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## Teaching Philosophy

As a dance educator, teaching with the rigor of inquiry-based, student-centered, collaborative learning, I recognize students as creators rather than consumers. Creators not only of artistic work, but also of the world around them, consciously shaping their reality in positive and innovative ways through the choices they make. My role in this is one of a guide, an elder, a shaman leading students on a journey of self-discovery, facilitating the realization of their full movement potential, and through this, their full potential as creators and human beings.

A passionate, and compassionate, vision driven artist, with an inherent need to create and share worlds both seen and unseen, I see myself as one of many architects attempting to positively affect the trajectory of our shared cultural evolution. My determination and passion to leave this world a better place than when I arrived in it can be seen in every decision that I make. The creation of art and support of artistic creation mixed with an inherently inquisitive, entrepreneurial spirit is how I intend to bring about this betterment.

However, the act of creation, the making of something new, is never a self-contained event. As matter can neither be created nor destroyed, it becomes clear that a creation is dualistic, in that it is a whole made up of parts. In the case of something intangible like dance that springs forth from the body-mind those parts are knowledge and experience. Knowledge in dance begins with lineage, which is extremely important not only contextually as a frame of reference of one's own work, but also in the recognition that knowledge is built upon knowledge. To point out a well-worn adage, "in order to know where one is going, one must know from where one has come."

In recognition of this, my pedagogic style is deeply informed by Laban/Bartenieff Movement Studies (LBMS), primarily resulting from my work with Dr. Robin Collen, Richard Haisma, Karen Kohn Bradley, and through my certification in Laban Movement Analysis. LBMS brings an attention towards observation, analysis, and synthesis of data to my work, as well as a highly effective language, the usage of which spans across the many roles that I fill as educator, choreographer, and performer. The improvisational genius and dynamism of the Nikolais/Louis tradition, the sensitive and precise work of Irene Dowd in functional anatomy, the introspective somatic work of Irmgard Bartenieff and Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, and the close mentorship of both Richard Haisma and Karen Kohn Bradley additionally inform my work.

My movement (technique) courses are framed by three guiding principles, that collectively work toward the goal of helping students achieve their full potential both in dance and in life: technical proficiency, performance, and community.

Technique coursework should provide a student with a foundation of technical proficiency in their ability to arrive at mastery in commanding the body. This proficiency should then be brought to life by conscious work in marrying life experience with technical skill. So often in

dance, we view technique and the creative process as two separate things. However, I believe that one should work in more holistic terms. Therefore, technical ability should not be divorced from performance. Finally, the choices made through the use of this marriage must be informed by the fact that said marriage both exists within the relational context of a larger entity (community), and that these choices have an affect on that community, for better or for worse.

Generally, these classes progress from establishing a strong connection with self, a ground of awareness rooted in the affirmation of oneself, then moving towards a connecting with one or more other self aware individuals, before concluding with group connectivity, a recognition of self as part of a larger community of diverse individuals.

Knowing that each student has their own path and their own destination, my instruction reflects this truth, in that I offer flexible structure that accommodates derivation when necessary and worthwhile.

My approach to coursework in improvisation and composition are rooted to the very essence of creation, through an intimate understanding of the creative process. Quite simply, the very act of creation suggests a choice. By making a choice we pay what in business theory is called an opportunity cost. That is the value of the foregone choice in favor of the preferred choice.

The ubiquitous nature of creation has, to some degree, left us blind to the effect that these choices have on the world around us. This idea of an opportunity cost becomes useful as we begin to think about the larger context of the work we are producing. The opportunity foregone represents the path not taken, or the potential that will never be realized. The awareness of this brings with it sensitivity in favor of evaluating choice and being able to articulate why a choice was made.

However a balance must be struck between chaos and order, so that students feel comfortable taking risks, while embracing failure not as something to be feared or avoided but as something to learn from, in order to make more informed choices.

In all, I want students to leave my class with a wider lens through which to view the world, and an understanding not only of how they fit into the current structures of societal operating, but a fearlessness and awareness of making decisions that improve these structures or shape new ones.

To this end, I encourage students to embrace and nurture their creative potential, offering guidance and support while pushing them to expect more from themselves than they might otherwise.

## The Role of Dance in the University

Dance as a field of academic inquiry is relatively new. The first dance major in the United States was founded in 1926, at the University of Wisconsin, housed within the Department of Women's Physical Education, under the leadership of Margaret H'Doubler. (Kraus, 118) For many years thereafter, until the 1970's, most dance programs were affiliated with physical education. Following the enactment of Title IX (1972) and Equal Educational Opportunity (1974) legislation, dance as a field, embarked on a three decade long migration to the performing arts, within academia. (Bonbright, 2)

I believe the unfortunate result of housing dance under physical education for so long, and perhaps the reason for it, is the Western perpetuation of belief in a mind-body split. Though Descartes, the father of this belief, is unarguably one of the great intellectual contributors to the development of contemporary, Western civilization, this contribution laid the foundation for the destructive, Western, ideological dominance of the mind over the body.

As a dance scholar, and research-practitioner I reject the dictum of Cartesian duality that has shaped much of Western society since the Enlightenment, in favor of a holistic perspective that unites mind and body. If nothing else, the most important idea that dance brings to the academic table is proof that the mind-body split is a fallacy, that there is truth in physical experience as much as in thought, and that these truths are in actuality one truth. In dance, knowledge is obtained through the perfectly concerted effort of theory and practice.

Dance, which engages the entire body-mind, the platform through which we interface with the world and with other people, can serve us individually and collectively in our interactions with both. According to the American Anthropologist Joann Kealiihonomoku, dance is a microcosm of the larger culture to which it belongs. (Kealiihonomoku) If we accept this as true then dance becomes much more than either physical exercise or artistic expression. It serves a much broader purpose in human life, a purpose that many non-western societies continue to acknowledge. Dance provides us with a means to not only know ourselves better, but to know each other and our surroundings.

Within academia, dance should be viewed as both a distinct discipline, a home for critical inquiry and practice that holds just as much weight as STEM disciplines, and as an agent of connectivity, a bridge to transdisciplinary, collaborative research.

In my own work, I have brought dance together with such varied fields as conflict resolution and peacebuilding, architecture and urban planning, theatre, the sociology of community and culture, arts management and business, law and justice, psychology, and physical and mental health. My current work with conflict resolution specialist José Pascal da Rocha bridges dance, movement analysis, and peacebuilding in search of a deeper understanding of the nonverbal aspects of conflict, and through this, a more effective process by which conflict can be prevented and/or resolved. Continuing research, that unites dance and theatre, utilizes Laban/Bartenieff Movement Studies to develop character movement profiles, which allow dancers and actors to more fully realize and embody the characters they are tasked to portray. Past research that bridges organizational theory with dance, finds parallels between patterns of bodily organization and organizational structures of communication in corporations through the use of Laban/Bartenieff Movement Studies.

By downplaying the role of dance in academia we negate the fact that we experience the world through our moving, interacting bodies. Only by acknowledging that embodied research is as valuable as intellectual research, will we fully realize the potential that dance holds for human advancement.

New Jersey. 1981.

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