

# The Emerging Critical Pedagogies of Dance Educators in an Urban STEAM After-School Program for Black Girls

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## Abstract

*The preparation of urban educators has gained widespread attention across education policy, research, and practice. As US urban cities have become more diverse, the teacher workforce has not kept up, and the racial/ethnic demographics of students and teachers are disproportionately incongruent. In order to eradicate an education landscape that perpetuates white, middle-class ways of knowing and being, often at the expense of the cultural practices and cultural wealth of historically marginalized students of color, urban teacher education must be centered toward justice and rooted in critical pedagogies. The literature, albeit bleak, reveals that these perspectives must also be applied to urban dance education. Dance education programs have been significantly eliminated from urban schools over time, and although dance has historical roots in African and African diasporic cultures, dance education continues to be Eurocentric. This phenomenological case study examines the emerging critical pedagogies of undergraduate dance majors and minors who served as dance teachers in an urban Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) after-school program for 7-12-year-old Black girls. Findings reveal that (a) navigating race, place, and space; (b) mentorship and practice; and (c) critical reflection and self-efficacy were critical components of the urban dance educators' emerging critical pedagogies. Implications for urban dance education and the broader field of urban education are provided.*

**Keywords:** urban education, dance education, urban dance education, STEAM education, critical dance pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, Black girls, phenomenology

## Introduction

The preparation of urban educators has gained widespread attention across education policy, research, and practice for several decades (Acosta, 2018; Darling-Hammond, 2010, Milner, 2011). As US urban cities become more and more diverse, schools and the demographics of their students represent this upward trend. By and large, the teacher workforce both now and what is projected in the future is incongruent with the demographic composition of students (Easton-Brooks, 2019; Madkins, 2012; Rogers-Ard et al., 2012). In 2015, 49% of students in US schools were BISOC (Black, Indigenous, Students of Color; Kena et al., 2015), and this number is projected to rise to 55% in 2020 (Green, 2015). However, white women teachers comprise 60% of the teacher workforce juxtaposed with 5% that are Black women teachers (Allen-Handy & Farinde-Wu, 2017). Specifically, in the context of urban schools, Black students represent 26% of the student population, while 12% of teachers are Black (Osei-Twumasi & Pinetta, 2019).

With a student body that is outpacing the diversity of teachers, it is imperative that urban educators are well trained to critically interrogate the status quo (Esposito et al., 2012; Neri et al., 2019) and develop critical pedagogies to effectively teach minoritized (Harper, 2012)<sup>2</sup> students in urban schools (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In order to eradicate an educational landscape that perpetuates white, middle-class centric curriculum and norms, often at the expense of the cultural practices and cultural wealth of historically marginalized students (Paris & Alim, 2017; Yosso, 2005), urban teacher education must be centered towards justice (Allen et al., 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2018) and executed within a non-negotiable commitment to critical pedagogies (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017). These critical pedagogies and commitments have similar implications for urban dance education, which is the focus of this study.

One may ask, why is it important to explore dance in urban education? Particularly, when urban schools rarely offer co-curricular or extra-curricular dance education (Aud & Hussar, 2012)? First, it's important to operationalize how urban dance education is conceptualized in this paper. Urban dance education is an approach to dance pedagogy that carefully considers contexts, resources, and the systems that impact students in urban settings, rather than in reference to a specific dance form. For example, the word urban in

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<sup>2</sup> We utilize Harper's (2012) use of minoritized instead of minority throughout this paper to support the understanding that the word *minority* is a social construction of underrepresentation and subordination in social institutions and that individuals are rendered minorities in institutional environments that sustain an overrepresentation of Whiteness.

dance has historically been problematically used to group various cultural dance forms together, while also supporting a reductionist perspective of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and their cultural dance genres (Chang & Hogans, 2019). Moreover, these viewpoints are often advanced without parallel discussions of power, race, and appropriate acknowledgement of the historical roots of various dance forms.

Specifically within urban school contexts, often guided by neoliberal educational agendas (Lipman, 2013), schools can operate as factories of standardized testing and rote learning that are cloaked under the guise of “feel good” education reform like “not leaving children behind” and “racing to the top.” Yet, herein resides an interesting paradox, particularly for Black students, who are the focus of our study. Dance has been and continues to be woven into the everyday lives of Black families and children (Malone, 1996), and even though dance is such an important part of Black culture, it is often omitted from urban schools and informal learning opportunities that serve majority Black students. Even when dance education is accessible, it often represents white/western forms of dance that neglect the cultural and traditional dance forms of the African diaspora (Kerr-Berry, 2012). Dance teachers who do teach in urban schools are often white women who are trained in such white/western forms of dance and exhibit appropriated perspectives of Black dance and Black dancing bodies (Asante, 1993). These dispositions are upheld through underlying ideologies of anti-Blackness (Dumas, 2016), and unfortunately, they may be integrated into dance teachers’ classroom practice. To compound this issue, Black dance professionals are significantly underrepresented across the dance educational and career continuum, which perpetuates a cultural incongruence between urban students and dance educators.

Therefore, it is imperative that dance education, particularly in urban contexts, employs critical pedagogies in order to build pluralistic communities, affirm students’ cultural aesthetic, as well as support cultural and artistic expressions as channels for learning (McCarthy-Brown, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017). According to McCarthy-Brown (2017), “dance is a cultural experience. It is a racial experience. It is a gendered experience. It is a kinesthetic body experience. All of this is to say that one’s experience in dance is reflective of his or her demographic and dance environment” (p. 14). Currently, there exists a great need to further expand the extant literature within the field of dance education to support the preparation and professional development of dance educators in urban environments.

This study seeks to respond to the aforementioned needs in urban dance education, and thus its purpose is to amplify the voices of dance educators as they learn to employ critical pedagogies in dance instruction for Black girls in an urban STEAM after-school

program. The program integrates Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM) learning, including dance, design, and computational learning with the intent to support STEAM literacies, STEAM identities, and positive self-concept. Dance is the centerpiece of the program, and dance instruction is led by undergraduate dance majors and minors who serve in the role of dance educators. Findings from this study have important implications for urban education and urban dance education in particular.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Dance Education in Urban Schools**

According to the National Center of Education Statistics, there is a downward trend in access to dance education. For example, 95% of elementary students and 77% of secondary students who attend schools where 76% or more of students receive free and reduced lunch, do not have access to dance instruction (Aud & Hussar, 2012). Likewise, in 2000, 20% of elementary and 18% of secondary schools offered dance classes compared to 3% of elementary and 12% of secondary schools in 2010 (Parsad & Spieglerman, 2012). These findings are problematic because the benefits of dance education have been well documented. The literature indicates that dance education supports increased academic achievement, social/emotional well-being, student motivation, and cultivates a positive learning environment (Bonbright, et al., 2013; Catterall, 2012; Creedon, 2011; Ruppert, 2006).

The literature also reveals that there is an underrepresentation of both diverse faculty and dance education students (Risner, 2007), particularly Black women who pursue dance career paths in college. The 2018-2019 Higher Education Arts Data Services (HEADS) study included 74 nationally accredited dance programs, and findings indicate that Black women represent 10.6% of enrolled undergraduate and graduate students, while the majority of students studying dance are white students, at 57.9% (HEADS, 2019). A similar imbalance is represented in the numbers of Black women faculty in college dance programs. Black women represent 9.5% of faculty, while white women represent 48.2%; with only 7.8% of Black women earning full professor status but 54.7% of White women earning the same rank (HEADS, 2019). In a female-dominated field, where men represent 31.5% of dance faculty and 12.6% of dance students, Black women remain underrepresented in the field. With the majority of dance educators emerging from the field being white women, it is imperative that their educational and professional experiences incorporate the colonized

history of dance education, an interrogation of their personal dispositions and biases, and an integration with critical pedagogies.

### Critical Pedagogies

Critical pedagogy is foundational to more fully understand the untapped potential of urban dance education. Rooted in the works of Freire (2000), Bell (1995), Crenshaw (1995), Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), and many other legal, social, and educational scholars, critical pedagogy represents what Ledwith (2001) shares is “that form of education which emerges from critical compassion.... It requires liberation of the mind, the courage to act, and the confidence to connect autonomy, agency, and alliance” (p. 181). Critical pedagogy merges theory and practice in transformative ways that challenge the status quo (Esposito et al., 2012; Neri et al., 2019), strengthen educators’ and students’ critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and center the lived experiences of the most marginalized toward a liberatory form of education (Allen-Handy, et al., 2020). In this study, we draw from an integrated framework inclusive of two critical pedagogies: *critical dance pedagogy* and *culturally sustaining pedagogy* to situate the experiences of dance educators in an urban STEAM after-school program for Black girls. These two frameworks work in tandem with one another and inform our understanding in ways that would not be possible if our conceptual framework was informed by only one perspective.

### *Critical Dance Pedagogy*

Critical dance pedagogy (CDP) is a framework that critically examines how power and race impact dance education. Rooted in critical race theory in education (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), CDP explicitly interrogates the historical legacy and contemporary landscape of the field of dance. Although the dance literature attempts to acknowledge African and African Diasporic culture, it has been profoundly shaped by racial/ethnic biases that have disparaged the contributions and influences from Black dance (Asante, 1993; West, 2005). Dance curricula often fails to represent American dance as “a product of cultural fusion” as it is largely influenced by Eurocentric norms (Kerr-Berry, 2012, p. 50). Few studies have discussed interventions to decolonize dance education (McCarthy-Brown, 2014, 2017; Thomas, 2019), due to the field of dance’s ability to provide individuals with a means to practice their cultural heritage. Despite several American dance forms having African roots, the focus of dance departments in the US continue to be whitewashed (McCarthy-Brown, 2014). Likewise, certain genres such as ballet are persistently white, resulting from the dearth of Black representation.

While Black perspectives have helped shape the landscape of dance (Walker, 2019), they continue to be overlooked in the evolution of dance (Hazzard-Gordon, 1985). Black dance artists have not been appropriately recognized for their contributions to dance due to racial tensions and cultural appropriation (Stovall, 2015). For example, while ballet continues to be seen as a predominantly white genre, Black dancers have not been appropriately credited for Afro-centric origins of genres such as hip hop, jazz, and tap dance (Patton, 2011). Moreover, there continues to be a paucity of diverse bodies in dance, and even less who are Black in featured/principal roles (Patton, 2011). Social constructs of race, class, and gender influence all parts of society, including dance education, and CDP serves as a cultural-political tool to address the various power dynamics at play in the aforementioned social constructs, while relating them to dance pedagogy (McCarthy-Brown, 2017). According to McCarthy-Brown (2017), education is culturally informed, and without the teacher making a conscious effort to integrate customs, artifacts, rituals, and language into the curricula, the students' culture may be ignored or delegitimized.

Dance educators' personal interior work to examine their cultural perspectives and the perspectives of their dance training, must attend to power, race, culture, and social constructs to mitigate imposing bias in dance curriculum and instruction. Embedded challenges created by systemic racism and colonization in dance education are compounded by color-blind ideology, the belief that race does not influence a person's preferences and opportunities in dance education (Bonilla-Silva, 2009; Prichard, 2019). To overcome this ideology, white dance educators must acknowledge and challenge power systems, structures, hierarchies, and relationships as they impact dancers and dance forms (McCarthy-Brown, 2017; Prichard, 2019). Although many dance forms have Black historical roots, even the most critically conscious educators tend to ignore race or present a whitewashed perspective in their curriculum by re-enacting White privilege by replicating it without examination (Kerr Berry, 2018). Kerr Berry (2018) contends, "because whiteness goes unchecked and people dance and teach from their own cultural *and* racialized experience, they can enact whiteness—unless it is questioned" (p. 140).

Acknowledging and valuing students' cultural connection to dance provides an entry-point for students in urban contexts to authentically experience dance and to make connections to understand their identities (Walker, 2019). For this reason, CDP is a needed stance to examine structures of power and the dancing body, as well as to allow urban dance educators to contextualize how power systems and relationships shape the way they understand dance and approach teaching dance.

### ***Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy***

Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) is a social justice-oriented framework that supports transformative learning outcomes for all students, by centering students' lived and cultural experiences throughout the project of teaching and learning (Paris, 2012). CSP derives from culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and recognizes that students' past, present, and future exist upon a continuum of white supremacy and social marginalization (Ladson-Billings, 2011). CRP encompasses three tenets: 1. academic achievement (students choose to pursue academic excellence), 2. cultural competence (students maintain their cultural integrity), and 3. critical consciousness (students interrogate existing structures of power) (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Ultimately, CRP is not a list of steps or a checklist one does, rather it is who one is, a state of being (Ladson-Billings, 2011; Parsons & Wall, 2011; Sleeter, 2012). According to Ladson-Billings (2014), "pedagogies must evolve to address the complexities of social inequalities" (p. 77), particularly as CRP evolves into CSP (Paris & Alim, 2014).

CSP seeks to promote, foster, and sustain students' cultural identities and youth culture, inclusive of the arts, literature, music, dance, and film, while sustaining students' ways of knowing and being towards equity and justice (Paris, 2012). In this vein, "what if the goal of teaching and learning with youth of color was not ultimately to see how closely students could perform white middle-class norms, but rather was to explore, honor, extend, and at times problematize their cultural practices and investments?" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 3)

The role of the arts in enacting CSP is paramount (Wong & Peña, 2017). For example, Gilbert's (2006) *Brain Dance* encourages students to create their own dances to their own tempo and directions (Humphreys & Kimbrell, 2013). This exercise centralizes students' individuality as they have the freedom to create and express their own dance forms. Through a CSP framework, students can connect dance to their cultural and personal backgrounds, sustaining their various ways of knowing and being and through making space for various iterations of their identities and interests.

## **Program Background & Positionality**

The *Black Girls Dance and STEAM Program* (*BGDSP*; a pseudonym) is an after-school program for 7-12-year-old Black girls in one urban intensive (Milner, 2012), northeastern city in a predominantly Black community. The program was established to

respond to the underrepresentation of Black women and girls across the STEAM continuum (Marra et al., 2009; Pinkard, et al., 2017; Towns, 2010), and it integrates dance, design/making, and coding with virtual and augmented reality (VR and AR) for the purpose of nurturing STEAM literacies, STEAM identities, and the positive self-concept of Black girls (Allen-Handy, et al., 2020). Dance is the thread that weaves the other elements of the program together into one complete tapestry of STEM and the arts.

The program was founded by four Black women professors in urban education, dance, product design, and computing and informatics who created the program in 2017 to demonstrate the prowess of transdisciplinary collaboration across fields. The common vision of developing a program that would engage Black girls with diverse experiences in STEAM is cohered by the founders' commitments to social justice, access, and equity in STEAM education, critical pedagogies, as well as positive self-concept formation that incorporates the girls' and our own intersectional identities. The weekly program includes an hour-long dance class taught by undergraduate dance majors and minors, and an hour-long STEAM lab taught by the professors and a graduate research assistant. BGDSP has served 30 Black girl participants over the three years of the program.

To more fully understand the program and the authors' roles in it, it is important to share our own positionality as scholars and educators. We all identify as Black women. We are ever negotiating our intersectional identities grounded by a Black feminist and critical race feminist epistemology, within the predominantly white spaces of our university. Therefore, BGDSP serves as an unapologetic counterspace specifically for Black women and girls. Ayana is an urban education scholar and a former first-grade teacher and counselor whose research and scholarship is grounded in critical perspectives toward espousing justice. She serves as the primary investigator and leads all research aspects of the program.

Valerie is a dance educator whose research is focused on embodied learning and identity development through community-based learning. Valerie leads the dance components of the project, including training the dance educators and developing dance curriculum. Raja directs the university's product design program, and her research focuses on ways both the design of wearable technology and STEAM education can improve the lives of women and students of color. Raja leads the design/making curriculum and components of the program. Monique is a graduate research assistant whose research focuses on engaging Black girls in technology-related educational activities while facilitating their creative processes. Monique supports the technology aspects of the program, specifically the AR and VR components. Michelle is a STEM faculty member whose work

aims to engage students who are underrepresented in the sciences to envision themselves successfully participating in computing fields. Michelle leads the STEM aspects of the program, particularly coding and computational learning.

## Methods

### Research Design

This study's research design is situated within a constructivist paradigm, and thus we believed that a qualitative tradition was best suited to answer our research question. More specifically, this study is a phenomenological case study design. Phenomenology explores "essential meanings of individual experience" (Patton, 2002, p. 104), and offers research participants the opportunity to internalize their first-hand accounts of experience within a given context, which often shapes their perceptions (Miller & Salkind, 2002; O'Leary, 2007). Thus, phenomenology supports gathering a deeper understanding of the essence of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013), and thus this study is a phenomenological examination of dance educators' development of critical pedagogies in an urban STEAM after-school program for Black girls. This study is guided by the following research question:

How do dance educators make meaning of their emerging critical pedagogies in an urban STEAM after-school program for Black girls?

### Participants

The participants in this study are four undergraduate women who served as dance educators in BGDSP (see Table 1). According to Creswell et al. (2007) there exists no clearly defined criteria for sample size in a phenomenological study such as this one that draws exclusively from narratives of experience; thus, a small sample size is warranted. Our participant criteria was that the dance teachers were undergraduate dance majors or dance minors who had taught in BGDSP for at least one year, had a significant investment in their own personal dance training and professional development, and were committed to dance education with underrepresented youth. Prior to the conception of BGDSP, all of the participants taught community dance classes at the neighborhood extension center, under the direction of Valerie. Through this experience, they were required to take a community-based learning training that included a module on Critical Dance Pedagogy, and most of the students also took a Dance Pedagogy course as part of their curriculum (Allen-Handy, et al., 2020).

The four participants were invited to serve as the dance teachers for BGDSP, based on their demonstrated interest and for which they received a stipend. Valerie supported their ongoing development and implementation of lesson plans for the one-hour dance classes they co-taught, which preceded the one-hour STEAM lab that they also assisted with. All four of the teachers had had Valerie as a professor in their undergraduate dance curriculum at the university but had no prior relationship with Ayana, Raja, or Michelle.

**Table 1: Participants**

Name & Race	Status	Major	Dance Class Taught	In Her Own Words <i>Why do you want to become a dance educator?</i>
<b>Grace</b> Race: White	Senior	Dance	10-12 year olds Concert Dance (Ballet & Jazz) 4-6 year olds creative movement	I just really think that dance is an amazing tool to understand yourself and other people, and your experiences and your body. And I think that everyone should have the access to do that and to learn about that, and to learn about themselves and the world through this vehicle.
<b>Sarah</b> Race: Non-Disclosed	Sophomore	Dance	7-9 year olds Concert Dance (Ballet & Jazz) 4-6 year olds creative movement	I think it's a variance of things. I grew up with dance, and I understand the capabilities it has to create social atmospheres for kids, to create embodiment experiences. I feel like there's a lot of valuable things that were so impactful for me that they are still worth sharing. And so I think it's great that this program exists because then we can share it. And it's not something like you have to be able to afford it or anything like that. We're just throwing it out there and if you want it you can receive it and it's like an offering almost.
<b>Danielle</b> Race: Black	Junior	Entertainment and Arts Management Minor: Dance	7-9 year olds Concert Dance (Ballet & Jazz)	Since I was a dancer since I was young. I like what it did for me, I grew in <CITY>, so not like it was rough place or anything, but it just kept me focused on more than just dance. In my studies as well. It taught me a lot of life skills that were outside of dance just like discipline, stuff like that. So I just want to be able to share that or even give the opportunity for others to join in with that.
<b>Hannah</b> Race: White	Sophomore	Dance	7-9 year olds Concert Dance (Ballet & Jazz)	I grew up having dance. My sister started when she was four and I remember sitting in the classroom and watching her. And I really wanted to join, so my parents put me in it. Through my whole education of dance, I also saw a counselor. And both of them, kind of together, really made me realize: "Oh my gosh, dancing is so helpful to me." It gets me through anything, and it just lets me laugh, let out some energy if I need to, or do whatever. And I was like, that's what I want to do, because I realized how helpful it was to me.

## Data Collection and Analysis

This IRB-approved study collected data through audio-recorded one and a half hour face-to-face interviews with the dance educators after gaining their informed consent (the interviews are one component of a larger study and thus why small in scope). All four interviews were conducted by the PI, transcribed, and then analyzed utilizing an inductive and multi-layered collaborative data analysis approach. During our weekly research team meetings, we engaged in reflexive iterative data analysis which supported our meaning-making processes (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). The first stage of data analysis included a holistic-content analysis of each interview. Holistic-content analysis supports gaining a global impression of narrative data and of the whole of each participants' story to capture the who, what, when, where, and why (Beal, 2013; Lieblich, et al., 1998). This primary focus on the individual content and how each participant maintained coherence in her narrative was an important exploratory process for later iterations of data analysis.

The next layer of analysis included applying open coding, an initial coding schema that combined both *in vivo* and process coding (Saldaña, 2016). This process identified emerging patterns within the data, and a code book ensued. Next, we applied an axial coding process of categorization and recategorization to further reduce our initial codes to identify sub themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). We also employed the process of intercoder negotiated agreement (Campbell et al., 2013) by comparing our individual codes and reconciling any coding discrepancies amongst the team. In the final stage of analysis, we identified common themes and subthemes across all four interviews by clustering the themes (Creswell, 2013).

After several rounds of integrating the clustered themes, three themes emerged as the study's findings. We engaged in member checking with the participants, which included informal follow up conversations to discuss our findings and to mitigate any potential misrepresentation of their meaning making. We wanted to ensure that our themes were representative of the participants' perceptions, and that we had maintained cohesiveness within their narratives. To manage any potential bias due to our ongoing work with the dance teachers, we all journaled and openly discussed how we were managing our positionalities and our own perceptions, and constantly sought to address credibility, dependability, and transferability to support trustworthiness in this study (Beal, 2013).

## Findings

The dance educators in this study experienced various degrees of knowledge and skill development, including “learning on the job,” in real time with their dance students. Particularly within a dance class with young girls, there were many moving parts both literally and figuratively. The dance educators had to balance creating and preparing lesson plans, classroom instruction and management, and the often-unanticipated events of each class. In answering the research question, three themes uncovered in the findings are presented.

1. Navigating race, place, and space
2. Mentorship and practice
3. Critical reflection and self-efficacy

### Navigating Race, Place, and Space

Race, place, and space emerged in the educators’ narratives as they each navigated their experiences in the program. Each woman contends with her race in a program that is led by Black women and serves Black girls. Place emerged through the urban context of the city and neighborhood in which the program is located, and space is representative of the “traditionally white dance space” in general and the Afrocentric dance space of the program, in particular. For example, Hannah shares,

I am white and from a very small, predominantly white town. That's what I grew up with. And coming to a big city I've never been in, and there's so many differences. So being here is like "Oh my goodness." Experiencing different cultures even among one class of students, I feel like I'm experiencing so many different cultures from each student. I know they are from different areas of the city, and it's always interesting to hear them talking about things that they've done in their school that they find really authentic to them and to what they do, and to their families. It's very different hearing from someone who actually can really relate to it more, maybe than I can because I'm white. It's been really interesting and kind of eye-opening. I'm experiencing a lot of different culture things here, which is really awesome for me. And I feel like that's important, especially in dance because there's so many different styles and techniques that pay tribute to different cultures and we're doing ballet, modern, hip-hop, and jazz.

Hannah’s narrative strongly supports the theme of race, place, and space as she shares without filter the ways in which she is navigating her race as a white teacher in this

predominantly Black space, in a large urban city. Herein, the onset of her critical pedagogies are illuminated as she finds beauty, brilliance, and excitement in the various backgrounds and perspectives that her students bring into the space. Likewise, this theme is expressed by Sarah,

I come from a very weird place. I grew up in a world where I look very much like the majority, but my dad was born in Mexico and I'm not [just white]. But no one would guess. I don't look it, and so in my head I grew up in a world where I wasn't treated any different because I don't look any different. But I felt very unique and culturally interesting and all of these things, and then grew up and found out that people are putting other people down because they are from a different place or because they believe in different things. I have grandparents that wouldn't have loved me if I would've looked more like my dad than my mother. And so, one of the biggest things I think that's important to make a space culturally relevant, and accepting, and comfortable is just listen. Listen to the girls, they have lots to say.

As the only Black dance educator in the program, Danielle shares the ways in which the program affirms her cultural pride and serves as a safe space as she navigates often culturally incongruent spaces in her own educational journey:

It's just so good to see Black female professors leading this to young kids who may not see that all the time. They'll be able to look back on it and be like, 'I was exposed to all of this. I've had teachers who were black females.' I remember I never even had a Black female teacher until I came to college or a Black teacher at all. So, when that's your reality, it's like, oh I would've loved to have that as a kid.

Navigating the complexities of race, place, and space was noted to be central to the development of their critical pedagogies because not only did they have to enact these pedagogies within the dance classroom, but they simultaneously were required to work through their own cultural dissonance, or for Danielle congruence, within the dancing space.

### **Mentorship and Practice**

The second theme is the salience of mentorship and practice, which shows up in the reciprocity of mentorship between the professors and the dance educators and their own mentorship of their students. This mentorship included many opportunities for modeling, guided practice, and lesson implementation. Sarah shares the ways in which Valerie supported her in reframing some of her previously held mindsets about dance:

Val and I have had many conversations about my teaching. One of the beautiful things about having her as a part of this program is that I often get moving situations from, like, I'm unfamiliar with this action, or this place, or this reference.

And I can go to Val and be like, "Could you explain this to me?" or walk through my lesson plans, or whatever. We've had multiple conversations about this because ballet is so tricky, especially when it comes to diversity. I come from a ballet school in high school. That's my knowledge. And in my brain, it was never only for white people or only for financially fit people. And so, it's been a balance of sharing it, giving equal opportunity. The knowledge I've gained should just be equally shared to the young women in this class, but also be[ing] aware that this is not something that they might not have grown up with or envisioned for themselves.

Sarah also describes the reciprocal nature of mentorship while sharing a story about her experiences within the STEAM lab:

Something that really stuck with me was to shift in my role of also learning with the girls. While I come with skills like I do know how to sew, there were just a couple skills that I came with because I'm a bit older and I've had certain experiences, but other than that I've never made glowing up costumes before, never had done computer programming, so it was just really fun to be learning with them. And the fact that sometimes, they were supporting me through something, and sometimes I was supporting them, and I wasn't Sarah doing ballet class or a step to follow and they realized Miss Sarah didn't have all the answers.

Although several of the women share the importance of their preparatory pedagogy experiences, they highlight the ways in which putting what they learned into practice supported the development of their critical pedagogies. Danielle states:

Even after a day at school, not negating their experiences, just acknowledging that they could have had multiple different days. So, if they come in a different mood, not assume that they're just being difficult on purpose. Giving them the freedom to move how they want, especially in a dance class. Giving them the opportunity to do free dance or whatever they want to do. Something fun so it's not just imposing. Especially in a field like dance, it's so disciplined focus. There's not a lot of room for outliers, in the different genres.

Within this narrative, Danielle shares the importance of drawing from students' strengths and even their points of weakness, i.e., maybe having a bad day at school, and allowing these student experiences to be a launching pad for the lesson or outlet for emotional release. Allowing the girls to be free in their movement espouses a sense of freedom and liberation to live out their truths.

Likewise, Grace illuminates her experiences in putting her gained knowledge and skills into practice. The conversation that ensues with Ayana and Grace supports this finding.

**Ayana:** What does being a culturally sustaining dance educator mean to you?

**Grace:** There is a question of what do you want to do, and what do you want to bring in, and what do you want to show? I think that to be a culturally sustaining educator and practitioner and human, the first step is to ask questions and not make assumptions just as a person, and then obviously as a teacher. And then the second step is actually taking those answers and doing something with the answers and not ignoring them. And one's understanding of various cultures and backgrounds from the people themselves, not from what you think. To go into the places, to experience difference of all sorts. Using strengths as strength-based education rather than unison-based, to phrase it I guess super gently.

**Ayana:** What do you mean by unison-based? What do you mean by that?

**Grace:** Like sameness. Like teaching to one level, or one set of goals and one set of values that isn't necessarily everyone's values in the real world, teaching to those strengths that are already there.

The interplay between mentorship and the actual practice of implementing what they were learning supported further development of their critical pedagogies.

### Critical Reflection and Self Efficacy

Each of the teachers worked through their own processes of critical reflection, which was highlighted in their narratives. Critical reflection showed up and was enacted through journaling, ongoing inter-dialogue, and/or reflective conversations with the researchers. Meanwhile, negotiating their self-efficacy, an assessment of one's capabilities to attain a desired level of performance in a given endeavor (Bandura, 1977; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007) was also present. Following, we highlight examples of the dance teachers' critical reflection and the resulting process of self-efficacy to demonstrate how these two themes are working in tandem.

While giving her students a worksheet showing young girls doing various ballet positions, before implementing her first lesson in ballet for the BGDSP participants, Hannah was not initially aware of the implications of only including pictures of white girls dancing as a model for Black girls. Hannah critically reflects:

I found pictures, two or three of them were white. And I didn't realize that I had done it. I just pulled the pictures off the internet that looked like it would be the easiest for them to understand, and wow, that isn't something I thought of, but made a lot of sense to me that I should put it so that it is a little more diverse in the pictures, so I did change them. And I was like that coming from such a small town, I mean, we were all white in my classes. That's something that I would never

have thought of before, which is really good for me to understand and to be more aware of. So, I changed it, I didn't even realize I had done it.

Hannah then proceeds to connect this to her self-efficacy,

Last year I was an assistant and was just exploring how to teach. I hadn't ever really taught before so that was my experimental introduction. But, this year I'm the lead teacher, I've...especially in the beginning, I was meeting a lot of new people, and I was kind of a little everywhere and trying to think of, Okay, how do I do this? So that they're going to understand it and also put some of their style, their culture, their personalities into the dance. But also, that they're going to get everything out of it? And then connecting it with STEAM, I think I was struggling a little bit because I was like, okay, so how do I incorporate STEAM into class? How can I combine them so that they can experience both ends? I think that was a little struggle for me.

Similarly, while discussing a lesson that didn't go so well, Sarah critically reflects on her teaching and exhibits moments of pause and reflecting back:

Where is that place in the middle where I'm not having to let go of who I am to support my students. But also acknowledge that they're not me. We are different people. And even though they might have a similar situation closer to each other than it is to me, they still are all very different. It's not like there is them, and there is me. There's a very diverse place that's happening that is constantly... I feel like I don't have it down to the science. It's a lot of pausing...being aware...thinking back, like, Was that a good choice? Maybe that wasn't my best moment. How can I move forward? This is a place where we're all sharing the space and the knowledge. And if you need to share knowledge about where you come from in this moment, you can share that with me.

Sarah attributes her ongoing critical reflection to her own self-efficacy,

When I started teaching last year, my freshman year, fresh out of high school, I think at the time, I thought I was doing okay. But in retrospect, I only had this one skill. I came from a ballet school where they didn't really teach anything else. I had this one thing that I felt very passionate about, really wanted to share, and had tools to share it with people at home who knew ballet or were a part of that community already. But now, I had to introduce it, not just share it, but introduce it to them in a way that was new and meaningful. But this year's been really interesting because I came in, now, I have more skills since I've been in school for a year. I've been doing modern, and jazz, and African. And I have this different set of tools that I didn't have a year ago. And so, I'm walking in, I can play different movement games. It doesn't just have to be technique. We can come in, and we

can start our classes with a name game. “Go around. Say your name. One movement of how you’re feeling today and one movement of something you remember from class last week.”

Both Danielle’s critical reflection and self-efficacy are enacted through her relationship with her students:

I like kids. I have, well, I don’t know if this is assuming, but it feels like I have a connection with kids. I like being able to have that. And then, it just feels like they’re receptive of me for the most part. They still have their days, but it feels like we have a connection. I feel like a lot of them just learned what they’re capable of, because looking at the project as a whole from the beginning, a lot of them were like “Really, do we have to do that?”

The theme of critical reflection and self-efficacy was pervasive throughout each women’s narrative and the ways in which the interplay between the two support their meaning making. Overall the findings demonstrate that navigating race, place, and space, mentorship and practice, and critical reflection and self-efficacy contributed to the urban dance educators’ development of critical pedagogies (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Urban Dance Educators' Emerging Critical Pedagogies



## Discussion

Four dance educators served as participants in this study as we examined their meaning-making processes and the development of their critical pedagogies in an urban STEAM after-school program for Black girls. Overall findings show an ecology of experiences that support the development of their critical pedagogies. First, their own urban dance education training was grounded in critical dance pedagogy and culturally sustaining pedagogies. The dance educators noted that this training and professional development, which included extensive mentorship and hands-on support, was an ongoing interplay between their own teaching practice and the development of their various critical pedagogies. Likewise, throughout their experience teaching in the program, findings show that critical reflection was also an important component of their emerging critical pedagogies and their evolving self-efficacy (Howard, 2003). Within an urban STEAM program that centered the ways of knowing, cultural practices and ways of being of Black

girls, led by Black women professors, each dance educator was tasked with (un)intentionally needing to navigate race, place, and space.

While navigating race, place, and space, the findings also indicate that the dance educators engaged in an ongoing process of acknowledging how their own racial identity influenced their understanding of dance and the material they taught to their students in BGDSP. A CDP lens helped illuminate that they were constantly navigating their own race and how it relates to the race of the students, the cultural wealth of the community in which they were teaching, and the ways in which they enacted their critical pedagogies within the space. This process depicted a heightened need for self-efficacy and even more so an (un)learning of former ways of knowing, all the while teaching and learning new approaches to dance education. Findings show that the dance educators were at various stages of the comfortability continuum with this work.

Similarly, color-blind ideologies (Bonilla-Silva, 2009) in dance education have emerged as a challenge to the permanence of racism in dance, and a belief that race does not influence a person's preferences. The dance educators in this study themselves identified weaknesses in this approach and how they navigate their own role and the seeming incongruence with their racial presence in their dance classes (Farinde & Allen, 2013). Findings show that the dance teachers acknowledged that they value their students' cultural connection to dance and hoped to build on those experiences throughout the program.

In regard to mentorship and practice, the literature is less definitive in describing the role of mentorship and practice among dance educators; however, this study highlights the reciprocal relationships within the program among the faculty members, the dance educators, and students. The dance teachers see their work as an opportunity to not only show the girls about dance, but receive direction and guidance from the faculty on dance-specific knowledge as well as critical and culturally sustaining instructional approaches. According to the findings, this allowed the teachers to grow their own practice as they taught the girls and participated out of their own areas of expertise in the STEAM lab, as Sarah shared. In this vein, findings support the idea that mentorship through coaching, modeling behaviors, and conversational reflection in and through practice is a necessary part of their process towards employing critical pedagogies.

Ongoing critical reflection was a vital part of the process of developing critical pedagogies, including the dance educators' evaluation of their curriculum development and their approaches to instruction. These critical reflective practices worked in tandem with

their evolving self-efficacy, which was often fluid. Critical reflection allowed the dance educators to make adjustments in their lessons, mindsets, pedagogy, and classroom management as needed to meet the diverse needs of their students. Building self-efficacy is not a concept that is as clearly articulated among dance teachers who work with students who are from different racial/ethnic, social, or economic backgrounds than themselves. When it came to their own self-efficacy, several of the dance educators expressed necessary growth that they had to experience as a result of where they were from, their own identities and lived experiences in and outside of the program, in addition to navigating differences and similarities with their dance students. The question is then raised about the need to understand how the teachers view their skills and if there is a need for further support in the program before they can be confident in their support of their students.

### **Implications/Conclusions**

Although research has revealed the benefits of the arts, such as positive youth development and identity (Catterall, 2012; Creedon, 2011), students who attend schools in low socioeconomic urban schools have limited access to the arts, particularly dance instruction (Kraehe et al., 2016). Thus, afterschool programs such as BGDSP have the potential to provide students access to culturally congruent STEAM learning such as dance, design, and computing through affordable and effective means. Through understanding power dynamics at play and empowering students in their classrooms, urban dance educators can develop transformative relationships with their students, which could ultimately lead to their academic growth and success (Ladson-Billings, 1995). These perspectives are especially pertinent for urban dance education and urban education at large.

In order to effectively teach in urban informal or formal programs, a critical examination of the historical and socio-political contexts, resources, and existing systems must be unpacked (Change & Hogans, 2019; Dumas, 2016). This complex understanding must begin with the teacher educators, such as the Black women faculty in this study. Findings from this study further support the need for urban dance educators to first be trained by teacher educators who themselves employ critical dance and culturally sustaining pedagogies in their own practices. This has significant implications for the field of dance education, as currently it is significantly underrepresented with BIPOC dance faculty and prospective dance teachers (Risner, 2007), centers Eurocentric genres and norms in dance, and often lacks critical dance perspectives (Kerr-Berry, 2012, McCarthy-Brown, 2014).

Therefore, providing critical mentorship and practice for urban dance educators to themselves engage in CDP and CSP in their own practices is essential.

What also emerged in the findings are concepts that support and build on the existing literature that CDP is essential when interrogating power and whiteness in the discipline of dance (McCarthy-Brown, 2017), and that CSP is a “lifeway” to transformative education (Paris & Alim, 2017). When these two pedagogical perspectives work in tandem, they act as, metaphorically speaking, both the foundation and the sky, or the desired outcomes of becoming critical dance and culturally sustaining pedagogues in urban dance education. Urban dance educators must themselves be trained by teacher educators who are rooted in and employ CDP and CSP in order for the dance educators to themselves be able to employ and become self-efficacious with CDP and CSP in their own teaching practice. The emerging critical pedagogies of urban dance educators in this study are “necessary to honor, value, and center the rich and varied practices of communities of color, and is a necessary pedagogy for helping shape access to power in a changing nation” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 6).

Using critical pedagogies such as CDP and CSP to approach dance pedagogy supports dance teachers, regardless of race, in providing a healthy and supportive dance class experience. These approaches are particularly important when teaching in urban dance contexts. Additionally, making dance more accessible to students in urban settings as a mode of learning and form of artistic expression has the potential to support long-term participation and expand the pipeline of racially and ethnically diverse dance professionals who remain underrepresented in their roles as artists in dance companies and within dance education.

## Acknowledgements

*This study was supported by the Drexel University ExCITE Center and the West Philadelphia Promise Neighborhood Grant, funded by the United States Department of Education (Grant # U215N160055). We are so grateful to work with the beautiful Black girls of BGDSP, their families, and the Drexel University Dornsife Center for Neighborhood Partnerships, which hosts our program.*

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