Introduction to Critical Folkdance Pedagogy: Around the World in 7 Folkdances

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### Questions to Consider

| Can culture be better understood as an action instead of a noun? |
| Is there a joint experience between the person watching (researcher) and the person dancing, like a hermeneutical experience? |
| How do performances impact the way we interpret culture and how do we experience/engage in it? |
| What can we do as a community to be active participants in Critical Folkdance Pedagogy for diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging? |
| What is the relationship between performance and power? Can we use CFP to advocate and include marginalized voices and cultures? |
What is Critical Folkdance Pedagogy?

Expresses a performance of liberation and searches for performative action-based dance as potential for peaceful action.

Creates possibilities of peaceful resistance in educational spaces. Comes from anthropology, where Victor Turner first understood that public performances in a culture are like a ‘social drama’ where members work out their relationships and ideas.

Is a way for cultures to produce and reproduce themselves. The performances teach societies about competition, loyalty, collaboration and other cultural values.

Comes from the tradition of Critical Performance Ethnography, which interrogates personal and societal consequences that may highlight perspectives in social justice. (Dwight Conquergood)

Includes a moral scope of hope within a community.
Dwight Conquergood: The Listener, Critical Performance Ethnography

First triad:
The researcher becomes a listener instead of a spectator and we take in the experience as a co-performance.

Second Triad:
Praxis is used to practically apply performances or have insights about performances.

Third triad:
1) citizenship, creativity and critique
2) analysis, artistry, activism
3) inquiry, imagination, intervention to understand how culture is used in order to teach, challenge and create.

DounDoumba: “Dance of the Strong Man”

Brief explanation before viewing:

Traditionally DounDoumba means the biggest drum and also a community social dance where a community of men, of all different ages, gather around in the village square around a mangrove tree. The elders coordinate the dance and give permission to the older boys, who then encourage the younger boys. Personal conflict is also handled through dance. The oldest encourage their younger members to dance to the sound of the Doundoumba rhythms.

https://youtu.be/MjhXfRCIarM

This performance represents Dance of the Strong Man” by Les Ballet Africains, a renowned Guinean ballet company.
Gender and Performance

- Women are also part of this rite of passage where this process “penetrates all aspects of society, everyone is required to pass through it, and is designed in such a way as to teach all societal members about life” (p. 65, Abiola).

- For women, these steps can be traced back to about one hundred years. In the steps, the dances “depict an egalitarian universe where men and women share equally in the inception, maintenance and preservation of the Mandinka domain” (p. 26, Abiola).

- The universal concepts of not only dance celebrations, but also how the cosmos and the earth are viewed, are unified within the Mandinka culture. Age-grade dances like this one maintain 15 rhythms and unchanged root steps, regardless of the different rhythms being played.

Links

- Community Dance in Guinea: https://youtu.be/Zx5G3c46Y28
- Documentary clip on Les Ballets Africains: https://youtu.be/MXg8WdqBkQo
- Sample Coed dance: https://youtu.be/S_Gsaj4CPAM
- All-women dance clip: https://youtu.be/kYFOuHISmHA
- Dissertation about building community: https://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu:168985/datastream/PDF/view

Cumbia: A Triethnic Mixture from Colombia

- Originated on the banks of the Magdalene River in Barranquilla, Colombia.
- Uses African rhythms and the Native Gaita flute.
- It now represents the sound of popular culture in Latin America.

https://youtu.be/55mpzrRHmFA  

https://youtu.be/3wN5YcDTx0Y  
In this video Toto la Momposina sings El Pescador, the fisherman, a traditional Cumbia. May 13 2015.

https://youtu.be/GMZtkctRt1Q  
Cumbia performed by San Martin in La Plaza Colonial. Sept 17, 2011.

http://hdl.handle.net/2142/80110
Hula: The Heartbeat of Hawaii

- Mostly honoring land and unpredictable behavior of volcanoes personified by Pele. Stories are about “love, hate, passion, betrayal, revenge, vulnerability and loyalty” (p28 Seiden). She, Pele, is in search of a home, of a place of belonging.

- Hula links humans to higher power and honoring the land.

- The mele’s, or chants, had to be memorized since there was no written language.

- Kuamo'o o'lelo o ka hula, the back story to Hula, is a folkdance which preserves the stories of the ancestors. It links the dancer to the universe through movements that symbolize the myths and legends memorized and told through memory and word. https://youtu.be/upK-xODTd50

- National Geographic clip: https://youtu.be/BLjwluzYfM4

- Heartbeat of the Hawaiian People: https://youtu.be/4vPueyJqOuA

Nihon Buyo: Japanese Dance

- In 712 Kojiki was oldest Japanese text, and the dance was dedicated to the Sun Goddess.

- “In Japanese traditional performance circles (unlike Western dance genres, such as ballet or modern dance), dancers continue dancing to advanced ages” (p38, Hahn).

- Simplicity, irregularity, suggestion and impermanence are part of the Japanese Dance.

- The feet are firmly grounded. “The connection to the bodies ki energy to the Earth is via tactile contact with the soles of the feet. This is an energetic transmission flow between the dancer and the ground.” (p. 63 Hahn)

- [https://youtu.be/sMq90zFzvRs](https://youtu.be/sMq90zFzvRs) (July 18, 2015)

Flamenco

- The music from Andalusia, the southern most part of Spain.
- The gypsies may have been the catalysts, but it was developed by a mixture of Moors and Jews who were driven out of Spain due to the intolerance of Christians.
- Performed in houses and caves until the 18th century.
- Began in the 19th century as a musical style that was once considered low stuff from commoners, of the people.
- They learned from one another by listening and few performers are able to read any music. Ole comes from the Moorish for “by allah”.
- A culture of spontaneous emotion, for those who were/are hungry, homeless and poor.
- Releases feelings and expresses a tragic human condition.
- A place to be oneself and do away with worldly cares.

[YouTube Video](https://youtu.be/X5QJ_9aQuDO)
Flamenco documentary, July 2015.

Bharathanatyam: Southern India

- Oldest traditional Indian dance. Tamil Nadu, 2nd century BC.
- Devadasi performed in temples.
- One of the Hindu gods—Shiva—represents the cosmic dancer, who destroys the negative to bring the positive.
- Banned by British in 1910.
- Still practiced today.

Reference: [https://paipa.in/history-of-bharatnatyam.html](https://paipa.in/history-of-bharatnatyam.html)
Dabkeh: Palestine

- Peasant celebratory dance; part of the folklore revival of 1967.
- Emblem of Palestinian National Identity.
- Crosses all class divisions as a political identity.
- Symbolic meaning of oppression, dispossession and resistance.
- In 1970, became a Social activity for youth in West Bank.
- Solidarity among indigenous people “an active means of resistance, asserting national presence on the land with every stomp of the circling line” (p118 Rowe).

https://youtu.be/erfqdPH7iyY
The Art of Palestinian Dabke, Jan 12 2021.

https://youtu.be/FS4mNNJaC0Y
Palestinians perform Palestinian Dabke in front of the Israeli snipers.

Evaluation of Critical Folkdance Pedagogy

**Weaknesses:**
- Not always able to experience it in person.
- Performances are not static: always changing, evolving.
- Favors community over individuality.
- We may not always connect with the performance.
- The performances may seem trivial or superficial.
- Takes time to build reciprocity, commitment and action.

**Strengths:**
- Introduces us to other cultural perspectives.
- Imagines alternative ways to build solidarity among communities.
- Builds awareness of how people create embodied social change, social classes.
- Alternative, peaceful ways to embrace marginalized cultures.
- Addresses power struggle between dominant cultures and grassroots practices.
Conclusion

Why do people continue to work so hard to keep dances alive? What is the payoff?

- Unity and strength in groups, ancestral knowledge, wisdom, corporeal awareness, freedom to move and travel in public and private spaces.

- Socio-economic constraints are limiting and problematic, but love of self, love of land, love of cultural identity is alive and actively present.
Final recommendations

- Change our rationale and understanding of folkdance.
- Become aware of the reasons we have ignored dance as a pedagogical tool in education.
- Realize how dance is used to oppress and liberate cultural knowledge.
- Speak and comparatively learn from the attitudes and intentions of folk dance cultures in hopes of advancing a politics of peace.
- Respectfully and critically integrate dance back into our social and educational fabric.
- Teach dance to others, with others on layman’s terms, to create a space to heal and celebrate within.
Where do we go from here?

How can we use Critical Folkdance Pedagogy to include marginalized people in our communities? What would it look like?

In what capacity are we able to learn and grow by sharing different cultural perspectives?

How comfortable or uncomfortable would you be in joining a community of dance as a practice for solidarity and why?