

The Clark Method
Street Dance Pedagogy for
the 21st Century

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Thomas F. DeFrantz, Thinking Partner

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Acknowledgements

I would like to take this moment to thank GOD and my lord and savior Jesus Christ for blessing me with the gift of dance and the passion to impart it the way that I do. All glory of this book goes to GOD. I want to acknowledge and thank my wife, dance, business partner, and co-founder of the Clark Method, Dinita Clark. You have stood by my side through every step of this journey. High, low and everything in between. You have remained steadfast in helping me create a way for anyone to be able to enjoy and experience the transformative nature of Hip Hop/Street dance culture the way we have. You have and always will be, a true inspiration to me and my work. For that, I am forever grateful. I love you! Thank you to my late maternal grandparents, Edward and Shirley Brawner. Your love and dedication to making sure I had the best possible chance to thrive in life is something I will never forget. You both inspired me in your own ways to be the man I am today. There is not a day that goes by without thinking about what it would be like to have you here now to see your impact on my life. Miss you both dearly! I want to thank my mother Kim Clark. You poured into me in a way that I could never repay. You taught me to live and work with care and compassion. You saw the joy dance brought me and ensured that I stayed in it because you saw something in me no one else could. This book is a testament to the love and care you took in building me up to be the man I am today. It's why I take the care I do with others. Thank you Mom, I love you. I want to thank to my father, Ernest P. Clark Jr. You taught me what it means to stand firm in my truth and convictions. You taught me to work hard and stay dedicated to my craft no matter the trial or tribulation. You taught me the meaning of continuity. May this book be a reflection of that. Thank you, I love you. Thank you to my first teacher, Moncell Durden. Your impact on my practice is undeniable. Thank you for teaching me that Hip Hop dance needs proper representation. That the ability to articulate the craft is just as important as doing it. Thank You! Thank you Rennie Harris! Thank you for the platform you provided me and generations of street dance artists. You taught me the value of Hip Hop and Street Dance! Also, what it takes to preserve and disseminate the culture from the community to the stage. I truly appreciate all that you instilled in me. Thank you to my thinking partner, Thomas DeFrantz. Your mentorship has truly been a blessing and helped push me past my boundaries in scholarship. Thank you! Thank you Donna Faye Burchfield and The University of the Arts for investing in Dinita and I. Thank you for providing us an opportunity to solidify the Clark Method over the last decade. For this we are truly grateful. Thank you to every student that has partaken in the Clark Method and given us honest feedback to help ensure that this method works for all!

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“True artistry lives on the line of knowing and not knowing...”

Kyle “JustSole” Clark

The
CLUB HEAD



That's where it all starts...
In the club, in the culture...



In the dark is where
you will find your light





THE
PERFORMER



The stage is where we
are made whole...



The leap of faith
is where we take flight

Introduction

Hip [H]op dance... enjoys a privileged position as a product of the marketplace with the credible appearance of resisting the authority of the markets that produced it. Of course, aesthetics are not outside of the marketplace, and hip-hop as a practice emerged in determined affiliation to political and economic circumstances that surrounded its emergence. Hip-hop's transformation, from a creative constellation that satisfied Africanist performance imperatives for youth of color into a market-recognized dance practice that could feed television, Internet, and film markets hungry for representations of young people engaged in aesthetic action, completes a feedback loop in which the system inspires creative practice that then validates the system. Hip-hop emerged as a resistant aesthetic practice that provided beauty and joy—aspects necessary for human development—to its participants outside of mainstream markets; it continues to provide these aspects to young people simultaneously within and without marketplace support. In this, hip-hop straddles, often uncomfortably, its own capacities as resistant and compliant practices that allow its practitioners to work within and without normalizing narratives of social order. For dancers who hope

to claim creative presence from the margins of local social order, hip-hop suggests an upending of common logics surrounding dance and expression with its downward-driven weightiness, it's impossible fragmentation of the body in gestures of robotic precision, and it's unlikely earthbound manipulations of directionality. But these dances are also available for those who dance on opera house stages, or participate in market-driven media exercises, such as *So You Think You Can Dance*. Hip-hop carries its markings as “street culture”—creative expression in reference to marginalized, minoritarian life—into venues far removed from its mythic roots.¹

-Thomas F. DeFrantz
Professor, Duke University
“Hip Hop Habitus”

And there you have it. Hip Hop culture and street dance forms are front and center on the Global stage. With these forms now beginning to become staples in institutions of higher education, we must respond with cutting edge, culturally affirming pedagogy for the 21st century.



The
BATTLER

So I began creating along with my wife, dance, and business partner Dinita “Queen Dinita” Clark, a culturally affirming pedagogy that immerses the students in rich cultural traditions and innovative somatic practices that makes space for the students to find agency in themselves, their artistry, street dance forms, and the street dance community at large around the world. With both of us having over 18+ years of experience in street dance culture, which is also multifaceted, we felt that there needed to be a “bridge” that could connect the younger generations (both from the streets and the colleges) to the History of street dance, its OG’s, the forms and where they derived. Our pedagogy aids the students in absorbing the fundamentals of any form of hip hop dance as quickly and effectively as possible. We call it the “Clark Method.” It consists of these three key aspects: Somatic Practices, Cultural Education, and Philosophy. All forms under the Hip Hop dance umbrella are rooted in similar kinetic core movement principles. Once those movement principles are understood, it allows the student to navigate other forms under the Hip Hop dance umbrella more efficiently. Our philosophy is that “dance and life are microcosms of one another.” This philosophy informs the student on how their discipline, growth, and lessons learned in the classroom

can translate to growth in anything else that the student aspires to do in life. That is the crux of not only our philosophy when it comes to the teaching of the forms, but speaks to the truth, power, and efficacy of Hip Hop Dance and other forms under the Afro-diasporic umbrella. Some say that life or experience is the best teacher. I maintain that “experience isn’t the best teacher, it’s the hardest teacher.” And our goal is to provide a map or blueprint of those lessons learned in our lives and careers to help properly prepare the students for a life and/or career in any facet of Hip Hop dance as well as any other dance form. Starting with the somatic practices, I am a firm believer in teaching the technique of the foundations of the Hip Hop dance forms. These forms are codified. It’s about using them not only in an athletic fashion, but in an honest, artistic, and creative way to breach your personal limits to achieve your best.

“You cannot be fulfilled by any process, if you are full of only your own perspective.”

“In order to learn, you have to unlearn.”



Where the unexpected
is the most expected...

The rigors that come with black life require perseverance, not just endurance. It is the reaction to constant struggle that has become encoded in the DNA of Street Dance. It is when you are at your most tired, when you actually let go and allow yourself to submit to the moment and the music to take the “one more step.” That is where growth lives. When you are tired you are no longer able to keep up the representation of self you are accustomed to being seen in. It forces you to feel, not only the fatigue itself, but the life that the music brings. I believe that dance is a form of submission. You are submitting to the music as well as the feelings it provides. Of course anyone can gain agency in any form if you practice it long enough. But to submit to it is to be vulnerable. Vulnerability is the place where truth and growth live. I tell my students... “I believe that true artistry lives on the line of knowing and not knowing...I know what I’m doing but I don’t know how it’s gonna go today.”

Music is like braille, it is meant to be felt not seen. You are the visual interpreter.

Are you reading the Braille as it is? Or are you paraphrasing and saying what you want?

“If you don’t understand the music, you will never understand the dance.”

*~Tyrone “The Bone” Proctor
Waacking Pioneer & Legend*

To be IN music, you must relinquish what you want to say to allow the music to say it for you through your body. You can read the music like you read a sentence in a book. The only pressure you feel when reading anything is to properly read the sentence, but you do not have the pressure of having to create the sentence. Without the pressure of creating the sentence (music) all you have to do is submit to the sentence and read it as it is. What you add is the creativity of tonality and dialect. Through a series of foundational movement and musicality drills, we help the student to understand the music they’re listening to, allowing them to create what they want in their own way whether it be on the one, on the and count, highlighting/accenting, or through syncopation.

No one can teach you how to dance. Just like no one can teach you how to speak. You were taught a language and then you spoke for yourself. I am teaching you the physical language and you will then speak for yourself.



The exchange is with the music,
The battle is with yourself...

I tell the students to dance the basics and the rest will follow. If you're doing plié at the bar without attaching your passion and fire for the art then you are wasting your time - you are practicing your practice and not practicing your greatness. So I teach the students to dance throughout the entire class. Dancing during warm up is the most important part. Your creativity and individuality are created through dancing the basics.

The second part of our method is teaching the cultural context, the history and heritage behind the dance that they are learning. It is a unique history. An American history. Beginning from the moment Europeans enslaved Africans, putting them on boats, creating the Trans Atlantic slave trade, and landing in Jamestown in 1619- starting from that understanding of history allows the student to understand the weight and responsibility of the art form they're learning.

The definition of musicality is - a sensitivity to music. In order for you to show that sensitivity, you have to understand the weight of every sound in the music you're listening to. The same is true in dance and life.

It's difficult to be sensitive with something you do not understand the weight of.

The likelihood goes up that you may break it due to ignorance, in a literal sense, willfully or not. So working from this perspective allows the student to let go of their preconceived notions of what they think Hip Hop is and do as true citizens of Hip Hop do. Which is shed the acceptable social skin and be your authentically raw self through the lens of good music and social dance. All those practitioners who live this life know that this embodied knowledge unlocks the feeling or "Spirit" of the form. Also, the Clark Method makes space for the tough conversations about appropriation vs. participation. Explaining that "taking my course does not make you a Hip Hop citizen no more than taking a French class makes you a French citizen." It is through the language and context that we provide that an environment is fostered that will allow the students to feel comfortable enough to be in dialogue with the Hip Hop Dance community anywhere in the world. Last but not least, the third part of our method is Philosophy. Dance is a mental test, not just a physical one. It is 90% mental, 10% physical. My belief is that the true way to the body is through the mind. The mind is the doorway to what's beyond our physical and creative limits. I teach that the only way to surpass a limit is to actually touch it. I break it down to them by saying...

“The Sky is not the limit, it is a milestone. Stars live in outer space. In order to breach that barrier between the Sky and space, it will require your utmost attentiveness to your ability to push your limits.”

I teach that mistakes are a part of that process. The only constant we have is human error. It is equated into every equation henceforth nothing is 100% foolproof. Which means that the variable is your greatness depending upon the amount of work you want to put in. So now the realization is that it is a choice. It is a decision. A mental selection for one's better self. To do so, one must let go of that same consciousness to be vulnerable enough to be raw aka authentic aka honest with themselves and others.



It's never the size of the mountain,
it's the will of the climber...

The Bill

Repertory Works

All Day Everyday (2011)

Choreographer: Kyle "JustSole" Clark
Music: "Alix" by Nina Simone
Character: "Alix"
Dancers: Kyle "JustSole" Clark

You (2012)

Choreographer: Kyle "JustSole" Clark
Music: "You" by Prince & The New Power Generation
Dancers: Kyle "JustSole" Clark

Club Life (2013)

Choreographer: Kyle "JustSole" Clark
Music: "Do It In The Club" by Danzel Stanger
Dancers: Danzel Stanger, Cristian Barretto, Tiffany Stanger

INTERMISSION

[15 minutes]

The Life Of A Just Sole

World (2014)

Choreographer: Kyle "JustSole" Clark
Music: "Line Woman" by Nina Simone
Company: Kyle "JustSole" Clark

Plight (2012)

Choreographer: Kyle "JustSole" Clark
Music: "Superbad" & "Man's World" by Prince & The New Power Generation
Dancers: Kyle "JustSole" Clark

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1.

Why is it important to bring Hip Hop Dance pedagogy like the Clark Method into the university setting?

Let's take a second here, to imagine ourselves in a space where Hip Hop/Street Dance forms have the full support of a collegiate institution. What would be the byproducts of such an accomplishment? There are so many good things to talk about, but for now let's focus on three major reasons that it should be in University Dance Curricula.

1. First things first, offering Hip Hop as a core part of the foundational education of all students in a college dance curriculum fosters an environment of respect and one that validates black genius as well as speaks truth to power that it's a form of genius that does not come from Europe. Some of the top dance programs in the nation are not only acknowledging this, they are affirming their commitment to Hip Hop by speaking out about it. In a Dance Magazine article entitled "College Curriculums are finally catching up to 2019," Maria Simpson, director of the Bard College Dance Program went as far as to say "she is giving equal weight to African diaspora dance, arguing that it's had as much influence on modern dance

as its more-frequently-lauded counterpart, Western European dance."²

10 years ago you would never hear such a thing. For this to be said openly shows that there is a cultural shift happening here in the US. An awakening. This also underscores the need for more affirmations of black dance forms and pedagogy in higher education because despite being kept on the fringes of these institutions since their inception, the practitioners of these black forms have still managed to influence some of the greatest known European and American artists such as Balanchine, Forsythe, Fosse, the lists goes on. So in essence, as lead rapper Kenyatta Blake a.k.a. "Buckshot Shorty" of Black Moon would write as the title to his 1993 hit single, "Who got the props?"

2. Speaking about props, this is a perfect segue to my next point: dance history and the archive. History and the archive are the most controversial spaces that need to be addressed in institutions of higher education. These are two spaces within college curricula where Black dance forms like Hip Hop are typically excluded. They have been blips on the proverbial radar instead of landmasses and landmarks of artistic genius within the road-mapping and archiving of the full spectrum of dance. Having Hip Hop history analyzed from not only the dance perspective but also through



Sharing your story....

anthropological research is just as crucial within the dance curriculum as studying its techniques for movement. To place Hip Hop within the frameworks of dance academic study allows students to see not only the disparities and marginalization of black communities and art practices, but also the full breadth, depth, and scope of its genius, positive impact, and influence on American Culture as a whole. It helps the students make informed decisions on the “what” and the “why” of their potential pursuits of a career in this field of dance. Some students see the potential business success they could achieve quickly with having social media savvy and tend to appropriate and/or approximate, instead of taking the time to engage the community and assimilate into the culture organically. Having pedagogy like the Clark Method, offers students the opportunity to have the “tough” discussions and dialogue to clear up any misconceptions about the culture being that we are a true part of it. Which leads me to... How can a culture or form get the support it needs from granting entities and larger venues to ensure its growth from its “roots” (when I say roots, I mean from those who are deeply entrenched in the fabric of street dance culture in any given city or state). If the 21st century student still doesn’t know how to respect black genius, forms, facets, and accom-

plishments in the way they know and respect its European counterparts then this mis- and underrepresentation will perpetuate negative social understandings, biased standards, and racist points of view. The Black dancing body is a place where history also lives: This body should be present in all spaces where dance happens, where dance is studied, where dance is supported and promoted. If we are serious about truly changing and broadening what we value moving forward, we must prepare those spaces for them.³ To go a little further, Dr. Takiyah Amir Mun makes the following point in her research article entitled “A Terminology of Difference: Making the Case for Black Dance in the 21st Century and Beyond” she says “[her] article suggests that the persistent realities of racism and White skin privilege in this postmodern age require that discussions on Black Dance remain a part of the agenda within academic, artistic, political, cultural, and historical dialogues.”⁴ I definitely agree with this. The damage is truly done when we don’t talk about it at all due to some folk’s uncomfortability with the notion of black dance excellence being a source of inspiration for many methods and formations in the world of dance and life. The Clark Method brings to the students the practice of citing sources as, what Dr. Thomas F DeFrantz would call a “Balm,” to soften the



with your own voice...

edges around tough topics such as appropriation. To know the sources of innovation eases and relaxes the tensions that could arise through such conversations. Giving the students a historical “ground zero” to reference affords them the opportunity to research for themselves and really helps them gain agency in their education.

2.

**How does the Clark Method
integrate cultural practices in a
classroom setting?**

How to integrate cultural practices in a classroom is totally dependent upon what culture is in that classroom. Perspective is everything. Let’s start with what culture is. Dr. Nyama McCarthy-Brown has defined it well. “Culture is a system of customs agreed upon by a group of people. Culture provides groups of people with a unifying approach to experience life. Culture encompasses practices and structures that support basic functions of daily life, such as clothing and housing, often particular to the geographic location in which the culture is situated. Culture also includes customs that provide order and safety for a community of people, such as time parameters for age-appropriate events, regulations to implement the use of car seats and

seatbelts, styles of eating, cooking, language, and fashion. Moreover, ‘culture provides us with a blueprint’ for how to live. The work of education scholar Ruby Payne explores one such blueprint through the ‘hidden rules’ of the classrooms, in which codes of conduct serve as cultural systems that a group maintains to sustain their culture.”⁵ I speak from the perspective of Hip Hop and black culture, not to be confused as two separate things, but to be looked at more like two sides of the same coin that, as a whole, represent black identity in the United States of America. From Slavery to now, all of the enslaved who lost touch with their heritage began to create new cultural heritages, especially due to the limitations placed on them by their colonizers. Our oral traditions and mitochondrial connection (blood memory) to our past allowed us to recreate our history and cultural heritage in new formations. We call it the “African Diaspora.” For instance, if you are Nigerian, there are 3 main tribes/blood lines in the country, which are Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa. For many African Americans, their national tribe is Hip Hop. There are several tribes folks group themselves into:...Dance, Art, Dj, and MC. The major subcultures under the Dance “umbrella” are the Funk Forms (Locking, Popping, Breaking), Hip Hop, and House Dance. There are also



with your family!

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Company

newer generations of subcultures under the Hip Hop Dance umbrella creating dance forms such as Krump (LA), LiteFeet (NYC), Jittin (Detroit), Jookin (Memphis), Footwork (Chicago) to name a few. No one tribe is better than the other. We need one another. The cultural tradition of the “party” is where our intersectionality happens. The cultural practices that come from the club and street settings have created some of the best dance artists in the world. In particular, with House Dance - that’s the form that I specialize in - there are quite a few practices within the party or club setting that we use to fully embody the knowledge passed on to us. Call and response is the main mechanism used for this learning. One of the most prominent learning tools the Clark Method incorporates from the social or club setting is the Cypher. The cypher is a circular formation that happens in African and Afro-diasporic forms where ideas and feelings are expressed in a physical conversation or communication that happens between two or more people within a community setting. Within the Clark Method, we have students form a Cypher circle and communicate with one another at the end of every week of foundational training. It creates a positive community atmosphere for the students, allowing them to be honest with who they are and where they are in relation to the culture, their dance journey

together, which is what would be done in a cultural setting. Everyone has different levels of understanding of the dance in the club, but honesty is always felt. What do I mean by Honesty? Let’s break that down. I define the word “Honest” as “To be truthful” or “To be full of truth.” Then I ask the the students “Whose truth?” then I reply “your truth.” It is important to bring yourself into your artistry. Your origin and background matters. It’s about how you incorporate that within your dance that brings about the crux of your identity. Hip Hop is about reinventing yourself through what is around you. Bringing your past and future into the now of your artmaking. Not putting movement together just to match rhythm and aesthetic, but saying what the music makes you feel and letting the room adjust to that. The way you define yourself is what always shines through. In order to teach the students how to use that honesty, they first need to learn how to create sentences with their new foundational movement (Freestyle). I firmly believe that dance is as innate to us as speaking. No one can teach us that. As I tell students, “No one taught you to talk. Your parents taught you language and then you spoke for yourself. The same goes with dance. I am here to teach you the language, for you then to speak for yourself.” For a student not from this cultural setting to

understand what it means to communicate, we look at the dance as a physical language. Each form has its own dialect, weight placement and aesthetic. To lower the pressure that we normally put on ourselves, we reduce the amount of time they have to speak physically, allowing them to focus on one sentence at a time. One freestyle (improvisational) drill that we do within the Clark Method is called “2-4-6-8.” This drill specifically focuses on sentence structure. We ask them to work within the 4/4 rhythm pattern, a common counting of music for dance, going by two measures of 4, we call this an eight. House music in particular, is on average 120 bpm (beats per minute). In that speed range, two eights of music is roughly 7 1/2 seconds. In the 2 eight count segments we really focus on the following: how to introduce yourself, what words you would like to use to introduce your style, with style being the manner in which you apply your foundation. Then we move on to 4 8 counts, which is 15 seconds. 15 seconds is enough to create four solid sentences. Through this practice, students learn how to create an elevator pitch or snap shot of their life in the moment. Students learn how to get their point and style across without doing everything under the sun. As I say to the students, the goal is not to fit your entire life into one moment but to share one moment of your life at a time. Build-

ing sentence structure is necessary especially for battles and choreography but most importantly for communicating with others in the culture around the world. The cypher is a place to practice our honesty. As in speaking in our truth. That takes practice.

Another part of our method is to introduce the students to their community. For most students they never leave the space known as the campus. How could you ever communicate physically with a community if you were never in it? Also another issue is that most students are too young to be in the spaces where these dance forms live. For example, house dance is a club dance form. All of these clubs are 21 and over which kind of alienates the youth to a degree. They are learning how to communicate without being able to breach the space, which could lead to frustration. As a student, how can I use these forms in the community if there aren't any community events to express myself in? To address the issue, my wife and I created a party entitled “SOLEFULL” as a part of the curriculum for all of the students that we teach the Clark method to across 4 universities here in Philadelphia (UArts, Temple University, Drexel University, and Swarthmore College). The mission is to provide the students with an opportunity to come outside of the “bubble” we call the campus to have a

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Dinita Princess D' Askew

Kyle 'Just Sole' Clark

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\$12 per class

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The
COMMUNITY LEADER

club experience in a place where the Philadelphia Hip Hop dance community lives. We bring in one of the best House Music DJs in the city, Calvin Bailey aka DJ Lonely the Bronxonian, to play a 5 hour set. Also, we invite the street dance community here in Philadelphia to come party with them. This allows the students to not only communicate with the street dance community of Philadelphia, but they also see that there are levels to the forms and that it doesn't have to be perfect, it just has to be honest. McCarthy-Brown states this well: "In order to be successful in any given environment, one has to find ways to communicate - to understand and be understood by those in power. For some individuals this is an easy process of assimilation, for others it is a matter of 'code-switching,' and for still others it is a challenging puzzle that never fits together."⁶ Some of the students adapt well to learning the foundation physically, but when they are in the cultural space they get to "feel" the depth of cultural wisdom the form lends, which allows the elders to transmit in a way that goes far beyond the physical.

3.

Which form is more important?

Now, there are many different forms

under the umbrella of hip-hop. The 5 major forms listed here are the most commonly practiced. When we talk about the forms, there's no one way to introduce them within your pedagogy. There is no one form that is more important than the other. When properly articulated, any form can be a great base of foundational learning and critical study. Yet, for the sake of transparency, in the Clark Method, we use three forms that are very good in opening students up to the movement principles of street dance. In the world, Breaking is the most dominant form. It has a rich cultural history as well as a strong culture of competition. With that comes a consistent raising of the bar in the physical department as well as the artistic one. Breaking battles happen almost daily around the world. With that being the case, to me, it's hard to establish breaking in a collegiate Street Dance pedagogy that is not specifically geared toward breaking only due to the depth of cultural heritage, global aesthetics, and intense physical training necessary to achieve greatness within this form. Dancers without consistent proper training are far more susceptible to injury in my opinion. It truly requires sufficient time, knowledge, skill, and repetition for dancers to develop. Not saying that they can't develop quickly, but rushing it for the

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SOLEFULL

VOL. 5

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sake of a grade for some dance students would make the risk outweigh the reward. I personally feel as though Locking, Hip-Hop social dance, and House Dance are the most inclusive of forms when we talk about the multiplicity in forms of the body. The movement principles of the bounce and the body rock are the essential and main principles for all forms. With breaking in particular, the Bounce and The Rock are in the upright aspect of the form. Top rocking and Uprocking. To separate top rocking from breaking for the sake of saying you're embodying the form would be equivalent to separating the port de bras from Ballet and saying you learned the form. It is still a form of appropriation if the intent is not to connect the student to the entire form. We don't want to do that because it then limits the form to only one aspect academia feels is most important for the student, which indeed is cultural appropriation of the form. To take what's accessible and leave the rest behind then becomes a commodification of a certain aspect. In a dance magazine article written by Brian Schaefer, entitled, "At What Point Does Appreciation Become Appropriation," Michelle Heffner Hayes, a professor at the University of Kansas' Department of Theatre & Dance states "Cultural appropriation is taking the external trappings of cultural traditions and using them as decorations on your own history without devel-

oping mutually supporting relationships in the community that you're taking from."⁷ Though it would be nice to have Breaking in a university setting, to properly disseminate that form would require full immersion through the development of a very specific pedagogy and curriculum, something that certain students and programs may not have the time or resources for. With that said, Hip-Hop and House Dance primarily work in the upright position and are the most pedestrian in nature. These two forms are the most inclusive of forms. There are breakers that do hip-hop and house dance. There are poppers that do hip-hop and house dance. There are hip-hop and house dancers that Break. There is an Intersectionality that happens within the culture. Hip-Hop and House Dance make room for people of all ages, creeds, and body types to learn at an accelerated rate necessary for the success of the student and a collegiate dance program.

4.

How does the providing of cultural context and history help one embody Africanist movement principles?

"Dance is a cultural experience. It is a racial experience. It is a gendered experience. It is a kinesthetic body experience.

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and all those who desire to learn...

All of this is to say that one's experience in dance is reflective of his or her demographic and dance environment."⁸ In short, you are a product of your experiences. So, if you have never had a particular cultural experience (in this case we are talking about a Hip Hop/ Street Dance/ Black), it will be difficult to understand and learn from it without cultural context informing you as to the "why" these practices are done. There are a lot of dancers who are just simply gifted and are able to embody movement quickly. Some even without cultural experiences. Yet, once the gravity of the culture and history of perseverance is understood, then we can begin the process of innovation. That is the taking of the movement and its principles (Foundation + Technique) to reshape it to our understanding of what the possibilities can be with our artistic voice by fully embracing the Africanist movement principles. As complex as this notion may seem I am going to attempt to break it down in the simplest way for us all to understand. Having cultural context and historical reference is the determining factor in whether someone sympathizes or empathizes with a culture. This is the determining factor on how one aligns with a culture. Whether or not you think, feel, or move outside or inside of a culture. To feel sympathy only means that you feel sorry for those in said culture. Once introduced to

the culture's history and the context in which its practices are derived, then you go from an outside perspective to an inside perspective. With an inside perspective, you are now "feeling" from within that culture's shoes, which in turn helps you understand the social, political, and economic struggles this culture had to endure for these dances to emerge in the flamboyant way that they do. With empathy, "I understand what you're going through and want to help you through that pain or help preempt that pain if possible." Empathy lessens the urge to just be another appropriator. It is, of course, impossible to completely eradicate the effects of "Capitalism" in our daily lives on every level, but in the classroom we must tussle against the notion of thinking in a capitalistic way when approaching these forms and cultures as a way to move towards a "something else" as Dr. Thomas F. DeFrantz would put it. Legendary writer Susan Foster also speaks towards this in her book, *Dances That Describe Themselves*, by stating "...resist the spectacular commodification of the body deployed in late capitalist marketing strategies, and instead invite viewers to intimate scenes of bodily becoming."⁹ If I only teach for my personal benefit without helping my culture in the process, I am no different than any other appropriator. I want this pedagogy to shine

JustSole x Funky Sole Fundamentals

presents

SOUL SOLE

street dance competition

SOLE ROYALTY EDITION

1x1
HOUSE
KINGS
Judges:

Sekou DF
JustSole JSI/DF
Junious UA

1x1
HOUSE
QUEENS*
Judges:

Michele LOHH
Queen Dinita JSI/DF
Linda MAWU

2X2
ALL-STYLES
Judges:

Smart Mark Phresh
Josh Polk Hoodlockers
Hannibal 360 Flava
Queen Dinita JSI/DF

*Winner gets a TOP 8 slot for Ladies of Hip Hop 2018 House Category!

Hosted By Steve Believe

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Create the environment for ideas to
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the light I receive towards the pioneers and foundations of street dance forms and culture to show what can happen if you work through it as opposed to outside or alongside it. Most of the students will not be able to identify with the trauma and hardship that surrounds the experiences of black life that produces such forms, yet will get to financially and socially benefit from being in the midst of or having been involved in black culturally responsible pedagogy. This changes the dynamics of street dance education at large which is why becoming a cultural affirming space instead of a culturally appropriating space is imperative. Cultural context and history properly frame the forms, making visible the unspoken habitus the culture demands. Taking the students out of the space of wondering to a space of knowing. As Maya Angelou says “When you know better, you do better.” That is how the Clark Method will help instill cultural respect within all who participate in it. It now allows the student to dance with understanding and purpose. No longer practicing movement but beginning to practice dance. Dance being, the life force behind movement. A byproduct of that life force or experience becomes an aesthetic. Which some scholars would call black dance. Once that cultural understanding and respect

is had, then the understanding of the weight placement makes sense. Being grounded or weighted as an approach to things is a life skill that is embodied or encoded within black dance forms. Using this embodied understanding in any movement practice is imperative for technical and aesthetic growth especially within street dance forms.

5.

How does the Clark Method prepare students to excel in the culture at large and other dance forms?

The Clark Method is a pedagogy intended to aid students in the “unlocking” of the artistry on all levels as well as in other forms they study. Artistry, Performance, Improvisation, Education, upon other things require a concrete and embodied understanding of culture self. Which is what Hip Hop is all about. The 3 principles the Clark Method stands on is Identity, Community, and Education. Giving the students this in the clearest way possible gives them a platform to be themselves in the best way possible: Honestly and Earnestly. I have to say it...Dance is dance. Movement is movement. They have separate meanings. Dance is the energy, life force, and spirit behind our



It's a calling...

movement. Something we would call technicity. It doesn't matter what form you practice. What matters is your submission to that practice. At the end of a course, I ask "How do you feel? You look great! How many people saw themselves having the ability to freestyle with new foundation like this when you started?" Most students don't raise their hands. Especially those that are not dance majors. Then I go on to say, "If you were able to take the risk of becoming a better version of yourself through a form you've just learned, then how much more can you give to what you are most passionate about? Are you going the extra mile? Or are you waiting on Uber? Don't laugh, cause Uber is going to cost you something your not prepared for."

There are so many facets and forms to Hip Hop and Street Dance Culture. We must preserve them all so it can take its rightful place in the market place... As is, not diluted or reconstituted. From the club, to the classroom, to the stage, to film, to television and beyond. How will the next generation know what the truth about these forms? How will they know how to keep the integrity of these dance forms? How will the those outside of the culture know to respect the culture and its traditions? By building a bridge for the masses. By teaching street dance history. Giving it context. Teaching with care. Dancing in truth. So that when these students go out in the world, they know how to get down in any way, shape, or form. This is the

CLARK METHOD



It's a duty



When done well...



Can change a life...



including mine....

Endnotes

1. Thomas F. DeFrantz, Anita Gonzalez, *Black Performance Theory*, (Durham Duke University Press, 2014), pg. 237.
2. Rachel Rizzuto, "College Curriculums are finally catching up in 2019," *Dance Magazine*, June 28, 2019.
3. Gregory King, "Exclusion is Oppression: From Pedagogy to Performance," *Dance Magazine*, Nov 11, 2020.
- 4 Dr. Takiyah Nur Amin, "A Terminology of Difference: Making the Case for Black Dance in the 21st Century and Beyond," *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.4, no.6, September 2011, pg.11.
5. Nyama McCarthy-Brown, *Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World : Culturally Relevant Teaching in Theory, Research and Practice*, (Jefferson, North Carolina : McFarland & company, 2017), pg. 36.
6. McCarthy-Brown, *Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World*, pg. 14.
7. Brian Schaefer, "At What Point Does Appreciation Become Appropriation?," *Dance Magazine*, Aug 19, 2019.
8. McCarthy-Brown, *Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World*, pg. 14.
9. Susan Leigh Foster, *Dances That Describe Themselves: The Improvised Choreography of Richard Bull*, (Wesleyan University Press, 2002), pg. 232.

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4. (pg.9) Photographer: Kyle Clark Yr: 2012
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Subject(s): Kyle Clark Fire & Ice Nightclub, Philadelphia
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