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FEATURE ARTICLE

"I Wish Dance Class NEVER Ended": An Activist Approach to Teaching Dance

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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to respond to the calls for dance educators to explore alternatives to harmful authoritarian teaching practices, we propose that one such route forward is an Activist Approach to teaching, which was originally developed in physical education contexts as a student-centered, inquiry-based approach that attends to issues of embodiment while listening and responding to students over time. The purpose of this study is to describe what an Activist Approach to teaching looks like in dance. Specifically, we discuss how we used an Activist Approach in an after-school dance club to co-create a curriculum with youth dancers. Data collection occurred for one year of dance club at middle school charter school in a southwest border community. We describe and reflect on our process of co-creating the learning environment and co-constructing the curriculum with the dancers to facilitate their interests, motivation, and learning.

KEYWORDS

Student-centered pedagogy; dance; dance education; adolescents; activist approach to teaching

> "Being a good [dance] teacher requires you to be willing to listen to other people, to listen to the input from the students, and being able to factor in that, you know, you're going to have a lesson plan, but it's not going to go like that exactly . . .because you're working with kids, and they can be unpredictable." (Darla—7th grader)

> "It was really fun that we could do our own style of hip hop and we don't have to go by the rules." (Kat—7th grader)

From the whirlwinds of chaos that compose middle school after-school clubs, we start with the voices of two adolescent dancers as they articulate both directly and indirectly their needs and dreams for what dance might be. Their thoughts reveal voices unencumbered by years of silence, years of practice that stifles creativity and choice, and years of tradition that has taught them what dance "ought to be" (Green 1999; Alterowitz 2014). It is through and with student dancers' voices that we as teachers might learn to see and think and dream differently about dance. We are fortunate to be in a time where dance pedagogies are moving from behind the curtains of silence and into the spotlight where traditional authoritarian practices can be challenged and changed (Lakes 2005; Barr and Oliver 2016).

Over time, dance pedagogies have evolved and become codified in an effort to meet the needs of the dancers and/or choreographers. However, not all of these practices are healthy, practical, or beneficial for all parties (Alterowitz 2014). For example, dance educator and somaticist Robin Lakes (2005) writes, "Specific authoritarian teaching behaviors evidenced in dance technique classes … can escalate to humiliation of students for making errors, screaming, sarcasm, mocking, belittlement, barbed humor, and bullying. Questions are dismissed or squelched and the questioners demeaned" (4).

Dance educator Ann Kipling Brown (2014) further illuminates how the body itself becomes objectified and thus controlled and manipulated by dance teachers for their own benefit. As a result, dancers become conditioned into structures and patterns of silencing where "teachers' behaviours provide subtle but constant indications for students of how they do not 'measure up'" (182). Similarly, dance scholar Jill Green (1999) writes about teachers maintaining control through tacit rules that afford their status of power over students: "In a sense, dance students give their bodies to their teacher" (81). Dance educators Sherrie Barr and Wendy Oliver (2016) echo this assertion and take it one step further as they problematize how dance teachers use the myth of the "perfect dance body" to assess dancers' potential before they ever see them dance.

While we seem to have allowed these codified forms to become above reproach because "they work" (Green 1999; Lakes 2005), we question for whom do these practices work, in what context, to what extent, and at whose expense? As dance scholars have grappled with these types of questions for decades, they have started to problematize and challenge traditional authoritarian pedagogies in hopes that dance educators will move beyond a cyclical perpetuation, regurgitating what was done to them

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(Green 1999; Barr and Oliver 2016). We echo these scholars in the appeal that authoritarian structures in dance pedagogy do not offer mutually beneficial contexts of respect but rather operate with the prospect of abuse, humiliation, and intimidation intensified by the imbalance of power within the classroom and studio (Lakes 2005; Fitzgerald 2017).

Given this critique, dance scholars have offered alternative pedagogical lenses such as somatic practices (Dragon 2015; Berg 2017), feminist pedagogies (Stinson 1998; Alterowitz 2014; Barr and Oliver 2016), and community as well as student-centered approaches (Fitzgerald 2017) in order to reduce the forms and effects of the abuse dancers experience (Green 1999; Lakes 2005). In an attempt to help students more fully embody and come alive in their movements, somatic practitioners desire whole-person integration within dance practices for the dancers to listen to themselves, "empowering themselves to make meaning and decisions and to take action" (Dragon 2015, 30).

While somatic practices focus on the embodied knowledge of the individual (Berg 2017), feminist pedagogies make an appeal for a democratic and collaborative environment where individual voices matter as we seek collective flourishing for all (Stinson 1998; Alterowitz 2014). Barr and Oliver (2016) describe a holistic version of dance where teachers "learn about their students' thoughts and feelings regarding their dance and life experiences, and then foster a mutual respect for the many individual voices present in the classroom" (109). In line with somatic and feminist pedagogies, dance educator Mary Fitzgerald (2017) in her attempts to move beyond authoritarian practices writes about her shifts from instructor to facilitator. Using community and student-centered approaches in her dance contexts, Fitzgerald works to bring students' voices into the conversation about how to best shape the course agenda, even taking her university dancers into the community to work in settings where people might not otherwise have access to dance.

While there are various alternatives to authoritarian practices such as somatic, feminist, and community/student-centered pedagogies, "educators agree that there is a need for further reconceptualization of dance training in the 21st century" (Fitzgerald 2017, 1). With this continued appeal for change, like the others before us (Lakes 2005; Barr and Oliver 2016), our intent is to challenge authoritarian practices so that we might imagine with our dancers empowering spaces and begin to co-create these environments where all can flourish.

An Activist Approach to Teaching

Challenging Authoritarian Practices

As dance teachers, critics, parents, and students have seen a need for a different route forward, one avenue emerges in the Activist Approach to teaching (Oliver and Kirk 2015). The Activist Approach, grounded in feminist, anti-racist, and critical pedagogies (e.g., Welch 1990; Hill Collins 1990; hooks 1994; Giroux 1997; Stinson 1998; Davies 2000; Weis and Fine 2004), offers a process for working with people to co-create both the curriculum and a physically and emotionally safe environment in which learning can happen. This Activist Approach first emerged in physical education (PE) pedagogy as a way to engage disengaged girls by inquiring into their perceptions about PE, identifying and negotiating the barriers that hindered their participation, and creating meaningful experiences by understanding what facilitated their learning as they co-constructed their physical activity choices (Oliver and Lalik 2000; Oliver, Hamzeh, and McCaughtry. 2009).

While this approach originally developed with and for middle school girls in a PE education context (Oliver and Lalik 2000), the approach has since expanded to include coeducational PE classes (Oliver and Oesterreich 2013), PE pre-service teachers, work in schools with youth (Luguetti and Oliver 2019), and after-school settings (Luguetti et al. 2015). The researchers have engaged contexts around the world (Walseth, Engebretsen, and Elvebakk 2018) in traditional school settings (Lamb, Oliver, and Kirk 2018) as well as with socially vulnerable youth in sport settings (Luguetti et al. 2015) and firefighting camps for girls (Lambert 2018).

Similar to some elements used in dance pedagogies as described above, the Activist Approach as described by physical education scholars Kimberly Oliver and David Kirk (2015) unites the critical tenets of student-centered pedagogy, attentiveness to issues of embodiment, inquiry-based education centered in action, and listening and responding to students over time. Looking at the tenets of an Activist Approach, we find a commitment to collaboration among participants, a progression beyond solely identifying *what is* but imagining together *what might be*, and an understanding that this change begins at a microlevel.

Student-Centered Pedagogy

Similar to what we see in dance contexts with student-centered pedagogy (Fitzgerald 2017), PE contexts have shown that student-centered approaches help promote engagement and willingness to participate (Enright and O'Sullivan 2010; Fisette and Walton 2011). As communal

relationships and trust build between teacher/student and student/student, teachers as facilitators seek to meet the students where they are to work collectively *with* the students toward what might be (Oliver and Kirk 2015). Education scholar Alison Cook-Sather (2002) describes the importance of authorizing student voices in the learning, involving not only listening and creating spaces for students to speak but also responding in-kind with action to what was heard or not heard.

Operating from this perspective challenges the traditional hierarchy of teacher-student power assigned in educational settings (Cook-Sather 2002; Fisette and Walton 2011), shifting from teachers recycling the same old units as they make and control all the decisions into a student-centered place where students have voice and agency. Such a practice involves negotiation and investigations into student interests to better understand how to construct an environment where learning can best occur (Luguetti et al. 2015; Walseth, Engebretsen, and Elvebakk 2018).

Attending to Issues of Embodiment

While attending to issues of embodiment may sound obvious for physical activity, even more so for dance settings, embodiment goes beyond simply physically executing movements. With particular regard to work done with girls in PE settings:

> Activists work from the stance that until young girls can name the forms of inequities that contribute to how they are learning to think and feel about their bodies and physical activity, educators will not have the necessary knowledge with which to assist girls in the process of coming to value the physically active life. (Oliver and Kirk 2015, 44)

In recognizing societal norms and pressures, addressing embodiment acknowledges the students' concerns rather than operating from a teacher's assumptions of their experiences. Attending to issues of embodiment takes time, but recognizing matters of inequity and offering space for students to study their embodiment allows for an exposure and understanding of the factors influencing their own embodied experiences (Fisette and Walton 2011).

Inquiry-Based Learning Centered in Action

In efforts to promote student voice and to better understand what facilitates and hinders students' interests, motivation, and learning, the tenet of inquiry-based learning centered *in* action combines critical inquiry and critical pedagogy (Giroux 1997). Taking the response beyond advocacy *for* students to engaging the process *with* students, this active engagement of the learner helps facilitate their interest (Oliver and Hamzeh 2010; Fisette and Walton 2011). By questioning the status quo coupled with accompanying action, students become instigators and problem-solvers within their own contexts (Enright and O'Sullivan 2010; Fitzgerald 2017). Understanding what facilitators and barriers students encounter, a level of responsibility and ownership emerges as the students enter this process of the co-creation of possibilities beyond the status quo. This does not indicate that it becomes a free-for-all where whatever the students want they get, but rather a place where teachers and students work to improve their learning opportunities.

Listening and Responding to Students over Time

Listening and responding to students over time allows the participants to co-create the learning environment and curriculum to understand and act upon what facilitates and hinders their interest, motivation, and learning. Again, it takes time to develop relationships and correspondence as students learn to communicate, teachers learn to listen, and the collective learns how to move forward negotiating with each other and their barriers in order to create that which might be (Oliver and Kirk 2015). This becomes a continual process to seek to understand each other, rather than a one-time questioning that produces an outcome frozen in time.

Our pedagogy, thus, becomes a responsive process with a commitment to inquiry and action centered in student voice as integral to the construction of the environment and curriculum. The listening and responding cycle continues over the course of the class timeframe to create space for elaboration and creativity as the group continues to critically examine their processes and engagement (Oliver and Lalik 2000). This process of listening and responding is particularly evident within the student-centered inquiry *as* curriculum model below.

Student-Centered Inquiry as Curriculum

Student-Centered Inquiry <u>as</u> Curriculum (Oliver and Oesterreich 2013) is a process often executed in an Activist Approach as a way of integrating student-centered pedagogy, attentiveness to issues of embodiment, inquiry-based learning centered *in* action, and listening and responding to students over time (Oliver and Oesterreich 2013). Groups begin by building the foundation together by inquiring into students' perceptions about PE (or dance), what makes a physically and emotionally safe learning environment, what changes they would like to see in PE (or dance), and their interests in physical activity. Fostering mutuality, the

group will then co-create the ways of working with which the class will operate; if the ways of working cease to work, the group reevaluates to help them move forward well. Next, students review expected learning standards and identify areas of interest to focus their attention.

Next steps include broadening students' perspectives about what is possible with respect to physical activity content. This is done through the use of sampler lessons to help students begin to identify the teaching and learning styles that best help them learn as well as movement concepts that they would like to know more about. Student data again are gathered and analyzed to help mold the path forward. After this, a cyclical process begins of planning, responding to students, listening to respond, and analyzing responses as thematic units explore relevant and meaningful material for students to engage in physical activity.

We believe that an Activist Approach (Oliver and Kirk 2015) to teaching is one way we can continue to challenge the authoritarian practices (Lakes 2005) so often employed in dance education. While scholars point to a desire for dance to evolve, "it holds so tightly to its past, to what made it successful already, that its rootedness impedes progress" (Alterowitz 2014, 11). Fear of change often stifles creativity and growth, but if we hope for dance pedagogy to become less authoritarian and more humane, then generations of dance teachers need to model student-centered pedagogies. Dance teachers will teach in the ways with which they have been taught (Kipling Brown 2014). We cannot break the abuse found in dance classes unless teachers teach fundamentally differently than how they have done before. Thus, the purpose of this study is to describe what an Activist Approach to teaching looks like in dance. Specifically, we discuss how we used an Activist Approach in an after-school dance club to co-create a curriculum with youth dancers.

Methodology

This is a participatory action research project. Participatory action research draws participants in as co-researchers with the desire to "engage people in taking action on their own behalf as part of their own communities" (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 58). This methodology is at once about understanding and about action.

Setting and Participants

This study took place in a K-8 charter school located in a southwest border community in a dance club that ran between the months of January–May 2019 and August–November 2019. The charter school was developed eight years prior with a focus on dual language acquisition and project-based learning. The school has one class per grade, K-8, for a total of 154 students in the entire school. While part of the school's charter is daily physical activity, the school does not offer after-school sports or intramural programs. Thus, students' opportunities to engage in physical activity are limited to PE and daily walking routines.

As such, the local university partnered with the school to create more physical activity opportunities for its students. One such program offered by university faculty and students is an after-school dance club. This study took place in the after-school dance club, created with and for middle school (sixth-eighth grade) boys and girls. Study participants were recruited from the club, but participation in the research was not required for club participation. Given that this study cut across two different academic years, the sixth- to eighth-grade participants changed. We had eight dancers (six girls, two boys) in the first session, 12 in the second (10 girls, two boys), and six overlapping both semesters. Three adults also participated in the club: one PhD student who served as the club facilitator (Jackie Beth) as well as one college professor (Raquel) and one professor (Kim) who served as participant observers. All adult participants had varying levels of experience using an Activist Approach.

Data Collection

Data collection happened in two phases. The first phase began in January 2019 and continued through May 2019. Participants met immediately after school every Thursday from 3:15–4:15 for 15 weeks. The second phase ran from August 2019 through the end of November 2019. Participants met immediately after school every Monday from 3:15–4:15 for nine weeks.

Data Sources

We used a variety of data collection techniques including video footage of all club sessions, Jackie Beth's researcher journal, participant observer field notes, student journals, ongoing journal communications between Jackie Beth and the youth, youth debriefing sessions following each club, and weekly debriefings with the three adults the day after club.

After each club session, Jackie Beth made personal journal notes in relation to dance curriculum development and using an Activist Approach (Oliver and Kirk 2015) in dance, as well as reviewed the video to note things she missed and how she used the Activist Approach. She would then type these personal notes and e-mail them to everyone. Additionally, Kim would

write field notes after club based on what generally happened and with regard to using an Activist Approach and e-mail everyone these notes.

All adult participants read this documentation prior to their debriefing meeting the next day. Here we discussed what happened, what aspects of the Activist Approach we were using, challenges faced, thoughts on negotiating these challenges, and brainstormed for the upcoming club session. We also discussed how an Activist Approach looked (or needed to look) different in a dance context than in PE where this work originally developed. Jackie Beth transcribed debriefing meetings and made notes for future planning. Then we planned for the next session, implemented the session, and the process continued each week throughout the study.

In addition to researcher-generated data, we collected student data for use in two ways: to have an understanding of their experiences and to have a club that reflected what they needed. All of this was a process over time, honoring the listening to respond piece of the Activist Approach (Oliver and Kirk 2015). Across the course of the club, students were asked to engage in particular writings and discussions to help us better understand what facilitated and hindered their interest, motivation, and learning within the club. These data were reviewed weekly and used in our planning for upcoming club sessions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study was three-fold. Level 1 included debriefings after each session to analyze weekly data and plan for upcoming sessions. Level 2 analysis involved Jackie Beth and Kim reading through all transcripts, researcher journals, and student-generated data. Individually, we jotted down what caught our attention. Next, we each shared our interpretations, discussed our thoughts, and made further notes to keep in mind, noticing that one tended toward details and the other toward the broader framework of activist teaching. For Level 3 analysis, we accumulated data on a board, posting illustrations of how we were using the four critical elements of an Activist Approach. From these analyses, we developed our paper with regards to identifying what an Activist Approach looked like in a dance context.

Findings

In this section, we discuss what an Activist Approach looks like in an after-school dance club. The findings are divided into two parts. The first describes the progression of tasks and dance activities of the after-school dance club curriculum. For the sake of space, we created a table to illustrate the week-to-week content tasks for the first session (see Table 1). The second part describes our process of co-creating the dance club with the dancers.

"I Like that We Got to Learn Different Types of Dance"

Dance Club Curriculum Overview

In addition to the weekly dance and movement tasks outlined in Table 1, this next section includes two vignettes that embed the *processes of co-creating* the dance club with our dancers. We use vignettes in order to capture the feel of the club, the experiences we shared, and the challenges we negotiated together. We start by painting a picture of the context with which we worked.

"Be Open-Minded"

Co-Creating a Class Environment

> *"Sometimes I wish my teachers knew that I have random pains." (Sunny)*
>
> *"The teacher should teach, be fun, be supportive, and be understanding . . . [whereas] the student should do all the same things." (Lynn)*
>
> *"They know what they need to have it work. People just don't ask." (Kim-adult participant)*

As the school bell rang, the dancers bustled through the door of the small, tiled PE room with emotion and lively conversations after a long day of learning as they lined the edges of the room with backpacks, cellos, violins, school projects, jackets, lunch boxes, and shoes. We greeted the dancers and started the day with ice-breakers and snacks to help us get to know our new dancer friends as we launched into this adventure together.

Through journals, poster-sized sticky-notes, and group conversations, immediately we began inquiring into the students' perceptions of what a "dance club should be." We would learn that the dancers valued spaces where they "could dance with their friends," "no one was made fun of," and we "accept everyone." They confided in us that, "I get embarrassed when I have to ask a clarifying question about a move" and "when dancing in front of people," and "I get frustrated when I can't do most things other people do." They helped us understand that for a dance environment to be physically and emotionally safe there should be no "calling someone names," "teasing people, being mean/harsh," or "bullying." We should also be aware of "pushing our selves too far," "knowing our limits," as well as to "try to be kind, and not laugh at people when they mess up or if they do something funny." In discussing our roles as

Table 1. Week-to-week dance club curriculum overview.

Day	Major focus (+sub focus)	Club Objectives	Activist Approach Process
1	Body (hip hop)	- Icebreakers: name game, partnering activities - Introduce: body principles, hip hop vocabulary - Co-create choreography	*Building the foundation*: Student perception data - What do you want your teachers to know? - What did you learn? *Sampler Lessons—Broadening student perspectives*
2	Time (modern/step)	- Icebreakers: name spelling, partnering - Introduce: time principles, modern/step approaches - Co-create choreography	*Building the foundation*: Student perception data - In dance, sometimes I wish … I get frustrated when … I get embarrassed when … I have fun when … *Sampler Lessons—Broadening student perspectives*
3	Improvisation (dance as games)	- Get to know club members' perspectives - Practice: improvisation, making choices, teaching others - T-shirt design	*Building the foundation*: Student perception data - What makes a physically/emotionally safe learning environment? -What hinders a physically/emotionally safe learning environment? -What does bullying look like? *Sampler Lessons—Broadening student perspectives*
4	Effort (ballet, line dance)	- Introduce: effort principles, ballet/line dance approaches - Practice: improvisation skills - Develop "Ways of Working"	*Building the foundation*: Student perception data -What is a teacher's/student's role in the classroom? -Sometimes I wish my teachers knew that … *Sampler Lessons—Broadening student perspectives*
5	Space (choreography)	- Practice: strategizing how to learn and remember movement material, choreography skills, attending to use of space	*Sampler Lessons—Broadening student perspectives* *Agree to Ways of Working* *Planning with students* -Choices to move forward: personal/public choreography experience
6	Choreography	- Practice: strategizing how to learn and remember movement material, choreography skills, strategies/practice for teaching choreography to others	*Responding to students* -Creating choreography for their teachers
7	Choreography	- Continue: previous week's choreography practice attending to space, strategizing learning and remembering movement material, teaching	*Review Ways of Working*
8	Choreography (jumping)	- Choreography practice: transitions, time, speed, jumping strategies - Reflect: performance experience	*Listening to respond*: -Debrief performance experience
9	Choreography	- Choreography practice: space, time, speed, co-creation - Reflect: what's working, what would change to make better, how everyone can contribute to making the club environment great -Plan for future weeks	*Listening to respond*: -What is working in dance club? -What can we do in dance club to make things better? *Planning*
10	Choreography	- Brainstorm for future sessions - Choreography practice: levels, movement potential, group work, characterization, abstraction - Create call/response	*Planning* *Responding to students*
11	Choreography (call/response, feedback)	- Practice: improvisation through capoeira, giving feedback	*Responding to students*: -Potluck brainstorming
12	Choreography	- Choreography practice: props (jump bands, scarves), teaching/learning choreography from each other, giving feedback	*Responding to students*: -Sharing choreography students prepared outside of club
13	Choreography	- Explore: props with rhythm skills - Choreography practice: teaching, improvisation, partnering, props	*Responding to students*: -Music choices
14	Choreography	- Debrief the semester - Brainstorm future sessions - Choreography practice: building sequencing	*Listening to respond*: -What have you enjoyed? What kinds of things would you like to see added for next year? What advice do you have about recruiting students for next year? -Let's think about the structure of the club. How did that work for you? Why? What recommendations do you have about the structure? What did you notice about the performance portions vs. the play aspects of the club? -Talk about the journaling process. -Describe an example of how we did something in dance club that reflected an idea you or another dancer had. -What example can you give of something that we did in dance club that connects with something outside of school?
15	Choreography	- Create choreography and movement options - Enjoy student-planned potluck! - Write notes to club members	*Responding to students*

students and teachers in this process, several of the dancers recognized the shared responsibilities for making a safe dance environment. For example, Darla writes, "The teacher should facilitate, teach, learn, help and listen . . . . [The student should] teach, learn, help and pay attention." Similarly, Lynn writes, "The teacher should teach, be fun, be supportive, and be understanding . . . [whereas] the student should do all the same things." (See Table 1 for detailed questions.)

Given all this information, we worked as a group to develop our "Ways of Working" understanding that both students and teachers have responsibilities for making the club work. We agreed to "be safe," "include everyone," "be open-minded," and "be respectful." By co-creating our ways of working with the dancers, they revealed a willingness to try new things and how they anticipated our group operating together where all parties help shoulder the ownership.

Behind the scenes, in addition to our work with the dancers, Jackie Beth, Kim, and Raquel also spent a great deal of time around a conference table discussing how to implement an Activist Approach in a dance context. We spent hours talking about how to best gather student input, what that process might look like, and challenges that emerged week by week reminding each other that this takes time and that we need to "afford each other grace" as we learn to work together. These conversations were integral to our abilities to listen and respond to our dancers. Jackie Beth and Kim discussed ideas about structuring how we might weave in student input in the beginning.

Jackie Beth: My thought is, for the next few weeks, keeping having mini-breaks of saying, "Everybody, real quick, you've got 25 seconds. Go write: 'Sometimes I have fun in dance when . . . '"

Kim: I liked the multiple breaks. I think it's useful-physically useful . . . It's never too much of any one thing.

While we recognized that we could have collected all student input in one session like in high school PE, this was an after-school club for middle schoolers who had been sitting all day; thus, we wanted to start by dancing. As such, we intentionally segmented across days and across individual sessions when and how we gathered the dancers' input. We also built into each club session spaces to echo back what we believed we were hearing, which gave us an opportunity to test our theories and the dancers the chance to correct any misunderstandings and add additional information.

In addition to discussing how to best gather input for designing our class environment, we also talked about how to manage the various class environmental challenges that emerged including the various participation patterns of the dancers and how they contributed to the ways we agreed to work together. There were four highly participative seventh-grade girls who were friends and often hung on each other while dancing; another seventh-grade girl that marched to the beat of her own drum, eager to share her dance experience and often found camaraderie with the adults; one eighth-grade girl with sporadic attendance; and two boys who also hung all over each other, contributing boisterous vocals as they utilized all the space in the room no matter what we were doing. Because this was a club designed to meet the needs of the group, we wanted to be respectful of the various forms of engagement, yet also be mindful of how different participation patterns might influence others. Raquel and Jackie Beth discuss this challenge for variance in participation considering Mario's engagement in club the day before:

Raquel: It's interesting to see how somebody who is a teacher who is very teacher-centered would look at him and say, "He's off task, and he's not doing what he's supposed to be doing, and he's causing problems . . . " Versus somebody who's more student-centered can see it as, "Well, he's just exploring the space." Or . . . he doesn't like to be told exactly what to do and how to do it. He's not one of those kids . . . He likes to do it in his own way.

Jackie Beth: In his journal . . . he just wrote, "Thank you teachers . . . " It was his offering of being thankful for being there.

Raquel: And I think somebody like that probably has a lot of harping on him all day long . . . so it's probably nice for him to just kind of do what he wants to do for a little bit . . . still being on task.

As we attended to the physical and emotional space, we also noted patterns that could potentially disrupt our abilities to be "open-minded" and "respectful" to others as we had agreed upon in our Ways of Working. Whereas some behaviors challenged the flow of the club, others influenced the perceptions of the dancers. On the first day we met, Sunny was extremely vocal about her dislike of ballet, drawing in her journal: NO BALLET. Her aggression toward not having ballet left others feeling hesitant to express their enjoyment of it. Darla, on the other hand, in response to our poster board prompt of "What is Dance," wrote "pirouette, exams (RAD), plié, grade jeté, grand plié, tendu," indicating her experience and interest in ballet. Part of what we discussed as adults involved the need for everyone to

be open-minded about the various dance forms if we were to respect all club members.

Jackie Beth: And I don't know if I inadvertently reinforced the "no ballet" when I said, "Modern was kind of a rebellion against ballet," and as soon as I said it, I thought, "I should have used some like- 'codified dance' moves where they wanted to explore." So, having hindsight, I think I would have rephrased it … But of recognizing on behalf of other people that Raquel may really enjoy it [ballet]. And for a club, we're participating together.

Raquel: Right. And I think when you do have your Ways of Working … like being open-minded … you can pull from your ways of working and say, "Ok, y'all … our ways of working are being open-minded and respecting other people's views and opinions, so we're going to try ballet today … " We did agree that we were all going to be open-minded and respect others' opinions, so that could kind of help you with that. Pull from that if you have any resistance against—I mean, any kind of dance that you try—they may have preconceived notions of what this certain type of dance is … you can kind of help them to see past those.

We find true in the dance context what has been found in PE contexts: the process takes time and does not happen overnight. While foundational work is done at the beginning to create anticipations of how we will operate together, it evolves as a continual process of co-constructing the environment. It must be done together rather than as an imposition from the teacher and takes patience from all parties. People need time to learn how to do this in relationship with others. Over the course of the semester, we listened together as it took all of us—facilitators and students alike—to make the environment function well. We listened at more than one time and in more than one way. As Jackie Beth put it, "So, reminding myself, as I give them grace of being in the learning process, I'm giving myself grace because we are learning how to create this club together."

"We Should Play More Games"

Co-Creating the Dance Curriculum

> *"We got to do more of what we were interested, instead of just what the teacher wanted us to do" (Kat)*
>
> *"She lets us put some of our ideas into the choreography we have done" (Maria)*

Jackie Beth, Raquel, and Kim are back at their conference table trying to figure out how to best proceed in the co-creating curriculum process for the dance club. We had built the foundation together, developed ways of working with the dancers, and offered sampler sessions designed to broaden dancers' perspectives (Oliver and Oesterreich 2013) through a variety of tasks to overview the elements of dance through a variety of stylized options (see Table 1). We were now at the juncture of needing to make decisions about how to proceed. Our intent was to co-create a curriculum with the dancers that best facilitated their interests, and one in particular that emerged during the building the foundation was choreography where they enjoyed the opportunities to create.

Jackie Beth: Next week, I was thinking it would be interesting to expand on what Maria said, to say, "Hey, here's a little block. Let's spend some time." And I think this little choreography unit could be a really interesting way to do that … Because we could take what they've done … and begin to play with it choreographically like canon where you're echoing the movement. And say, "Now we've got this kind of base, and now how can we make it even more complicated and more complex?" And begin to build in some of those extra tools, but let them have choice about how to work it in …

Kim: But everybody seemed interested in choreography. So that is coming out of them.

Realizing that creating their own choreography was of interest to the students, in our meeting we discussed a possibility to choreograph for their teachers in the upcoming talent show. The PE teacher had invited the dance club to create a dance for the teachers, and we discussed how we might best investigate about student interest. Upon inquiry, the dancers were all excited to get to not only create a dance for the teachers but be in charge of teaching them the choreography. To facilitate this process, Jackie Beth created three short sequences using different dance styles and taught these to the dancers, and then the dancers chose the one they wanted to continue with for their choreography. From here we split up into small groups to create choreography. The dancers jumped right in and eagerly began creating segments, which would be added to the original sequence. Some wanted to "trick the teachers" in order to "make it really hard." This led us to a discussion about envisioning ourselves as teachers and how we might go about helping them to learn our creation.

Over the next three weeks we worked as a group to create our dance and teach it to the teachers performing in the school talent show. Three of the teachers came to dance club to learn the dance, which they would then take back to the others to teach. We also made an instructional video where the kids hammed up their performance to help their teachers learn. The dancers

were given the choice to perform with the teachers, and five decided they would join in order to help the teachers remember the choreography. Part of what the dancers learned through this process was that, although they really enjoyed the choreography component, performance did not capture their interest in the same way. Darla shares her view, which was ultimately reinforced by the other four dancers who performed, "We wanted to choreograph it, not BE in it! That's why we all wanted to do it, to see … them have to do it." This experience was good insofar as it helped the dancers better articulate the direction for the remainder of the club. Having received an invitation to perform at a downtown arts event, they declined, indicating they "enjoyed" the choreographic process but "did not want to perform." This was a point of departure from what is often viewed as traditional dance–that is, performance culminates the experience.

Knowing that performance options were eliminated from future planning if we were to honor student voice, back to the conference table we went, once again trying to figure out how to move forward in a way that reflected student voice and interest. Part of what we began to recognize was that the dancers continually voiced suggestions on ways to modify our activities. For example, they asked to "help lead warm up," to "teach" their choreography, and to turn dance into "game-like" experiences.

In our attempts to honor the dancers' voices and give them spaces to try new things, both in terms of dance content and participation, we saw their desire to share ideas with others as well as opportunities for play. Both Sunny and Darla point to their appreciation for Jackie Beth creating spaces for them to teach their choreography.

Darla: I liked how you let other people in the club, like, create choreography and then teaching it.

Sunny: Whenever me and Darla got to share our dances. That was fun.

Others really enjoyed the play-like atmosphere. Kat repeatedly pointed to her desire for "more dance-related games" and remembered fondly "Night of the Museum-dance version … where we had to go to [a poly spot] and then we had to go to another one and dance."

When we debriefed with the dancers, they often pointed toward an interest in having dance activities that reflected games. Kim found this odd reflecting on student interest, "That's funny. We want to be in a dance club, but we want games." At times we instituted their ideas in the moment, where other times we planned them into future sessions.

Kim: Jackie Beth was having us do something, and Kat said, "I have an idea." And it wasn't just to shift the game to red light/green light. It was to shift the game—it was "add on to what Jackie Beth was having us do" but with the red light/green light. So, we were having to move to different poly spots and do different jumps. Well, Kat wanted to add the red light/green light component to the moving. So, she stayed in the task. She extended the task …

Jackie Beth: Yeah, because sometimes they'll have ideas like, "Can we do the museum game?" Which is just a fun game to do … But this was a development of what we were already working on to say, "Oh, this might be interesting if we took this shift."

Games continuously came up as a topic brought in by the dancers, prompting us to discuss different activities that combined games and dance that included ideas and props like Twister, jump bands, poly spot games, musical activities, tinikling, and drumsticks. We abstracted a floorplan map activity to create a pirate treasure map where we had students running all over the field behind the school, with Cameron yelling, "If my calculations are correct!" as he guided his partner across his trajectory. Another day to help facilitate both choreography and games, we brought in dice with one die's surfaces listing body parts and the other die with verbs. The students would roll the dice to prompt their improvisational compositions. Raquel reflects on this process in relation to listening and responding to student voice.

Raquel: From the beginning … you were listening to respond, or responding to student voice … "Y'all had said that you liked this … " And then about the choreography and the games … you created kind of like game-type stuff with the map and the night at the museum, so you're showing them that you're listening to respond.

We discussed this in relation to the lack of opportunities students have for unstructured movement experiences in a world dominated by organized sports, technology, and itineraries planned to the minute. Keeping the value of unstructured play and their continued interest in choreography in the back of our minds, we made the decision to use the last four club sessions for play-like dance experiences using jump bands, various props, and dance games. When asked how the dancers took responsibility for contributing to curriculum design, Maria and Sunny offered the following thoughts:

Sunny: We get to come up with choreography to do stuff and … to teach GAMES!

Maria: We have a lot of freedom … You want us to get involved more … We get to make up the dance. Sometimes [in other dance classes], it's one person who is making up the dance, but it's all of us making up the dance when we do make up the dance.

As we looked back across the club design, we realized that there were various places where we worked together to co-construct the curriculum. From daily sequences, to dance choreography, to game creation, to the club structure and flow, the dancers saw their fingerprints.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to describe what an Activist Approach to teaching looks like in dance, specifically how we used an Activist Approach to co-create an after-school dance club with youth dancers. This example of an Activist Approach highlights an alternative to the typical hierarchical approaches used in dance which are often maintained with a white-knuckled grip to traditions and unhealthy, unexamined pedagogy (Lakes 2005; Alterowitz 2014). With the Activist Approach's base in feminist, anti-racist, and critical pedagogies (Hill Collins 1990; hooks 1994; Giroux 1997; Weis and Fine 2004; Oliver and Kirk 2015), we find that we must take this time to listen rather than assume on behalf of the dancers. Listening allows us to work with the students to negotiate their barriers, speak into the curriculum, and become integral contributors to the co-created community. We see this here with dance club participants as they took ownership of their embodied experience. By listening to our dancers' thoughts and feelings, we have a chance to reflect with the students about what makes a safe and enjoyable environment (Oliver and Oesterreich 2013) and displace practices that instate power through objectification (Green 1999; Kipling Brown 2014). By "re-tuning our ears so that we can hear what they say, and redirecting our actions in response to what we hear" (Cook-Sather 2002, 4), as dance educators, our practice of listening and responding matters.

By engaging in student-centered practices and building relationships with the dancers (Stinson 1998), we built community together with our dancers where they were able not only to voice their thoughts but also to take action on ideas presented. As dancers continued to understand and find space for their agency, the Activist Approach offered a path for shared learning and creativity. By creating opportunities for student-centered pedagogy in a dance environment, like Fitzgerald (2017), we see the value in engaging the dancers as co-creators. For us, this practice of listening and building relationship not only facilitated their interest in the programing as they co-constructed the curriculum, but it also provided natural opportunities for leadership (designing t-shirts, potluck signups, teaching choreography, etc.).

The Activist Approach to teaching is but one route on the road forward. As a process for working with people, this approach allows for newness in each context to listen and to get to know each other, thereby being able to respond more intelligently. By hearing their perspectives and building a foundation with dancers, we foster mutuality where we resist the authoritarian locus of control and not only co-create the curriculum but also co-create an environment of support. The Activist Approach to teaching allows us to disrupt the authoritarian practices so deeply entrenched in dance and affords us a new perspective on how we view dance in general. For us, giving up traditional expectations of "performance as culmination" in dance and moving to respond to students' desires for game-like experiences and opportunities to teach each other choreography allowed us to reflect more deeply about what dance might be.

In so doing, we negotiate a space together where we gain and give up, listen and respond, and construct and modify together along the way. As we surrender our perceived security found in so tightly clinging to perfection, predictability, and control, we can open ourselves to a way forward that includes the dancers in the process of their own learning, empowering them to come alive in who they are and share what they have to offer with the world around them. We have seen that such an approach has viability in a dance context upon its translation from PE settings, and we feel that next steps for research prompt us to examine our practices to understand what we might gain and what we give up by using this approach in a dance context.

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