

## CHAPTER TWELVE

# GLOBAL CREATIVITY IN DANCE

SUSAN R. KOFF

### Introduction

When dance or any art form is mentioned, the popular conception is that creativity goes hand in hand with the arts. However, there is a much more nuanced definition of the arts and creativity, and it depends on the role one plays in the arts. Specifically in the performing arts, there are teachers, performers, all those who technically and practically support the actual performance, as well as the creator(s). More specifically, this chapter is focusing on dance, when there is involvement of creativity within dance, and how this is both limited and supported in a global context.

Dance, music and theatre, as performing arts, are expected (in a western paradigm) to be experienced in performance. However, creativity occurs in the performing arts in the process of creation, and not in the product of representing the creative process. From the viewing perspective, clarity is expected in the presentation of the process, without focus on the creative activity of the actual process. By the elevation of performing arts within western contexts to the concert or performance stage, the performing arts are often not observed nor experienced in their creative stage. The mystification of this important element of process leads to a misunderstanding of the value of the creative process.

Creativity in dance can be observed by an audience who is watching the product of that creativity. But there is an untapped amount of creativity that can be practiced, experienced and explored through well-constructed dance education, with or without resulting in a performance. This creativity is nurtured and developed through dance education. Dance education is a misunderstood term, often confused with dance technique teaching (Koff, 2021) however it is a term that is frequently used when one is learning to dance, which is necessary to be a performer. This term is rarely applied to the dance education that is inclusive, supports creative development, and is culturally specific. Further, any time dance is mentioned, one assumes creativity is involved. Contrarily dance technique rarely involves creativity. This chapter will first define why creativity is not consistently involved with the art of dance, and how this varies in a global context.

### Colonialism

In order to examine how dance has been so misunderstood in multiple contexts, I am examining colonialism as a contributor to this perception. There is no universality to cultures and societies throughout the world, just as there is

no universality to dance throughout the world. Dance has mistakenly been referred to as a universal language, however that non-verbal language is not identical throughout contexts. This mis-perception of universality spread as the art of classical ballet spread through colonialism. Systems of government, systems of education, religious practices and other cultural experiences traveled from conquering nations in Europe throughout the world, as they colonized these “new” lands.

Educationally, UNESCO (United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization) has taken steps to neutralize the hierarchy of events surrounding locations of education throughout the world. Dance is experienced and learned in many contexts that are defined as UNESCO different fields of education “formal, non-formal and informal” (Keuchel, 2014.) The nuances of these different locations or types of education have been co-opted by forces from outside education and certainly outside of the arts. Western styles of concert dance (most often referring to ballet and more recently, forms of modern dance) have been spread throughout the world through colonialism (Mabingo, 2019). Globally dance education in these contexts existed long before the colonial spread of western concert dance. The dominance of colonialism dictating thought and approach to politics, life and education created a hierarchy making the western dance forms more respected and revered than forms that had existed longer. One result was often removing indigenous dance from any formal education causing indigenous values and lifestyle to be de-legitimized. This resulted in eliminating or repressing integration of arts, religion and socio-cultural functioning.

Though the major European colonizing empires no longer operate in that fashion, colonialism had a lasting impact on dance and how it is considered and taught throughout the world. First, many indigenous forms were suppressed and are only now reclaiming their legitimacy. The western curriculum model has spread throughout and now the energy is spent to “decolonize” the curriculum (McCarthy-Brown, 2014) without much guidance and often with inadvertent pitfalls. Colonialism emphasized the Cartesian mind/body separation (Damasio, 1994) that may not have been present in indigenous dance. The emphasis on Cartesian thought caused indigenous practices to be referred to as “primitive,” a moniker that is difficult to remove, and that ultimately created a hierarchy of dance forms.

### **Commercial Dance**

The current iteration of colonialism and its hierarchy of dance forms is commercial dance on a global scale. This intellectual leap from colonialism to current forms of commercial dance is considering this rapid spread through media (TV, TikTok, the internet) that becomes replicated, focusing on movement alone. Commercial dance takes place predominantly off the concert stage and focuses, instead, on techniques that are replicated and create their own standards of excellence through a westernized value system. This enforces the Cartesian split and focuses on bodies excellent in replication of these techniques. Creativity is simply not present.

Commercial dance is “dance used in service of selling a product that draws from a blend of jazz, hip-hop, and contemporary styles that is per-

formed in the entertainment industry by heteronormative, highly gendered, young dancing bodies” (Schupp, 2019, p. 59). In Schupp’s definition, this leads to appropriation of styles into one that results in “the invisibility of influences and the unstated naming of technique as ballet” (2020, p. 210) regardless of the stated style of dance. When not appearing as ballet, it still values balletic lines and tricks. In many instances of globalization, commercial dance has also been infused with dance competition, as exemplified by *So You Think You Can Dance* (SYTYCD), which has been replicated in 28 countries. Competition in dance is not always commercial, and has existed for far longer, sometimes as a central element to a dance form. Another expression of dance (competition) has been colonized through commercialization and globalization.

However, global commercialism of dance, while increasing world-wide popularity, has relegated dance to techniques that are to be perfected in order to succeed. Since success is commercial/monetary, this becomes the driving force at the expense of creativity and expression.

Foster (2019) then connects this to the values in commercial dance competition: turning dance in these settings into the “labor market” with values set by measurable competencies that are easily quantified. “...In place of the dance recital format that supported a notion of public good through its collective presentation of shared understanding about dance, the dance competition substitutes a machinery of the marketplace that privileges individual accomplishment, replacing public with private values” (Foster, 2017, p. 7).

The current form of commercialism in dance through a global market “...is only the latest iteration of colonial imperialism” (Tuck, 2013, p. 325). Tuck defines neoliberalism as “Epistemology, economic strategy, and moral code rolled into one, neoliberalism refers to the reliance on market-based relationships to explain how the world works, or how it should work” (2013, p. 325) referring to neoliberalism and education. Considering neoliberalism and dance competition together in the university, thought to be a location of creativity through dance, DeFrantz states “University-sponsored hip-hop workshops and master classes align black social dance with identity formation within the state-sanctioned context of the university, a revision that dilutes the capacity of these forms to function as creative resistance to mainstream hegemonies” (DeFrantz, 2012, p. 135). Neoliberalism, therefore, circulates popular dances without the sources of their creative energy nor their cultural context. In other words, these dance forms are appropriated for popular culture, and therefore colonized, stripping them both of culture and creativity.

### **Creative Movement /Dance**

Creativity in dance is exemplified by divergent thinking and student-centered teaching. In formalized practices of dance teaching creative movement has been the focus for children. As children grow, the emphasis has moved to formal techniques and creativity has been decentered. As mentioned earlier, education has been defined as taking place in three contexts: formal, non-formal and informal. Examining these settings further leads to comprehen-

sion about where creativity is nurtured or not in dance education. Summarizing the definitions again:

- “The **formal field of learning** is concerned with curriculum offerings within education and training institutions” and often is recognized by relevant authorities.
- “**Non-formal** is learning that has been acquired in addition or alternatively to formal learning. In some cases, it is also structured according to educational and training arrangements, but more flexible.”
- “**Informal learning** is learning that occurs in daily life, in the family, in the workplace, in communities and through activities of all individuals” (Keuchel, 2014, p. 43)

When examining these contexts and what occurs to dance within them, the pathway of creativity can be traced.

The formal field of dance education teaching and learning includes PK-12 (pre-kindergarten through grade 12) schools, colleges and universities. Within dance, the PK-12 teaching is through certified dance educators, physical educators and classroom teachers at the earlier ages. Teacher preparation emphasizes creative movement for the earlier years, and moving into formalized techniques for the later years. In the USA, teacher preparation and curriculum are government regulated. This occurs in many other countries as well. In areas where dance curriculum is taught through Physical Education, the teacher education does not typically include creative movement, but recent research has shown that adding expressive (i.e., creative) movement augments the physical education instruction (Mattson & Larson, 2021). Within colleges and universities, neither teacher preparation nor curriculum is government regulated, however, all these settings lead to a credential, which is another definition of formal education. College and university curriculum emphasizes techniques and performances more than creative practice, but include creative process in small doses as needed in composition courses. The tertiary education focus on techniques is emphasized through the conservatory model of dance in higher education. Creative process and exploration in PK-12 is limited to earlier years. Within colleges and universities, it is limited to special composition courses. These arbitrary separations of creative movement from technique training become tacit norms.

The non-formal landscape of dance education is broad and ill-defined. “Education that is institutionalised, intentional and planned by an education provider... Non-formal education mostly leads to qualifications that are not recognised as formal or equivalent to formal qualifications by the relevant national or sub-national education authorities or to no qualifications at all” (ISCED, 2011). Within dance, this includes the private sector of studios throughout the world that are normally responsive to business regulations rather than educational regulations. Additionally, this is the sector that has given rise to the very large commercial dance sector. Creative dance is rarely emphasized within this sector.

Informal dance education is “the most common way people around the world learn dance culture” (Vissicaro, 2004, p. 128). It is also the least struc-

tured and the most creative because there are no set or expected outcomes. Locations of informal education are varied and wide and can be familial, communal or solo. Possibly informal education in dance has been in existence for much longer, and is the very type of practice that was discouraged and sometimes banned under colonialism (Koff, 2021). The act of colonizing and dismissing of these practices are what has removed creative dance and exploration to the margins of dance education. Globally, the focus on returning to culturally based practices in the settings in which they naturally occur has led to the resurgence of creative dance.

### **Focus on Teaching**

Types of education and teaching are always influenced by the type of education expected or developed within each of the three settings discussed. Creativity and exploration are least limited within informal settings, as they have no formal teaching and no parameters. However, the values and growth potential of creative development in teaching (not necessarily in dance) is frequently discussed (Amado, et al, 2014; Sowden, et al, 2015). Within formal and non-formal settings creative dance is frequently focused on young children (Cone & Cone, 2005; Stinson, 1988) and more often on the practice and not the theory (Gilbert, 1992; Gough, 1999). Theoretical discussions began with dance educators (Chappell, 2021) first looking to analyze creativity within dance, and then spreading expertise about creativity to other disciplines (Chappell, 2021; Cremin & Chappell, 2021). This discussion exists in western conversations about pedagogy and education. Most notably, the values of creativity within education are discussed more frequently outside of dance than within (Sternberg, et al, 2022).

Within formal instruction and dance, creativity and perfectionism become polar opposites as so much of the formal instruction is striving for a perfected technical skill (Nordin-Bates, 2020). This research continues with an exploration of basic psychological needs, and discovers that denying basic needs also squelches creativity. This can be seen most frequently when, in the non-formal sector, commercialism has become a driving force. Looking at dance education from outside the profession, some assume that it supports convergent thinking and mind-body connection, leading to creativity (Frith, Miller & Loprinzi, 2019). But this does not account for all the instances in which divergent thinking is the focus.

Within dance and dance education creativity is assumed, but not frequently the focus beyond working with children. Outside of dance and dance education, creativity is considered an important value of dance and one that is sought within dance and other arts. The different foci begin with naming the desired outcomes. Creative dance is discussed through dance education; creativity is discussed from an outside perspective. What is being taught? This disconnect is evident in both anecdotal as well as research evidence. Now is the time to emphasize creative values in dance education and expand those values to include all settings for all participants.

## Global Efforts

Globally, we are continuing to emerge from the limitations imposed by colonialism. At the same time, we are fighting colonialism that is spread, not through armies, but through the innocuous forces of social media. Whereas previously, western ideas were imposed through power imposed through conflict, now western ideas are spread through social media so that these ideas, frequently western, are imposed through ubiquity.

Lost in this media imposition is the idea of personhood through dance. Through international suggestions, UNESCO has created several documents to establish the rights of people throughout the world to appropriate education and cultural recognition, among many foci. Most significant for dance education is the Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education (2010), which guides many governmental policies on action about arts education. Fully global conversations on arts education are complicated because the USA withdrew from UNESCO in 2017 and does not adhere to its policies.

However, those of us working in the arts education arena on a global platform focus on UNESCO because of its clarity and ability to focus efforts with consideration of cultural backgrounds and differences. Through UNESCO guidelines, daCi (Dance and the Child International) makes policy suggestions to ensure that:

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. (daCi international website, n.d.)

Through this claim, enacted through the organization and brought to life at triannual conferences, all members are encouraged to create opportunities for expression through all facets of dance. This vision keeps the focus on expression and creativity in a non-competitive and sharing environment and has been expanded to be inclusive of all ages, not just youth and the young children.

Those working within the USA can use research and contacts globally to promote fair and equitable engagement in arts education focusing on expression and creativity. Those working outside the USA can begin their conversations with UNESCO and international efforts to provide fair and equitable arts education with a focus on creativity and expression. Working together globally we can capitalize on our collective strengths to put creativity at the forefront and counter commercialization that ultimately works against creativity.

## References

- Amado, D., del Pillar, F., Sánchez-Miguel, P.A., Leo, F.M., & García-Calvo, T. (2014). Analysis of the impact of creative technique on the motivation of physical education students in dance content: Gender differences. *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, 50(1), 64-79.
- Chappell, K. (2021). Researching posthumanizing creativity: Expanding, shifting and disrupting. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 28(5), 496-506.
- Cone, T.P. & Cone, S. (2005). *Teaching children dance*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Cremin, T. & Chappell, K. (2021). *Creative pedagogies: A systematic review*. *Research Papers in Education*, 36(3), 299-331.
- Damasio, A. (1994). *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. New York: G.P. Putnam.
- Dance and the Child International (daCi). <https://daci.international/>
- DeFrantz, T.F. (2012). Unchecked Popularity: Neoliberal circulations of Black social dance. In L.D. Nelson & P. Ybarra (Eds.), *Neoliberalism and Global Theatres Performance Permutations* (pp.128-142) London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Foster, S. L. (2017). "Dance and/as competition in the privately owned US studio," in *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Politics*, R. J. Kowal, G. Siegmund, and R.Martin (Eds.) New York: Oxford University Press,
- Frith, E., Miller, S., & Loprinzi, P.D. (2019). "A review of experimental research on embodied creativity: Revising the mind-body connection." *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, 54(4), 767-798.
- Gilbert, A.G. (1992). *Creative Dance for All Ages*. Reston, VA: AAHPERD.
- Gough, M. (1999). *Knowing Dance: A Guide for Creative Teaching*. London: Dance Books.
- Harrington, H. (2020) "Consumer dance identity: The intersection between competition dance, televised dance shows and social media." *Research in Dance Education*, 21(2),169-187.
- ISCED (2011) <http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/non-formal-education>
- Keuchel, S. (2014). "Arts Education Development Index (AEDI) A Comparative International Empirical Research Approach in Arts Education." In *Inter-*

*national Yearbook for Research in Arts Education, Vol 2.* Larry O'Farrell, Shifra Schonmann, and Ernst Wagner, eds. Münster: Waxmann, 41-51.

Koff, S. (2021). *Dance Education: A Redefinition*. London: Methuen.

Mattsson, T. & Håkan Larsson (2021) 'There is no right or wrong way': Exploring expressive dance assignments in physical education," *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 26 (2),123-136, DOI: 10.1080/17408989.2020.1752649

McCarthy-Brown, N. (2014). Decolonizing dance curriculum in higher education: One credit at a time, *Journal of Dance Education* 14 (4),125-129.

Nordin-Bates, S.M. (2020). Striving for perfection or for creativity? *Journal of Dance Education*, 20 (1), 23-34.

Schupp, K. (2019). Dance Competition Culture and Commercial Dance, *Journal of Dance Education* 19(2), 66.

Schupp, K. (2020). Performing whiteness on the competition stage: 'I dance all styles', *Research in Dance Education*, 21(2), 209-224.

Sowden, P. T., Clements, L., Redlich, C. & Lewis, C. (2015). Improvisation facilitates convergent thinking and creativity: Realizing a benefit of primary school arts education. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity and the Arts*, 9(2), 128-138.

Sternberg, R. J. Glaveanu, V. & Kaufman, J.C. (2022). In quest of creativity: Three paths toward an elusive grail. *Creativity Research Journal* DOI: 10.1080/10400419.2022.2107299.

Stinson, S. (1988). *Dance for Young Children*. Reston, VA: AAHPERD.

Tuck, E. (2013). Neoliberalism as nihilism? A commentary on educational accountability, teacher education, and school reform, *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 11(2), 324-347.

UNESCO (2010). "Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education" in *UNESCO's Second World Conference on Arts Education* (Seoul, Republic of Korea, May 25<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> 2010).

Vissicaro, P. (2004). *Studying Dance Cultures Around the World: An Introduction to Multicultural Dance Education*, Dubuque: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company.