

Pedagogy of Afro-Fusion: Connecting Cultures Through Dance

Topic: Dance Education

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Project Statement

Goals:

I have embarked on an investigation of a dance form emerging in South Africa, “Afro-fusion.” It involves a community effort working toward combining traditional African dance with contemporary western dance. It is my intent to build a body of research on: the collaboration process that is used in this dance form, pedagogy practices, obstacles that inhibit growth in this field, and the vision for the future of this dance form. I am now in the process of using this research to develop a curriculum to teach “Afro-Fusion,” and other dance forms that combine movements derived from different cultures.

“Afro-fusion” serves to blend movement, customs, and ideas in a racially tense environment. The work informs the dancers and audience on a tangible relationship that acknowledges and promotes a collaboration of two distinct cultures. In result is a composition that challenges the notion of historical and continuous innate conflict.

In order to learn about Afro-Fusion, I spent this past summer in South Africa researching the dance form. My goal is to contribute to the body of research in Dance Education. With the information I have collected, I plan to produce a curriculum for schools that face issues of cultural xenophobia. As a graduate student and former high school dance teacher in the racially divided city of Oakland, California, I have found it necessary to empower students with tools to work in partnership and appreciation of their racial counterparts.

Currently, South Africa is undergoing a major transformation. Since the collapse of Apartheid in 1994 much work has been left for the people of South Africa. The politics, culture, and society must and is slowly changing each day. As life imitates art,

evidence of this change can be seen in the dance community. Working with 'Moving Into Dance' company, 'Jazzart' dance company, and a community outreach program, 'Amajika Youth and Children's Arts Institute'; I studied the growing dance fusion of contemporary western music and dance forms with African traditional dance movement, rhythms and rituals of South Africa. All of these organizations offer a new approach to teaching dance and cultural studies through collaboration of choreography. In addition, each organization has flourished while struggling to teach and produce socially relevant work during the Apartheid regime and through the change to a democratic government system.

My teaching focus is centered on under-serviced urban communities. With the opportunity to teach Urban youth from a different part of the world, I have gained knowledge that I can apply to working with my current and future students. This includes new strategies and methods of educating urban youth in various geographic centers.

Methodology

The research project was based in Johannesburg, South Africa. I made contact with both dance companies 'Moving Into Dance,' in Johannesburg and 'Jazzart,' in Cape Town. Both companies have established teacher-training programs. While in South Africa I researched and interviewed: company members, students, teachers, artistic directors and the founder of 'Moving Into Dance.' Dance classes and rehearsals are held on a regular basis in the company's home facilities. I was fortunate enough to take class with these companies, learn new movement vocabulary and participate in the dance community.

Documentation of classes, rehearsals and performances was taken via written notes and videotape whenever possible. Getting footage of this rare mixing of artistry remains an integral part of my research. The footage and observation notes now serve as written and visual documentation of pedagogy practices in this dance form, and a guide to the development of a curriculum. Additionally, I worked with 'Amajika Youth and Children's Arts Institute,' a community based performing arts school. Amajika welcomes children and youths from all of the neighboring townships of Johannesburg, including Soweto and Tambisa. There, I studied the pedagogy practices used to teach urban youth in Johannesburg and had the opportunity to teach.

Outcomes

Currently I am in the process of developing a dance curriculum for 9-12th grade students. The curriculum will be process based, and specifically designed for students in metropolitan urban areas. It will call upon students to create a fusion of their own movement and develop the following skills:

- ❑ Teamwork
- ❑ Community Building
- ❑ Critical thinking skills
- ❑ Compare and contrast
- ❑ Movement Exploration
- ❑ Cultural Appreciation
- ❑ Writing across curriculums (incorporation of writing into creative process and analysis of work)

This curriculum will be aligned with national content standards incorporating, interdisciplinary, critical thinking, and writing skills.

Significance

In an age when diversity is being embraced and promoted, many people still do not have the opportunity to learn the skills necessary for the task. I believe that I can assist my students and the danced community in being prepared to meet this challenge; by creating collaborations inspired by my research and work with diverse cultures. Through the study of a community of dancers who have been successful in sharing culture through movement in spite of an extremely tense national environment (Apartheid); I have researched the degree to which dance has transcended political, social, and racial boundaries. It is an important challenge to be considered in America. Can this medium to do the same in our multiracial and multicultural nation? I believe it can, and that I can develop a new praxis to multiculturalism through dance.

Note: Request early acceptance for budgetary reasons