

WORKING CONSENT:

**Ethical Engagement with Collaborators, Audiences, and Land
in Dance and Theatre Pedagogy and Practice**

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Abstract

Theatre and dance pedagogic methods and performance traditions have been around for hundreds of years. These ways of doing and learning are steeped in hierarchy, capitalism, colonialism, and binary thinking. They can be found in dance studios, conservatory and academic classrooms, theatre rehearsals, dressing rooms, and arts organization board rooms.

For those wishing to create in collaboration and/or teach in ways that promote embodiment and transformation, these authoritarian methods are not valuable, and in fact are harmful and traumatic. Instead, in order to be in a right relationship with performers, students, audiences, and/or the land, we must work ethically, in ways that center equity and justice. This thesis enters a lively conversation in Western performance and pedagogy around consent, #MeToo, student-centered learning, disability justice, as well as Indigenous systems of knowledge, decolonization, and #LandBack.

Working Consent is the ongoing process of acknowledging the power dynamics in performance and learning spaces, opening dialogue between all parties involved, and centering the focus on the overarching work we have agreed to accomplish. My thesis explores this process of establishing consent-forward and trauma-informed relationships between teachers and students, as well as between artists with collaborators, the audience, and the land. I draw on experiences from my roles as a dance professor, intimacy choreographer, choreographer, scholar, and workshop facilitator. In this paper, I impart somatic practices, performance structures, pedagogic tools, and theoretical frameworks for deepening these relationships.

Keywords

Bodily Autonomy, Boundaries, Choreography, Collaboration, Consent, Dance Teaching, Ethical Performance, Ethical Pedagogy, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Intimacy Choreography, Intimacy Direction, Working Consent

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements and Dedications	2
Abstract	4
Keywords	5
Table of Contents	6
Introduction	1
Foundational Concepts	7
<i>Working Consent</i>	7
<i>Collaboration</i>	11
Conclusion	13
Working Ethically with Performer Collaborators	15
Accepting Bodily Autonomy	15
<i>Staged Intimacy</i>	15
<i>Embodied Reality</i>	16
Broadening Boundaries	18
<i>Boundaries in Conversation</i>	22
Collaboration Creates Community	23
Personal Collaborative Experiences	26
Conclusion	29
Working Ethically with Student Collaborators	30
Choice	32
<i>Differing Modes of Engagement</i>	36
<i>Choice in Practice</i>	38
Bodily Autonomy	40
<i>Technically</i>	43
<i>Expressively</i>	44
<i>Functionally</i>	45

<i>A Final Note on Bodily Autonomy</i>	47
Touch	49
Depersonalizing Corrections	52
Assessments	53
<i>Ungrading</i>	59
Conclusion: Trauma-informed Teaching	63
Working Ethically with Audiences	66
Content Warnings	67
Accessibility	69
Cultural Competency	71
Conclusion	74
Working Ethically with the Land	76
Crafting and Using Land Acknowledgements	77
The Land in Performance	80
Personal Land Based Experiences	82
Conclusion: Being Accountable	91
Personal Accountability	95
Conclusion	96
References	99

List of Figures and Videos

Fig. 1- Working Consent	7
Fig. 2- Boundaries Worksheet	20
Fig. 3- Boundaries Conversation	22
Fig. 4- Joanna in <i>KINesphere</i> Performance	28
Fig. 5- Boundary of Comfort Zone Graphic	34
Fig. 6- Touch Policy	51
Fig. 7- Blob People	56
Fig. 8- Another Example of Blob People	57
Fig. 9- Screenshots of Syllabi Language re: Ungrading	60
Fig. 10- Screenshots of Syllabi Language re: Narrative Assessment	61
Fig. 11- Screenshot of Momentum Stage's Land Acknowledgement	77
Fig. 12- Ricky in <i>KINesphere</i> Performance	83
Fig. 13- Yasmin in <i>KINesphere</i> Performance	84
Fig. 14- Joanna in <i>KINesphere</i> Performance	85
Fig. 15- Joanna in <i>KINesphere</i> Performance	85
Vid. 1- Video of <i>KINesphere</i> Excerpts	86
Fig. 16- Jo, Yas, and Ricky in <i>KINesphere</i> Performance	87
Fig. 17- Jo, Ricky, and Yas in <i>KINesphere</i> Performance	88
Fig. 18- Nicole, center, with audience members at the reflection station during <i>KINesphere</i> performance	88

Introduction

Theatre and dance pedagogic methods and performance traditions have been around for hundreds of years. These ways of doing and learning are steeped in hierarchy, capitalism, colonialism, and binary thinking. They are supported by Western society at large, and can be found in dance studios, conservatory and academic classrooms, theatre rehearsals, dressing rooms and arts organization board rooms.

I am an intimacy choreographer and dance choreographer for theatre, a modern concert dance choreographer, an intimacy coordinator for TV and film, and a dance and movement educator for a university. I show up to each of these jobs in a white, cis-female, heterosexual, thin, middle-aged body, that has survived a period of disability and chronic illness, and continues to exist and work with a chronic injury that can be debilitating. The body that I carry into these spaces holds power, because I fit the typical Western and commercial ideas of how a “dance teacher” or “choreographer” (both dance and intimacy) presents in the world. I started dancing late, at age 12, and felt like I was always not quite good enough in every class I was in, because of it. However, I loved choreography, and had a talent for creating story-telling dances early on. It is my work in dance choreography that led me to theatre, and then eventually to intimacy choreography, and then intimacy coordination. Upon my introduction to the consent-forward¹

¹ Consent-forward is the phrase used by Intimacy Directors and Coordinators to describe their approach to staged intimacy work and education. For Colleen Hughes, the Director of Core Training, this language helps position consent with a positive, “you can do it” mindset, because often the changes the work requires us to do in creation and teaching can feel overwhelming. I choose to use this idea of consent-forward in my own discussions of the work, because I believe it supports the idea of ongoing consent, as described in my definition of Working Consent, in **Foundational Concepts**.

work of intimacy, I was inspired to examine the power dynamics, traditions, and status quo of the ways that I taught and created. I have found that each adjustment and change to facilitate consent leads me to new areas for growth and change in both pedagogy and praxis.

The ways that movement and bodies make meaning are of deep interest to me. I write in my artist statement (2022a),

Bodies are sculpted, legislated, objectified, punished, idolized, and idealized. For performers, bodies are often “other”: an instrument or tool, an object to be trained, the focus of work. But, bodies are also the point of connection—sharing space, ideas, meals, a glance, or a touch. In my work as both an artist and an educator, I explore connections between bodies.

Through dance and intimacy choreography, I focus on how movement creates meaning, and how power dynamics in educational and performance spaces affect embodiment. My training in the Laban/Bartenieff Movement System, in addition to my work to unsettle my creative practice, provide communication tools, allowing me to uphold the creative sovereignty of my collaborators, as well as my own creative integrity. We work together to create confident spaces, in which every artist is cared for, and operates from agency.

It is this constant interplay between bodies and power (both socially structured and embodied) that continues to draw my interest as an artist, educator, and writer.

I included in “Power Dynamics in Dance” for *Dance Geist* ezine in early 2021 a quote from dance historian Deborah Jowitt:

When Marius Petipa worried about pleasing “the public,” he was speaking of a power elite. Dancers on the stage of the Maryinsky could look out into an orderly assemblage, seated according to rank and prestige....

The spectators looked back at a stage world that flatteringly mirrored theirs in protocol, decorum, and elegance....

The parades, grand entrances, and large ensemble dances in the ballets affirmed the power of ceremony. The surviving works from this period—*The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, and *La Bayadère*—contain courts of their own. (243-4)

I then concluded:

21st century ballet companies continue to be structured in models that reinforce hierarchy and produce works that promote appropriation.

While modern dance may have rebelled against the aesthetic of ballet, many trainings and companies were organized around one charismatic teacher. Therefore, a hierarchical power structure remained. (28)

Of course, this hierarchical structure is not particular to dance. Theatre shares this model, with directors being “over” actors.

[I wrote about my own experiences with directing](#), “In our Enlightenment-shaped world, the director’s focus on thoughts and words are valued above the bodily doing of the actor” (Perry 2021c). But, the idea of the all-knowing director in theatre is fairly recent. Theatre historian Isaac Butler writes in *The Method*, that Stanislavski was inspired to create his own ideas of theatre as

...in April 1890 when one of the first director’s companies in the world, the Meiningen Ensemble, toured Russia. In most of Europe, the actor-managers ran theater troupes, overseeing productions while performing in them. It had been this way for centuries.... The Meiningen Ensemble, by contrast... productions were unified under the vision of their director.... Their tours through Europe helped give birth to the profession of directing, and they had a particular impact on Stanislavski, who sat in on the Ensemble’s rehearsals, marveling at the absolute control Chronegk wielded. (42-43)

Stanislavski and his Method have, for better or worse, for his intention or not, shaped most of Western, particularly American, actor training and performance.

Simply because these are the traditions of dance and theatre does not mean that they are models worth continuing to perpetuate. In my work in both academia and professional performance creation, I regularly witness colonial, supremacist systems in action, particularly in adherence to hierarchical power structures, Euro-centric aesthetics, and separation of the body from the mind and spirit.

Recently, in the stretching and conditioning class I teach, a student asked why the education system values the mind over the body. I first mentioned that this was not unique to our institution, but that it really was a systemic value that began in the Enlightenment. We went on to discuss that ancient societies were not unintelligent, but rather invented the mathematical and scientific systems we use today. These people were architects, thinkers, and embodiment practitioners in their own rights. However, because Western societies often think of progress as linear, we also assume that the future will be better and more beneficial than the present, which is better and more beneficial than the past. And so, in much of Western thought there is a value on the new. Therefore, old ways, such as embodied practices, are not seen as worthwhile. Since the 1960s, in Western Society, those embodied practices have been making a comeback, but now as new “somatic practices.”

I wrote in [an essay](#) for *DanceGeist* and part of the DAP concentration requirements at Goddard about the whitewashing of somatic practices.

The practice of appropriation holds a lot of interest to me as a teacher, choreographer, and someone who enjoyed yoga. It shows up most obviously in my work as a Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analyst. Laban had a huge influence from Sufi whirling from a childhood tutor and Egyptian occultic practices through Rosicrucianism. These other cultures are rarely mentioned in learning the System that bears his name.

Just as Laban was influenced by other cultures, so were other “somatics pioneers.” Many discussions of their methods do not offer students a history of the form beyond the founder. Yoga, tai chi, and chi gong, [ancient Asian and African practices, are influences](#) of Alexander, Rolf, and Bartenieff. Feldenkrais was [influenced by judo](#). Bainbridge-Cohen gives credit to her aikido training², but rarely is this mentioned in overviews of Body-Mind Centering. Cranio-sacral work has been well-documented as [descended from Indigenous American healing practices](#).

² The original article had a hyperlink to a discussion of this from Continuum Movement practices, but they have since removed the article.

Why are these original practices not considered part of ‘Somatics’ in our 21st-century understanding, but are only occasionally-mentioned precursors? Why are bodies and practices of color erased from our discussions of somatics? What is our obligation to history and culture as teachers? As practitioners? As people who love, enjoy, and appreciate bodies?

We enter into our somatics practice with curiosity- eager to learn about ourselves and how we might change our relationship to the world. Yet, I rarely hear the conversations happening that will actually affect change—asking of the hard questions regarding white-washing, erasure, and appropriation of cultural traditions. (2021e)

This research and examination is important to share with students, and I get very excited when they create those opportunities for me to do so, rather than having to introduce a lecture on it!

The question posed in the stretching and conditioning class provided a time to remind students of the above, as well as the fact that many of the ancient societies that provide us with this embodied knowledge were mainly people of color. Additionally, the Enlightenment was also the beginning of the European slave trade, and many witch hunts and trials which persecuting women in particular for practicing traditional healing arts. Race and gender played large roles in whose ideas and practices were seen as valid and worth promoting. This answer was likely not what my students were expecting to have discussed in their stretching class, but is important to illuminate the systemic nature of the devaluing of the body, particularly when that body is not that of a white male.

These intertwining systemic oppressions fit Tuck and Yang’s (2012) definition of “internal colonialism”—control methods of land and the bodies on the land, to support the desires of the colonizers—in their field-defining essay *Decolonization is not a Metaphor* (4-5). It is this desire for control, or “power-over” (Follett [1933] 1973, 101), that has led me to reexamine my work as a choreographer and teacher.

I have often said that learning consent-forward work as the foundation of intimacy choreography has not only given me a new career path, it has changed how I do everything. I

first experienced this in ideas of choice and autonomy in dance classes Bill Evans, a modern dancer, choreographer, educator, and teacher trainer, in 2016³. When I attended my first intimacy choreography workshops in 2018, I layered onto that foundation new understanding of harmful power dynamics. I now strive to create, teach and learn, and relate to all living beings ethically, with a focus on relationality and equity.

The traditions of dance and theatre training and performance do not align easily with the precepts of consent-forward work. In these same spaces, there also exists deep resistance to ways of thinking and doing that would require change. Because white supremacy and capitalism would have us believe that these are all individual, rather than systemic problems, many educators and creators believe that they are “good people,” and therefore, their ways of teaching and creating are “good,” too. But, this leaves the systems of oppression inherent in our dance and theatre spaces unaddressed, continuing to cause harm and promote inequity. Diana Taylor, a performance studies scholar, poses this question in the introduction to her book *Presente!: The Politics of Presence*, “How do we live and respond ethically to this systemic brutality, knowing full well that many of us are embedded in it and benefit from the economic inequalities it produces” (4)? In this paper, I examine ways we might teach and create dance and theatre ethically, including practices that create equitable systems for the people we encounter in creative processes and classrooms, through the use of trauma-informed and consent-forward work, collaborative working methods, and accountability.

³ See this in the [Working Ethically with Student Collaborators](#).

Foundational Concepts

In creating, teaching, and presenting over the past two years, I have developed several ideas I find necessary to engaging ethically with performers and students. These concepts are my guide and goals in the creative spaces I enter as an artist or teacher. They have been informed by my work in intimacy choreography, my study of power dynamics, my personal experiences as a classroom teacher at middle school, high school, and university levels, as well as my professional experiences as a performer in both dance and theatre.

Working Consent

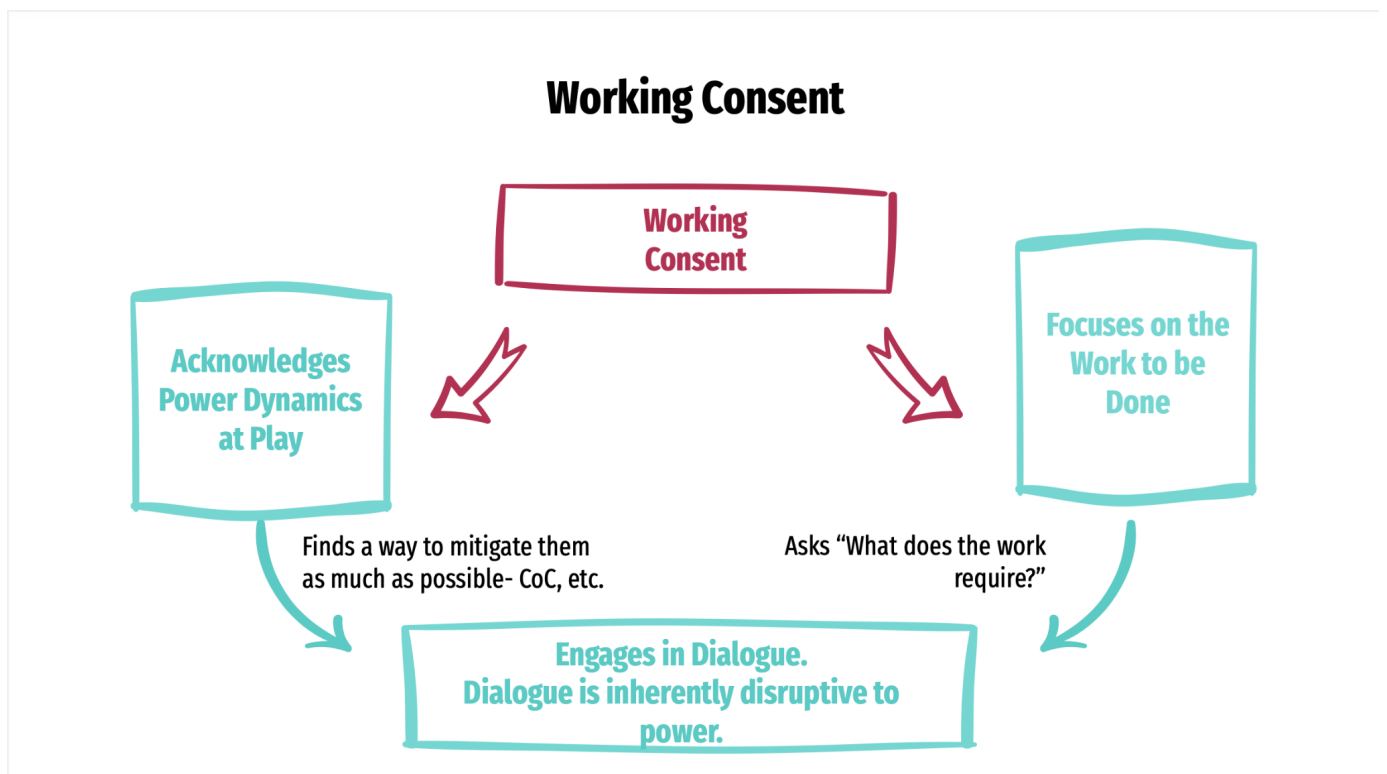


Fig. 1- Working Consent Slide from Power and Consent presentations at Momentum Stage.

The first concept is Working Consent (Perry 2021a). The main tenets of Working Consent are:

- [The “work⁴-”](#) reminds us that the focus is on the work we are there to create, rather than the titles of people in the creative roles. The “Law of the Situation” was originally stated in 1929 by Mary Parker Follett, a management consultant working in America and England in the early 20th century: “An order then should always be given not as a personal matter, not because the man giving it wants the thing done, but because it is the demand of the situation” (128). By focusing on the work, we disrupt the power dynamics of roles, and instead center on a shared goal we are achieving through particular relationships.

- Shawn Wilson (2018), an Indigenous scholar and researcher wrote *Research is Ceremony* to codify an Indigenous research paradigm, which particularly values relationality as a way of developing and sharing knowledge. In it, he offers, “...everything needs to be seen within the context of the relationships it represents” (64). As a dance and theatre educator and practitioner, I find that relationships are crucial to our work. Much of theatre requires a director, actors, designers, and an audience. For dance, it’s a choreographer, dancers, designers, and audience. In academic settings, we have teachers, students, and administrators. While these may be seen as hierarchies, they are really relationships of equal artists with differing responsibilities.

These relationships, often in practice hierarchical, can be egalitarian. Just because we all have different roles in the making of art does not mean that one role is over the others. We all contribute to the process, so focusing on the work frees us to be in relationships of equality, rather than hierarchy.

⁴ If you wish to hear me speak about these things, rather than read, please follow the links at each bullet point to my TikToks about Working Consent.

All of these roles are part of the structures we are in, and no amount of wishing it were otherwise or pretending these roles do not exist will make it so (of course, if you have developed a beautifully egalitarian devising, improvising or other type of creating group, you may not have these roles, but most theatre and dance companies do). As a matter of fact, in order to create our work, we actually *need* all of these roles to exist. Sandra Styres (2019), a professor of education in Canada, with Mohawk, English, and French ancestry, calls us to make this focus on relationships central to unsettled work and learning as “Indigeneity and working within Indigenous contexts is first and foremost about reciprocity and relationships” (24).

- While participants may not be enthusiastic about every action they engage in on stage or in the classroom, they are often enthusiastic about the work, and the final outcome of that work, whether it be a performance or credits toward graduation. When we frame directions, corrections, and dialogue in the context of the work we are all here to do—create art—we address power dynamics and open the space for collaboration around the many different ways we might get to that creation⁵.
- [The “-ing”](#) in “Working Consent” reminds us that consent is a process. Consent is not a destination to reach, and then it is done. Rather, consent requires consistent and frequent check-ins, reiterations, and adaptations. All of this requires dialogue.
 - Dialogue is inherently disruptive to power. Paulo Freire ([1973] 2006), an influential educator, community activist, and author, shares in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the paradigm-shifting idea that most of current Western

⁵ See more on this in the **Assessments** section in the “Working Ethically with Student Collaborators” chapter.)

education has a “banking model.” He declares that this model is flawed, and does not value humanity, as “...dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s ‘depositing’ ideas in another... . Because dialogue is an encounter among women and men who name the world, it must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others” (89).

If we are going to engage in dialogue, I must believe that your point of view is valid, and equal to mine. This does not mean that I must adopt your point of view, but I must be able to see how and why you would hold this opinion, and accept it as an alternative. Freire writes later in the same book, “Dialogue does not impose, does not manipulate, does not domesticate, does not ‘sloganize’” (168). In this agreement to hold multiple perspectives, those with power acknowledge that their way is not the only way, or even the right way.

- In order for people to confidently engage in dialogue across power dynamics, they must know that there is a process in place to address harm that may occur. There must be a public measure of accountability⁶. I recommend in workshops that this take the form of a Chain of Communication or a Resolution Pathway. This tool should include at least one other human alternative to the person in power in the room, as well as applicable hotlines and resources for the organization. This should also be included in contracts, handbooks, etc., and posted if possible. (Perry 2021, *Power and Consent*)
- The final word of “Working Consent” opens up the idea of [consent](#) occurring all throughout the process of creating the work, by everyone involved. This now

⁶ Please see **Conclusion: Being Accountable**, as more thoughts are offered on this topic there.

encompasses not only contact, but all of the ways bodies interact with, and are affected by, content and context in art-making. Consent should be an ongoing process that requires the continual engagement of all parties in performance and performance training spaces, as every moment of creating theatre and/or dance requires the full engagement of all collaborators.

This idea of Working Consent has shaped the way I teach university students, as well as lead workshops for dance and theatre teachers. It has also become key to my process as both a choreographer and an intimacy choreographer.

Collaboration

[Collaboration](#)⁷ is the combination of consent and creativity, focused at the work⁸. I am interested in working in collaboration as a teacher and an artist. Collaboration gets thrown around like a nice kindergarten concept, like cooperation, “just try to get along with everyone”. However, it is much more nuanced. Mary Parker Follett ([1933] 1973) calls this “power with,” or “coactive control” (101). As such, this is “jointly developing power”, or “a unifying” (115). In such a setting, the powers of everyone are pooled together, to achieve the goal of that situation. Everyone’s power and role is necessary to the execution of the work to be done. In this sense, it supports Working Consent.

⁷ If you wish to watch, rather than read, about collaboration, please follow the link to a TikTok.

⁸ In conversation with Ian Bond around this concept, he offered the image of two people standing side-by-side, being attentive to what is in front of them. I appreciated this view of teamwork, and clarification, that we are in relationship to do the work.

Likewise, collaboration, like Working Consent, is relational. As noted in the definition of Working Consent, it is a relationship between equals. OpenSource Leadership Strategies provided a handout in 2020 that looked at modes of addressing conflict, referencing Ron Kraybill's Personal Style Inventory (which speaks to a Cooperative Style), and the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (which includes collaboration as one of these modes). OpenSource Leadership's version adds an important caveat to the definition of collaboration: that it "requires an equal balance of power." A new 2022 version of this handout has actually removed the word *equal* and now reads, "Collaboration requires a balance of power. Balancing power requires an honest assessment of the power dynamics inherent in the relationship and intentional effort to change them...." I recognize "equal" was likely removed for redundancy issues, as if something that is actually balanced is equal. However, I miss the clarity that word provided. I do appreciate the new language offering that power dynamics do exist, and that with concentrated strategies we can work to mitigate them. While Working Consent may not eliminate power differentials within existing systems, it does seek to transparently and continuously address them and highlight the need for equity in collaboration.

I personally experienced this conflict between power hierarchies and collaboration on a recent intimacy coordination gig. This was a very big job for me, in terms of studio and star power. I was very aware of this in beginning my work and reaching out to the Assistant Director team to gain Director to get scene questions answered. Through this gatekeeping, I was very aware of the power I did not hold in this project. I had to send several emails to get any movement on this front, and with each subsequent communication, I was feeling more and more guilty and like I was being a pest to these very busy, important people. In a moment of sitting with the feelings, it became clear to me that I was falling into the influence of power dynamics

(and also making assumptions, as no one had said, “please stop nagging us!”). I was feeling the power held simply in the title “director” and dismissed my own role as a collaborator. Legally and artistically, that gig needed me to do my job, and to do it with excellence. I was a necessary collaborator, and it was essential for me to step into my power, and get what I required to do my job well, for the good of the whole team and production. In the hierarchy created by titles, I felt unequal. However, in collaboration, I was powerful and required.

Conclusion

This idea of equal and accountable relationships was not created for a Western leadership model. Leadership, as a concept, is antithetical to equality. Rather, “The shared aspect of an Indigenous ontology and epistemology is relationality (relationships do not merely shape reality, they *are* reality). The shared aspect of an Indigenous axiology and methodology is accountability to relationships” (Wilson, 9). Wilson clarifies further, “Both people in the relationship call the other *chapan*. *Chapan* is balanced relationship, without hierarchy of any sort” (107). Holding an Indigenous worldview requires relationship, and true relating can only happen between equals.

Competition, power structures, tradition, and assumptions can all be barriers to creating equitable relationships. Learning to work, create, and learn in equality disrupts hierarchies and the capitalistic idea that you are only as valuable as you are better than the person next to you. This competition mindset is prevalent in dance and theatre training programs and performance spaces. It creates fear and distrust, and often leads students and performers to violate or give up their own boundaries, to ensure that they get a job or a good grade, or stay in favor with a power holder.

In the opening chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire ([1973] 2006) provides important context, “And as an individual perceives the extent of dehumanization, he or she may ask if humanization is a viable possibility” (43). He goes on, “It [humanization] is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression and the violence of the oppressors; Dehumanization... is a *distortion* of the vocation of becoming more fully human” (emphasis original) (44). Art-making and teaching should be ways of guiding others in explorations of what it means to be human.

In order to be collaborators, we must see the full humanity of our co-artists. Yet, often dehumanizing tactics are used in the creative or pedagogic process. These cause harm not only amongst the collaborators, but through the larger world, as humanity is destroyed rather than validated, restored, or created.

Styres (2019) reminds “Many scholars involved in decolonizing pedagogies and praxis consider resistances in engaging in decolonization as acts of denial, deflection, and a defense of the status quo, which serves to reinforce relations of power and privilege” (30). She cautions, “There is a general unwillingness to engage in the uncomfortable process of decolonization because decolonizing is an unsettling process of shifting and unraveling the tangled colonial relations of power and privilege.” This paper highlights areas to address so that we might ethically engage, as collaborators, with performers, students, audiences, and the land.

Working Ethically with Performer Collaborators

There are several situations in performance settings where directors and/or choreographers can seek to create Working Consent, allowing performers to bring their full selves, including their creativity, into the room and process, to all work as collaborators, rather than roles in a hierarchy. Timothy Clark (2020), a business consultant whose work on psychological safety⁹ has greatly influenced my pedagogy, reflects “...that people can become conditioned to accept exploitation, which leads to the normalization of abuse” (124). In performance settings, I believe we can end maltreatment by accepting bodily autonomy, broadening our ideas of boundaries, and creating community.

Accepting Bodily Autonomy

Currently, perhaps because of the buzz around intimacy direction in live performance, consent in performance is a hot topic. Resistance to consent-forward work in performance may be a refusal to hire an intimacy director, but, with a reframe of Working Consent to include all collaborators who are affected by the context and content of the work, it now more insidiously appears as a lack of bodily autonomy or personal agency.

Staged Intimacy

The colonial way, that still often exists in performance and performance training spaces today, of executing staged intimacy was/is to ask the actors to “go for it” or, to “do what you’d do in your real life.” I have personally always found these two directions to be counterintuitive in

⁹ See the section on **Choice** in “Working Ethically with Student Collaborators” chapter.

industries that prescribe every other moment of bodily movement. Directors tell actors when to sit, when to stand, how to move across the stage. The idea that moments of staged intimacy require less attention than those movements is silly. However, directors may have been offering this “just do it” option as a way of offering bodily autonomy. Yet, because the hierarchies and power structures were never addressed, performers still felt pressure to please the power-holder, rather than freedom to express agency and find the option that worked best for them.

As for the idea of calling upon real life experience, we do not require performers to have had a sword fight in their real life to accept that they can perform it believably onstage. Personal experience is not always available, or always good or healthy fuel for creation. Rather, technique and communication should support creative processes. Intimacy choreography, when applied well, brings consent-forward work into the process of creation, while still allowing the director to guide the entire process. Intimacy choreography proves that physical instructions can be given that support personal agency and bodily autonomy, in service of a story or art form.

Embodied Reality

We show up to make art, whether it is theatre or dance, in certain bodies. Those bodies influence how much power we have in any given room, and can positively or negatively compound the power we hold in the role we fill. AORTA (2020), an organization that provides training on group facilitation and creating anti-racist spaces, offers that one of the ways to help mitigate power dynamics is to notice whose voices are not being heard, and then to question why. *Are those people not in our space? Why? Are they here, but not speaking up? Why?* The answers to these questions often have to do with the bodies people are in, and their perceived level of safety and belonging in the space. Bodies of all races, ages, genders, abilities, and sizes should be included in the collaboration process of dance and theatre performance.

Dancers are expected to weigh a certain amount, often around 100 pounds, but still have the muscle and stamina to dance. “Curvy” dancers, with breasts and glutes, have become more accepted in recent years, but particularly in ballet, face discrimination in overall hiring or in role placement. Chloe Angyal (2021) quotes many dancers, former dancers, and others associated with the ballet world in her book *Turning Pointe*. In Chapter 5, “The Hidden Curriculum” she quotes several stories, some well-known, some newly published, of dancers being encouraged to have eating disorders. She goes on to write “Company directors can still fire or refuse to hire dancers for not being... ‘fit’ “(112). She continues:

Defending the practice of hiring and firing dancers based on their size and shape, teachers and directors will point to the sacredness of the line, which must not be interrupted by the inconvenience of breast, hips, or buttocks. But because of the new cultural injunction against outright telling dancers to lose weight, gatekeepers have developed a suite of euphemisms that all amount to the same message: slim down. (113)

This phenomenon, while perhaps more familiar to dancers, impacts who audiences perceive as performing bodies on all stages.

The Broadway Body Positivity Project examines the different bodies put on stage, noting a lack of fat, disabled, queer, and People of Color on America’s largest stages. While they do not offer statistics, the Facebook discussion group associated with this Project is daily refreshed with anecdotes of harassment and/or discrimination against bodies from actors in regional, Broadway, and national tour productions.

A failure to accept bodies as they are—whether it is race, gender, age, size, ability—is a denial of humanity, personal agency, and bodily autonomy. If we are truly going to be ethical creators in dance and theatre spaces, we must be inclusive of all bodies, at all points and positions in the creative process.

Broadening Boundaries

Collaborative creating is denied when the people who hold power in the room assume the “yes” of everyone else in it. *Yes, they can be touched by the director, pas de deux partner, scene partner, and everyone in the ensemble. Yes, they want feedback not just on their execution, but on what that execution says about them as a person or about their body. Yes, they want to engage in every possible opportunity and exercise offered to them.* Just because folks have said “yes” to a role does not mean they have agreed to harassment, injury, or conflict.

Directors and choreographers often expect that their directions will be followed, even if a performer’s boundaries would keep their body from doing a certain thing, or if a performer’s body is physically incapable of a certain action. This, coupled with the above mindset of assuming “yes,” is why boundary conversations should be a part of every creative process. We cannot assume someone’s age, gender, experience in the industry, sexual orientation, manner of dress, or any other outwardly observable factor determines their willingness to engage in touch, staged intimacy, difficult or traumatic content, physical activities, or any other specific performance-related action.

[I define a boundary](#) as “a need I have that must be met in order for me to do my best work.” That may mean ensuring there is time for breaks, not engaging in certain types of contact, or not appearing nude on stage. Another way of thinking about boundaries I often bring into the room is, “If I do this thing, I will be less me.” My colleague in Australia, Nigel Poulton, defines boundaries like forks in the road; any time we have to make choices about how we will proceed, we have hit a boundary.

Every person has their unique boundaries around:

- What they are willing [to have their body do](#)

- Ie. what physical actions will they perform or, in the case of simulated sex, be seen as performing
- What are they willing to consent [to have done to their bodies](#)
 - Ie. receive touch, be lifted, etc.
- What they are willing to have their bodies do (with consent) to the bodies of others
 - Ie. give touch, perform a lift, etc.
- The [atmosphere or context](#) (both physical and psychological) of those actions
 - Ie. how close is the audience, what is the level of trust in the ensemble
- The [content](#) around those actions
 - Ie. is this topic activating, is this topic/character within lived experience (Perry 2020)

The idea that boundaries are not only physical, but are also based on content and context, is far more expansive than how they are usually discussed. I created a worksheet in 2020 to help performers in the Consent and Power workshops I lead think through these things.

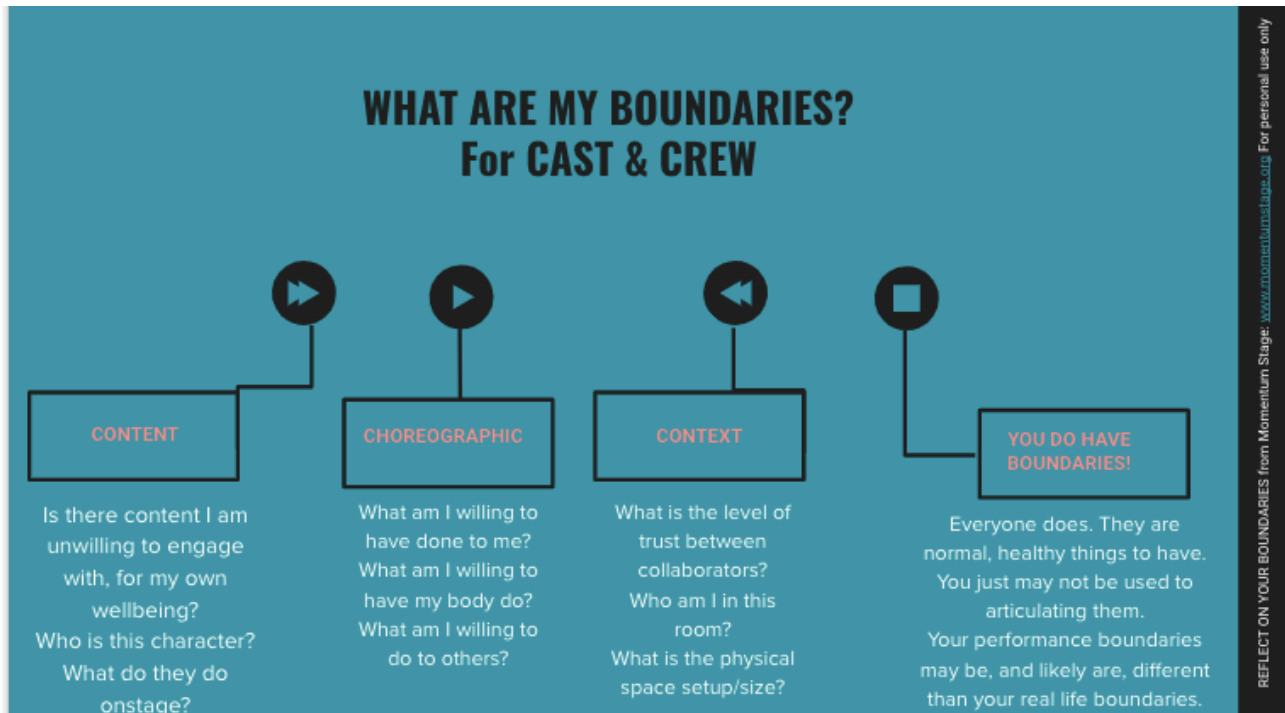


Fig. 2- Boundaries Worksheet developed for Momentum Stage¹⁰

This worksheet was originally developed as part of the “Ethics and Pedagogy of Teaching with(out) Touch” course offered at Momentum Stage¹¹, a non-profit organization I founded in 2018 to provide professional development in theatre and dance, especially for educators. In the course, the worksheet is introduced as a way for teachers to discuss boundaries with students. In its original 2020 version, the only points discussed were physical—the three questions that currently live under the PHYSICAL category. However, in teaching middle school dance in 2020-21, I realized that young people were often engaging in emotionally challenging CONTENT in their conversations, TV shows, and dances. For some young dancers, those choices were cathartic. For others, they were dangerous.

¹⁰ This product is available as a download in the Store at [Momentumstage.org](https://www.momentumstage.org)

¹¹ Learn more about the mission of Momentum and see our other offerings using the link above.

The idea of CONTEXT as an area of boundaries became clear to me across multiple performer workshops in 2021 and 2022. As we would work through the idea of boundaries, I kept hearing that “trust,” in their scene partner, their director, and or the ensemble, was a big factor in determining what those boundaries would be.

Also, over the course of that season, I worked in almost a dozen different performance spaces. In these various locations, there were some in which the audience was hundreds of feet away from the stage, and some where actors and audiences practically shared breath. I found myself wondering if actors who felt confident performing simulated sex in a large theatre, would still feel that way with the audience viewing their actions up close. I realized that all of these things contribute to a performer’s consideration of their boundaries and needs in the moment, and should be discussed and upheld with the same intentionality as physical boundaries.

The idea of “boundaries” itself can feel very colonial—conquering territory, removing the original/current inhabitants, and then building walls, fences, and borders to keep what is yours, yours. In this way, boundaries can be used to demonstrate “power over” (Follett [1933] 1973, 101). Instead, boundaries should be relational. Prentis Hemphill (2021), a somatics practitioner and podcast host, defines boundaries in this way: “Boundaries are the distance at which I can love you and me, simultaneously.” When we remember that our relationships are affected by more than just our bodies, but are also affected by the context we are a part of together and the content we engage in together, we are reminded that boundaries are not about power, but about relationship. Instead of boundaries being individual zones of power, boundaries are ever-changing ways that we relate well to one another.

Boundaries in Conversation

An intimacy choreographer can help facilitate these discussions in professional, healthy ways. In the absence of an intimacy professional, discussions between the director or choreographer and the performer, and between the performers themselves should be normalized. However, the usual hierarchies and power structures do not allow for these conversations to happen without fear of a negative consequence. If a person in a position of power is going to hold these conversations without an intimacy professional, I would suggest that the other protocols for “Working Consent” be well established.

For conversations between peers, or as a tool those in power can offer those not in power, I have developed a three-step boundary conversation formula I share in (2021b).

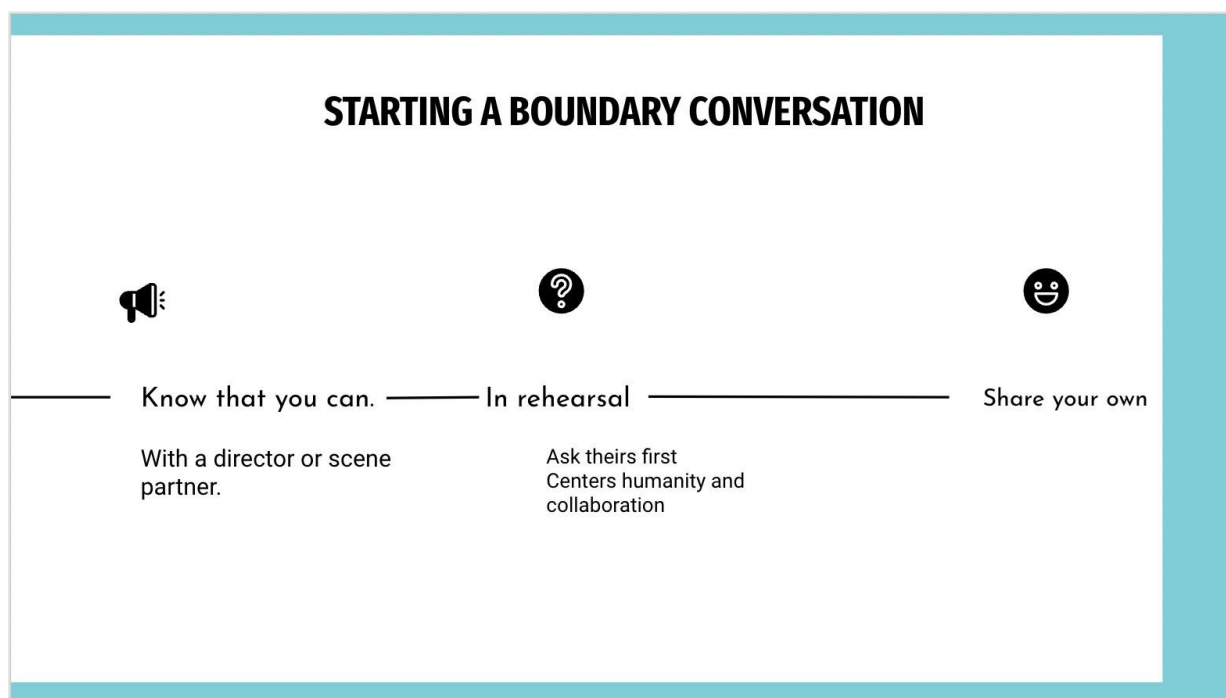


Fig. 3- Boundary Conversation Slide from Consent for Performers presentations at Momentum Stage.

1. Know that you can. Everyone has boundaries, and has a right to expect them to be heard and upheld in the workplace.
2. Ask theirs first. I model this as “Hey scene partner. I know we’re doing this work together today that requires some contact. I was wondering if you had any boundaries I should know about?” By asking theirs first, I have centered their humanity. I have made evident that I believe boundaries are normal, and I expect people to have them. I also demonstrate that I want to be a good collaborator. I want create work we both feel confident in.
3. Share mine. Hopefully, after I complete step 2, my scene partner will follow up with, “Do you have any boundaries?” But even if they do not, I still have an opening to say, “Thanks for sharing that with me. Here are mine.”

While this conversation formula is not foolproof (performers are still conditioned to say “oh, I don’t have any boundaries”), it does help to normalize the idea of boundaries, and open up space for conversation.

Collaboration Creates Community

As mentioned above, simply because a performer has accepted a role does not mean that the performer is ready to adhere to any and all requests of the director or choreographer to fulfill that role. The idea that performers do not have, or should not have boundaries, so that they can be a vessel to the art, is dangerous and inhumane. Consent-forward, trauma-informed work normalizes boundaries and agency, putting people at the center of the artistic process.

I recently had the honor of collaborating with Jeri Lynne Johnson, the Founder and Artistic Director of Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra, as she guest conducted at Florida Grand Opera. She says,

When people see an orchestra on stage, they see lots of different instruments in the musicians' hands—violins, trumpets, flutes, etc. So naturally they assume that the object in the conductor's hand—the baton—is our musical instrument. However, unlike a violin, trumpet or flute, the baton in the conductor's hand does not make any sound. So in reality, it is the orchestra itself—the talented people playing those instruments—that is the conductor's instrument.

An important part of being a top musician is not only having the talent but also an instrument of the highest quality to play. In order to sound their best, they have to take care of their instruments—protect them from damage, repair normal wear and tear, ensure the instrument is in tune etc. Similarly, as a conductor, I have to ensure the instrument of the orchestra is well-cared for. So, when I founded my ensemble, Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra, I wanted to create the most beautiful instrument I could imagine and that meant I needed to address musical AND extra-musical needs equally. And this meant I was listening not only for how the musicians played music together, but how they communicated with each other beyond their instruments. How could I balance strong leadership from the podium with a collaborative artistic process? I wanted to build the orchestra's external reputation for excellence while maintaining an internal culture of mutual respect, trust and collegiality. In other words, I needed to make sure the musicians were not just in tune with each other musically but within the ever-shifting and multifaceted working relationships within the orchestra. (2022)

In Jeri Lynne's use of the metaphor of artist as instrument, she is very clear that the instrument is not in service of the power-holder, or even the art. Rather, they are there for each other. The art does not exist without the people, and the people require care.

This echoes the words of Johanna Hedva (2022), a Korean-American, chronically ill, nonbinary performance artist and author, in her deeply personal essay *Sick Woman Theory*. In it, she offers a view of care as a decolonizing, unsettling, ethic of engagement with others.

The most anti-capitalist protest is to care of another and to care for yourself. To take on the historically feminized and therefore invisible practice of nursing, nurturing, caring. To take seriously each other's vulnerability and fragility and precarity, and to support it,

honor it, empower it. To protect each other, to enact and practice community. A radical kinship, an interdependent sociality, a politics of care. (13)

Care, the arts, and teaching are all devalued in a society that values product over process. Our society is built on hierarchy, rather than community.

Trust is a key feature of community. Freire ([1973] 2006) writes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “...trusting the people is the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change” (60). Entering with the mindset of a collaborator, rather than the defined traditional role is certainly a revolutionary change in creative processes. As I teach workshops for dance teachers, I often remind them, as people in positions of power, that there is no substitute for time, when it comes to building trusting relationships. People must see that you mean what you say, that your actions are consistent with your words, and that you are accountable to your actions if harm occurs. We do not always have this time in our creative processes, and so, consistency and transparency become even more important.

Trust also alleviates the competition mindset. If I see you as my competition, I am more likely to judge you, and myself, harshly. I will constantly measure each of us to see where and how we outperform the other. In such a relationship there can be no trust. Wilson (2018) cautions “Criticizing or judging would imply that I know more about someone else’s work and the relationship that went into it than they do themselves” (64). Trust creates space for exploration, different methods, and more relating. These relationships are the grounds from which excellent work is developed. He writes later, “Thus the strength of your bonds or relationships with the community is an equally valued component of your work” (119). Our performances and processes should only be considered as excellent as the relationships which formed them.

This community and lack of hierarchy or worth based on performance is a decolonial, unsettled way of being in relationship, creating, and performing. Taylor (2020) quotes Leanne Simpson's book *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*,

... 'performance art' (and I would argue performance more broadly) proves invaluable to understanding 'Indigenous thought...obtained through collective truths that are derived from the experience of individuals, relationships and connections (to the non-human world, the land and each other' through action or "presencing," and through creative process'. (17)

Community is the only way to truly have collaboration in creative spaces.

Personal Collaborative Experiences

In my own work, I have become more and more collaborative as a director and choreographer. I wrote in an essay (2021c) about directing as collaboration, in which I documented my first attempt to be a consciously collaborative, rather than generous but hierarchical, director.

In working in co-creative ways, we stop valuing only the words on the page, the idea in the director's head, or the academic or critical standards of "good theatre." Instead, co-creators live into the moment, to see what their experiences, both separately and together, can bring to the work they are developing. In doing so, the embodied discoveries of the actor have more importance than the ideas in the director's head. In perceiving part of the directing role as participation as an audience member, this also gave me permission to access my sensate self, and notice my own bodily reactions to the piece, rather than only my thoughts about it. Our work became about the current, lived experience of it, rather than our thoughts about it—which ultimately is what I want for audiences, as well.

This project and my methods of working went on to shape my practicum project, *KINesphere* and following new dance works, as well as the new program of criticism being developed for Momentum Stage¹².

¹² See more on this program in the chapter on "Audiences", in the section on **Cultural Competency**.

KINosphere 2021 was a dance-theatre piece composed of three dance solos, accompanied by spoken word, set in nature. Since these pieces were solos, I was able to easily stay in a collaboratory creative mode with dancers. A new method of allowing for co-active control in the creating was in the rehearsal process, which I documented (2022d) thusly

I began our rehearsal process early in the fall of 2021, by recording small phrases of movement and sending them to the dancers.... Starting in October, I scheduled rehearsals with the dancers. Yas and I met once in person at my house, twice on Zoom, and once in person at the location.... All of the dancers did not get to rehearse the finale together until the day of the performance!

This mixed rehearsal schedule and style was surprisingly not stressful or anxiety-inducing to me. As someone who would call herself ‘a control freak’, this was not a way I had worked previously. But, it allowed me to know that I was compensating the dancers fairly, as they did what they could do and wanted to do, around their “real life.” Because we started early with the videos, and the dancers had agency over their processes, I felt [this] removed the white supremacist emphasis on urgency and productivity. Instead we were able to stay ‘in process’ longer. Because I was working individually with dancers, each got more focus and agency as we developed a piece that was for them.

This rehearsal method was very beneficial in a variety of ways. As mentioned above, it allowed the dancers more freedom in their schedule, and to choose how much time they could give the work, based on the budget. The use of the video as a communication medium allowed me to release a frequent choreographic concern of right versus left, and also some ideas of what the quality of the movement should be. Instead, the dancers were free to either mirror or flip the choreography, and to interpret the movement in their bodies, removed from my influence.

The pieces were also intensely personal, as each dancer chose their own theme and focus within the idea of connecting with nature. Because of these connections, the energy and message were embedded in the bodies and movement, making them palpable to audiences. In a reflection shared with me after the performance, one of the dancers, Joanna, wrote that “freedom” was her overall impression of this creative process. As Jo has been in multiple other works and musicals I have choreographed since 2017 to the present, she has the best outside perspective on my

methods and how they have changed. This freedom, she felt, came from the rehearsal process, the emphasis on theme (rather than steps), and setting itself.



Fig. 4- Joanna in *KINesphere* performance. 30 Dec. 2021. Photo by Nicole Hullett.

I plan to keep working this way in the 2023 version of *KINesphere*. Again, these will be solos set in nature. Two of the dancers from the 2021 *KINesphere* have agreed to be a part of the new work, which also validates for me this method of working in collaboration.

I recently submitted a grant for another new work. Should it be received, we will also receive rehearsal and performance space. It will be a personal exploration to notice how the

sense of freedom may change with a change in setting. It is my goal to continue working in collaborative, co-active ways, even in a more formal and traditional performance model.

Conclusion

Collaboration requires a relationship of equals, engaged in dialogue, with the shared goal of doing the work. This method of working is contrary to hundreds of years of performance tradition, as well as the academic and conservatory settings in which performing arts training takes place, as we will see in the next chapter. However, if we are to humanize our profession, we must accept bodies and boundaries, and create community. Only through humanization will we prevent trauma and burn-out, and create an industry that values personal creativity, and the artist as well as the art. This is what ethical art making looks like.

The inadequacy of pay for artists plagues both dance and theatre. Often this is blamed on a lack of government funding and audiences not buying tickets. But, it starts inside our industries. When we do not value ourselves and our colleagues as fully human, deserving of autonomy and respect, how could we expect those outside our circles to do so?

Working Ethically with Student Collaborators

Students are often not seen as whole beings, complete with autonomy and agency, but rather objects to be shaped in the way of the teacher. Freire ([1973] 2006) names this as viewing students “... ‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’...The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are” (72). When we work ethically with our collaborators, which students are, in a training setting, whether academically or community-based, we seek to honor their humanity and wholeness.

School was a place that I found great success. It was what made me feel valuable in relationships—good performance was rewarded both there and at home. I consistently heard that doing well in school was important to doing well in life. So, I learned to apply my reading, writing, and reasoning skills in other areas as well. I write in an essay regarding degrees and certifications:

I was never the most talented student in dance class. I started late. I had scoliosis. I wasn't flexible, the best turner or jumper. What I lacked in natural aptitude, I aimed to make up for in work ethic and being the smartest dancer in the room. I knew the vocabulary and history, and I was dedicated. I suppose this is why, in my adult life, I have found myself attracted to degrees and certifications. They are “proofs” of my worthiness; that I do, indeed, deserve to be in the rooms that I am in. Based on my current positions in the world as an adjunct professor of dance and a regularly working Intimacy Professional, I would say this method has worked thus far!

I write later in the same paper,

I understand the desire for education, for standards and benchmarks. They are important for safety and accuracy. Letters behind a name are a code that the outside world can interpret to mean that this person knows what they are talking about! But, I cannot ignore the fact that the entire idea of education as a system, or education delivered by an institution, particularly in the United States, is a tool of colonization and capitalism. Our hierarchical ideas of education, like other colonized structures, create situations of scarcity, urgency, and the idea that there is only one right way to learn or work. (2022j)

Despite the fact that the traditional transactional model of education worked well for me, I recognize that it does not support the learning of many students.

A transactional form of education is antithetical to Indigenous and unsettled ways of knowing and learning. It was not one particular moment, but rather a series of learning and unlearning experiences that led to the realization that the education system that we are indoctrinated in from a very young age contributes to inequity and injustice—not only in our human relationships, but in our relationships with land, animals, and the earth. This is why bringing unsettled ways of learning and knowing into the classes that I teach is important to me. I want students in these classes to leave not only with technical or content area knowledge, but with tools that help them develop and maintain healthy and equitable relationships with their peers, collaborators, families, and more-than-human connections. While each class that I teach has occasional lectures and readings, those are always linked with active application through participation in movement and movement creation, and followed with personal and group reflection. In these ways, I have unsettled classes. As Shawn Wilson (2018) writes, “Traditional Indigenous research emphasizes learning by watching and doing” (59).

Just because students are not able to give consent because of the power dynamics of the systems that we are in together (not to mention in the education system, sometimes students are not legally of the age of consent), does not mean that we cannot engage in the process of Working Consent with them. In fact, we should, because the academic hierarchy of teacher and student models the barriers to collaboration and reciprocity in many relationships. Areas of address for working ethically with student collaborators include: choice, differing modes of engagement, developing awareness, bodily autonomy, and touch as a teaching method. Taylor (2020) situates these issues in colonization: “The separation of knowledge production

(authorized educators) and consumption (students) in today's capitalist culture builds on centuries of separating knowing from doing. Knowledge production, as a cohesive performance, entails elements of interrelationality, of choice, of agency, reflection, and follow-through" (30).

Choice

[I wrote for *Dance Geist* in April of 2022](#), "Folks who have experienced trauma had their opportunity to choose taken from them. Therefore, opportunities to make choices, and have those choices upheld, can be crucial to healing and moving forward" (24). No one chooses trauma. So each opportunity to make a choice, even around seemingly insignificant scenarios such as: is the turn a double or a triple, selecting your own scene partner, whether the rehearsal room door is open or closed, are opportunities to validate someone's agency and autonomy.

Freire ([1973] 2006) reminds us that "Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence....to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects" (85). There is no teacher I know who wants to actively perpetuate violence in their classroom. And yet, this is what our traditional, hierarchical, transactional model of education does: the teacher deposits the information into the student, and the student deposits the information back onto a test or replicates it in execution.. At no point is the student encouraged to create their own pathways to learning, demonstrate their learning in their own way, or, in the words of Timothy Clark (2020), "contribute to" or "challenge" the structure in which learning is done (ix). They remain objects of the teacher's instruction, rather than active subjects in learning.

These terms come from Clark's work on *The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety*. He defines these as: inclusion, learner, contributor, and challenger safeties. He writes "With

inclusion safety, you're asking to be included; with learner safety, you're asking to be encouraged; with contributor safety, you're asking for autonomy; but with challenger safety...the team is asking you to challenge the status quo" (100). Often, in our classrooms, we settle for inclusion or learning, but we could be offering opportunities for contributing and challenging.

Teachers can be resistant to creating this change, as offering choices within exercises or experiences requires time and creativity. For some teachers, this will mean reexamining an activity that has "worked" for decades. However, I find that time and creativity, willingly invested in the psychological safety of students, leads to trust. In fact, Clark writes, "if you make any excuse for not extending psychological safety, you're choosing to value something else more than human beings" (123-124). Again, we must humanize our pedagogy.

Offering Choice may bring up a concern that students simply do not know the difference yet between discomfort and pain, or between a comfort zone and a boundary. In 2020, while teaching a section of "The Ethics and Pedagogy of Teaching with(out) Touch" for Momentum Stage, I realized the need for a tool teachers could use with students to help the sort out some of these nuances (2020b). So, I created a graphic exploring the range that exists between someone's "Confidence Zone" and their "Boundary Zone."

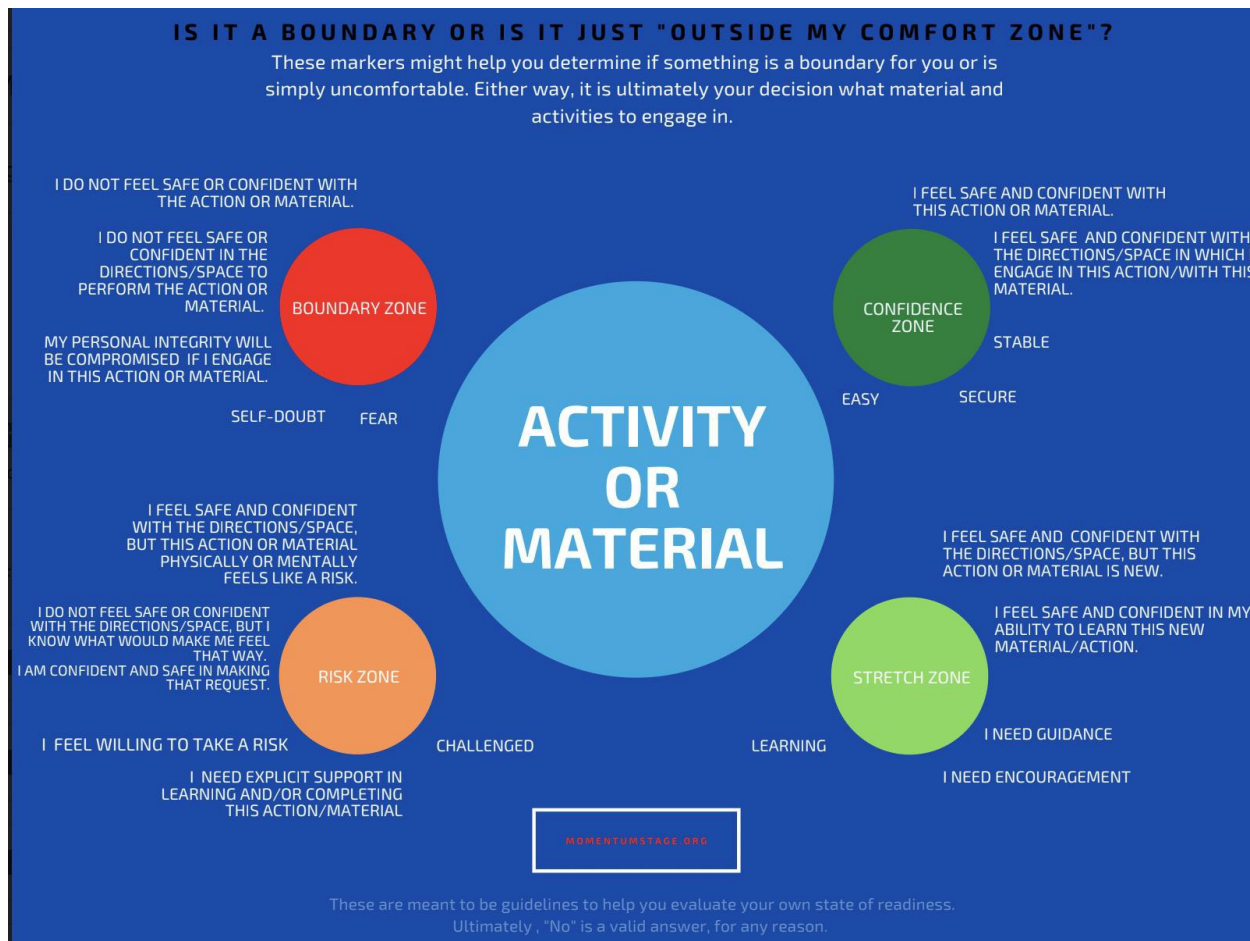


Fig. 5- Boundary or Comfort Zone Graphic created for Momentum Stage¹³

This graphic uses the framework of “Growth Mindset”, coined by Carol Dweck (2007), to promote the idea that there is always room for change. Growth Mindset, as a theory, can be harmful, as it puts the onus on the individual to create change, and does not take into consideration systems of oppression that may be affecting them. However, in the idea of creating individual boundaries, I find that assessing where we are at the moment, as well as where we may want to be in the future, to be helpful.

The graphic uses colors and terms to examine various feelings and/or experiences a student may have when encountering new material or a new activity. Teachers may ask students to

¹³ This product is available as a download in the Store at [Momentumstage.org](https://momentumstage.org).

describe their feelings about an action or piece of content with one of the colors or one of the statements or words on the graphic. Or, they may choose to designate sections of the room as each Zone, for students to move themselves to when offered a new activity.

- Confidence Zone- colored deep green. A student feels confident in the activity or material, as well as the directions they are receiving and the space in which they need to perform the activity. They might describe the activity as “easy”, or feel “stable” or “secure” in the moment.
 - The teacher can step back and watch them do!
- Stretch Zone- colored a lighter green. This zone is a mix of confidence and discomfort. I often express to dance students that a “stretch” is inherently uncomfortable. That’s how we know change is occurring—it isn’t what our body is used to. However, in this area of discomfort, the student must feel confident in their ability and/or opportunity to learn the material or action being requested of them. They may need guidance, or encouragement, but they are ready to learn. This ties back to Clark’s Learning Safety tier. Learning is risky because it requires vulnerability in the possibility of failure. However, there is the underlying safety of belonging in the space.
 - The teacher may be needed for a moment, but for the most part, the student simply needs to know that someone is there to help if it’s needed, but that they are trusted to learn.
 - In time, what felt like Stretch should become something the student feels Confident in.
- Risk Zone- colored orange. This section covers both things that are inherently risky (for example, being lifted or suspended) and things that feel beyond uncomfortable, and have

entered the unsafe range. A key feature of this zone is that the student is able to ask for what they need to feel safe, whether that is more time, a spotter or a mat, or something else. Even though this is challenging material, the student does feel ready to take the risk. However, they need explicit support in doing so.

- The teacher should be able to provide that support, so that the feeling of Risk can become a feeling of Stretch. Or, they should clearly state that the needed supports are not available, and ask if now this becomes a Boundary.
- Boundary Zone- colored stop sign red. This zone means that a student is feeling unsafe about everything—the activity or material, the directions, and the space in which they are being asked to do them. They are filled with fear and self-doubt.
 - At this point, teachers should respect this choice. They may ask a clarifying question to ensure students understand the difference between Boundary and Risk like “Is there any condition that may help you do this, such as: more time, a spotter, etc.?” If the student does have a condition that can be met, teachers can offer that perhaps this is a Risk, and not a Boundary. However, students’ Boundaries should always be respected.

Teachers are encouraged to place this graphic in their room and invite students to think about their “comfort zones” in these more nuanced views, in order to make choices that help them learn and progress in healthy ways.

Differing Modes of Engagement

When teachers express concern that students will use consent-forward work as a way to opt out of experiences, I remind them that that is not the offering. According to Follett’s ([1929]

1955) “Law of the Situation” we have all agreed to be here, and do this work (ballet class, acting class, rehearsal, etc.). Therefore, the consent-forward options are to help folks stay engaged in the work and/or the learning outcomes, in ways that are accessible to them.

A tool I use to help keep students involved in and contributing to the process of creating is “Zones of Participation” (ZoPs), which I learned from Colleen Hughes in a class for Intimacy Directors and Coordinators in 2020. Similar to adding choice for consent and trauma-informed experiences of an exercise, ZoPs offer students different modes of engagement, while still staying connected to the work to be done. These offerings may look like:

- You can be an Active Observer during this time, observing for Energy, Levels, etc.
- You can be an Active Participant, and choose to perform in a solo, duet, or group or similar offering.
- You can be the DJ, timekeeper, prop person, or participate in other tasks that will support the experience.

Teachers of high school theatre will recognize this modes of engagement structure as a way to involve folks in the performance who are not ready to be, or interested in being, onstage, by giving them experiences as crew, understudies, marketing and promotions assistants, and/or front of house staff.

If the goal of the experience is learning, I want students to be in the room and engaged in the activity in a way that keeps them focused on the learning outcome. That does not mean they all need to be doing the thing, in the same way. For example, if I want modern dance students to understand weight shifts and weight sharing, they may be able to do that back to back with a partner, back to a wall and sliding down and up, back on an exercise ball, and by observing all of

these different performances and noticing what is happening in the bodies performing, and in their own bodies, as weight shifts and shares. All students will leave with a better understanding of the concept, and no one was asked to participate in actions that felt unsafe to them.

Choice in Practice

In terms of practicality, I do not offer a choice on every single exercise. I have chosen to structure class this way for several reasons, however, the biggest one is relationships. Students likely have, for the previous nearly two decades of their lives, experienced both academic and dance settings that were highly structured, even to the point of authoritarianism. To completely upend that familiarity would likely cause them to not trust me, in terms of their academic rigor and physical safety. By balancing structure with freedom, their trust in me is allowed to develop, as well as their trust in their own embodied knowledge and creativity, and their trust in the class ensemble as a place where they can take risks and belong. Instead, I ensure that in each section of class (the check-in, the warm-up, the technique drills, the combination, the cool-down, and the check-out), there is at least one opportunity for choice. Some of these options are detailed below.

The check-in itself is based on choice. Drawn from the work of Molly W. Schenk and the Grey Box Collective (2021), we begin with a personal somatic check-in where students are asked to spend two minutes giving themselves what they need. I ask them to decide if they need something to bring their “energy up” or their “energy down.” The goal of these two minutes is to engage in a physical activity that will help bring awareness to their bodies, regulation to their nervous systems, and allow them to work with presence and attention.

During the warm-up and technique drills, choice may look like giving the option for students to do a balance or to choose the number of turns they attempt, leave out the arms on a

complex footwork pattern, or adjust levels in space to protect knees and backs. I may also give them time at the end to stretch or move in a way I didn't offer them that they feel they need.

By asking students to make choices early in the class, I am asking them to listen to their body, and to claim their knowledge about it. Class is not just about "showing what you know" in terms of steps, rather, students are asked to demonstrate their embodied knowledge of self. I remind students that this means that they *should* be making different choices every day, because our bodies are different every day. The triple turn is not rewarded because it's "harder"; listening to the body and making the appropriate choice for the day is the goal.

In combinations, depending on the content of the class, I may offer students choices around how they apply their Effort Energy, ie, *Will the movement be Strong or Light*¹⁴? *Free or Bound?* For challenging combinations, I often give choices around tempo, ie, *group one will perform at tempo, group two will perform at half speed.* Another basic choice may be "choose a shape to start or end the combination." Students may also work in groups to create combinations, being given a structure such as, "include 2 movements from today's warm-up or drills that you enjoyed or want to work on more," or "include at least 4 different types of locomotors in 4 counts of 8."

As we reach the cool-down, I leave time for students to include a stretch they feel their body needs in the moment, that I didn't offer them. Finally, students check-out with the option to share something from class they are thinking about/working on. I struggle with having that time available in each class, and it is part of my own work to make this a more consistent part of class.

¹⁴ A note to readers: in the Laban/Bartenieff Movement System, concepts, like Effort and its components, are written with capital letters.

None of these offerings are ground-breaking pedagogic tools. And yet, for many of my students coming out of commercial dance studios, this is the first time they have been asked to contribute their own embodied knowledge or creativity to their learning. For students who have experienced trauma, particularly at the hands of dance teachers or choreographers, these moments of ownership are key to their senses of safety and belonging. For some, it allows them to return to a space where dance was about expression, rather than perfection, instilling a sense of playfulness and personal creativity.

With the ability to choose, students have opportunities to practice their power, and see the impacts of their power on their world. In workshops with teachers, I encourage them to interrogate the word “empowerment.” While it seems like a great thing to do for students, it’s actually a disempowering situation, because it means that power must be given, granted, or permitted from someone who holds power-over, rather than something to be lived into or claimed by anyone. Mary Parker Follett ([1933] 1973) writes “I do not think that power can be delegated, because genuine power is capacity” (108). As such, everyone has power. She clarifies later, “Power is not a pre-existing thing which can be handed out to someone, or wrenched from someone. ... You cannot confer power because power is the blooming of experience” (111). Teachers simply create opportunities for students to practice their power, or they deny students’ inherent power.

Bodily Autonomy

Power should be experienced by students in dance and theatre classes in their bodies. Yet, bodily autonomy and personal agency are issues in dance and theatre performance, because students often start very young in these training programs. Small performers are still developing

bodily control, as in some cases, they have just begun using the toilet! Because this is true, teachers exercise bodily control over students, attempting to model the discipline students should be exerting themselves. However, bodies, particularly bodies of students, remain objects throughout dance and theatre training, regardless of age.

As objects they remain in a state of oppression, as objects cannot be in equal relationship to subjects, and objects cannot transform their worlds. Freire ([1973] 2006) writes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students’ creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor see it transformed” (73). When students are validated in their own existence as subjects, then they are able to be truly creative, which is what we as teachers often have for a goal in our dance and theatre classes, even to the point of transforming their world.

The idea that there is a lack of bodily autonomy in dance and somatics where the body is the instrument, may seem counterintuitive. However, I would suggest that this way of thinking about the body is actually part of the problem. Carol Lynne Moore, whose work is documented in Judith Grey’s *Dance Instruction* (1989), writes of four categories of body metaphor: a beast, a machine, an object d’arte, and a child (146-148).

When it is a beast, the body is learning physical skills, but it is also susceptible to overwork and injury, and being seen without thought or emotion. As a machine, the body is incredibly skillful and efficient, yet it is only so in one area. It cannot change or adapt; it cannot be creative. An art object is valued on stage and in performance. With the focus on outer appearance, it is meant to be looked at and appreciated. However, the inner life of the performer is ignored. There is no reflection on sensation or meaning-making. Finally, a child is open to

creativity and play. But children also do not reach a professional level of skill. Seeing the body as a child may also make the student and/or their teacher risk-averse in explorations, feeling the need to protect it. All of these categories appear in Western dance education and appreciation, and keep the body and the performer as less-than-fully-human.

In an exercise¹⁵ with the Modern Dance 311/411 students each semester as we examine somatics as a way of knowing ourselves, I ask students to name the metaphors and images they know for the body. Answers range from “a temple” and “an instrument,” to “brain taxi” and “meat puppet,” to *Star Trek: The Next Generation’s* (1988) “ugly, giant bags of mostly water.” An instrument or tool serves a purpose outside of themselves. They are also meant to be used by others; left on their own, they are not functional. A temple, while a place to attend to your spirit, clearly delineates the body as separate from spirit. Some metaphors and images value the mind above the body, others are simply derogatory. Yet, these are how we often speak about and perceive our bodies.

Students who speak languages other than English and/or have grown up in cultures other than Western, particularly American, often have great contributions to this discussion. Students from the Middle East are very aware of stigmas around the body as it relates to modesty, yet many of their expressions and metaphors are body-based. For example, instead of “I love you with my whole heart”, as we might say in America, their expressions are more “gut-level”, “I love you with my liver” (both Farsi and Arabic have a similar phrase). To students from Caribbean and Latin American countries, as hips are a body part emphasized in their dances, but can be seen as “too sensual” in American culture. Many dance students at the university are Chinese, and discussions of foot-binding often come up in ballet class, but sometimes in this

¹⁵ See the full instructions to this exercise [here](#).

exercise as well, emphasizing the idea of a body as something to be controlled. Every time there is a school shooting in America, the fragility of bodies becomes front and center to all of us. We are able to see the cultural implications and values of bodies through the language we use every day. And, by naming it, we are all able to examine if this is what we truly believe about bodies, and particularly the bodies we are in.

In class, we also discuss that some of these cultural values on bodies, or body parts, are what make it challenging to be present in our bodies and vulnerable in this movement space together. I ask students to consider that many of the metaphors or images we discuss put body into object status, subjected either to their own mind, or to me. I invite them to think about what it might be like to be in control of their bodies, technically, expressively, and functionally.

Technically

In technique classes, the dancer strives to make their body as close to the epitome of that technique as possible. The goal of the dancer is to do it like the teacher or the choreographer. In ballet, this striving is often for anatomical impossibilities. 180 degree turnout, 180 degree extensions, and going beyond 90 degrees in back extensions have become the expectation. While some of this physical flexibility can be achieved through training, some is also a genetic luck of the draw. Regardless, much of it is unsustainable as dancers age.

The offering of choice or adaptations for injuries of physical issues in class reminds students that all bodies can dance, but that they may look different than expectations, or than others. In technique classes, I regularly speak to anatomical facts of bodies and how they dispel corrections we are often given:

- “Put your shoulders down” is a common correction, and students are often flabbergasted to discover that when their arms go up, their scapulae actually go down, all on their own!
- “Don’t lift your hip” or “keep your hips square” is often said to dancers in leg extension. Yet, anatomically, leg extension above 90 degrees to the front or side requires movement of the pelvis.
- The idea of “turnout” often has students compensating from feet and lower legs, rather than accepting what is available in the hips.

An anatomical understanding of movement can bring embodied clarity and appreciation for the work bodies do, without needing to be managed by a dancer or a teacher.

Expressively

Some theatre directors offer “line-reads,” where instead of a direction on motivation, context, or technique, the direction is actually an example, usually beginning with the words “Do it like this....” Other directors, particularly at the high school level, watch YouTube videos of other productions, and instruct their students to do the same and replicate what they see, rather than follow personal creative impulses (I personally watched a director do this during two of the last three years I taught and choreographed in a high school setting. Besides denying the collaboration of students, it is actually an infringement on intellectual property, exposing new issues in how consent shows up in performing arts spaces.). In both of these examples, the director’s way is the right way and the only way, limiting students’ bodily autonomy, personal agency, and creative contributions.

In dance performance, particularly those for competition, much is made of facial expressions. Yet, dance students are rarely given acting training, leading them to default to large smiles or blank faces.

I find that the Laban work, with its category of Effort, or Energy, provides students with language and sensations to distinguish between movement qualities. Teaching with imagistic and evocative language can stimulate emotional resonance. We can also use this language as a way to appreciate expressive differences in movement. Bound Flow may feel sneaky or cautious to some, while Indirect Space may bring up those same correlations for others. Strong Weight may make one student forceful and explosive, while it causes another to be stable and grounded. Validating expressive choices aids creativity and opens space for conversation and collaboration. Students then have tools to decide which sensations and emotions best fit what they want to convey to the audience.

Functionally

Western classrooms often exercise bodily control of students. They are expected to sit still and be attentive, request access to the bathroom, and not eat or rest during class time. These became standards in education because students were being conditioned for employment in factories, only able to be present to themselves during scheduled breaks. Despite the fact that very few American students will go on to factory jobs, this model continues, and is perpetuated in dance and theatre classrooms, as well.

As a college student, I was not allowed to get water during ballet class. The teacher told us no one died of dehydration in a 90-minute class before, and so we would not either (As if simply not dying was a perfectly acceptable state for students to be in!). This is a teaching I took with me and parroted in my own early teaching. It is an example of how I, like many dance

teachers, teach as we were taught. But, now that I have learned pedagogy, done work to unsettle my creative practice, and decided to focus on equity in my teaching, I choose to do many things in a dance very differently than I experienced them.

I began shifting my pedagogy first through the lens of consent, and recognizing the humanity and autonomy of the students I worked with. This quickly led to a realization that the systems in which I was trained, and was perpetuating in my classes, tried to deny that humanity of students. The spaces in which I was asking them to be connected to their bodies, to acknowledge their physical and emotional boundaries, and to be vulnerable and creative, were also the spaces in which I was trying to be in control, hold the “right” answer, and craft students’ bodies and ideas into what I, with my expert power, thought they should be. By acknowledging the full humanity of students, including their occasionally ill-timed needs for water or a bathroom, students were more encouraged to connect with their bodies and their impulses, which is what I want them to be learning to do in both dance and theatre classes.

A profound change for students in my classes at the University of Miami is that they do not need to ask for permission to go to the bathroom; they simply go and come back. I tell them on the first day, as we are going over the learning objectives for the class, that one of our goals is that they better understand and appreciate their bodies, which means listening to and addressing its needs in a timely fashion. Recently, teaching a version of “The Ethics and Pedagogy of Teaching with(out) Touch” for the National Dance Education Organization, a participant expressed frustration at the disruption students asking for the bathroom caused. I responded:

I’m curious what would happen if you had a policy of bodily autonomy in your class that included bathroom breaks—don’t ask, just go. Would you still find it disruptive? Or is the act of asking and answering the more disruptive part? My classes have the don’t ask, just go policy. And while there is likely a student or 2 that abuses it, it really cuts down on disruption, and helps emphasize that you are in charge of your body. (2022e)

In many academic settings for dance and theatre, students are expected to deny their bodily needs, so they can focus on receiving the learning from the teacher. Instead, we could reframe the learning to include learning about your body, a necessary component of art-making and responding appropriately to it, which may mean going to the bathroom or getting a sip of water during class.

A Final Note on Bodily Autonomy

Another way to consider bodily control of student collaborators is in language. In workshops, I talk to teachers about how this mindset shows up with a language of possession. Possession, rather than sharing, is a practice of colonialism, as well as a denial of autonomy. “My dancers,” “my students,” etc., deny the agency of the dancer-collaborators in our spaces. Directors and choreographers often use similarly possessive pronouns. A challenging, yet effective mindset shift can occur when we acknowledge full humanity by leaving out ownership, and simply calling them dancers, students, performers, etc.

Language also plays a role in colonization, and this shows up in the dance classroom as well. I have worked concertedly over the past two years to remove ballet terminology from the modern and jazz classes I teach. Ballet is an imperialist art form and is structured as such. However, modern dance was created to communicate a dancer’s inner life. Its early concern was with personal expression and exploration, rather than adherence to rules or a previously held structure. Jazz dance developed out of social dances of enslaved African people in the Americas who had to use movement and music to communicate with each other, because they did not share the same verbal language (Guarino 2014, xv). To subject these two forms of dance to the language of ballet is a form of colonization and erasure.

I am transparent with students about why I do not use ballet terminology in these classes, as it is a huge shift from how dance classes are often experienced in a studio setting. Instead I use anatomical actions, describing a plié-like movement as “hip flexion, knee flexion, ankle flexion”, or a tendu-like movement as “stretching the leg from the glutes through the toes.” Since I teach somatics-based modern, the emphasis is on the body of the dancer, so the anatomical language also upholds the goal of helping dancers connect to their bodies. If I was teaching a specific technique, different vocabulary may need to appear to honor the creator. I do teach a day or two of Graham, because I love floor work, and we do refer to “seated fourth” on the floor, as she did, but I also introduce the term “shin box” which is used to describe the same position in personal training and physical therapy exercises.

The jazz class that I teach is Theatre Dance Forms, and is currently the only place jazz appears in the curriculum. We spend the first two weeks of class looking at historical African-American dance steps, and discussing jazz’s musical and social roots. I emphasize the importance of relationship, to both music and others, to truly call a dance a jazz dance. These concepts are often different from how students have experienced jazz in a studio setting. Since this is Theatre Dance Forms, we do spend one week on ballet, as that vocabulary will show up for folks dancing in musicals. However, it is not the focus, nor is it how I introduce the definition of jazz for the course, nor discuss jazz movement throughout the other thirteen weeks.

While the language adjustment was initially challenging, and there are still times I struggle (I cannot find a concise, yet descriptive alternative for pirouette in parallel, for example), it has become a normal part of class instruction of me. I recently took a jazz class and a contemporary dance class, in which both teachers spoke about pliés and tendus. I found it quite

jarring, and realized how often we take vocabulary for granted and leave it unexamined in our movement classes.

Touch

Touch as a teaching method is another area performing arts can employ consent-forward work. Again, this is more prevalent in dance than in theatre, but it certainly exists there, too. As mentioned earlier, I have created and taught a course called “The Ethics and Pedagogy of Teaching with(out) Touch” since 2020. This course has been offered through Momentum Stage, the National Dance Education Organization, and the Laban Institute of Movement Studies. The goal of this course is for movement teachers to be able to articulate why and how touch is a part of their pedagogy.

In the first session, we use Fiona Bannon’s 2012 study of touch in UK dance spaces for a reflection on how touch is already being utilized by the teachers. We also examine power dynamics, and how they affect students and teachers, and the ability to give consent. In subsequent sessions we look at consent, practices to create a consent-forward space, alternatives to touch, and specific language to use around touch. Teachers leave the course with an Ethics of Touch statement they created, and received feedback from the whole class over the last three weeks. They can add this statement to their syllabus, dancer contracts, waivers, or handbooks. I have taught this course six times in two years, and in every class, the teachers enter willing to examine their reliance on touch, and yet fear that they will not be effective teachers without it.

During the course, many teachers recognize a level of comfort doing exercises and feedback methods in certain ways. A simple awareness of the facts that not all students will learn through touch, and some may even be harmed by it, is reason enough to explore alternatives.

One full session is dedicated to low-touch and no-touch alternatives. What is often rewarding for me as a facilitator in this session is seeing these teachers realize how much of this they are already doing, could do easily with one small change, or are inspired to try to incorporate. Touch as a teaching method is simply taken for granted as “the way it’s done” because it has been the way we’ve experienced it. However, we can choose to make things different for our students; to better support those with different learning styles, to honor their bodily autonomy, and to avoid trauma activation of those who have been harmed in the past.

I personally no longer teach with touch. The path to touchless pedagogy began when I was teaching middle school in 2016-2019, and noticing the power dynamics between students affecting partnering work. Students did not want to touch certain others, or only wanted to be paired with particular people. Eliminating touch between students helped to alleviate some interpersonal tensions.

After my first introduction to staged intimacy work in 2018, I began asking for consent to touch students. I made a concerted effort to ask in open-ended ways, like “How would you feel if I...”, rather than putting an assumption of availability in the question with a phrase like “Is it OK if...” As time went on, I also tried to get very specific in the ask, with questions like, “How would you feel if I used the back of my hand to bring your elbow up into second position, since that is what the aesthetic of ballet is asking of us?” However, students likely still felt the pressure to say “yes”, because of the teacher/student relationship. Therefore, I have eliminated touch from my teaching practice.

In my touch policy shared with students on the first day of class, I recognize that they may be kinesthetic learners who learn well through touch, and that my no-touch policy may not serve them. In this case, students are encouraged to ask me for a corrective touch, and we will

negotiate level of touch, duration, etc. at that time. The focus of any teaching method should be their learning, not my policy.

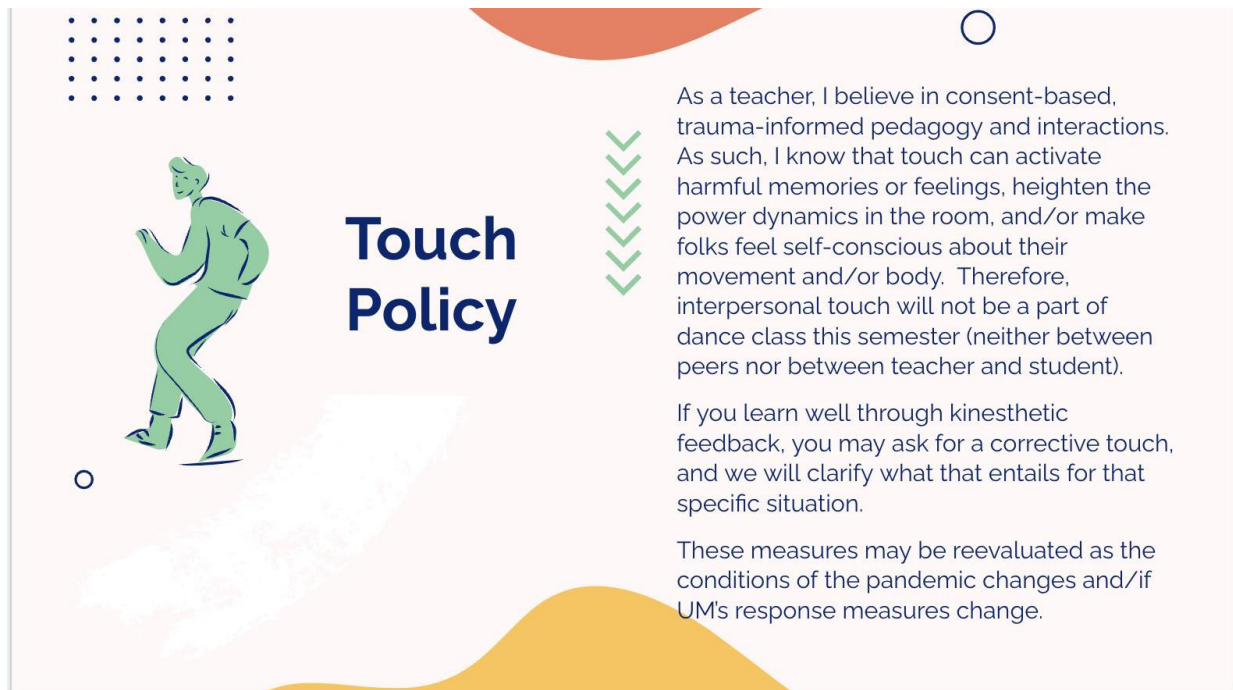


Fig.6- Touch Policy that appears in all of my syllabi.

As I write in “Trauma-Informed Approaches to Dance Class” for *Dance Geist*, consent-forward work and trauma-informed work share the same characteristics. “They both involve addressing power dynamics, communicating with openness and specificity, and focusing on the humanity of students, which means honoring their agency and power” (2022, 25). In critically evaluating touch as a pedagogic method, teachers can incorporate more care into their classrooms. In failing to do so, they are also failing to see the full humanity of their students.

Depersonalizing Corrections

Another change to my own teaching methods has been depersonalizing corrections. Based on Mary Parker Follett's "Law of the Situation" ([1929] 1955), this way of speaking to students removes some of the power dynamics inherent in the student-teacher relationship, by putting the focus on the shared goal of the work to be done. In moving my language to depersonalization, it is my goal to alleviate feelings of personal shortcomings on behalf of students, as well as their desire to please me as the teacher.

In ballet class, for example, this looks like stating: "The aesthetic of ballet requires us to point our toes", rather than "Student, you need to point your toes!" With this change, I've reminded them of the physical action to take, and the "why" for doing it—to do the work we are here to do, ballet. We are both listening to the aesthetic of ballet for what we should do; in the words of Mary Parker Follett, "...both should agree to take their orders from the situation." I do not offer a correction because I find the student personally disappointing, or because it gives me my desire. Rather the correction serves the work we both agreed to—create ballet. Likewise, students do not have to point their toes because I said so, but rather because they are there to do the work.

It must also be clear to students that this situation is simply that, this one. As stated above, in my jazz and modern classes, I tell students on our first day that I will not be using ballet terminology in class. Jazz did not grow out of ballet, which I have heard said in previous dance studio settings. Modern dance was created to be the antithesis of ballet. Therefore, I could use the ballet vocabulary to say what they are not, but not what they actually are. Retaining ballet vocabulary in either modern or jazz classes would be inappropriate, and frankly, colonizing.

Styres (2019) quotes Marie Battiste (2013), an Indigenous scholar focused on protecting and promoting Indigenous knowledge systems and education, “in order to effect change, educators must help students understand the Eurocentric assumptions of superiority within the context of history and to recognize the continued dominance of these assumptions in all forms of contemporary knowledge” [186] (33). So, in the ballet class, we examine the particularity of the ballet situation. Students’ first reading is a choice of *An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet* by Jean Kealinohomoku (2001) and a post from Marlo Fiskens’ (2020) blog, *A Letter to the Pole Community: It’s time we talk about toe-point supremacy*. These two pieces clearly connect the dots of assumptions of supremacy culture—that Euro-centric is more valuable—to the prevalence and significance of ballet in Western dance training and on concert stages. Tuck and Yang (2012) write “The settler positions himself as both superior and normal;...” (6), and this is often what happens to ballet in dance studio settings—it is considered a baseline for other genres, rather than its own particular form, drawn from its own cultural context. In every class, students are encouraged to find the appropriate cultural context from which to consider their situation.

Here we find a key part of Follett’s “Law of the Situation” ([1929] 1955): “Our job is not how to get people to obey orders, but how to devise methods by which we can best *discover* the order integral to a particular situation” (59). I appreciate this idea applied to pedagogy; our job as teachers is not to order students, but rather to create space and experiences for them to engage in the work, so that they learn what is needed.

Assessments

If, then, I believe that student learning is actually the important activity that is occurring in a class, and that that activity looks different and happens at a different pace for each student, it

would be rather silly of me to attempt to measure all students in the same way. Every class that I teach at the university, even though it has a level in its title, is open to everyone. There are no prerequisites. This means I may have a student in the 400-level modern class who has been dancing since they were two years old and used to compete, right next to a twenty-two year old who has never taken a dance class before. Grading these two students on technical proficiency would be ridiculous, not to mention extremely disappointing for the new student.

As I am writing this, I have also been reading Introduction Letters (or viewing or listening to them, as students can submit via whatever media feels appropriate) for Fall 2022 classes. Many students in ballet and modern particularly those who danced in high school, but then had time off due to the pandemic, did not have time to continue dance earlier in their college career, or are aware that they are in a whole new group of experience in college dance classes than the studio life they are used to, are feeling a bit self-conscious. They are aware that dance can be a great stress reliever, as they move and express themselves. But they also fear that it will be a cause of stress, because of the situations mentioned above, and because of their past experiences in learning dance. It is my goal for these classes that they find the joy and challenge in the learning process, and let go of the need to compare themselves, to me, the dancer next to them, or the dancer they were in high school.

Students do not need to be held to a standard of perfection, because learning is what we have agreed to do in this space. Instead, students should be asked to measure their own learning by synthesizing it into their activities. My goals for students include them taking risks that feel appropriate to them, engaging deeply with the material presented, whether it is movement or theoretical, and learning their own bodies and selves more deeply. By embodied work, group work and discussion, and personal reflection, I hope to unsettle the typical learning atmosphere

of judgement and encourage personal growth. “This approach de-centers the focus on the instructor as the fount of all knowledge and pushes students to consider their own prior knowledge, positionalities, and the resulting implications of what they have learned from the course material by considering the ways they may balance and harmonize this new knowledge” (Sytres, 34). Students are encouraged to balance personal reflection and ownership of their learning with an acknowledgement of how the communities they come from and are now in shape that learning. This learning is taking place because they are who they are, I am their teacher, their peers are who they are, and we are all sharing a very particular time and space together—and all of that impacts knowledge creation.

This idea of group sharing and reflection is one that has been interesting to me since I was first introduced to it in 2016, through classes with Bill Evans. In the past few years of teaching, social distancing and virtual teaching have made it difficult to apply in studio space. This semester, I have been inviting students to participate more in this way, so that they might learn from their community, and the personal contexts of those in their community. Doing so removes the ownership of knowledge from those who hold “Expert Power” in the space, like me and the authors of articles. The idea of sharing as learning is also part of unsettled, decolonial work. Wilson reminds us, “Indigenous epistemology is all about ideas developing through the formation of relationships. An idea cannot be taken out of this relational context and still maintain its shape” (11).

In order for students to know themselves, and to engage well in group discussions, they also must be aware of the lenses they constantly wear because of their own cultural context. When I teach, particularly modern dance and Laban-based work, I offer inroads to this awareness through quotes, videos, and exercises. Brian McLaren, a theologian and podcaster (2020), titled

one of his episodes, co-hosted with spiritual writer Richard Rohr and the Reverend Jacqui Lewis, PhD “What you focus on determines what you miss.” I often offer this to students as a cautionary statement against our own preferences when viewing and interpreting art. Other resources are selective attention tests, and an exercise I call Blob People.

In Blob People, first I model the exercise for students. I share a 3D rendered image of two blob people, engaged in an action, but fairly devoid of context.



Fig. 7. Blob People.

I tell students that first we are going to “objectively” or “clinically” describe what we are seeing. For example, one person is on a low level, the other is at a mid level. One has a hand extended, one is supported by the ground. No interpretation is allowed at this point. After that is completed, we enter the narrative phase, and write or record a short story or other creative piece about what is happening. They are encouraged to create context, and to be as specific, and creative, as possible. Students are then asked to do the same two steps with a new image.



Fig. 8. Another example of Blob People

After following the steps, I ask a student or two to share their story. They often interpret emotions from body positions, even though there are no facial expressions, as well as ages and genders for the images. They are frequently surprised how deep their assumptions are hidden, until I point out that these images are blank canvases. Any story that includes personal identity, they have seen themselves, based on their worldview¹⁶.

I use this exercise to demonstrate to students that they have a worldview and a cultural context that constantly influences their interactions, and interpretations of those interactions, with others. I leave them with a quote from Capt. Michael Burnham of the starship, *Discovery*, “We cannot interpret their intention from our own cultural context” (Goldsman 2021).

In all of these experiences, I remind students that what we are learning gives us a vocabulary to enter into conversations with others. To get curious about what we see, how it fits into both our worlds and the worlds of others. Movement and body language, despite 4am infomercials, should not be used to make assumptions about the intentions, purposes, or desires of others. As Suzie Gablik (1992) wrote, “In these terms, to know oneself becomes an end, instead of a means through which one knows the world” (25). Rather, viewing movement can be used as a way to engage in knowing them more deeply, as we ask questions about their meaning-making and context.

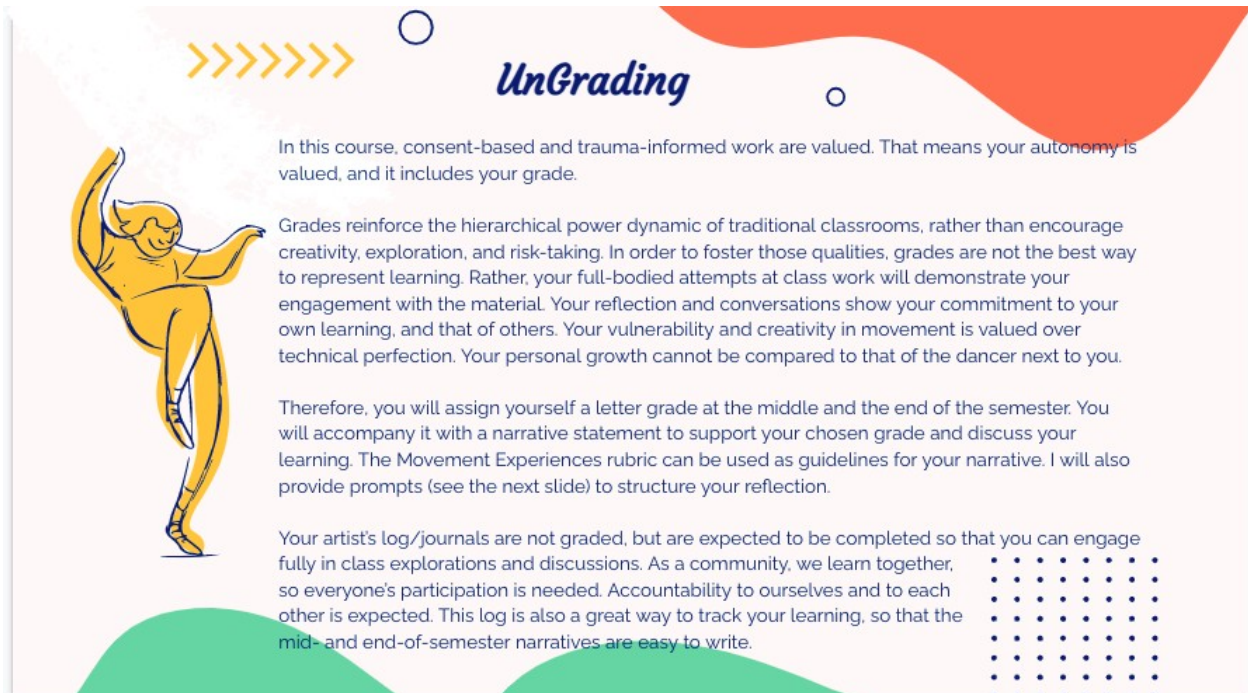
¹⁶ A flaw in this exercise is that 99% of 3D rendered images on the internet are white blobs. While they are paper white, a color no human actually is, I believe this does affect students’ racial ideas of who is represented in these images.

Ungrading

This fall, I am committed to ungrading. My influence on grades is unethical, if what I really want to measure is student engagement in and ownership of their learning. Instead, students will engage in three narratives: an initial goal setting, a midterm evaluation, and a final evaluation. Classroom activities and journals will be framed as ways to synthesize their learning and demonstrate ownership of the material that is appropriate for them¹⁷.

It also builds accountability of students—not to me, but to the work and to each other. Because the measures of learning include interaction with others, and sharing learning experiences, their peers depend on them to aid their learning. Diana Taylor (2020) describes this as “What we know, in part, depends on our being there, interacting with others, unsettled from our assumptions and certainties, forging at times the conditions for mutual recognition, trust, and solidarity” (9). Already in Fall 2022, students have come to class very interested in group work, because they recognize that much of their academic work of the past 3 years has been very individual and isolated from their peers, due to COVID. The pandemic has given them an interest in connecting and sharing in class.

¹⁷ More on my approach to “homework” can be found in a draft¹⁷ of [the article](#) I recently co-wrote with Halie Bahr and Cat Kamrath Monson.



UnGrading

In this course, consent-based and trauma-informed work are valued. That means your autonomy is valued, and it includes your grade.

Grades reinforce the hierarchical power dynamic of traditional classrooms, rather than encourage creativity, exploration, and risk-taking. In order to foster those qualities, grades are not the best way to represent learning. Rather, your full-bodied attempts at class work will demonstrate your engagement with the material. Your reflection and conversations show your commitment to your own learning, and that of others. Your vulnerability and creativity in movement is valued over technical perfection. Your personal growth cannot be compared to that of the dancer next to you.

Therefore, you will assign yourself a letter grade at the middle and the end of the semester. You will accompany it with a narrative statement to support your chosen grade and discuss your learning. The Movement Experiences rubric can be used as guidelines for your narrative. I will also provide prompts (see the next slide) to structure your reflection.

Your artist's log/journals are not graded, but are expected to be completed so that you can engage fully in class explorations and discussions. As a community, we learn together, so everyone's participation is needed. Accountability to ourselves and to each other is expected. This log is also a great way to track your learning, so that the mid- and end-of-semester narratives are easy to write.

Figs. 9. Language from my syllabi re: Ungrading.

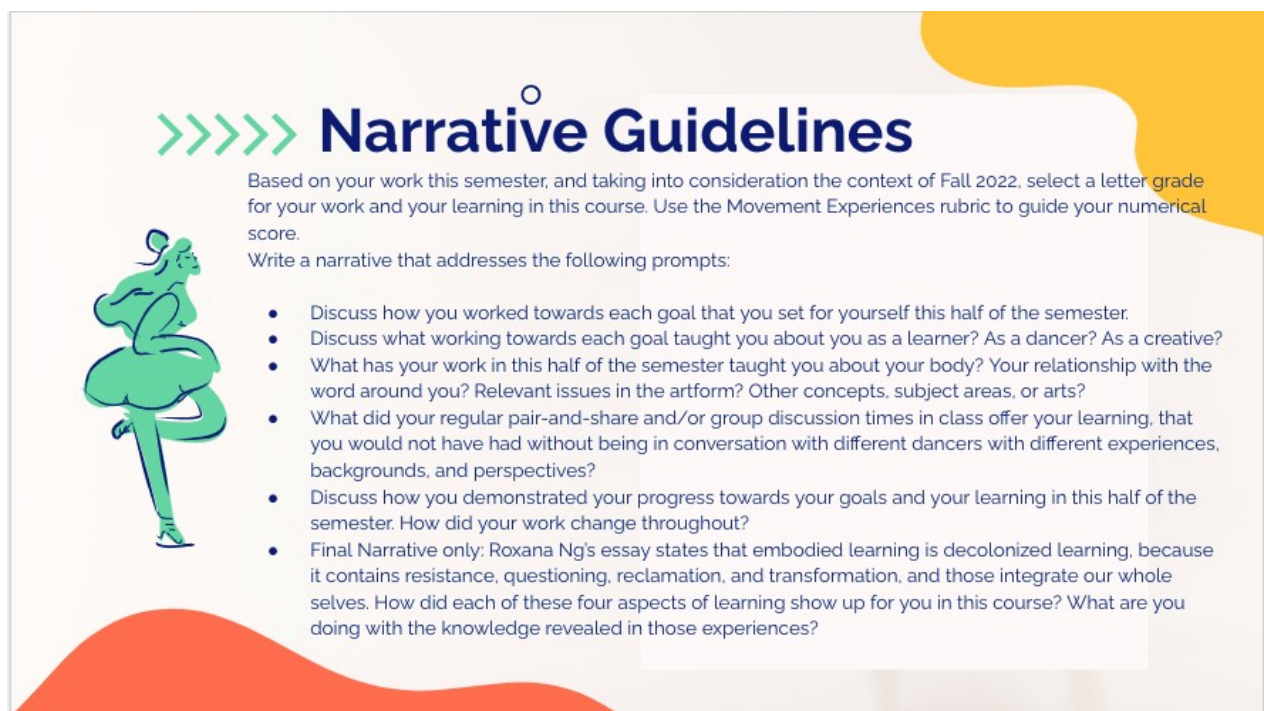
Students will use the rubric to guide their narratives, as well as prompts from me. The rubric, adapted from a theatre colleague, Emmi Hilger (nd) asks students to evaluate themselves on:

- Taking Risks
- Listening to Understand the Ideas of Others
- Contributing to Group Discussions
- Preparation for Class
- Incorporating Theories and Methods into Creative Work
- Supporting Peers
- Staying Present and Intentional

There is also a place for students to write in another choice. All of these categories were developed to keep the emphasis off on technical execution and on the process of learning and

engaging in material. Students are encouraged to connect to themselves, the material, and their classmates, by choosing 3 of these categories as goals for each part of the semester.

These are not things that can be measured by anyone outside of themselves, and require a level of self-awareness, group accountability, and cultural context. Instead of counting on my measures of that, students are asked to assess themselves. Students will give themselves a grade, and justify it with a narrative. The following prompts were developed from the previous semesters' letter prompts, as well as Jessica Zeller's 2021 blog post about her move to upgrading. Those questions are:



>>>>> Narrative Guidelines

Based on your work this semester, and taking into consideration the context of Fall 2022, select a letter grade for your work and your learning in this course. Use the Movement Experiences rubric to guide your numerical score.

Write a narrative that addresses the following prompts:

- Discuss how you worked towards each goal that you set for yourself this half of the semester.
- Discuss what working towards each goal taught you about you as a learner? As a dancer? As a creative?
- What has your work in this half of the semester taught you about your body? Your relationship with the word around you? Relevant issues in the artform? Other concepts, subject areas, or arts?
- What did your regular pair-and-share and/or group discussion times in class offer your learning, that you would not have had without being in conversation with different dancers with different experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives?
- Discuss how you demonstrated your progress towards your goals and your learning in this half of the semester. How did your work change throughout?
- Final Narrative only: Roxana Ng's essay states that embodied learning is decolonized learning, because it contains resistance, questioning, reclamation, and transformation, and those integrate our whole selves. How did each of these four aspects of learning show up for you in this course? What are you doing with the knowledge revealed in those experiences?

Figs. 10. Language from my syllabi re: Narrative Assessments..

- Discuss how you worked towards each goal that you set for yourself this half of the semester.
- Discuss what working towards each goal taught you about you as a learner? As a dancer? As a creative?
- Discuss how you demonstrated your progress towards your goals and your learning this half of the semester. How did your work change throughout this time?
- What did your regular pair and share and group discussion times in class offer your learning, that you would not have had without being in conversation with different dancers?
- Final only- Roxana Ng's essay states that embodied learning is decolonized learning, because it contains resistance, questioning, reclamation, and transformation, and those integrate our whole selves. How did each of these four aspects of learning show up for you in this course? What are you doing with the knowledge revealed in those experiences?¹⁸
- Final only- What has your work in this course taught you about your body? Your relationship with the world around you? Relevant issues in the artform? Other concepts, subject areas, or arts?

By answering these questions, students can evaluate their new knowledge with me, so that I can input it as a university-approved grade. I am excited to see how this personal assessment plays out in each course this fall.

¹⁸ This question was developed from my essay, [*Embodied Knowledge as Decolonized Learning*](#), created as part of the DAP concentration requirements and Progress Report at Goddard College.

Conclusion: Trauma-informed Teaching

One of the most challenging aspects of developing a trauma-informed approach to teaching or creating is that trauma does not look the same on everyone. Because trauma is about the response to an event, not the event itself, it is personal (Schenk 2021). When I teach teachers about trauma-informed approaches, I tell them there is no one universal sign that lets you know someone in your space is experiencing a trauma response. Rather, it is more noticing changes in attitudes and behaviors, and being responsive to those.

As teachers and creators, we are not therapists or doctors. Our job does not include treating or diagnosing the people in our spaces. Instead, we offer resources and life skills that develop resilience, healthy coping, and personal expression. We must also adjust our content or methods in order to not retraumatize or cause a trauma response in someone an additional time. “We cannot know everything that may activate everyone in our space. We can, however, take steps to make our spaces as welcoming to risk-taking and compassionate to complicated humans as possible” (Perry 2022, 25).

Trauma-informed teaching and creating means that the power holder in the room, the teacher or director, must be aware that there are days that the work will not get done. Sometimes we are able to support people in our room by offering embodied tools, space and time to step away, alternatives to experiences, or resources to follow up with. Some of the options discussed in the “Choice” section above are ways to offer trauma-informed support.

However, in a full trauma response, that may not be possible. Rather than push through, I would suggest that we let go. Let the student leave. Let the performer take a day off. Cancel the day for everyone. The work that may get done in this state is not going to be good work anyway,

and may cause activation when revisited, starting the cycle again. It is actually a better use of our precious class or rehearsal time to care for the people at the heart of the work.

In a recent workshop I was leading on consent-forward spaces for acting teachers, in a rather famous US-based acting program, we touched briefly on the intersection of trauma-informed work with consent-forward work. One of the teachers, rather famous herself, responded that sometimes acting students are experiencing trauma or the reactivation of a trauma in the acting class, and they just need to “push through it, come out the other side, and use it to make them better actors.” I suggested to her that “if someone is experiencing trauma in your classroom, they are not actually learning. And, if they are not learning, you are not actually teaching. So, then, what are you doing?”

Trauma responses were developed for human survival. Dacher Keltner (2017) writes in *The Power Paradox*, “The human stress response is a dictatorial system, shutting down many other processes essential to our engagement in the world.... .the chronic stress associated with powerlessness compromises just about every way a person might contribute to the world outside of fight-or-flight behavior” (151). When we are simply surviving, we do not have the energy to give to learning, deepening understanding or nuance, or creativity. Actively causing or allowing trauma is not a learning tool.

Working with Bill Evans in the summer of 2016, as I was about to reenter the academic dance setting was the first time I had experienced choice in dance class as a pedagogic method. I was also at the end of six months of chemotherapy treatments for Hodgkin’s Lymphoma, and was entirely unacquainted with my new body. I was in a traumatized state about my body and current abilities. As I was able to make choices on how to engage material, and was encouraged to take class as a way of connecting with my body, my ideas of what dance teaching could be

transformed. I have continued on that journey, and broadened it to the teaching of theatre, and teaching in general. Giving students opportunities to contribute to their own learning and validating their own bodily goodness and autonomy has the potential to change their lives.

Working Ethically with Audiences

I have written above about centering people in the art-making, but we must also consider our audiences with care. In these ways we extend trauma-informed work to our collaborators throughout all levels of the project. The art would not exist without the artists who create it and perform it. But, it also would not exist without an audience to consider it and be impacted by it. Considering an audience as a collaborator recognizes the necessary contribution they make to the process of performance.

Suzi Gablik (1992) paraphrases art critic Peter Fuller in *Has Modernism Failed* to caution us, "...if the artist has total freedom, if art can be anything the artist says it is, it will also never be anything more than that" (28). In this view, and in a worldview shaped by relationality, art requires collaboration and the active participation of an audience.

In her chapter entitled "Anxious Objects," Gablik borrows a phrase from art critic Harold Rosenberg to describe a piece of modern art that inspires anxiety in its viewers because they do not know how to interpret it, or even if they are viewing art. She later writes

Along with notions of impermanence and inaccessibility, then, we also find artists making use of violence, self-mutilation, and highly personal risk as acts of provocation that force the viewer to examine his or her own emotional responses. Our society is one which devalues suffering, hardship, and adversity in favor of comfort, efficiency and occupational success. (48)

This puts in the negative Hedva's (2022) words on care—if we devalue suffering, we must also devalue care. We may follow that through with the premise that if we do not care for ourselves, we will not care for others. The value modern art, and its performance art siblings, have placed on individualism have separated artists and art works from their community.

Diana Taylor (2020) echoes these words “Caring acknowledges the interconnectedness between ourselves and others, ourselves as only a part of that larger entity” (122). As such, we can nurture the connections with audiences through steps like content warnings, accessibility measures, and developing work with cultural competency.

Content Warnings

Consent doesn’t just happen between those making the art. We also need the consent of the audience. This means offering content-warnings when appropriate. This also supports a trauma-informed approach to performance. I choose to discuss these as “content warnings” rather than “trigger warnings.” Simply the phrase “trigger warning” could be possibly harmful for someone who has been affected by gun violence. However, I like “content warning” because it puts the onus of care on the organization responsible for the content, rather than the person having the reaction. This is an important distinction, as people experiencing a trauma response or “being triggered” do not choose it and may not have the tools or skills to control it. However, the organization has chosen this content. Therefore, they must show care and responsibility by providing measures of care.

As a matter of fact, this is what first interested me in the intersection of trauma-informed and consent-forward work in performance. In July 2018, I had just been introduced to intimacy direction and consent-forward work. I attended a dance performance that I found very activating because of its subject matter of sexual assault, including actual recordings of the victim’s voice, telling her story. There was no content-warning, and I did not believe I had consented to this experience. When I contacted the artists about this, the answer was that art isn’t a safe space. My response (2018) was “I wonder if it is fair, though, to ask the audience to consent, if they don’t

know what they are consenting to?” Now, after being immersed in consent-forward work for nearly five years, I would say, “No.” This is absolutely not consent, and is therefore an abuse of power by artists.

Gaby Labotka (2021), an intimacy and fight director in Chicago says about content warnings, “[B]ut the very first place I start is the thought ‘Is there any action, onstage or off, that causes trauma to a character?’ I think this because likely there’s some one [sic] in the audience that’s experienced it too.” I would expand that thought with the knowledge that the person with a similar trauma or activation may be in our audience. We simply do not know, and we must act with care and consent around the content and context our artists and audiences are in.

A content warning could be displayed on an arts organization’s website while people are buying tickets, and again in their playbill or posted in their space. Organizations worried about “spoilers” could do an opt-in sort of warning, i.e., “This show contains incidents of _____. Do you need more information about this content? Click here to learn more.” or “This show contains incidents of _____. Do you need more information about this content? Ask one of our ushers or box office staff.”

I was sharing work in recent gathering, and included a content warning. However, afterward, I was told by a viewer that the warning did not contain enough information. If faced with this in the moment, in-person, opportunity again, I would follow the warning with “Does anyone feel they need more information?”, to create such an opt-in scenario. I recognize that content warnings are a balance. They must have enough context so that people can have informed consent, but not so much that the warning itself is activating. This is a difficult line to navigate, particularly at the moment, in conversation. I suspect written ones allow for more

nuance, as they can happen over time, be revised, and go through a team. Additionally, steps like those mentioned above can allow for people to opt in to getting more specific information.

Earlier this year, in a trauma-informed creative practices workshop with Aili Huber (2022), she mentioned that many content warnings lack a simple, yet important, piece of information—the *when*. She suggests writing a warning that includes information such as “In the second act...” or “During such-and-such number...” This allows audiences to release their vigilance for possibly harmful content, and care for themselves at appropriate times. This was such a simple, yet profound point that I will be bringing to future discussions I may have with theatres on content warnings.

We really do not know everyone’s trauma that comes with them into our shared spaces. This is why content warnings show a measure of care. What feels like “enough” to one, may not to everyone. But erring on the side of care by having something in place is more humane than not having one for fear it is inadequate.

Accessibility

Care is simply not a term artists or arts organizations often use in considering audiences. This is present not only in the arts, but in the Western world. Johanna Hedva (2022) writes

“Sickness” as we speak of it today is a capitalist construct, as is its perceived binary opposite, “wellness”. What is so destructive about conceiving of wellness as the default, as the standard mode of existence, is that it *invents illness as temporary*. When being sick is an abhorrence to the norm, *it allows us to conceive of care and support in the same way*.

Care, in the configuration, is only required sometimes. When sickness is temporary, care is not normal. (12) (emphasis original)

As we consider accessibility needs for audiences, this lack of care is at its most evident.

Physical accessibility in a performance space may look like ramps, ASL interpretation, sensory-friendly shows, audio descriptors, and/or more. We are seeing more sensory-friendly children's shows in the theatre sphere, but I would caution organizations to remember that this is not an issue that affects only children, nor an issue with only theatre productions.

Personal accessibility might include things like child care, access to a refrigerator for medicines or breastmilk, a private room for self-care or breastfeeding, and more. Creating a performance schedule based off the public transportation schedule, rather than "traditional times," may bring new audiences in. A lack of virtual options, for both performers and audiences, currently limits participation to able-bodied, non-immunocompromised people.

Accessibility is obviously not only an audience issue. All of the accommodations a space makes for audiences may be needed for their performers. Other accessibility needs a performer might have include those above, as well as things like a transportation allowance and regular breaks. Scheduling is often an accessibility issue for performers. When performance companies do not pay a living wage, performers must have other jobs. While many companies do recognize this, and ask for conflicts at the audition, actors are often made to feel guilty about having other commitments. 10/12 tech rehearsals are impossible with other jobs, and physically and mentally exhausting.

The pandemic has allowed artists and arts organizations to do things differently. But now, there is a push to "return to normal", which really means returning to practices that were classist, exclusionary, ablest, and supremacist. Arts organizations can continue to demonstrate care for their audiences by taking measures to improve accessibility. While these measures do sometimes add cost to a production, I would echo Timothy Clark's words from before, that we are investing in humanity.

Cultural Competency

Performing organizations also show care to their audiences by offering culturally relevant and culturally competent performances. Emilio Rodriguez, a playwright, professor at the University of Michigan, the founder of Black and Brown Theatre, and an educator at Momentum Stage, clarifies that there is a difference between representation and competence.

Rodriguez, in his workshop *Creating Culturally Competent Productions* reminds us that a key trait of these shows is that “the usual decision makers will not have complete control” (2022). Rather, organizations that genuinely desire to be engaged in their community must know what their community members actually want in an arts experience—and be ready to understand and enable change if and when what the community finds engaging and relevant is something completely different than the organization has done before, or than what is in their usual taste or style. He offers in his workshops these questions organizations should answer before attempting a production to “reach their community”:

1. Why does this story need to be told? Can it wait until you are more prepared?
2. Why are you/your company the ones to tell this story?
3. What will you lose if you don’t do this production?
4. Who wants you to do this production? Is it your actual community?
 - a. Does your community have decision making power?
 - b. Are you willing to change plans if the community doesn’t agree?
 - c. Are you open to doing a co-production with an organization who is better connected than yours?
5. How does this production fall in line with your other productions? Why is it divergent? What would you need to do to make it aligned? (2022)

Regarding the third question, Rodriguez (2022) cautions that not receiving a grant or award are not good reasons to not do a production. This is a transactional way of approaching art, if we focus on what we can get for our work. Rodriguez offers “reciprocal relationships” as another key feature of community engagement. Rather than arts organizations engaging transactionally,

i.e. you buy a ticket and we put on a show, they should be finding ways to relate to their community beyond commerce. This point echoes in Freire's pedagogy and Indigenous systems of knowledge—relationships are key to transformation.

Momentum Stage is attempting to address some of the issues of relevance, competency, and representation by launching a new program on community-engaged criticism. I will quote at length from a grant proposal written for this program by me, with contributions from Jose Solís and Meredith Bartmon (2022f).

In many ways, art criticism has become the ultimate gatekeeper: it judges more often than it enlightens. It ends the talk, instead of engaging in dialogue. By gathering 4-6 audience members of differing viewing points and demographics for a facilitated discussion following a performance, and editing those conversations into a published form, Momentum Stage proposes to use dialogue as a tool to transform criticism. This new method of dialogic, community-engaged criticism aims to address this by answering the following questions:

- How can reviewing become a more compassionately challenging and equitable art form? What is the purpose of the critical review? Who is criticism for? Why does it exist? Why should it continue to exist?
- How can criticism better serve the relationship between the arts and the audience?
- How can the work of criticism de-center the opinion of one writer, invite more diverse voices, actively engage with the audience/potential audience, enrich the relationship between organization and audience, and add to the conversation of Arts and Culture in the community?

To answer these questions we will gather 4 to 6 audience members for a facilitated discussion about the performance with a humanities scholar from a related field. That scholar, with a partnered scribe, will transcribe and edit the conversation into a critical review for public consumption on MomentumStage.org and social media channels.

The vision of this program is to place emphasis on cultural competency for theatre productions, and allow them to measure that success where it matters—in their community.

As many theatres try to diversify their programming, they face several challenges: connecting with new audiences, keeping previous audiences engaged with programmatic changes, creating spaces that support artists of different demographics, etc. We do not believe

that the demographic of a theatre critic should be a barrier to change. As I wrote in a different grant proposal,

This community-engaged dialogue addresses this major systemic issue in theatre. The activities of reviewing theatre has been recognized as often biased, othering, elitist, and not useful for developing theatre's relationship to community and culture. As theatres strive to offer more diverse story-telling and representation, these offerings are still being filtered through a mainly white, male, middle-aged, middle- to upper-class lens. (2022e)

This program will attempt to measure a piece's cultural relevance to its audience and community in a more holistic manner, and hopefully increase connection to a theatre's true local community, not only the regional theatre community.

My interest in this project stems from experiencing feedback as a teacher, student, and artist, and realizing that not all methods of feedback were beneficial. In fact, many of them reinforced supremacist systems and valued the voices of a singular person and/or demographic. What began as [an essay](#) on using Liz Lerman's Creative Response Process as a teacher and a student for the Performance Concentration requirements at Goddard at the October 2021 issue of *DanceGeist*, has found new life in community-engaged criticism project.

The key to this project, something it shares with the CRP method of feedback, is dialogue. As mentioned in the **Introduction**, dialogue is an indispensable component of Working Consent. Being in dialogue means that everyone's humanity, and opportunity to develop and hold their own identity and opinions as human beings, are valued. This project would open dialogue between audience members, possibly with very different life experiences and demographics, and also between audience members and producing organizations.

Often dialogue in performance spaces is very limited. Audience members may speak with the folks they came with about what they saw, or tell a friend. Theatres may hold a talk-back after one performance, however those often center on the "how" of the process, rather than its

impact, or, worse, the audience has no idea what to ask, and the time goes to waste. Much like classes require structure to guide students into creativity and choice, creating a fruitful dialogue in a place where it has previously been excluded does, too. This project aims to use facilitated dialogue to enrich relationships.

The goals of this project, as written for both grants, are:

- Explore a new way to do dramatic criticism
- Disrupt harmful reviewing practices (i.e. tendency of the reviewer to be cruel to or dismissive of individual artists in order to generate shock value)
- De-center singular opinions in order to disrupt the binary of ‘good’ vs ‘bad’ reviews.
- Give theatres more perspectives on their productions
- Offer reviews by people of the same demographic group that are represented in the storytelling

While we have not been able to secure funding for this endeavor, we believe we can fund a test case ourselves in the 22/23 season, and use it as proof of concept to better position us for funding in the future. We believe this program has the capacity to change arts criticism to be more culturally competent and relevant, and allow arts organizations to measure impact in more meaningful ways that reviews, or even ticket sales.

Conclusion

As a freelance artist, I do not get to make decisions about a performance company’s season or venue. However, as care is clear to me as an ethic for artistic work, I am curious about how I might use content warnings, accessibility and diversity riders, and/or land acknowledgement requests to encourage places where I am working to think more broadly about care. If they are bringing me in as intimacy choreographer, either out of care for the artists or care for the art, care for the audience must also be part of that.

As long as arts organizations see audiences as a point of transaction, they can never truly be in collaboration with them. If audience members equate to dollar signs, true care cannot exist. While money is, in the capitalistic system of Western performing arts, important to organizational health and longevity, I would suggest that the inverse of current experience could also be true. If organizations brought their energies to care and collaboration with audiences, the audiences would reciprocate with fiscal and social support. Ethical engagement, with audiences as collaborators of the experience, would likely result in more fulfilling community and artistic experiences that are also financially robust.

Working Ethically with the Land

Dance and theatre often take place indoors, on stages. However, the traditions of theatre are outdoors—Greek amphitheaters and societies who tell stories while sitting around the fire. Isadora Duncan turned the concert dance world upside down, not just with her bare feet and refusal to execute ballet vocabulary in performance, but in her outdoor setting choices. Dance has existed for thousands of years in many Indigenous cultures to not just take place in nature, but to affect the natural world—the rain, seasons, presence of animals. Our current dance and theatre spaces can connect our inner and outer worlds, with a recognition of our connection to the land.

In Nicolas Bourriaud's essay *Relational Aesthetics*, included in the 2010 book *Participation*, he points out that owning art requires space. "What is collapsing before our very eyes is quite simply the pseudo-aristocratic conception of how art works should be displayed, which was bound up with the feeling of having acquired a territory" (160). When I first read this I made connections with the idea that in order to own a large painting, you need to own a large house, which occupies more land. All of these are signs of wealth, and in our Western culture, signs of power. Owning a theatre building, or land for a theatre building is a luxury, and is not at all the same as directing a theatre or dance company. In fact, many small companies rent performance space from larger, better endowed institutions. But, wherever a company performs, performance is an act of, at least temporarily, claiming space.

Crafting and Using Land Acknowledgements

Land Acknowledgements are becoming a more common way of honoring the land that we are on when we teach or create. I was first introduced to the practice of Land Acknowledgments while in Toronto, Canada in the spring of 2019, for a nearly 2 week staged intimacy intensive. The practice of what they called a Territory Acknowledgement supported the concept of consent-forward work, by acknowledging the traumas that can occur when consent is not sought, or a denial is ignored.

I use a Land Acknowledgement I created in a workshop with Joseph Cloud, a member of the Cherokee Nation, whenever I teach or present work. Land Acknowledgements place us as part of a larger story—they connect us to the past, to traditions, to each other. All of these are things we share, because we are in the same place, at the same time. This was created specifically for the location I am in, and the work that I do with other artists and educators.

Momentum Stage is based in Broward County Florida, which is the occupied land of the ancestral stewards of the land the **Tequesta and Taino**, as well as the current home to the **Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida**, and the **Seminole Tribe of Florida**. Despite occupation and displacement, The Seminole and Miccosukee peoples still live, work, and create in South Florida, while maintaining their culture, traditions, and sovereignty. Momentum Stage is located in the United States, all of which is **stolen land**, built up by **stolen people**.

We also want to recognize that we are coming to you via technology, a luxury. This technology is made possible by the natural resources of our environment, and contributes to the environmental crisis we are living in. In our South Florida home, this looks like sea-level rise and threats to the Everglades.

Additionally, this technology has a consumption cost that does often limit participation to people with a certain level of income.

As educators and creators, we know that there is value in embodied ways of knowing and taking action. We invite you to learn more about the Indigenous peoples on whose land you reside and create and the erased narratives of People of Color throughout history. We encourage you to take action to support causes important to your local Indigenous people and to bring these conversations to your students and your artwork in creative ways. If you are making your first steps in this work, check out [native-land.ca](#) to start your research. If you are seeking application, see the free resources on our [Equitable Performing Arts Classroom page](#).

Fig. 11. A screenshot of the Land Acknowledgement on the [homepage of Momentum Stage](#).

For many of the students in my courses, this Land Acknowledgement on the first day of class is the first time they have encountered this practice. I remind them that wherever we come from, whatever our history or culture, this unceded Seminole and Miccosukee land in South Florida is now something we hold in common. Therefore, it makes sense for us, in learning to honor ourselves and each other, that we honor the space that we share, as well.

In a previous class, one student shared in her introduction letter that in her Cuban family her father is descended from Spaniards, but her mother is descended from the Taino. This had been a recent discovery and conversation in her family, and hearing the Taino mentioned in the Land Acknowledgement was very exciting to her, and helped her to feel validated and included with her identity.

Besides reminding of us of present commonality, I also find Land Acknowledgments an important ingredient in avoiding appropriation. In dance and somatic practices in particular, the contributions of people of color are whitewashed. By starting workshops or classes with a Land Acknowledgment, I begin the process of appreciation, not appropriation. I wrote in an essay (2021e) for *DanceGeist*:

I do invite you to examine how your silence in these conversations upholds white supremacy and erasure of bodies and traditions of color. I invite you to reflect on what your somatics practice has offered you, and then do a bit of research to discover its culture of origin. The stakes are high— we are affecting people’s relationships with their bodies and therefore how they approach their world.

Just like in a [Land Acknowledgement](#), the first step is to know that we are benefiting from the presence of ancestors and other cultures. Who are your movement ancestors, and how can you honor them? The next step is taking action- what can we do to live in right relationships with our world, now? (25)

This follow up, to action and relationship, must also be part of the work we do around land.

In a recent workshop, I began, as always, with a Land Acknowledgment. As soon as I finished, the founder of the program came on her microphone to express that Land Acknowledgments were all well and good, but “I don’t understand why we don’t just give the land back?”¹⁹ I told her that I agreed with her, and that, as the founder of the organization I was visiting, she absolutely had the ability and authority to bring that to the board of directors. As the guest facilitator, I was using the Acknowledgement to put our time together into perspective, and to ground us, who were about to explore how power dynamics affect consent, with a reminder of how power can be used very badly, for perfectly “good” reasons. I also suggested that she write this point down, as their homework assignment at the end of the workshop was going to be “one thing they could do immediately, one thing they are working towards, as well as the steps they would need to take to get there, and one thing that they needed to discuss with other in order to enact it.” I felt this perfectly fit into the last category. It became clear from her comments, however, that she was not actually seeking an answer to her question, or to be accountable for how her organization existed on its land. She was seeking to exert her power over the organization by pushing back against a guest, who was going to ask them to do things differently, by “exposing” me as not progressive enough.

In this way, she exemplified exactly why I use Land Acknowledgements. They are meant to be the first step in entering into a right relationship with the land and the Indigenous people on whose land we work and reside, and that relationship cannot exist without accountability. Later, this moment caused me to connect to others around me who shared similar ideas of Land Acknowledgements, and their place in teaching and creating. My relationships with others were

¹⁹ It will not surprise the reader to learn that this is the same person who pushed back against trauma-informed teaching, as cited in **Conclusion: Trauma-informed Teaching**.

a necessary part of clarifying the purpose of Land Acknowledgements in my work, and strengthening my resolve to continue to include them.

To be in an ethical relationship with land, we must be accountable to how we see the land, and treat the land. We must be accountable to the way that we treat Native people, and do what we are able to do to support the causes and ideas that are important to them

The Land in Performance

Shakespeare is often an example of colonization: in the stories of colonial England told in his plays, the appropriation of tales from other cultures and places, and his overwhelming presence, even today, as standard of what “theatre” is and is assumed to be in all cultures. However, he also lays out a different world. Green space and nature figure prominently in many Shakespearean works. In fact, in Shakespeare scholarship, a green space in a play is where the magic happens; it is the space of transformation. There is often a play between the natural world and human emotions. In *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, flowers and moonlight are key ingredients to love stories. In *King Lear*, his broken heart and mind find mirrors in the weather. Relationships of humans and nature also appear in other ways. Deforestation makes up part of the storyline of *Merry Wives of Windsor*. In fact, one of the solutions to England’s own deforestation was colonialism—not only in finding resources elsewhere, but in moving people out of England’s already taxed land. Natural disasters start *Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest*. Elizabethan science may not be twenty-first century science, but Shakespeare and his audience certainly recognized a relationship between human action and natural results, and vice versa.

Randall Martin (2015), a Shakespeare scholar specializing in ecology offers in his epilogue:

Shakespeare's greatest possibilities for becoming our eco-contemporary, however, arguably lie not in academic discourse but in performance. ... In theatre productions specifically, but perhaps other mediums as well, audiences see and feel a physical space shaping the bodily interactions of players, characters, and audiences— in-the-moment relations which Shakespeare often asks us to notice within his dramatic fictions. These spatial and kinetic feedbacks implicitly convey an environmentalist ethos: that actual or imagined environments are not decorative or utilitarian backdrops for human-centered relations, but have independent agency and determining energies of their own. (167)

In this way, these plays can be used as reminders that we are in relationship with nature.

Shawn Wilson (2018) quotes at length from *Indigenous Research Methodology* by Evelyn Steinhauer,

An Indigenous paradigm comes from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all creation. It is not just interpersonal relationships, or just with the research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with aloof creation. It is with the cosmos; it is with the animals, with the plants, with the earth that we share this knowledge. It goes beyond the idea of individual knowledge...you are answerable to *all* your relations when you are doing research. (84)

Likewise, we are answerable to all our relations, including the land, when we are doing art. New plays, and new scholarship on old plays, may offer us ways to do that.

Dance, particularly modern dance and its origination in outdoor settings, can do the same. Isadora Duncan and Rudolph Laban, considered the creators of European modern dance, both created their techniques, performance pieces, and methods of working while moving, teaching, and being inspired in the mountains, fields, and rivers of Germany and Italy in the early 1900s. Now, modern dance is often encountered on stages, inside of buildings. Dance, like theatre, is often an experience meant to be consumed and departed from. But, these performances could be

something that connect us and surround us. Performance can offer us a way to become more aware and more involved with our own natural world and kin.

Personal Land Based Experiences

KINesphere 2021 was developed to be a piece that was connected to the land, as both inspiration and site. I wrote in the initial grant proposal (2021), that became the basis of my Goddard [practicum proposal](#).

In each new place, audiences would be confronted by the dancer's relationship to nature-as a backdrop, as a partner, as an obstacle or an inspiration, etc. The purpose of this piece is to encourage audiences to reflect on how they encounter their natural world. Is it something to be subdued? Tolerated? Enjoyed? Protected? It is my hope that in a talkback and surveys, we will hear from the audiences how their perceptions have been challenged, changed, reinforced, and/or re-examined.

Through the *KINesphere* series, it is my intention to examine my own relationship with the land I am on, and encourage others to do the same.

KINesphere 2021 performances began with a Land Acknowledgement and movement ritual for the audiences. While I, as the tour guide, read the Acknowledgement, I also led the audience through turning to face all four cardinal directions.

Using this as a starting point, people entered the performance space with an awareness of the land around them, and its history. They used their bodies to become more attentive to their space, rather than hold land as only an intellectual concept. This movement ritual also opened all four of the dance performances. This experience supports Styres (2019) assertion "Inter-sensory perception enables us to have meaningful perceptual and embodied experiences of our places. Embodied or emplaced spaces, while always intimate, are never neutral" (27). I found this

coupling of movement and words to be a powerful experience for me, as well as memorable for the audiences, and will be repeating it in the 2023 version of *KINesphere*.

The ideas and movements grew from my own movement experiences in the arboretum on the campus where I teach and my work at Goddard in exploring Indigenous approaches to land. Movements also came from the personal reflections from me and the dancers on the importance of nature to each of us.

I will quote excerpts from my [practicum report](#) (2022b) here to illustrate this:

Ricky was a dancer I had not worked with before, but knew through theatre. His piece, *Legacy*, was intensely personal to him. I believe this comes through, even in the videos. The piece was originally created in a park, under a tree, and is really about that tree, its roots, and Ricky's own roots as a 1st-generation Haitian-American. His words, in Creole, speak of strength and breath, images of roots and leaves.



Fig. 12. Ricky in *KINesphere* performance. 30 December 2021. Photo by Nicole Hullett.



Fig. 13. Yasmin in *KINesphere* performance. 30 December 2021. Photo by Yassar Morales

In terms of location, I love where Yasmin's piece was performed. The deck that was surrounded by water, mangroves, and then also shipping cranes and airplanes was the perfect juxtaposition I was seeking in this piece. She was both in nature and in the human world. The audiences could not help but be confronted by both.

Since Jo was exploring the ideas of air and inspiration, her piece was full of leaps and turns. However, when we got to our performance Jo was finishing her first trimester of pregnancy, making leaping and turning a new experience for her dancing body! We were able to make good use of the structure around her to support her leaps. We did all of our work on location, so the piece was really created for the space, in a way the others were not. (9-10)



Fig. 14. Joanna in *KINesphere* performance. 30 December 2021.. Photo by Yassar Morales.



Fig. 15. Joanna in *KINesphere* performance. 30 December 2021. Photo by Yassar Morales.

I state in my practicum report that I do wish the setting had allowed the dancers and the audiences to be more connected to, rather than removed from, the natural setting. The boardwalk, created accessibility for wheelchairs and strollers, both of which were used by audience members. But it also very much made nature a backdrop, rather than the partner it was imagined to be, and is demonstrated in [videos created](#) with Ricky and Joanna.



Vid.1. *KINesphere* excerpt video.

I followed up with Joanna to discuss how her theme resonated with her and her identity. Joanna spoke of her life-long training in ballet as lending her body more to “air” type movements. She wrote “I am not grounded like I imagine earth to be...” (2022b). In light of Ricky seeking grounding and his roots, I wonder, and may be projecting, that this lack of grounding may also resonate with Jo’s personal experience, as her father was born in France, and her grandparents still live there. One of her brothers lives in Canada, as Jo herself did for a time.

The transient and fluid natures of people are very evident to her. Jo is also fluent in French, so the movement vocabulary of ballet, in many ways, is a familial tongue for her.



Fig. 16. L to R: Jo, Yas, and Ricky in *KINesphere* performance. 30 December 2021. Photo by Nicole Hullett.



Fig. 17. L to R: Jo, Ricky, and Yas in *KINesphere* performance. 30 December 2021. Photo by Tovah Johnson.



Fig. 18. Nicole, center, with the audience at the reflection station during *KINesphere* performance. 30 December 2021. Photo by Tovah Johnson.

I have received a grant for another iteration of this piece for 2023. This time, the location is levies of the Everglades. While these gravel trails will still provide safety for the dancers and accessibility for audiences, they will offer significantly less remove from the natural setting. I believe this will help support the original investigations of this project.

I would also like to develop *KINesphere* into a residency for schools, where students could use their creativity to connect to the green spaces close to them. Please see the collection of all of these thoughts, processes, and more on the [Collaboration page of my Portfolio website](#).

The 2021 and 2023 performance proceeds benefit(ed) *Love the Everglades*, an Indigenous-led advocacy organization. I was originally connected to this organization, led by Houston Cypress of the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, by our mutual friend, Joseph Cloud. *Love the Everglades* often uses visual art and film, as well as community action, to promote awareness of Everglades health, as well as the ramification on the ecosystem by proposed state politics. Momentum Stage promotes and supports *Love the Everglades* as part of the action to our Land Acknowledgement. Since I already had a professional and personal relationship, they were a natural choice to be *KINesphere* beneficiaries. It is appropriate for 2023 that we will be in the Everglades, hopefully drawing more attention to this ecosystem and the Indigenous people who have cared for it for centuries. It is also part of the vision for this new iteration to “highlight changes to the landscape and weather patterns as the month progresses” (Perry 2022b, 4).

The creation of *KINesphere* has definitely changed the type of art I want to be making. This is a clear reflection on my time at Goddard, as both an artist and a scholar. I have a new love for site-specific work, which means I must work to be in right relationship with the land, its current inhabitants (people and our more-than-human-kin), and its ancient and current stewards,

the Seminole, Miccosukee, Tequesta, and Taino. Christóbal Martínez (2022) writes in his essay for *Critique is Creative*, “An indigenous worldview might argue that people cannot be accountable to one another in a social ceremonial gathering without knowledge and acknowledgement of the land underneath their feet. ...an indigenous person might ask: without stewardship of land, memory, and context, how can we be truly respectful of one another” (215)?

I wish to always create with respect, create to respect, and create respect.

Conclusion: Being Accountable

Whenever we are making changes in the way we do things, especially structural disruptions like all of the methods mentioned in this paper, things do go wrong. We make mistakes. Our best of intentions can still cause harm. Therefore, accountability is a necessary part of ethically engaged creative processes. Those who are unwilling to participate in accountability are not actually prepared to follow through on the consent-forward, trauma-informed, and collaborative work they are instigating. A refusal to be accountable ensures that these methods of training and creating will fail.

Those of us creating and teaching with ethical engagement are confronted with our own training and personal experiences in systems of oppression. There are decades of unlearning to do. We are making these policy and procedural changes inside institutions and organizations based on systems of oppression. There are centuries of unlearning to do. We will make mistakes. We will cause harm. We will fall back into old habits because they are the ways of least resistance. Accountability measures are the only way to continue to move forward.

Accountability is different from justice, in that justice in the United States is often carceral. While movements encouraging Restorative and/or Transformative Justice have become more encouraged, carceral justice remains the most common way to address harm. Because of this mindset, many people perceive punishment as the only way to be held accountable. I believe we can engage in accountability practices with the purposes of addressing harm, centering the survivors, and creating change. Miriam Kaba and Shira Hassan (2019) offer

Three important questions guide CA [Community Accountability] processes for us (gleaned from restorative frameworks):

1. Who has been hurt/harmed? (*Centering those who were harmed.*)

2. What do they need? (*Justice is defined as meeting the need of multiple parties... with the goal of more healing and maybe transformation*)
3. Whose obligation is it to meet those needs? (*Bringing a broader group into the process of accountability.*) (32)

These goals also point to the difference of calling someone into accountability, and calling someone out to cause shame.

Recently, I was co-teaching a class in which we discussed the difference between calling in and calling out. To me calling in looks like:

- Pushing back on an idea or act, not a person
- Requires an acknowledgement of harm from the person who created it
- The goal is not shame, rather changed behavior. Punishment isn't the end goal of accountability; change is. A lack of punishment does not mean a lack of consequences. However, the motivation of the consequences is to help promote healing and change, not to exact revenge or retribution.

Calling out on the other hand:

- Pushes back on a person
- The goal is punishment, revenge, or ostracization. No acknowledgement of harm can occur, nor any proof of changed behavior, because that person has been removed or has removed themselves from the community.

Accountability is not something someone can “inflict” on another person. Mia Mingus (2018) defines accountability as “...not only apologizing, understanding the impact your actions have caused on yourself and others, making amends or reparations to the harmed parties; but most importantly, true accountability is changing your behavior so that the harm, violence, abuse does not happen again.”

In the same piece, Mingus reminds us that accountability is relational. It is not only a personal, reflective process, but it must be a communal and active one. Harm happens in relationships, we can be called to be accountable to ourselves and those we are in relationships with, we show our accountability by making changes in those relationships. Real relationships—and therefore accountability—require vulnerability.

In my work as an intimacy choreographer, I had an instance where I believed I called-in a producer on the way that they were treating and speaking to their cast and crew. I had given a workshop on the first day of rehearsal to the cast and crew that addressed power dynamics and how they show up in performance spaces. I had been hired by this company to do so, because they felt it would help their retention of cast members, many of whom did one or two shows, but then never returned to the company. Part of this workshop included that performers should, and do, have boundaries, and that a condition of work should not involve dismissing those. I was contacted by a member of the production who felt that this assertion, backed by the company by hiring me to say it, was not being upheld in practice.

This was the company's first show back from a COVID-pause, and many items, like air filtration, mask availability, and testing protocols, had not been addressed. But this person was concerned because the producer said to the cast in a rehearsal "If you are feeling unsafe, let us know, so we can find a replacement." This was a clear abuse of power, and made some actors feel that they had to go along with things that made them uncomfortable or even crossed boundaries, so they could keep their jobs. This behavior was unacceptable to me for a company that had contracted me to do a power and consent workshop for two more shows, as well as for the protection of this cast, so I asked for a meeting of the producer, director, music director, company staff, and stage manager.

We concluded our (very emotional) meeting with the producer agreeing to changed behavior that supported the cast in mask-wearing during rehearsals, providing more masks, and offering transparent communication, including apologies, when things went awry. However, twenty-four hours later, that same producer emailed me, vehemently relieving me of my duties. Not because they didn't want to make the changes, but because the discussion, which had included the director and stage manager, made the producer "look bad" in front of their employees (the email was also filled with possessive language regarding the creative team, cast, and crew, which, as discussed above is a sign of colonialism).

I still stand by my operating procedure, as all of the creative team needed to be on the same page regarding daily mask wearing, and needed to be a part of the same accountability process regarding communication and transparency. This meeting did create the change needed to support the cast. It is unfortunate, however, that experience was so disruptive to the supremacist and hierarchical values of that individual producer, that this change is the only one that was affected, and is likely to occur during the existence of the company.

This episode showed me that accountability works, in individual instances. The behavior did change and the people without the power in the room were able to be heard and protected. However, it also showed me that while change in procedures may be possible in some settings, it still does not mean that the person has changed. Not everyone is ready to enter into accountability processes, because it does mean an acceptance of harm and change of behavior, which requires vulnerability in front of others. While some arts-makers may be willing to change behind the scenes procedure and policies, they are unable to be accountable to them when they go wrong.

Personal Accountability

This idea of relationships as sources of knowledge creation and places for the sharing of knowledge is an unsettled one, rooted in Indigenous epistemology. “Indigeneity and working within Indigenous contexts is first and foremost about reciprocity and relationships” (Styres 2019, 24). In my own life, my relationships with Indigenous people have been crucial to moving beyond knowledge, into action and integration. Learning from Ty DeFoe and Carolyn Dunn at Goddard, working regularly with Tara Moses, publicly supporting the work of Houston Cypress (for his work as an artist and as the founder of *Love the Everglades*), and my over-decade long friendship and working relationship with Joseph Cloud, are regular reminders of connectivity. Ty, Carolyn, and Tara regularly challenge me to take ideas into pedagogical practice. Houston and Joseph do the same for my artistic work. Because these are my friends and colleagues, and we are in relationships, not transactions, I share what I am learning, how it is resonating with my students, make connections between them and others (The Ty-Joseph connection is hopefully resulting in some cool opportunities for both of them this year!). As I do my own work on Land Acknowledgements, Joseph is the recipient of all of the good links and resources I come across, to help him build his workshops. Ty is a regular recipient of photos of Florida wildlife from my yard, campus, and treks to the Everglades. All of the above folks, with the exception of Houston, and only due to calendar issues, have been invited and paid educators at Momentum Stage, with Tara being a regular member of our faculty.

I am currently missing a right relationship with the Seminole and Miccosukee local people (with the exception of Houston). As they return to in-person events this year, I hope to change this. Gablik (1992) writes in *Has Modernism Failed* “Modern life is lived in a world turned upside down, in which we are painfully aware of our separateness but have lost sight of

our connectedness” (28). I am aware of my still separateness from the local tribes, and desire to connect in ethical, relational ways.

Diana Taylor (2020) cautions in her introduction to *¡Presente! : The Politics of Presence*, “We—scholars, artists, and activists—often coemerge from and inadvertently continue to coproduce these colonial scenarios” (8). She also offers some remedy for this ongoing challenge: “Part of my responsibility is to learn, unlearn, listen, engage, challenge, and if possible change the scenario.” These are the things that I hold myself accountable to, and my relationship with other aid that accountability. She concludes her first chapter with what I now make my mission as well: “...for me, I strive to know differently, not just to survive but to be less complicit in the colonialist production and practice of knowledge” (37).

Conclusion

As seen in the above chapters, the systems and traditions of dance and theatre training and performance make change difficult. Sometimes, people are simply embarrassed that they do not know how to do something ethically, so they simply do nothing, and hope the “fad” of equity, or pronouns, or land acknowledgements, or intimacy direction will go away. Other times, people have made changes, but then when they realize there is still more work to be done, as there always is when we look at unsettling colonial systems while we live in a Western society, they become frustrated or disillusioned, and decide they have done “enough.” Sandra Styres (2019) writes “Concepts of settler and whiteness are rooted in the myth of meritocracy, relations of power and privilege, and an assumption that everyone has access to the same resources.... Relations of power and privilege and the networks that sustain them are always striving to maintain the status quo and recenter whiteness and settler colonial relations” (31).

Some artists and educators will be happy to support change for other people, other companies, other institutions, leaving their own work unexamined. Styres (2019) reminds us that “...decolonizing praxis challenges colonial relations of power and privilege that are systemically embedded....and challenges taken-for-granted biases and assumptions” (31). But those unwilling to engage in this work do so often not because they don’t believe it is worthwhile, but because they don’t need it, as they are “good people”.

Ethical engagement has nothing to do with how “good” of a human we are. Rather, it has to do with how human we believe others to be. Can we see the humanity in our students? Our collaborators? Our audiences? Can we see them as equal collaborators, with a shared goal, but different, yet valid, working methods? Can we assume their best intentions when they come into our spaces? Can we accept that their boundaries are right for them, and have only to do with their own safety, and nothing to do with us? Can we look at everyone in our space and know that they deserve care for their whole being? Can we be in relationship with them, with honesty and vulnerability, recognizing our own fragile humanity?

Pedagogic and performance practices that center collaboration are how we move beyond “being good”, and into being human. Working Consent is a key tenet of these practices as it requires us to acknowledge power dynamics, and be truthful and transparent about the hierarchical structures we so often find ourselves in as we make art. Working Consent requires relationality. We cannot dialogue with or care for the needs of those we are disconnected from. Finally, Working Consent also requires that we see these relationships with collaborators, whether they are students, peers, audience members, or our more-than-human counterparts, as equitable. Our collaborators are worthy of respect and care, and to be in the process with the same amount of autonomy and agency as we are.

Being a good person only carries weight in relationship. It is easy to hold our values and worldviews in silos, alone. Relationships are where these are tested and measured. Goodness is only good when it is good for all, and not just those in traditional roles of power; when our work seeks to create equity and justice for every person, creature, and place it connects with.

Through my work at Goddard and learning to apply it in performance creation and pedagogy, I have come to understand this. My very conservative, Evangelical upbringing taught me that “being good” gets rewarded, but also that “being good” is an individual endeavor. As I have deconstructed my faith, unsettled my praxis, and created not just art, but a new worldview, my focus has shifted to relationality. I want to work with, be with, create with, develop and share power with.

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