Radical Response Dance Making Dismantling Racism Through Embodied Conversations

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Abstract

Racism is a social construct that is inscribed on the body. In this study, two dance educators working in the U.S. engage the body in the dismantling of racism. This case study is presented on teaching anti-racism in dance education, through embodied dance making processes. For this study, over sixty undergraduate students participated in activities exploring racism during a two-day workshop. Students later performed at a campus community event that included a critical discussion on racism. The authors analyze their ethnographic, qualitative research on dance education that employs embodied conversations to end racism. Student responses to these processes and events are featured in this article describing the impact of these embodied conversations.

Radical Response Dance Making Dismantling Racism Through Embodied Conversations

We, the authors, are artists, educators, and scholars in the field of dance. We design educational dance practices for our students to examine how embodiment challenges the vestiges of racism constructed in our bodily selves. As educators, we feel responsible to include the social ills of racism as a focus of education and research. Through the moving bodies of our students and ourselves, we position racism as socially constructed (Omi and Winant 1994; Bonilla-Silva, 2006). By using movement, somatic sensation and dance making processes, racism can be deconstructed within a learning community. We engage the body as the site for our research, demonstrating that dance processes can engender change and dismantle racism at an embodied level.

Deeply affected by the divisive racial climate[1] in the United States, we confront racism in our lives, work, research, and courses. Our collaboration began as passing dialogues in hallways after challenging in-class discussions, and after meetings where implicit racial biases were evident. These talks were juxtaposed with shatteringly painful truths of living in the United States where fatal racial injustices proliferate for brown and black bodies. Our need to address racism with our students became imperative to both of us, and a shared mission. Not taking action towards dismantling racism felt like a grave disservice to our students' success and survival. We knew that our students, just as we had, were viewing the killing of Philando Castile on social media[2], and we were concerned that out students did not have functional tools to articulate their feelings. We noticed our students were unable to critically analyze their responses to these racist fatalities. Our goal was to facilitate our students and our campus community to address the complex racial climate of our country. We developed and convened a series of embodied workshops for our students focused on understanding racism as a specious social construct. We created, produced and performed the culminating dance performance event, *Embodied Conversations on Racism: Dancing Difficult Dialogues.* We then designed and implemented an approved research study and collected data on the impact of these events with our students. These embodied processes model creative approaches for academic communities to dismantle racism.

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[1] This paper reflects the social racial climate of the time, with incidents like "Charlottesville" (polemic response to anti-Semitic rally, in Charlottesville, Virginia), "Charleston Nine" (nine African Americans murdered while attending church, in Charleston, South Carolina), "The Dallas Five" (racially motivated shooting of police officers), and the murder of numerous unarmed Black men by police officers, compounding a centuries old endemic of racially profiled "justifiable" homicide.

[2] Philando Castile, a 32 year old black man, was killed by a police officer (who was later acquitted) in Minnesota in 2016 who shot Castile seven times, when during a routine traffic investigation, and Castile, complying with providing driver's license and registration to the officer, mentioned he had a licensed firearm in the vehicle. The murder was recorded and posted on social media by Castile's girlfriend, present in the car during the killing.

Our project began in August of 2016, with optional workshops for all students in the Contemporary Dance Program at Indiana University, Bloomington. First, we invited students to attend a two-day workshop of embodied anti-racist activities. Second, we choreographed and produced the performance *Embodied Conversations on Racism*: *dancing difficult dialogues* in October 2016 that included a duet we choreographed and performed, with dance and text interposed. We approached the choreography for this performance, and our subsequent research as auto-ethnographers, observing behaviors and engaging students in voluntary dialogues. At times, we co-facilitated workshop activities, in other instances, one of us led an activity, and the other participated or observed. Our central research question: *How can racism be addressed through anti-racist embodied dance processes?* Through anonymous questionnaires, administered post-event in December 2017, we asked the students:

1. Was the embodied anti-racism workshop an effective experience?
2. Was *Embodied Conversations: Dancing Difficult Dialogues*, an effective experience, engendering change in your understanding of racism?
3. What was it like to witness a white instructor leading and engaging in anti-racist work?
4. What was it like to witness a black instructor leading anti-racism work?
5. Do embodied dance processes support dialogue about dismantling racism?
   This case study examines the findings of that data.

Dancing Difficult Dialogues

We began our own dialogue with our embodied process of examining racism at the level of our dancing bodies: a black woman with racial oppression, and a white woman with privilege. We approached our creative research understanding that racial constructs inscribe our bodies. We committed to dance making processes as our radical response to racism with our conviction that embodiment, as dance making, pedagogy and performance is a critical anti-racist tool. During our choreographic collaboration, we asked each other questions about our individual racial identities. What is colorless love? What is cultural bravery? What are the pillars of embodying anti-racism in our lives and work? How do we navigate through systemic oppression in higher education institutions? How do we support our students of color? How do we educate our white students about whiteness and socially constructed racism? How do we address racism among our colleagues and families? Through collaborative choreographic development, we explored individually and together how racism affects our teaching and our interactions in higher education and incorporated some of these processes into the performance work with our students.

We knew from experience that engaging students with an uncomfortable topic was going to be challenging. Critical pedagogy anchored this work as we sought to engage students in a

process that required them to analyze positions of power, while simultaneously engaging the body throughout these thought processes. We choose to employ critical pedagogy[3] "where space is created for everybody" in conjunction with engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994, p. 188). These theories align with democratic learning processes ensuring each student's voice is included and valued. This provides a communal, and embodied framework to investigate positions of power. As dance teachers, we applied these theoretical frameworks to the physical and creative practices with which our students were already familiar.

As the research plan took shape, we worked through the ethical issues of involving students in our research. In leaning on critical and engaged pedagogies, we knew we had to examine our asymmetrical positions of power within this project and within our student's lives. We could not get around the power dynamic, and although we structured voluntary experiences and voluntary reporting, we understand that requests made by instructors directed to students carry an imbalance of power. In future replications of this study, we will secure research assistants to conduct workshops and or gather the data. However, in this instance, we would have lost student's initial response (student responses tend to be less detailed and get stale over time) and possibly lost students' participation (due to graduation) in delaying the project.

Authors' Positions in the Research
Selene Carter's position statement. As a white faculty member, I struggle to address the imbalance of privilege I see in the dance studio and lecture classroom. My deepest frustration is that at this campus, over the course of fourteen years, I have taught only fifteen black students, and out of that number only six have graduated. The fate of the other nine black students in comparison to the success of white students on this campus, haunts my conscience.

Sunny Spillane, a scholar in the area of arts education, writes about failure as a process towards change, "Failure permeates the complex and deeply personal learning process involved in developing nuanced critical race understandings." (2015, p. 65). When I analyze my race-based privilege imbedded within my learned and inherited creative practices I feel threatened and destabilized. In seeking to make my teaching of dance studies a more racially equitable practice I enter failure, both of my own aesthetic preferences, and the racially biased history of the canon of modern and postmodern dance. For example, I often ask students to close their eyes and sense gravity as it grounds through their bodies, or to touch each other, or to work in silence. Each of these experiences have cultural contexts that may be unwelcome or unfamiliar for students with different layers of cultural and racial identity, and who in that

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[3] Critical pedagogy is an educational theory developed by Paulo Freire and explored in his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 1970.

moment may be isolated in their sense of belonging to the dominant majority present in the room. For this reason, 'eyes closed' or 'touch your partner' is no longer a direction in my classes, it is an offered choice. Postmodern and somatic tools are my embodied foundation for this research. I continue discovering layers of my racist hierarchic privilege through these practices. I want my work in dance to challenge and transform systemic, structural racial oppression, reverberating beyond the historic and racially biased limits of the discipline.

Nyama McCarthy-Brown's position statement. In my teaching, research, and creative practice, I focus on dance as a medium for social justice. Racial inequity is destructive, and I am committed to anti-racist practices. It is imperative that I gather tools, education, and a framework of social justice to build upon.[4] Currently it is widespread in academic and other formal settings for language and pedagogy frameworks and funding resources designed to emancipate learners, to be co-opted and used to maintain the status quo (Earick, 2009). Within such a climate it is crucial that this research go beyond labels and platitudes, and instead act as a tool in dismantling racism.

I confront racism daily, moment to moment; my black body in white spaces is an act of resistance. In my position in the academy, I recognize the stereotypes I work against. I amplify codes of whiteness I was taught to display in my professional manner. My white colleagues become relaxed with students in areas of attire, speech, and communication due to the intimate nature of working with dancing bodies. Yet, I embody the structured stance I was taught, to maintain my position in this predominantly white institutional space. I embody resistance, while simultaneously embodying whiteness. Most of my students do not possess the language or experience in race relations to understand all of the underlying dynamics operating during our interactions. I argue that much of race relations experienced daily is acted out through the body on a subconscious level. I was compelled to do this project, to learn more about students' learning experiences with critical pedagogy through embodiment as well as implications of the instructor's race in this process. Additionally, I possessed a deep need to move beyond the hallway dialogues I regularly engaged in to process the racial encounters I had in the workplace.

Institutional Context and Professional Motivations

Race matters. However, in our experience, when requests were made to develop more critical pedagogy around race and dance in the curriculum, the response was, 'No one here is a racist, racism is bad, we do not tolerate it here. Agreed? Good! Next issue.' We recognize that for

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[4] Urban Bush Women's 2016 *Summer Leadership Institute* provided many tools and fueled me with creative approaches and critical considerations of race and equity for ongoing work in the field.

some students and teachers included in the dominant culture who believe racism is wrong and have chosen not to racially discriminate against others, race can feel like a non-issue. However, for people of color who are at the bottom of most statistics measuring quality of life, i.e. life expectancy, infant mortality, living below the poverty line (Henry Kaiser Foundation), high school graduation rate (National Center for Education Statistics), and the incarcerated population (Prison Policy Initiative), racism has structural implications on their present lives. Race matters a great deal.

Further, racial identity may seem unimportant to the student who sees teachers and administrators of the same *in-group* (racial background) every day. Such students are unaware that students of color seek out faculty of color from other departments or institutions for support and to find mentors who resemble their racial background. It may be unimportant to the student who sees their racial group represented in the images that line the halls of buildings on campus; and the subjects of the textbooks required by those in authority. Yet, for those who do not receive numerous in-group messages each day, esteem building, and identity development is a monumental aspect of their educational experience. We are motivated to do this work because we understand that failure to address the detrimental implications of racism on our students and the field of dance, is to fail our students and the field.

In our predominantly white institution (PWI) as assistant professors in a Contemporary Dance program, we recruit African American students to enroll and complete a B.F.A. degree. The undergraduate student population of our university is 70% white (IU Institutional Research and Reporting, 2017) with the administrative leadership, and faculty of the university way below that percentage. In our institution, diversity efforts have addressed some issues around entry, and access, yet the low retention of students of color remains endemic, affecting the lives of people of color in the Midwest region (Mugglestone, 2017). We witness students of color struggle with the structural standards for matriculation and degrees entrenched in white aesthetics. For example, in our degree program situated in a performance-based department structured around the conservatory model, within a college of liberal arts and sciences, 225 dancers auditioned in the past three years. Eighteen students of color auditioned, three were accepted, and none matriculated. Economic privilege is a huge factor for students entering our dance program. It is difficult to attain the type of training required for entry without a well-funded studio dance background. Indiana does not offer dance programs in the public schools. As a result, strong white dominant aesthetic-based training is only accessible to families with discretionary income. This has a great impact on the cultural demographics of our university dance program.

Monoculture in our university and dance program is damaging to white students. It is difficult for white students to learn to value people from different cultural backgrounds when peers

with the same racial identity surround them. Implicit notions of white superiority are hard to overcome when the people they see achieving admission into our program are predominately white and technically versed in the required Western-Colonialist, white dominant dance forms. Further, it is unrealistic for us to expect our white dance students to overcome embodied racism when most of the bodies their own bodies are in daily dialogues with are white.

Definition of Terms

Modes of embodied and experiential learning within a creative community ground our methodology. In our research, we designed kinesthetic experiences addressing normative biases; as both implicit and overt racism, existing in higher education arts pedagogy. We use the term embodiment as a mode of learning in which the moving body accesses and performs holistic understanding of feelings and ideas. Embodiment is integral knowledge beyond conceptual or rote learning whereby the body synthesizes living, personal understanding, as it acquires intelligence in relationship to other moving bodies (Bainbridge-Cohen, 2012). Supplementing our use of embodiment in support of our research is the field of *somatic* movement education, referring to movement training encouraging inner perceptions of the bodily self, that allow the nervous system to re-pattern awareness and alter habitual ways of moving and knowing (Bainbridge-Cohen, 2012). We define *somatic* as primary kinesthetic, sensory experience of the body then integrated with the mind. Somatic movement education is grounded in neuro-scientific theories, and is cited as emerging from historic, non-Western movement and physical awareness practices (Eddy, 2002).

Embodied Anti-Racism Training

To support our collaboration, we attended a ten-day intensive training in 2016 facilitated by, *Urban Bush Women (UBW), the Summer Leadership Institute: You, Me, We: Understanding Internalized Racial Oppression & How it Manifests in Artistic Communities*. Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, founder and artistic director of UBW and the *Urban Bush Women's Summer Leadership Institute (SLI)*, is a world-renowned force in the field, utilizing feminist and critical race theory to mobilize communities and empower people through embodied experiences. The Brooklyn, New York based training included strength and conditioning, movement, singing, writing and creative processes led by UBW artists. This training was a dynamic space for African American embodied traditions of singing, and dance as cultural and personal empowerment. Within SLI we participated in the *Undoing Racism* training facilitated by the anti-racist community organizing collective, the *People's Institute for Survival & Beyond* (PISAB). The *Undoing Racism* training was such a galvanizing process for our work together that we attended the training a second time in New Orleans, Louisiana

in 2017. The *Undoing Racism* trainings provided us a personal and shared experience in which to confront our life-long and embodied immersion in our systemized racist culture.

Selected Review of the Literature

International research supported by critical theory, pedagogy, and feminist theory has grown in the field of dance studies over the past two decades. For this project, centering on racism in the U.S., we identified scholarship on dance education and critical pedagogies in the U.S. We align our practices with dance education scholars using Marxist, feminist, and critical pedagogy lenses (Shapiro 1998, 2005; Kerr-Berry, 2004, 2010, 2012). Ottey highlights the values of student relevancy and critical dialogue. Risner, Barr and Stinson determined a paucity of resources for teacher preparation in dance education, and how there are few dance teachers employing critical pedagogy with diverse teaching methods beyond normative classical training modes. (Risner & Stinson, 2010; Risner & Barr, 2014). Risner focuses on critical and feminist pedagogies, calling for more humanizing dance pedagogy in dance education and dance theory courses (Risner & Barr, 2014).

Embodied dance experiences to transform understandings of culture and race were used by Jill Green's (2000) dance students to construct their identities as women through embodiment, arriving at feminism through creative experience. Ojeya Cruz Banks (2010) produced critical postcolonial dance experiences through ethnographic study of West African dance. Hui Niu Wilcox (2009) interrogated traditional academic, Euro-centric, and male dominated modes of knowledge production with a transformative pedagogy embracing students as "bodily beings." Martha Eddy (2002) situates somatic learning as a holistic paradigm supported by postmodern ideas of feminism, decolonization and social justice. Building on the research of these scholars towards dismantling racially biased pedagogies, we argue that embodiment engenders intercultural pluralism from the lived experiences of our students. These embodied dance pedagogies produce critical awareness of the origins of race based cultural identities. Embodied awareness, when skillfully employed through dance and movement experiences, may support students to feel and recognize their own patterns of mind and body that perpetuate bias and racially assumptive ideas.

Rationale and Background

As educators who include race as a socio-cultural factor in all topic areas, we noticed that many students seem ill equipped to engage the topic of racism in the context of themselves. Accordingly, many of our students resisted examining complex structural issues of race. For example, in a twentieth century concert dance history class countering the myth that ballet is the foundation of all dance, students were asked to consider the limited number of black ballerinas, reconciled with the stereotype that black people are 'great dancers.' A sharp silence

absorbed the classroom. In our courses, common to teachers using critical pedagogies (Haviland, 2008; Kerr-Berry, 2017; Watt, 2007) we faced confrontations, micro-aggressions, avoidance, refusal to participate, denial and other expressions of student's resistance. For example, students would be silent in facilitated discussions, and then post in private social media group chats that one of us had 'called the Juniors racist'.

These frustrating experiences led us to develop the embodied tools to involve students in openly considering race. At the time, we created the curriculum for the workshops and produced the performance, we were not aware of the extent of our project. Once the workshop series and performance concluded, we realized there was invaluable research to be gathered, analyzed, and shared. We pursued a full research project and designed questionnaires to examine how students experienced these activities. As a result, we administered the survey two months after the workshops and performance, allowing students time to process and reflect. Through the student questionnaires, we hoped to obtain enough information about students' experiences with the anti-racist embodied processes to help us develop the workshop curriculum and refine our pedagogical practices and tools.

Methodology

The research design for this case study included several data gathering methods: questionnaire, observations, a performance (video documented for content analysis), with a community dialogue (also video documented for content analysis). An anonymous questionnaire included both open-ended and close-ended questions. Close-ended questions were included for easier data processing and for catching short responses from students who might not want to provide responses in full written detail. Open-ended questions were used to provide insight into how students experienced each activity. We then integrated the data to draw interpretations (Creswell 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition to the questionnaire, ethnographic research in the form of observations, descriptions, analysis, and interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) were also used for data gathering. The ethnographic observations, descriptions, and interpretations were essential in ensuring openness and transparency throughout the project. We took a democratic approach to the workshops, as co-facilitators, when one facilitator led, the other facilitator participated with the students and kept observational notes. This multi-pronged method was utilized to give the case study dimension and provide for both direct and indirect empirical findings.

Our study examined the experiences of students from the Indiana University Contemporary Dance Program. The program serves 65 BFA dance majors. The racial demographics among the 65 Contemporary Dance students in the program at the time were as follows: sixty white, four African American, and one Asian. Sixty undergraduate dance students participated in the

workshops and 35 students completed post-event questionnaires. Only students who elected to participate in the study, completed questionnaires. Although we hoped for a larger number of student responses, for ethical concerns, we expressed the voluntary and confidential nature of the project and made one request for questionnaires. Ultimately, we were happy to collect responses from a little over half of the participants.

Because of the nature of the topic and activities, it was important to us that students have an opportunity to give voice to their individual experiences. The open-ended questions provided nuanced responses and an in depth understanding of how students experienced the structured activities. In addition, we felt that because it was a personal topic for many students, questionnaires would provide them with more anonymity than interviews, for they did not have to be face-to-face with an interviewer if they chose to skip a question during the process (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

We gathered ethnographic observations, and descriptions, to inform our critical analysis. Our deep investment in the study provided for a heightened awareness of students' physical and verbal response to the activities. We took copious notes of all activities as well as discussions with students.

We acknowledge some problems with the study. First, the sample collected was relatively small. An area of uncertainty in this research design is whether it was possible more students would have participated if the survey was conducted online, but paradoxically it is possible that some students would not have completed the survey on their own. Secondly, our dance program is small; with only three full-time faculty. Consequently, our program is a close-knit community. This raised an ethical concern that we considered throughout the research project—our emotional and physical proximity to our student subjects. While we were impressed with the candor many of the students expressed in their responses, we imagine that even though the surveys were voluntary and confidential, some may have been compelled to be positive in their responses to affirm our work as their professors. To be sure, most students wrote far more in their surveys than they were willing to share openly during feedback processing discussions.[5]

Findings and Interpretation of the Data

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[5] Both principal-investigators completed the Indiana University Institutional Review Board (IRB) training and the study was approved by the IRB. Students were given the option not to participate or to withdraw at any time.

Part I embodied anti-racism workshop series: description of activities. Within the embodied anti-racist workshops, we featured five dance processes for students to creatively explore their ideas about race, their own cultural identity, and equity.

- Activity One: Equality vs. Equity. In this activity, students worked with an image comparing the concepts of equality and equity (widely available online). Students discussed the image in small groups, then created movement studies to convey the concept, and finally performed the studies for each other.
- Activity Two: Significant Values. During this sociometric[6] activity, we asked students to move along a continuum of liberal and conservative in relation to the views of significant people in their lives (a teacher, a religious leader, parent, grandparent, neighbor, friend, etc.).
- Activity Three: Material Wealth. This activity is a sociometric on material wealth in their family of origin while growing up. Students lined up from those raised with the most material wealth to those with the least. They positioned themselves along the continuum through talking with classmates.
- Activity Four: Circle Stories. Students shared a personal story with the prompt: "I knew I was _____(white/black/ Latinx/ Asian/ or other) when…" With a protocol to guide students through sharing, listening, questions, and discussions, inclusive of time limits, students shared stories in small groups. Students then embodied their personal stories to share via dance solos.[7]

Our embodied anti-racist workshop was comprised of, but not limited to, all of the activities described above. The experience laid the foundation for ongoing discussions, critical thinking, and embodied explorations continuing outside this structured event, yet within this tight-knit dance community.

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[6] An embodied guided experience during which people express individual attitudes within a social group. For example, participants physically alter location based on a spatial rubric of social status. On the left side of the room stood people whose parents attended college, on the right side stood people whose parents did not attend college.

[7] We learned the "Circle Stories" protocol through the Urban Bush Women, Summer Leadership Institute in 2016.

Table 1.

Post-event Questionnaire Findings.

Question	Yes	No	N/A
1. Was the Equality vs. Equity session effective for you?	23	2	10
2. Was the sociometric on the ideology of people in your life effective for you?	19	5	11
3. Was the sociometric on wealth helpful for you?	21	3	11
4. Were the circle stories ("I knew what it meant to be _____ (white/black/Latinx)…when") valuable for you?	27	2	6
5. Do embodied dance practices add to your understanding of race?	24	3	7

During Activity One: equity vs. equality, students moved their bodies in space to shape and shift the concept. For many, the embodied process supported them to understand the concept in a more comprehensive way. Moving their bodies in space with one another to represent equality and equity evoked a deeper understanding for some. The process accessed multiple learning modalities as the visual learners were also drawn into the physical experience via the visual prompt. One respondent stated: "It was an image that really stuck with me and made me realize that I see equality vs. equity in everyday situations." Another student responded: "It really provided me a visual of what goes on in reality."

In these responses, we note that vivid identifications of the visual image brought students into the experience. The creative process of students moving their bodies in space to create a visualization of the concept activated multiple sensors in learners making for greater cognition (Biehl, 2017; Weber, 2017). As twenty-three students noted the value of the equity vs. equality collaborative creative process, the research did not discriminate between the embodied physical aspects of the process and the creative visual component. We argue that the multi-modal learning experience is potent because in the engagement of multiple sensory systems, a deeper level of cognition is achieved. Calling upon multiple learning modalities provides learning opportunities to numerous types of learners. Stronger kinesthetic learning

students were engaged as well as visual-spatial learners, interpersonal learners also supported through the group dynamic of talking through the creative process.[8]

Of the two sociometrics the one on wealth, garnered a noticeably different response. This activity aroused discomfort from most students. Although discomfort was overwhelming for some, many noted the growth through the process, and the attainment of new information. Below are three student responses to the activity.

The first response is from a student who sent an unprompted email to the facilitating professors after the workshop.

Response #1

> Getting into a line from wealthiest to least wealthy was definitely a heavy topic and it brought up a lot of bad memories for me. My family's financial situation has been pretty good, then really bad, and now is ok and stable but still not great. I realize that no one was judging but it was still really embarrassing. Being at the end of the line made me think a lot about the questions you were asking and I really did want to step up and give my opinions. I just wanted to let you know that I appreciate what you are doing, but I felt way too uncomfortable to contribute.

The next two responses were provided on student questionnaires.

Response #2

> It made me uncomfortable but started a dialogue I normally wouldn't have.

Response #3

> It was incredibly uncomfortable but surely that was the purpose. It was amazing how even during the exercise (where people talk to each other to figure out where they will position themselves on the continuum), people still resisted talking about their wealth.

This material wealth process was the most controversial activity in the workshop. Students referenced the material wealth sociometric activity throughout the year as a common experience of discomfort. Despite the challenges in facilitating the personal wealth reflection to disgruntled students uninterested in uncloaking their class-based identity, over half of the students surveyed found their experience effective. In hindsight, this is an activity we suggest

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[8] Multiple Intelligences is a widely accepted educational theory developed by Howard Gardner. He identified more than seven types of intelligences.

only if the facilitators/instructors know the students and group well, and students are prepared by a discussion about wealth and identity. In addition, students must agree to participate in a challenging activity examining embodied feelings about wealth.

In our society, we are taught not to talk about class or money. Similar implicit social guidelines around race, called us to this work, and stood as barriers through the process. Nevertheless, in the class-based activity, students faced discomfort, and witnessed peer distress through an embodied gauge. Students' vulnerably reflected on how avoiding certain topics can exonerate them from difficult spaces. Students discussed their "colorblindness" about social class. How those who *have* are privileged without thinking about those who *have not*. Our culture is structured to protect white privilege. Racism is implicit in the structures and systems of higher education. Conversely, *have nots* are not seen, and their challenges are often unacknowledged within the mainstream group. By having the students move and align themselves in space, a common practice in their training and choreographic practices, they were able to access a tangible visual representation and physically, and conceptually perceive class-based privilege. Witnessing their peers, students discerned intersections of wealth and race in their own lives.

The sociometric on the racial attitudes of significant people in their lives yielded a stark contrast in experiences. The white students did not perceive or express that the people closest to them had biased attitudes, however the black students avidly moved on the continuum of space, indicating that people in their lives held strong biases about race.

Activity Four: Circle stories, were powerful for the students, as each had the opportunity to tell the story of how they came to understand their racial identity. Built into circle stories is grappling with the inequity peers face. The question challenged students, "I knew I was (state your race) when…" Some students met the question, with a flood of eagerness to share their story. Yet for many, the inability to identify a race-based experience pointed to the privilege they possess yet struggle to see clearly. Responses to the activities demonstrate the outcomes of a *colorblind society* (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) — people are uncomfortable acknowledging what they have been taught to avoid. Below are two selected student responses to circle stories. Response #1: "It made me realize who I am and that I do have a culture." Response #2: "Showed how privileged I am to never have had a negative defining moment due to my race." These responses are examples of how the experience provided students with space to process their cultural and racial identities. Understanding the self, in relationship to others, is an invaluable component of development for young adults. Demuth and Keller, assert that identity formation is one of the main developmental tasks for young adults and that social exchanges offer young people the opportunity to process their behaviors and come to

understanding the self (2011, p. 425). Responses to circle stories indicate that this work is essential in engaging students in these important developmental processes.

For people of color, poor people, differently abled people and other marginalized groups, being ignored and made to feel invisible is a regular occurrence. Circle stories and the embodiment of them in dance solos spoke to the far-reaching marginalization of systematically oppressed people's human experience. Thus, students who regularly feel marginalized were viscerally activated by this activity. Directly aligned with research on critical pedagogy and students of color, students marginalized by these structures were excited to vocalize their lived experiences (Flynn, Lensmire, & Lewis, 2009; Shor, 1996). Some students felt uncomfortable by the dichotomy presented in the circle stories. White students struggled to find a story to share, juxtaposed with the students of color's excitement with more and more stories appearing in their memory catalog. For some, the defining moment of understanding their whiteness was sitting in this circle.

Our findings indicate a need for building a positive racial identity. Michael addresses the need for positive racial identities (2015). White students need support in building a healthy racial identity void of unproductive white guilt. Our workshop series points to a need for more work in developing positive racial identities. Expecting white students to engage in meaningful dialogue with issues of race is unrealistic if they are uncomfortable with their racial identities.

Circle stories yielded the highest response from students. The embodied experience of exploring a positive racial and cultural identity is essential to our work. The mixed modality process of layering the circle stories with active listening and dancing via creating choreography, deepens cognition for communicative, kinesthetic, and visual learners. While more research is required to isolate the embodiment component of the activity, circle stories were effective for most students.

Part II Embodied Conversations on Racism

The second component of our creative research project was the creation and performance of *Embodied Conversations on Racism: Dancing Difficult Dialogues.* All students in the Contemporary Dance Program attended the performance and the post-performance, facilitated community dialogue. One fourth of our students performed in the event. Students responded to the question: Was the *Embodied Conversations on Racism: Dancing Difficult Dialogues* event a helpful way to address racism? Response #1: "Before this [performance] all I knew was "racism is bad." I was never given an explanation about racism and was left with gray areas and questions about the topic. I now feel more educated on the topic." Response #2: "It made me realize how important it is to talk about race." Both of these responses speak to the

lack of dialogues students have about race. We argue that because race is a challenging and potentially polemic topic, it is often avoided in educational spaces. This is problematic because academic settings are where creative thinking and exchanges of viewpoints take place. It is also where our youth learn how to navigate these conversations. Without open dialogue on one of our nation's most divisive issues, students leave educational institutions ill equipped to navigate racial challenges.

All student responses about the *Embodied Conversations on Racism* event were positive. Students, instructors, parents, administrators, and community members filled President's Hall on campus. The thirty-minute performance and one-hour post-performance conversation surprised our students with the investment from countless people of different backgrounds within our University community. The public performance and conversation heightened our students' interest in embodied dialogues.[9] Despite the heavy topic of racism, the event was uplifting.

Embodiment

Our research is different from other anti-racism critical pedagogies because we use embodiment. Working with a dance community of predominantly white middle-class women, we must meet students at the body level. While often unaware of racial dynamics, as dancers, our students live in their bodies every day. They possess a great deal of race-based embodied cultural knowledge. Racial discomfort is experienced in the body. Most students felt involving the body in anti-racism processes was a productive experience that engendered meaningful change. With social constructs as multilayered and insidious as racism, feeling and understanding it through the body was transformative. We called upon these aspects of each student's humanity throughout this process.

Table 2.

Student Reflections &Understanding, Post-Embodiment

Question	Yes	No	N/A
Do embodied dance practices add to your understanding of race?	24	2	7

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[9] An administrator who attended and participated in the performance and dialogue affirmed the effectiveness of this embodied process. He made an instant connection with his own embodied experience that audience members were led to perform in the space. This opened doors for conversations with administrators who create policy addressing racial bias in our institution.

Students responded "Yes" or "No" to the prompt, and were offered the opportunity to explain their answer. The following student responses were collected: Response # 1: "Yes. For me, it made it more personal when I embodied what I have witnessed or experienced in regards to race." Response # 2: "Yes. I learn more through embodiment as a dancer." Response # 3: "Yes. Because I learn and understand feelings through dance so it was beneficial to me." Most dance students wrote about deeper learning in a kinesthetic experience. This supports widely accepted research that identifies embodied cognition as a means to deep learning, and "the 'lived body' as a primary means of connecting with the world." (Biehl, 2017, p. 20). It cannot be discounted that more than two-thirds of respondents articulated that they were able to understand the material and make it applicable to their lives because of the use of embodiment during the learning process.

Teacher Impact

The most illuminating responses were in the examination of our role as professors and its impact on students. Throughout our embodied anti-racism research, we tracked our impact on students by collecting data on students processing their interactions with us, as their professors. In the survey, the question was posed, "What is it like to witness a professor struggling with racism as an advocate for racial equity?" The last two questions about our race as facilitators garnered strong responses. Students articulated the shifting paradigm in which they perceive race and its consequences to their lives and learning. We determined that the space created for them to think critically about race was a locale many were unfamiliar and uncomfortable with, and most gained new understanding from the experience. Below are three selected student responses:

Response #1

It makes me feel lucky to have professors who care about pertinent issues such as racism. It also makes me rethink how I live my life because I look up to my professors as people to learn from. I was sad to see them struggle and wanted to help.

Response #2

Saddening, Humbling, eye opening
Seeing a person of authority struggle with something is always hard but this made it helpful to be involved.

Response #3

It's sad and difficult because we have such close relationships with our teachers.

We acknowledge the ethical concerns of our closeness to students, in recruiting students for participation. However, it is also of note here as a component of emotional growth and evolving learning. The responses of these three students were not unlike many others. Students noted a heightened emotional impact in the process because of the relationships students had with us prior to the workshops and the performance. Unintentionally, our personal relationships brought students into the process to invest in a way they might not have, had their facilitators been unknown to them. Of great significance is the modeling of engagement with critical dialogue by teachers in the lives of these students.

A similar question that inspired student's critical response was: "What is the difference between discussing racism with a faculty member of color or a white faculty member?" Some of the responses follow:

Response #1

> Its different because with the white faculty member I might feel more comfortable, where the faculty member of color I would be more afraid because I wouldn't want to say anything wrong or upset them.

Response #2

> Unfortunately, I feel as though I am more comfortable speaking with a white faculty member. I hope that as I become more educated on the topic I will feel comfortable (not guilty) talking to anyone about it.

Response #3

> Both bring views from different backgrounds and privileges. It opens the availability for students of both races to feel comfortable in the discussion.

Response #4

> I often times feel like I'm walking on eggshells when I talk about race with a faculty member of color.

The messenger matters. Student responses indicate instruction and learning experiences differ based on the racial identity of the instructor. There was an acknowledgement in survey responses that this is an uncomfortable topic, often avoided. They sensed boldness from us, and that this was a challenging topic for us to explore as well. The larger take-away from the responses indicates a lack of opportunities for these undergraduates to explore, and think critically about their racial identity and the implications of that identity within a race-based society. Responses 1- 4 note a degree of apprehension around the discussion of race with their African American professor. This suggests that students may have been impacted by racial

stereotypes about black women, being angry or volatile (Walley-Jean, 2009). Responses substantiate the need for open dialogue. Within an increasingly diverse nation, how can white students come to value people of different backgrounds, if they do not have the tools to hold difficult dialogues within a structured educational setting?

All students stated that, the race of their instructor was a factor (whether positive or negative) in their learning experiences during the constructed activities. We argue that this extends to students' learning experiences in most class settings. For decades, educational research has focused on the need for educators of color for students of color. (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Cooper, 2002). However, there is a scarcity of research on the impact of teachers of color for white students. How can we expect students to overcome white supremist notions that underpin our institutions if they are never placed in dialogue with, or under the leadership of, people of color? While more research in this area is needed if we are to draw more conclusions, we argue that white students need to see people of color lead them in critical thinking and evaluate their work. The data in this study supports students' need for diversity in instructors; with educators' students can identify with, and also with people from different cultural backgrounds. The benefits of working together, in representing both a person of color and a person with white privilege, are evident.

Conclusion

Our findings from creating, radically responsive, embodied dance processes affect our pedagogy and interactions with colleagues and students. In line with literature on embodied cognition and embodied pedagogy (Bainbridge-Cohen 2012, Biehl 2017, Green 2000, Wilcox 2009, and Weber 2017), we found that embodied processes examining race and racism were effective. We also found that the body, positioned as the site for research, places subjects in a physical space that allows them to process information intellectually while simultaneously integrating the physical responses their body is feeling. Because the body is giving the subjects information throughout the process, responses develop comprehensively.
In reckoning with our inability to achieve instant, wide-sweeping change, we acknowledge a degree of emotional distress when delving into anti-racism work on a personal level. The presence of discomfort for us has not waned. Examining race in the classroom is not easy, dance education scholars Takiyah Nur Amin (2017), Raquel Monroe (2011), Julie Kerr Berry (2017), Doug Risner and Sherri Barr (2014) among others, while great proponents of anti-racism work, identify student resistance to examinations of privilege and race as part of the process. Critical dance pedagogy is laborious and inviting students into a space of discomfort and self-exploration is challenging for the student and the instructor.

For many students entering an unfamiliar space of racial dialogue, the body was an accessible mode of entry. For dance students, their bodies are the means they use to investigate, create, and perform the realities and imaginations of the human experience. In reference to our central research question: *How can racism be addressed through anti-racist embodied dance processes?* Our findings affirm the value of the embodied workshop series as well as the dance performance and community dialogue we produced as outgrowths of our creative research. As educators, we seek compelling learning experiences for students tapping into their creativity, developing critical thinking, and engaging their humanity to end racism in our society. We found that the radical response dance making activities we developed for this case study, while needing fine-tuning, were powerful resources to inspire critical anti-racism dialogues among our students. In the process, we developed an appreciation for our inherited and evolving embodied dance practices as lamplight on our often-darkened paths to ending racism. To this end, we use dance as a means to prevent embodied dialogues that lead to physical and emotional violence. We hope that the research we began reverberated through our campus, transforming racism at an embodied level for our students and peers.

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