculty positions. What do you think of? What does it mean to be professional? What may be required to submit for a job application or grant application? Do you think of a head shot, resume, video links, and/or a website? These are widely accepted modes of representation for many mainstream artists. However, what about artists from culturally-informed dance companies, is this the way they present and document their work? Might their modes of representation and resources look different? Might they be less resourced in their ability to obtain many of these materials, and as a result, implicitly be penalized? Those involved in hiring faculty need to interrogate the cultural assumptions embedded in their definitions of professionalism if faculty, and consequently curricula, is to become more inclusive.

For true inclusion to take place, we have to think through how we get there. For example, on many Assistant Professor of Dance job postings there is a requirement of a MFA/PhD or equivalent experience. I (McCarthy-Brown) have an amazing colleague who danced in a West African Dance Company for a decade and studied under the renowned Pearl Primus; she has struggled to get equivalent status in many institutions. However, she has a treasure trove of experiences the typical MFA graduate does not, and yet she is identified as "less qualified" for lack of an MFA. This calls into question: How are equivalencies evaluated? Do those assessing portfolios know the top three Classical Indian dance groups, West African Dance Companies, or Bhangra Dance Groups? Who would be qualified to assess the credentials of potential hires? Or, are we asking ballet and modern dance professionals to stand at the gates of entry, hoping that the marginalization of diverse dance forms will miraculously end?

For the Present and the Future

Cultural change is slow; but action is vital. Dance programs committed to inclusion need to be strategic. There is no one size fits all plan; herein we offer myriad suggestions based on our research findings and lived experiences as equity-oriented dance educators. Likely some will work for your program, institution, and community, some will not, and some can work with adaptations. Consider what is possible for your particular dance community.

> 1 – Assign equal credit to all movement practice (also called technique) courses, allowing a range of dance forms to "count" for full credit. It is impossible to communicate to students that your program values all dance forms if only historical Western-based dance forms "count" (McCarthy-Brown 2014).

2 – If your program has historically invested more money in Western-based guest artists, create a three- to five-year plan to shift resources to other culturally-informed dance forms or artists of color. If the program is working toward equity, it might have more BIPOC artists centered for a couple years to ground the goal of developing more equitable programming.
3 – Find three ways to include dancers with disabilities into the program and curriculum this year.
4 – Re-evaluate the goals of your admissions process. Are auditions really needed? Who is being brought in; who is being kept out? Is the goal to educate and teach people to dance? If so, are there ways to prioritize this in the audition? Might part of the audition have a collaborative element or a communal element? Dance educator, Mary Ann Laverty focuses on competencies of the brain dance series to find movers in their audition. Another colleague in the field, Selene Carter, shared that her department holds auditions with all faculty and students together in a communal circle. Faculty, modeling care and investment in each other's artistry, take turns leading movement series as other faculty proceed as participant observers, giving feedback on the movement led by colleagues. At OSU we use group interviews to encourage collaborative thinking in dance studies and to see how prospective students model community practices. In our summer intensive program, all students respond to a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion prompt; while all students are not able to respond with great knowledge, it signals to students the values of the department and what they can expect in our dance community. At ASU, students participate in a required "Admissions Festival" – not an audition – where they meet other students and faculty as a means of learning about the program so that they can decide if ASU is a good fit. The day includes an introduction to faculty, a sharing of dance works by current students, a tour, and small group question and answer sessions with current students and faculty. Think about what type of student you want to include and the stated values of your program. Then see how your admission processes can exemplify that.
5 – It is not possible to decenter whiteness without dismantling the structural arrangements that privilege white bodies and white aesthetics. Equity work cannot be done or be sustainable without giving up something. It is not realistic to pile more and more responsibilities for inclusion (typically on teachers) without giving something up. What you give up is up to you and your dance program and community, but structural adjustments are required to foster and sustain equity. This may show up as funding, time, production resources, and/or curricular content.
6 – Become aware of the implicit messages in "neutral" courses. Any course that is required in a degree program needs to be audited for equity. For example, if all students are required to take choreography, what paradigms underscore how students learn to make dances? What expertise is represented through the faculty teaching these courses? At ASU, creative practice classes are often co-taught by

two instructors, each with expertise in a different dance form. In the period of this study, the first-year creative practice course was facilitated by two faculty, one with expertise in Afro-Latin movement forms and one with expertise in postmodern dance. It is critical to consider what values and dance forms are present (and absent) in any course designed for all dance major students.
7 – Address inequity directly. It is not a secret; students and faculty understand how dance hierarchies work. Create community space to come together and think through the best way to move forward.

These suggestions are good but they are not perfect; to be useful, you will likely need to adapt these ideas to work for your community. Questions may persist: How do we change culture? What do we do when we are tired? Our answer: start and continue. One could critically engage the challenges before us and bring forth additional possibilities. Those holding power can also find infinite logical reasons why not to implement substantive equitable change. It comes down to the will of those in power, and the ability of those who have access to those in power, to continue to apply pressure for change. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” We heard an unidentified speaker add to that statement, “but it does not bend unless ***we*** bend it.”

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About the Authors

Dr. Nyama McCarthy-Brown is a culturally sustaining pedagogue. She is an Associate Professor of Dance Pedagogy through Community Engagement on faculty at The Ohio State University and is the university's first Artist Laureate. She teaches dance education and contemporary dance with Africanist underpinnings, grounded in the celebration of all movers; and was awarded two national teaching awards, in 2021. She is also an established scholar, with articles in numerous academic publications. In 2017, her book, *Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World: Culturally Relevant Teaching in Research, Theory, and Practice* was published. Her second book, *Skin Colored Pointes: Interviews with Women of Color in Ballet,* will be released in 2024. Dr. McCarthy-Brown is an active workshop facilitator and consultant for diversifying dance curriculum for organizations such as: San Francisco Ballet School; Joffrey Ballet; Dance Educators Coalition, Minnesota; Rutgers University Dance Department; University of Buffalo; National Dance Institute; and Dance Education Laboratory.

Karen Schupp, MFA, is a Professor of Dance at Arizona State University. Her research commitments include dance competition culture, postsecondary dance curriculum and pedagogy, and equity and ethics across dance education. Her books include *Studying Dance; Dance Education and Responsible Citizenship; Futures of Performance; Ethical Dilemmas in Dance Education* (co-edited with Doug Risner), which received the Susan W. Stinson Book Award and NDEO's Ruth Lovell Murray Book Award in 2021; and *Dancing Across the Lifespan* (co-edited with Pam Musil and Doug Risner), which received the Susan W. Stinson Book Award in 2022. Professor Schupp is the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Dance Education*. Her scholarly work has been published in numerous journals and anthologies, and her choreography has been featured across the US and internationally. Professor Schupp's forthcoming projects include the book *Stories We Dance/Stories We Tell: Our Lives in Higher Education*, co-edited with Sherrie Barr.

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