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THESIS PROJECT

Dreaming to life Collective Liberation

Cultivating caring communities through dance and movement

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(she/her/hers)

Weight away practice (first workshop)
Photo by Nicole Oga
Ten dancers in a dance studio with black floors and white walls. Working in pairs, holding each other's forearms, lowering each other to the ground, and helping each other back up.

MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAMME IN DANCE PEDAGOGY

ABSTRACT

DATE:

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TITLE OF THE WRITTEN COMPONENT/THESIS Dreaming to life Collective Liberation: Cultivating caring communities through dance and movement	**NUMBER OF PAGES + APPENDICES IN THE WRITTEN COMPONENT** 73 pages

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Contemporary Dance and Partnering Community Practice Workshop

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There is no recording available for the artistic work. ☒

When I dream of what I want the future of dance education to look like, I imagine a truly liberated world where all people have access to liberatory dance and movement education. We, society at large, live in a world where all forms of oppression have been dismantled and all people are truly free. We live with a mindset of abundance, not scarcity, where there is space and resources for all types of movement and dance practices. In order to bring this dream of collective liberation, or a world where all people are free, into reality many societal changes must occur. I believe liberatory education praxis can bring about these necessary changes.

In my thesis, I utilize action research to examine and develop my own pedagogical praxis, seeing how implementing liberatory education praxis can bring collective liberation and abolition into dance education. For the practical work of the thesis, I organized and taught three *Contemporary Dance and Partnering Community Practice* workshops in three different countries. Through these teachings, I investigate if liberatory education praxis can be used to cultivate a caring community. I question, how can liberatory education praxis support the cultivation of a caring community within dance education? How does this contribute to bringing the collective liberation dream to life?

While my learning is a continual process which extends into many directions, I will focus on three main insights that I gained which directly relate to liberatory education praxis and cultivating a caring community. Through my own observations and reflections and based on the student's feedback, I found that my pedagogical praxis fostered feelings of inclusion and belonging, supported holistic growth, and cultivated caring communities.

Through these teachings and research, I am finding what is needed from me, as a teacher, to support the creation of a caring community and how this can support bringing abolition and collective liberation into dance education. I am both strategizing ways to teach that do not uphold the current oppressive societal systems and dreaming of alternative ways of being that transgress current boundaries. This work is an ongoing process, where I must consciously continue to evaluate how I teach, what I teach, and why I teach. Through dance and movement, we can bring into reality part of the collective liberation dream and extend this into society at large, until all people are truly free.

KEYWORDS

abolition, action research, care, caring community, collective liberation, community, contemporary dance, dance, education as a practice of freedom, growth, holistic growth, improvisation, intellectual growth, learning, liberatory education praxis, movement, partnering, touch

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1. INTRODUCTIONS

For me, introductions are not just about introducing the thesis work, but also providing introductions to who I am and how this affects my work. I will begin by opening up about myself and my perspectives, sharing relevant personal history and how it informs my perspectives and values. Then I introduce the practical work, my pedagogical praxis, contextualize the thesis, and elaborate on the structure of the written work. Throughout my thesis I use the word "we" to refer to humans as a whole within the world at large and when new concepts or theories are introduced, they are *italicized*.

1.1. Me and my perspectives

When I dream of what I want the future of dance education to look like, I imagine a truly liberated world where **all** people have access to liberatory dance and movement education. I see Black, Brown, Indigenous, people of color, queer, gender non-conforming, disabled people from varied dance and movement practices coming together to share knowledge with one another, creating communities of care and trust where learning and critical discussions can occur. Educators teach in nuanced and culturally relevant ways that are no longer framed within systems of oppression/domination[1], where the white, cisgendered, heterosexual, non-disabled[2] male experience is not universalized, rather there is societal support for the multiplicity of all the varied human experiences. We, society at large, live in a mindset of abundance, not scarcity, where there is space and resources for all types of movement and dance practices. This dream of *collective liberation*, or a world where **all** people are free, is not a unique or new dream. It has been dreamt of by many abolitionists[3] before me, for centuries, and will continue to be dreamt until we create a truly liberated world. I further discuss what collective liberation is in chapter 2.2.

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[1] In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as a practice of freedom*, hooks (1994) uses the term systems of domination. This was a new term for me as I have been accustomed to the term systems of oppression. In this paper I combine the terms to be systems of oppression/domination. Including both oppression and domination in the term acknowledges the various roles within these systems, those who are being oppressed and those who are benefiting (both through action and/or inaction) from the domination.

[2] There is ongoing discussion within the disability justice movement around terminology. I have chosen to use non-disabled as a way to avoid the erasure of disability, while others might prefer the term able-bodied.

[3] Abolitionists including Mariame Kaba, Angela Y. Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, adrienne maree brown, James Baldwin, Frederick Douglass, and many more.

As I dream, I question, what would it take to make these changes a reality? I acknowledge that many societal changes must occur. There must be a radical shift in our understanding of ourselves, how we interact with each other, how we relate to the more-than-human world (Kimmerer, 2013) and the Earth - an in depth changing at the roots. All types of oppression must be dismantled (including but not limited to racism, sexism, ableism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, fatphobia, heteronormativity, climate change, imperialism, settler colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, etc.) and all the systems and societal norms that uphold these oppressions, while simultaneously building alternative ways of being and living (Davis et al, 2022; Elia, 2023; Kudesia, 2022). This needs to not only happen on a larger scale within our society and its systems, but it must also occur through each of us on an individual level because "the implications of our visions touch everything – everything must change, including us" (brown, 2020, p. 1). I believe it is possible to create both societal change and change within ourselves concurrently, as this is what it takes to continue to dream collective liberation into reality.

This may seem overwhelming, and sometimes feels impossible, but I believe there are a multitude of ways of creating these changes. As I dove into my thesis, I wanted to find a way of dreaming collective liberation into reality through dance and movement. I will expand on this further later in the writing. My thesis is just one way for me to use my resources, capacity, and autonomy to continue the legacy of liberation work, and there are many more approaches I can take in the future. I know that collective liberation will happen because I am not alone in dreaming this dream. As Davis et al. state, "This is not impossible work because we do this together" (2022, p. 10). The collectivity, which is inherent in collective liberation work, is what makes it possible because there is a "we" who are all dreaming together and bringing this dream to life.

Dreaming, which is also a critical part of collective liberation and abolition, is a foundational aspect of my perspectives and perceptions of the world. Sometimes dreaming can be seen as an escape from reality, but I have another way of embracing dreaming. Dreams are not imaginary or make believe, but rather something that is or has not yet been experienced by those who are dreaming. I view dreaming in a similar way as Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, who states:

> Your dream can be realized right in the present moment. You live your life in such a way that every step in the right direction and every breath along the way becomes the realization of your dream. Your dream does not take you away from the present; on the contrary, your dream becomes reality in the present moment. (2017, p. 108)

This resonates deeply with how dreaming is integrated into my social justice, artistic, and teaching work. Dreaming is being acutely aware of ourselves, our surroundings, and how we relate to and interact with those surroundings in the present moment. My views on dreaming are also inspired by Dineo Seshee Raisibe Bopape's exhibit *(ka) pheko ye – the dream to come* (2023-2024), which I visited at Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art on 1 November 2023. Bopape describes dreaming as "intrinsically a cross species way of engaging with and redrawing realities" (2023-2024). Through dreaming I am redrawing realities, which more fully engages me with the surrounding world.

My perspectives are further shaped by speculative dreaming practices and writings, such as the speculative fiction writing of Octavia E. Butler and N.K. Jemisin, and the speculative dreaming practices of Sonya Lindfors and Maryan Abdulkarim (22, November 10). Speculative dreaming, whether through reading, writing, or practices, allows me to think outside of current realities to dream up different ways of doing things. I will elaborate further on this in chapter 2.2. This dreaming, or acute awareness and engagement with reality, allows for the clarity to understand how things are connected, what is upholding oppressions and what supports the dismantling of these oppressions, in order to build the alternative ways of being needed for collective liberation. Bringing our dreams to life.

1.2. Introduction to the workshops

Through action research, I am examining and developing my own pedagogical praxis, seeing how implementing liberatory education praxis can bring collective liberation and abolition into dance education. For me, my pedagogical praxis encompasses the overarching theories and values that all my teaching is founded on, which are put into action through my teaching practices. I unfold my pedagogical praxis further in chapter 1.3. *Liberatory education praxis* is inspired by bell hooks' education as a practice of

freedom (1994) and collective liberation work pursued by past and present abolitionists, which I go into detail on in chapter 2.3.

I have been intentionally applying liberatory education praxis within my teaching for the past year and, with this research, continue to deepen this application. I investigate if it can be used to cultivate a caring community, and how this caring community can bring part of the collective liberation dream into reality. My thesis questions, **how can liberatory education praxis support the cultivation of a caring community within dance education? How does this contribute to bringing the collective liberation dream to life?** I wonder what is needed from me, as the teacher, to support the creation of a community. I am both strategizing ways to teach that do not uphold the current oppressive societal systems and dreaming of alternative ways of relating to each other and the surrounding world that transgress current boundaries. This work is an ongoing process, where I must consciously continue to evaluate how I teach, what I teach, and why I teach.

For the practical work of the thesis, I organized and taught three workshops in three different countries, and hosted a shortened version of the workshop for the thesis examiners and invited guests. The first workshop occurred on 12-14 January 2024 on unceded Kumeyaay land in Turtle Island (San Diego, California, USA) and was hosted by Disco Riot, a revolutionary movement-based arts organization. The second workshop was hosted by Independance, a contemporary dance and performance practice organization, in Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa (Auckland, New Zealand) on 2-3 March 2024. The third workshop happened at Riveria, a vocational school, on 8-12 April 2024 in Outokumpu, Finland. Lastly, as a way of sharing this work with my academic community, I facilitated a workshop for the thesis examiners and invited guests, which was hosted at the Theatre Academy at the University of the Arts Helsinki on 6 April 2024. I believe experiencing the work is different from reading about it, so it was important for the examiners and my colleagues to experience and embody a portion of the workshop.

The title of the workshops was *Contemporary Dance and Partnering Community Practice* and each day of the workshops consisted of contemporary class followed by partnering community practice. The workshops delved into partnering, both through

physical touch and observation. During various partnering practices, support and care were used to cultivate a caring community. The workshops grappled with the question, **by putting into practice care, through touch, support, and observation, how are we dreaming into reality the world we hope to live in?** I elaborate further on the workshops in chapters 3 and 4.

The workshops developed based on feedback from the students, self-reflection, peer reflection, and discussions with my supervisor, Eeva Anttila. I discuss in detail how the workshops developed and unfold my findings in chapters 3 and 4. Throughout my thesis there are photos and written feedback from the students. I received their consent to use these photos and writings through an electronic consent form.

1.3. My pedagogical praxis

To better understand how further integrating liberatory education praxis influences my teaching, it is important to understand my perspectives on education and how I envision my pedagogical praxis. When I think of it, I like to imagine a scaffolding. A malleable foundation to base my pedagogical decisions off of - having an ongoing conversation and dialogue with theories, ideas, and questions. A scaffolding that supports the continual cycle of reflection, planning, action, and observation, known as an action-reflection cycle (McNiff, 2013) (see Figure 1 on p. 17). But instead of thinking of a rigid scaffolding, like that of a building, I envision a grounded yet flexible scaffolding, like a well rooted pine tree with solid connections to the ground while still having the ability to change, grow, and interact in relation to the surrounding environment. Similar to how the nutrients in the soil change over time, the theories, ideas, and questions I converse with will also change. This pine tree scaffolding allows my perspectives to evolve over time to continue to be in relation to what is relevant for the communities I teach in and socially relevant to greater society.

Pine tree (on a beach in Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa)
Photo by Nicole Oga
Large green pine tree next to a sandy beach and ocean.

My pedagogical praxis is not fixed, rather it continually shifts to stay relevant to current realities. As hooks states "The engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute but always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself." (1994, p. 11). This concept of continually being in dialogue with a world beyond myself is vital. I strive to be in constant action-reflection cycles, where I can be in dialogue with and in relation to those I am teaching, the community, and greater society.

As a teacher I believe it is imperative that teachers closely reflect upon their pedagogical praxis because education has a direct impact on how societies function. I feel education shapes how people perceive the world, and thus can shift societal norms and how society functions at large. Education, in its many forms and levels, can be where people experience how to learn, think, and continue to discover who they are through self-awareness and social consciousness. Chatee Omisade Richardson, a scholar and educator who actively uses liberatory education praxis in her own teaching and scholarly work, states, "Teachers literally shape the future both by what they teach and by how they teach"

(2023, p. 4). What teachers teach, how teachers teach, and why teachers teach is essential in shaping society and our future.

In my experience, in many Western educational institutions, it is expected when teachers and students enter the classroom, they are to compartmentalize their "personal" lives from their "school" lives. I believe this is an impossible task to accomplish, and something that should not be done, as it hinders the learning and classroom environment. As Richardson says, "I see learning as a dynamic and constructive process entailing content and all the prior knowledge and experience students bring with them" (2023, p. 7). I expand on this to include teachers' prior knowledge and experience, as well. Teachers and students are all human beings who bring with them their own lived experience, histories, and knowledge, which cannot be left at the door when they arrive at school. When people bring their full selves to the classroom, it enriches and enhances the learning experience.

Thich Nhat Hanh (2017), Freire (1968/2018), hooks (1994), and Anttila (2015) emphasize a holistic view of human beings, which emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and taking into consideration each person's lived experience and societal context, as it impacts the educational environment and circumstances. Because of this, education is inherently intertwined with society, greatly impacting how our societal systems function and how we live. Since education is so interconnected with society, teachers and educators must continually reflect on, evaluate, evolve, and enact change within their teaching. I delve into this more within chapter 2.3.

Through my experience within the US education system, many educational institutions define the student-teacher relationship within a hierarchy, which Freire calls the *banking model of education* (1968/2018). The teacher has the answers, knowing what is right and wrong, and bestows this knowledge to their students. The students are there to absorb, remember, and later regurgitate the knowledge to prove how smart they are. I find this type of educational relationship to be ineffective, harmful, exclusionary, and marginalizing. My pedagogical praxis recognizes and grapples with the deep-rooted hierarchical power relationship between teachers and students. This hierarchy is not inherently bad, but it can become toxic and oppressive when the power is abused. Within my teaching I aim to deconstruct the harmful parts of the hierarchical student-teacher

relationship to ensure I am not misusing the power I hold as a teacher. I redefine the student-teacher relationship as a two-way street, where teachers and students learn from each other, creating a mutual learning experience.

I acknowledge that within educational settings there will always be a hierarchical power relationship where teachers hold more power, and with that more responsibility, than students. While I cannot completely dissolve this imbalance, I can intentionally teach in ways that acknowledge and account for this power dynamic to not perpetuate harmful use of this power. hooks emphasizes the importance of "acknowledge[ing] our [teacher's] power in the classroom" (2010, p. 56), and due to the extra power that teachers hold, students' and teachers' voices cannot "carry equal weight" (2010, p. 56) in the classroom. As the teacher, it is my responsibility to constantly be aware of this power imbalance, which informs my intentional teaching choices. In *Dance pedagogy for a diverse world: culturally relevant teaching in theory, research and practice*, McCarthy-Brown (2017) writes about power in the classroom and how it relates to societal systems. She recognizes how "questioning power structures" can "dismantle oppressive systems of education" (2017, p. 16). In my pedagogical praxis, I must continually question and examine this power structure and my positionality as the teacher to ensure I do not perpetuate harmful and oppressive practices within my teaching.

This greater responsibility that comes with being a teacher also entails holding the space. To clarify, holding the space "means constantly crafting a situation's conditions or atmosphere to encourage engagement in the present moment" (Ojanen, 2022, p. 30-31) and fostering a space where everyone can participate. Teachers are responsible for cultivating a culture where students can think critically, relate what they are learning to their lives, and have critical dialogue (hooks, 1994). They guide and moderate interactions so that there is space for all to participate with the potential for critical discussion, where it is ok to be uncomfortable and push boundaries. Students are responsible for showing up fully and contributing to continually cultivating the communal space.

Currently I feel I am deepening my pedagogical roots, creating more profound connections to a wide range of pedagogical theories and praxes, while simultaneously

pushing my own boundaries. Reaching my branches further out into a realm of not-knowing and growing new pine needles to try out different teaching practices. Like a pine tree, I have many needles with practices and exercises which I use with the various groups that I teach. I observe how these practices and exercises are experienced by the students and reflect on what worked and what might need shifting or changing, then continue the cycle by planning for the next class. My pedagogical praxis will continually grow and evolve over time, shedding what is no longer needed or relevant to make room for new branches and pine needles to grow, constantly reflecting, learning, and developing.

Tree roots (growing down the side of a cliff in Aotearoa)
Photo by Nicole Oga
Large tree with exposed roots dangling off the side of a cliff.

1.4. Societal context and structure

Recognizing the positionality of where my thesis took place and how it impacts my work is essential. For transparency, I provide context on where the workshops took place and explain when this paper was written. As I work on this thesis, it is during a time of great

reckoning for Western societies[4] to continually confront our ongoing history of colonialism, imperialism, genocide, white supremacy, and all forms of oppression. This is a reckoning that has come again and again within our history and will continue to come until we have true collective liberation. The ongoing land theft, genocide, and attempted ethnic cleansing[5] of Palestine and Palestinians has been on-going for over 75 years (Hatem Bazian, 2023) and is at, what I perceive as, a tipping point where something must change. As I watched, listened, and learned from the *Gaza Teach-in at UC Berkeley* (Hatem Bazian, 2023), in support of Palestinian liberation, I was overcome with emotion. I felt a flooding tidal wave washing over my being, sending chills through my entire body, filling my entire being with both deep sadness and a sense of deep hope.

I mention this as I believe it is important for contextualizing my work. My teaching and thesis cannot be separated from all that is happening in society, nor should it be. My experiences with working in solidarity with Palestinians towards their liberation and land restitution, have greatly impacted this thesis by further shaping how I perceive things and continuing to fuel the passion I have for this ever-important work.

I am teaching and writing this thesis within the context of Western society, specifically unceded Kumeyaay land in Turtle Island (San Diego, CA, USA), Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa (Auckland, New Zealand), and Finland. Throughout this thesis I will mention the three places I taught in and will use the indigenous names for two of them to pay respects to the indigenous stewards of the lands and emphasize that I reside, work, and travel on stolen lands, which must be returned to the indigenous peoples to truly decolonize (Tuck & Yang, 2012). While this thesis, to my understanding, did not take place directly on Sápmi land, I would like to acknowledge the Sami peoples as indigenous stewards of the land which "expands from Central Norway and Sweden over the northern part of Finland to the Kola Peninsula in Russia" (Sarivaara & Uusiautti, 2013, p. 1). I recognize that Western countries, for example decisions made by the Finnish government,

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4 Western societies refers to countries and nations (for example USA, Finland, New Zealand) with histories tying back to Western Europe, which share similar cultural and political characteristics of democracy, rational thinking, individualism, and capitalism. This differs from the indigenous peoples who reside on the land in these Western societies, and are fighting for land restitution. Many Western societies indoctrinated Western ways of living through colonialism and imperialism, oppressing indigenous peoples.

5 I use the words "attempted ethnic cleansing" as a way of acknowledging the ongoing resistance of Palestinians against Israel's attempt to ethnically cleanse (funded and supported by many Western countries, including the USA and Finland). Their resistance will not let their culture, history, and ways of living be eradicated.

deeply affect and impact the lives of the Sami people. Since I taught and lived in Finland, I am complicit in any harmful oppressions that occur. There is much work to be done in all three of these Western countries towards reparations and decolonization, which I cannot go into detail on within this paper, but wanted to ensure this was addressed, as decolonization is deeply connected to collective liberation, abolition, and liberatory education praxis.

In my lived experience, Western society is a white supremacist, cisgendered, heteropatriarchal, capitalist dominant society. These three countries, where I taught and wrote my thesis, share similarities with other Western societies, but I acknowledge that each country, society, and culture have their own complex, nuanced, and normalized ways of being. Systems of oppression/domination have embedded themselves into societal norms in different ways. This means as we work in solidarity inter/nationally[6] (Elia, 2023) towards collective liberation we must share ideas and strategies while also adapting them to best fit our specific societies and communities.

When writing this thesis, I have been intentional about who I reference and cite. In *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed (2017) sees citation as a way of relating to academia and giving space for those who have been intentionally not acknowledged or credited. Ahmed writes how she specifically chose to not cite white men and "cite those who have contributed to the intellectual genealogy of feminism and antiracism" (2017, p. 15). I have taken on this task of working with the long legacies of collective liberation, intersectional black feminism[7], antiracism[8], and abolition, built by many Black, Indigenous, and people of color. I have chosen to intentionally cite Black, Indigenous, people of color, especially womxn[9], within my thesis as a way to uplift their work, which is often excluded from Western academia, and because it forms the foundation of my understandings of these theories, praxes, and practices.

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6 The term "inter/nationalism", as elaborated on by Nada Elia (2023, p. 129), originates from Steven Salaita, and emphasizes how our struggles against oppression transcend country borders, while pointing out how country borders are narrowly defined by oppressive, often settler colonial, ideology and acknowledges that these country borders do not define indigeneity.

7 I name intersectional black feminism as it is distinct from white feminism (which excludes BIPOC womxn).

8 Antiracism is distinct from "not being racist" as it requires constant action and is not an identity. I do not have space in this paper to go into further detail on the concepts of intersectional black feminism and antiracism, but list them as they are prominent within my values and are brought into any work that I do.

9 The term womxn is used to expand woman/women to be inclusive of all forms of gender expression and not only for cisgendered women. This includes transgenders, gender non-conforming, and non-binary, just to name a few.

Through my lived experience as a Chinese, Japanese, American woman, I experience a world that is built for white, cisgendered, heterosexual, non-disabled men where their thoughts are heard, and their achievements are praised. A world that does not take me, with all my intersecting identities, into consideration and does not provide space to share my thoughts and ideas. I am using my thesis as a way to give credit and space to those who have inspired me and laid down the foundation for my understanding of abolitionist, intersectional black feminist, antiracist, and abolitionist praxis and thought. They have carved out space so that I am able to do this important work.

I aim for the structure of my thesis to be clear and articulate. As you read in chapter 1, I introduced myself, the practical work for this thesis, my pedagogical praxis, and contextualized this work. In chapter 2, I elaborate on the conceptual and theoretical framework. I explain the research method and main theories and praxes which are used throughout my teaching, research, and written work. In chapter 3 I go into detail about the three workshops – how they were planned and what happened during each workshop. Section 4 delves into my findings and learnings, and chapter 5 looks at where I want to take the work next.

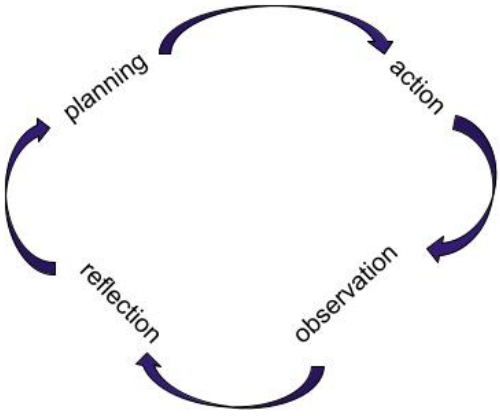
2. RESEARCH METHOD AND PRAXES

Returning to the metaphor of the pine tree as my pedagogical praxis, the soil for my pine tree is the research method, which provided essential nutrients and a stable foundation from where my research could grow. The trunk and branches of my tree are the praxes I used throughout the teaching and research process. In this chapter I will elaborate on action research, abolition, collective liberation, and liberatory education praxis. Action research forms the foundational soil from which my pine tree pedagogical praxis can grow and flourish, and these praxes create the core values within the tree trunk.

2.1. Action research

I applied *action research*, a research method, in the context of dance education to inquire about my own teaching. It provided a way to examine my pedagogical praxis "to check whether it [your practice] is as you feel it should be" (McNiff, 2013, p. 23). Through this action research I had the opportunity to ensure my pedagogical praxis aligned with my values, especially with abolition and collective liberation. As Jean McNiff states, "Action research involves learning in and through action and reflection" (2013, p. 24). It requires action from the researcher as a way to learn and grow through doing something and reflecting on it. For me, action research is a research-based practice, which is about continually learning and evolving, where the researcher is in a constant cycle of planning, action, observation, and reflection, see figure 1 below. This action-reflection cycle originally comes from Kurt Lewin (McNiff, 2013, p. 56-57).

Figure 1



Action-Reflection Cycle

Four clockwise arrows pointing from "action" to "observation" to "reflection" to "planning" back to "action".

Jean McNiff expands on the action-reflection cycle of Lewin, creating a "generative transformational evolutionary process" (2013, p. 66). Instead of having just one circular cycle, McNiff depicts an evolving cycle where new cycles are continually spun off and branched out. Imagine an upward never-ending spiral which has more spirals spinning off from it. I like this expansion of the action-reflection cycle as it highlights the exponential possibilities of action research to continually evolve, as long as the researcher continues to plan, act, observe, and reflect. Action research requires the researcher, or person who is inquiring, to actively reflect and act. As McNiff states action research can be seen "as a spontaneous, self-recreating system of enquiry" (2013, p. 67), where the continuous action-reflection cycle is perpetuated by the active participation of the researcher. They cannot be passive, but must take action to keep the cycle going.

During my action research I experienced this self-recreating system of enquiry. I found that once the cycle had started, it was difficult to stop it. After each day of the workshops, I was flooded with ideas and inspirations of where the next day could go based on my observations during the practices and how the students experienced it. Through reflection, multiple action-reflection cycles began branching off and I was able to better plan what practices to do the following day. Also, after completing each workshop, further action-reflection cycles spun off so that I could plan the following workshop. Since I was actively engaged and genuinely interested in the work, the effort required to continue the action research and action-reflection cycles felt natural and easy.

Through action research I can hold myself accountable to not only theorize and speak about how to teach, but also apply these theories within my teaching practices, or as Freire defines this as praxis (1968/2018). As both hooks (2003) and Freire (1968/2018) emphasize, these theories cannot just be thought about and theorized, but they must also be put into action within our teaching. In *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, hooks writes about her experience of speaking about education as the practice of freedom and the importance of implementing theories through action by stating, "It was clear to audiences that I practiced what I preached. That union of theory and praxis was a dynamic example for teachers seeking practical wisdom" (2003, p. x). Action research creates a pathway for me to find concrete ways of enacting abolition and collective liberation

through liberatory education praxis within my teaching. In order for my pedagogical praxis to be a praxis, I must take action and implement these theories in my teaching practices.

Action research is not a noun, it is a verb - something we do by taking action and looking at how we interact with and relate to the world around us to enact change. McNiff clearly articulates, “Action research is not a thing in itself; the term always implies a process of people interacting together and learning with and from one another in order to understand their practices and situations, and to take purposeful action to improve them” (McNiff, 2013, p. 25). Since action research is a process which requires interactions amongst people, my thesis would not have been possible without the participation and connections with the students in each of the workshops, the dialogues and support from my classmates and colleagues, and the mentorship and guidance from Eeva, my supervisor. Through all these interactions I was able to more deeply understand my pedagogical praxis and take purposeful action to improve my teaching practices.

While this thesis examines a defined time frame, January through April 2024, I acknowledge that examining my pedagogical praxis is an ongoing and infinite process that I must actively continue to pursue. Richardson states, “It is salient to continue doing self-assessment and self-work and to remain solution-focused by consistently merging research and practice; doing the work rather than just talking about it” (Richardson, 2023, p. 7). I am self-assessing and self-inquiring about my pedagogical praxis through not only this thesis, but will continue this throughout all of my teaching. This supports the evolution of my pedagogical praxis and prevents it from becoming static by taking intentional and informed actions to enact change.

I have chosen to pursue action research, diving into and inquiring about my pedagogical praxis because I believe through my teaching I can create societal change. As McNiff elaborates, “They [action researchers] undertake research to help them learn how to exercise their individual and collective educational agency, which they use to contribute to improved human, non-human [more-than-human][10] and environmental wellbeing”

[10] I prefer to not use the term non-human, as it can imply a human-centric hierarchy placing humans above all other things in the world. I have added more-than-human in parentheses as that is the term I prefer to use, which is used throughout this thesis.

(2013, p. 25). I believe that by intentionally engaging with my pedagogical praxis and enacting my teaching practices I can influence and change society to create the world I hope to live in, where **all** are truly free.

2.2. Collective liberation and abolition

Cross-section of a tree trunk
Photo by Nicole Oga
Brown, circular tree trunk laying in the dirt, showing the rings of the trunk.

Collective liberation and abolition form the core of my pedagogical praxis tree. Imagine the concentric circles of the trunk of a tree. The center and first ring of the trunk are collective liberation and abolition. That is how deeply embedded they are in my pedagogical praxis, directly at the core of it. As I watched the recording of the Gaza Teach-in at UC Berkeley (Hatem Bazian, 2023), I was reminded that abolition and collective liberation are foundational values for me. They permeate all that I do and all that I teach. There is no way of separating these from my teaching and this thesis, as such I find it important to discuss them further, looking at how they are woven into my pedagogical praxis and how they interweave with liberatory education praxis.

My knowledge on collective liberation and abolition is learned, and continually learned, through the grassroots organizing work I have done with Asian Solidarity Collective

(ASC)[11], attending direct actions (i.e. marches, protests, events), reading books and articles[12] (brown, 2020; Boggs, 2006; Davis, 2016; Davis et. al. 2022; Elia, 2023; Kudesia, 2022), attending teach ins and lectures (Hatem Bazian, 2023), and being in community and solidarity with a variety of grassroots organizing communities. I am sharing my understanding of these praxes, which is by no means meant to be a thorough or comprehensive history of the long legacy of these movements and praxes.

Abolition is a praxis and mass movement used throughout history to dismantle oppressive systems by recognizing that reform will not change the inherently oppressive systems (Davis et al., 2022). It centers on the understanding that prisons, police, and borders (as created by countries), cannot be reformed to end the oppression that they create, as these systems were built with the sole intention of dehumanizing, separating, excluding, and oppressing certain types of people, creating hierarchies of valuing some more than others (brown, 2020). Thus, these systems and ways of living must be abolished and dismantled, while simultaneously creating the alternatives (Davis et al, 2022; Elia, 2023; Kudesia, 2022). For Davis et al., abolition is "the refusal to consign humans and other beings to disposability" (2022, p. xii). Abolition dismantles hierarchies, undoing the idea of disposability, acknowledging the inherent value in everyone and everything, and does not put any one being above others. Abolition is inseparable from practice, as it is a praxis, or a theory put into action. If there is no action taken to dismantle oppressive systems and ways of living and simultaneously create the alternatives, then it is not truly abolition.

Nada Elia speaks of abolition in relation to Palestinian freedom and states, "Abolition hinges on the understanding that reform—making changes to an existing system—does not solve the problems created by that system, it only helps maintain the system by making it less obviously abrasive, without transforming its corrosive core" (2023, p. 10). In the case of Palestinian liberation, since Israel was founded on settler colonialism and the oppression of Palestinians, including the displacement, murder, and attempted ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people, it cannot be reformed. Any reforms that are made to how Israel is run and the mere existence of Israel as a country, only perpetuate and uphold the oppression of Palestinians. The only way to end the oppression is through complete

[11] For further information on Asian Solidarity Collective visit https://www.asiansolidaritycollective.org/
[12] For a list of additional resources, see appendix D.

transformational change, an abolition of the current system and ways of living, while simultaneously creating alternative ways of living and being, to "transform its corrosive core" (Elia, 2023, p. 10). Just as abolitionists knew that slavery could not be reformed, so do they know that policing, the criminal justice system, and the prison industrial complex[13] cannot be reformed, so do they know that settler colonialism of Palestine cannot be reformed. These oppressive systems must be transformed at the roots to simultaneously abolished while building the alternatives (Davis et al, 2022; Elia, 2023; Kudesia, 2022).

Collective liberation is a praxis that works towards creating a world where **all** are truly free. Collective liberation recognizes that, "Freedom for only some is not freedom at all. It is merely privilege if it does not also extend to the most marginalized members of our societies" (Elia, 2023, p. x). Specifically, the most marginalized, or most directly impacted (Davis et al., 2022, p. 55), are black, brown, indigenous, queer, trans, and gender non-conforming womxn. This idea has deep roots, going back to at least 1971, when Fannie Lou Hamer, civil rights activist, and black feminist, said, "nobody's free until everybody's free" (Brooks, M.P. et al., 2010, p. 139). Just as our struggles are intertwined so is our freedom. In order to be truly free, we must collectively all be free from oppression. If a single person is left behind, then we do not have collective liberation.

I believe that collective liberation rejects the idea ingrained into Western societies that there is a scarcity of resources which we must fight over. Rather, collective liberation enacts a way of living in abundance which recognizes that the world has enough resources to support all life on Earth and we do not need to oppress and abuse each other or the more-than-human world in order to live. We, as a society, will have to change how we live, including dismantling neoliberal, heteropatriarchal, capitalism in Western societies, in order to experience the abundance that Earth has. It will require much work, both as individuals and within our society at large, but it is possible. I do not have the capacity to fully unravel this within my thesis, but feel it is an important part of collective liberation which should be touched upon.

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[13] The term prison industrial complex refers to "the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems" (Critical Resistance, n.d.)

Abolition and collective liberation are deeply interconnected. For me, I cannot have one without the other because they form a kind of symbiotic relationship within my work and everyday life. They mutually support one another to continue to create a world where all are truly free. Because of this symbiosis, these two praxes have many things in common that overlap and interweave with one another. Both collective liberation and abolition understand that all forms of oppression are intertwined and interconnected (brown, 2020; Davis, 2016). For example, this means when we allow homophobic systems and ways of being to occur in our communities, we are not only upholding the oppression of LGBTQIA2S+[14] people, but also strengthening all other forms of oppression.

Through my thesis work, I am intentionally addressing systems of oppression/domination within my dance teaching and the dance field, and because all forms of oppression intertwine, I believe it can radiate outward to other systems. Of course, this radiation will not occur as a biproduct of the work I am doing, but requires direct and intentional action to bring these changes into wider society. In *Greater than the sum of our parts: Feminism, Inter/Nationalism, and Palestine* (2020), Nada Elia clearly depicts how the oppression of Palestinians is interconnected to all other forms of oppression, including climate change through greenwashing, sexism through purplewashing, and homophobia through pinkwashing[15]. If in my teaching I am perpetuating any systems of oppression/domination, then I am upholding these systems within society at large. It is my responsibility to directly confront these within my teaching and ensure I am not actively and complicitly supporting oppressions/dominations.

Sara Ahmed poetically describes oppression as "how we feel pressed into things, by things, because of who we are recognized as being" (2017, p. 50). Oppressions not only press people based on their perceived identities, but they also establish the supremacy of one type of being over others. They uphold supremacy, or "the belief that some of us are normal, are better, are justified to take and do whatever we want, including harm each other and the earth" (brown, 2020, p. 8). For example, ableism establishes ableist supremacy by valuing the non-disabled body, as defined by society, as normal, better,

[14] LGBTQIA2+ is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Two Spirit.
[15] Greenwashing, purplewashing, and pinkwashing are when an entity (i.e. a person, company, country) falsely claims environmentally conscious, womxn friendly, and LGBTQIA2+ friendly actions and utilizes these falsities to further enact harm and uphold oppression.

and justified in creating the world in ableist ways at the expense and harm of disabled people. Abolition and collective liberation work together to find ways of undoing the harms that are caused by all varieties of supremacy.

In order to combat all these varying forms of supremacy we must "look[s] beyond the end of oppression, to life-affirming practices" (Elia, 2023, p. 5) and "flood the entire system with life-affirming principles and practices" (brown, 2020, p. 8). Such practices are the alternative ways of living which abolition and collective liberation are creating. In *We will not cancel us: and other dreams of transformative justice* (2020), adrienne maree brown describes one such alternative, transformative justice, as an alternative to the criminal justice system. Transformative justice involves "justice practices that go all the way to the root of the problem and generate solutions and healing there, such that the conditions that create injustice are transformed" (brown, 2020, p. 68). The basis for reforms confines us to only finding solutions within the current, inherently oppressive, system. Instead of relying on superficial reforms, collective liberation and abolition are about transformation, at "the root of the problem" (brown, 2020, p. 68), dreaming outside of current realities to create alternative systems which are no longer founded on the oppression of others.

Artists have been an integral part of both abolition and collective liberation by being "key agents seeding resistance and providing tools for us to imagine otherwise" (Davis et al., 2022, p. 8). Artists are both integral members of social justice movements by fighting to dismantle oppressive systems and also cultivate spaces where we can collectively dream to reality alternative ways of living. They create artwork for the posters and protest signs used during direct actions and facilitate creative practices to host political education events, teach-ins, and webinars – just to name a few examples.

Abolition and collective liberation praxes have been used by artists in their artistic practices for many generations. For example, I attended one of the *We should all be dreaming* workshops hosted by Sonya Lindfors and Maryan Abdulkarim (2022, November 10). This workshop brought together artists across various art forms to dream together of collective liberation. The speculative dreaming practices and exercises fostered a community where we could build our dreams and bring them to life. In her

thesis, Reettaleena Rauhala describes how she attended a similar workshop by Lindfors and Abdulkarim, and states, “The act of dreaming and sharing dreams with others makes dreams somehow more real, more tangible, more potent, and more attainable. Their potential for existence is amplified” (Rauhala, 2022, p. 9). I felt a similar sense of dreams becoming more tangible and more able to come into existence. By saying my dreams aloud, I felt one step closer to them becoming a part of reality. Through this speculative dreaming workshop, I was inspired and motivated to continue utilizing these praxes of abolition and collective liberation within my own artistic work and teachings.

Alexia Buono, a dancer, educator, and scholar-choreographer, has been working with abolition and collective liberation within the field of dance. She and her colleagues, Cas Burns, Janet Schroeder, and Mariko Yamada have formed a coalition of adjunct faculty in dance, “who are reimaging power and privilege in higher education through antiracist pedagogy” (Buono et. al., 2020). They explain practices they use within their teaching to bring antiracist pedagogy into the dance classroom. I view their work to directly address and enact antiracist change within their teaching and institutions, as one of the many ways of dreaming to life collective liberation. I am motivated by their committed and clear actions, and I am encouraged to continue to take my own concrete efforts towards collective liberation within my pedagogical praxis. As noted, these praxes are not new to the arts field, and by weaving abolition and collective liberation into my pedagogical praxis, I am joining the long lineage of artists who have already been doing this work. Through teaching the contemporary dance and partnering community practice workshops, I hope to seed resistance and create a space to imagine otherwise within the dance and movement field.

For me, these workshops are a way to practice collective liberation and abolition by bringing into reality alternative ways of living and being in relation to one another. I believe that by creating caring communities within dance education I am creating the alternative ways of living that are needed for collective liberation. When the dancers experience this within the dance studio, they may be forever changed and, hopefully, can bring this change out into their daily lives. Potentially affecting wider change within their communities and society at large. Through utilizing liberatory education praxis within my teaching, I am able to bring abolition and collective liberation into dance education. I

aim to dismantle harmful student-teacher hierarchies and cultivate a community where everybody feels they are included and belong, which I see as an alternative to the current oppressive ways of being that permeate Western societies.

This is just a small portion of the theories, practices, and praxes of collective liberation and abolition. I have chosen to highlight particular aspects of the praxes in order to give a basis of understanding that can be used to examine my thesis. I will always be learning more and diving deeper, with the understanding that as we continue to change so will these praxes. After making your way through this thesis, I encourage you to continue this learning, which I intend to do for the rest of my life.

2.3. Liberatory education praxis

Since a common basis of collective liberation and abolition has been established, I now look at how they interweave and interact with liberatory education praxis. I am approaching liberatory education praxis in the context of dance education as a way to bring collective liberation and abolition into dance. Enacting liberatory education praxis requires intentional reflection, evaluation, and implementation of change, which can be done by anyone for any type of education.

My understanding of *liberatory education praxis* is rooted in bell hooks' education as a practice of freedom (1994), which is deeply influenced by Paulo Freire's emancipatory education and critical consciousness (1968/2018), and Thich Nhat Hanh's holistic view of beings from Buddhism (2017). To best articulate it with clarity, I define four elements that comprise liberatory education praxis – education as a practice of freedom, engaged pedagogy, holistic view of beings, and cultivating community. Returning to the pedagogical praxis tree, I envision liberatory education praxis as a large branch growing from the collective liberation and abolition tree trunk, and the four elements as smaller branches growing from the liberatory education praxis branch. These four elements are by no means comprehensive or the only components within liberatory education praxis. They are only my perspective on liberatory education praxis and what I have found most important within my own pedagogical praxis.

2.3.1. Education as a practice of freedom

hooks' education as a practice of freedom (1994) establishes educating in a way where systems of oppression/domination are not reinforced and education can liberate people, allowing them to have agency, autonomy, and the ability to affect change in the world. This is influenced and connected with Freire's emancipatory education (1968/2018), where education is a means to "Authentic liberation – the process of humanization" and "Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (1968/2018, p. 79). This idea of liberation as the ability to see the full humanity of each person directly addresses the dehumanization that occurs in all types of oppression.

Education can be a way to liberation by supporting people's empowerment to be agents in society so they can transform the world through their actions. Freire's emancipatory education has been expanded into critical pedagogy, where educators are committed to ending oppressions, and has been used within education for many decades (Ellsworth, 1989). As critical pedagogy has developed within academia, there has been abstraction through "consistently strip[ping] discussions of classroom practices of historical context and political position" (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 300). I incorporate this critique by Ellsworth and explicitly reveal the political and historical context of my work while giving concrete examples of how I put liberatory education praxis, a critical pedagogy, into action.

In order to genuinely support liberatory and empowering education, teaching is done in ways that emphasize and validate each student's lived experience and knowledge to avoid the banking model of education (Freire, 1968/2018), and the condescension and patronization which tend to occur in this type of teaching. Freire posits that emancipatory education is "a pedagogy that must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed" (Freire, 1968/2018, p. 48). This mirrors collective liberation and abolition where the emphasis is on following the lead of those most directly impacted (Davis et al., 2022, p. 55). That is why I view liberatory education praxis, which educates by forging with and following the lead of the students and their lived experiences and knowledge, as a way to bring the values of collective liberation and abolition into dance.

One way I implement this within my teaching is through encouraging students to speak from their experiences and relate the movement material and dance practices to their lives. I ask, "What is coming up for you? Any sensations or anything you notice as you do this movement?", which gives students the space to consider and speak to what they are experiencing. Something as simple as encouraging the students to play with the movement and find the way to do it that works best for their own body, can support them in validating their movement history and relate it to their own culture. This teaching practice is not unique to liberatory education praxis, and is used by many contemporary dance teachers, but I have found it to be an effective way of enacting liberatory education praxis.

While Freire contributes to the foundation of emancipatory education, which has greatly affected many ideas, theories, and actions for dismantling oppressions, there are critiques of his work. Feminists, often black and POC[16] womxn, have pointed out the contradictions of sexism, a simplified universal experience of the oppressed, and lack of intersectionality[17] within Freire's writings, teachings, and actions (Ellsworth, 1989; Stranger, 2018; Weiler, 1991). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was originally published in 1968 and came directly from Freire's work addressing classism, or systematic oppression based on social class status, within Brazilian society. As it was originally written, it only took into consideration class oppression, specifically for working-class and poor men, and lacked a feminist perspective (Weiler, 1991). Even hooks critiques him by stating, "it was not that I did not see sexist behavior on his part, only that these contradictions are embraced as part of the learning process, part of what one struggles to change" (hooks, 1994, p. 56). hooks is critical of Freire's sexism, while not allowing it to negate all his work. Rather, she is conscious of the shortcomings, carefully taking them into consideration and how they impact her work.

[16] POC is the abbreviation for people of color.

[17] Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). Intersectionality considers how someone's intersecting identities (i.e. black and womxn) affect and impact their lived experience and potential marginalization. Struggles are not categorized as singular issues (Crenshaw, 1989), rather we see the complexity of how various oppressions intersect and compound on each other, causing particular marginalization based on the multiplicity of our identities. Using this bottom-up approach not only benefits those most marginalized or impacted, but also uplifts all beings (Crenshaw, 1989). Through intersectionality those who are most marginalized or impacted are brought to the center to ensure all are uplifted during the struggle for collective liberation. No one is left behind.

I bring this approach, of being critical without completely disregarding his work, into my own critiques of Freire, where I find myself at odds with the human-centric ideology used throughout his writings. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1968/2018), especially during chapter 4, he utilizes a hierarchy, placing humans at the top, as the only living thing that can consciously transform the world around them. I disagree with this hierarchical, human-centric ideology and believe the more-than-human world has the ability to actively change the world. In my experience, our relationship to the more-than-human world around us is not as simplistic and binary as Freire depicts.

It is important within my pedagogical praxis to not integrate this type of hierarchical relationship. Instead, I incorporate Thich Nhat Hanh's ideas that humans and more-than-human life are more alike and are not in hierarchical relationship. He says, "Like every species on Earth, we are always seeking the ideal conditions that will allow us to live to our fullest potential. We want to do more than just survive. We want to live" (2017, p. 3). This deconstructs human-centric thinking and views the more-than-human world as capable of making choices to live to their fullest potential. Humans are in relation and interconnected to the world around us, not above it. I do not have time to fully develop these critiques to Freire's work, but I believe it is important to briefly discuss them as it impacts my understanding of liberatory education praxis.

2.3.2. Engaged pedagogy

The second element of liberatory education praxis is bell hooks' engaged pedagogy (1994/2010), which is influenced by Freire's dialogical education (1968/2018). She describes engaged pedagogy as, "crucial for me [the teacher] and every other student to be an active student, not a passive consumer" (hooks, 1994, p. 14) through critical thinking (hooks, 2010). Within engaged pedagogy not only are students enabled to think critically, but teachers are as well. This critical thinking promotes an active engagement in what is being learned and an interest in the people in the class, creating connections to be able to question, investigate, and learn from each other. Engaged pedagogy involves nurturing intellectual growth, spiritual growth, and well-being (hooks, 1994). Spiritual growth does not refer to religion or piety. Instead, spiritual growth "is a path for us to generate happiness, understanding, and love, so we can live deeply each moment of our life…discovering ways to handle life's difficulties" (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2017, p. 2) in

order to live more fully in the world. I build on this and refer to intellectual growth, spiritual growth, and well-being as *holistic growth*. Since I am using this in the context of dance, I am taking into account bodily knowledge. Holistic growth is rooted in bodily experience, embodied interactions, and how the entire body is a site for knowledge and intellect.

Engaged pedagogy is teaching in a way that supports agency and autonomy, which can lead to empowerment. I consider the power dynamic between teachers and students when approaching empowerment to avoid harmful patronization, or "forcing" empowerment upon students. Ellsworth (1989) problematizes empowerment, the notion of power imbalances between teachers and students, and how critical pedagogies, such as liberatory education praxis, can superficially address these imbalances. If educators inadequately employ critical pedagogy, they run the risk of "give[ing] the illusion of equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship intact" (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 306). I directly grapple with this and acknowledge, as a teacher, I do not have the power to empower students, but I can teach in ways that support their agency, which can potentially lead to empowerment.

In engaged pedagogy, education is not only about learning the academic facts but is also about understanding how the academic material being learned relates to the student's life, societal systems, and the more-than-human world. This enriches the material that is being learned and can be more easily remembered because it is relatable. Being aware of these relations allows for holistic growth, which supports self-actualization, or becoming more in tune with who you are and your relationship to the world around you.

To be able to support the students in this way, "teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being" (hooks, 1994, p. 15). If teachers are to guide students to live more fully in the world, then teachers must actively practice living more fully in the world. This self-actualization happens not only within the teacher's life outside the educational setting, but it also happens in the classroom with the students. There is mutual learning and growth for both the teachers and students, happening side-by-side, which is a key component to engaged pedagogy. This process of self-actualization is not fixed or static and requires continuous practice. As society shifts

so must our relationship to it, continually assessing who we are and how we relate to the world around us.

For hooks, vulnerability is a key component of enacting engaged pedagogy to nurture growth and self-actualization within the classroom. Teachers cannot ask students to be open and vulnerable if they are not also willing to be open and vulnerable. As hooks says, "Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks" (1994, p. 21). To cultivate a space where critical thinking and critical dialogue can occur, trust must be built. Teachers can facilitate trust amongst everyone in the classroom, including the teacher, through being open about their vulnerability. It could be as simple as being honest when you, as the teacher, do not know the answer to a question and let the students know that you will get back to them once you have looked into their question.

Finding a balance of honestly sharing and providing transparency, while not oversharing information that does not support the learning, is essential to engaged pedagogy. I aim to openly share relevant personal narratives and experiences with students to foster a space of open sharing. As a teacher, if I speak about a personal experience that relates to the material being learnt, then I am opening the door to allow others in the room to be able to share their own experiences.

2.3.3. Holistic view of beings

The third element of liberatory education praxis is a holistic view of beings, which is inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh's Buddhist teachings (2017). A holistic view of beings can start on an individual level. The body and mind are seen as inseparable and "depend on each other in order to exist. Whatever happens in the body influences the mind, and whatever happens in the mind influences the body" (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2017, p. 40). Each being is viewed as a whole, where the body and mind are interconnected with each other rather than siloed. A holistic view of beings also acknowledges what makes up each being is not just the present moment, but includes their lived experiences, knowledge, and culture. This holistic perspective allows us to "see[ing] each person as a part of a community and culture" (Anttila, 2015, p. 6). As previously stated, when each person

enters the classroom they bring with them prior experiences, knowledge, and perspectives, which impact the teaching environment.

A simple way I take into consideration students' backgrounds, or view them holistically, in my dance teaching is by consciously choosing not to use ballet terminology when teaching contemporary dance. Although they are not inherently harmful, the use of ballet terms can be exclusionary and marginalizing when used with a group of students from diverse dance and movement backgrounds. By deliberately using other terms that are not exclusive to ballet, I am validating the diversity of dance histories and recognizing the wholeness of each student. I return to this in chapter 4.

Then on a larger scale, a holistic view of beings involves understanding the interconnectedness of humans with all of the world around us, or what Thich Nhat Hanh calls "interbeing" (2017, p. 13). Interbeing acknowledges that humans cannot exist outside of the world. Rather, we are intertwined with it, constantly being influenced by the world around us and the world is constantly affected by us. Humans are not placed above all other life, instead we perceive a non-hierarchical relationship with the world where humans are just as much a part of the world as any other thing. This life perspective also has deep history with many indigenous peoples cultures, including those from Turtle Island (Kimmerer, 2013), which I do not have the capacity to expand upon within this paper.

This idea of taking into consideration the fullness of each person in the classroom, including the body and mind as inseparable, lived experience, and interbeing, has greatly influenced my pedagogical praxis, as described earlier in the introduction, and is a vital element of liberatory education praxis. A holistic view of beings shifts our relationship to ourselves, each other, and the more-than-human world. Through taking it into our perspectives we are enacting abolition and collective liberation by creating an alternative lifestyle while abolishing the current oppressive ways of living.

2.3.4. Cultivating community

The fourth element of liberatory education praxis is cultivating community. For me, community is about creating a space and environment where everyone is included and

everyone belongs[18]. Inclusion is about intentionally building a space where the multiplicity of human experiences is considered, allowing for a wide range of diverse differences to easily exist in the space. Belonging is when people can truly be themselves and they do not have to change or conform themselves to fit in. As a teacher, it is my responsibility to foster the basis of the community by modeling inclusion and belonging within my pedagogical praxis. This is what I hope to do within each workshop of my thesis, and all future teachings. By fostering an inclusive community where everyone belongs, we are creating another way of interacting and being with one another.

Creating community through inclusion and belonging will not happen instantly, but rather takes time and attention. Each class will be different and will require different amounts of time and various practices to support this cultivation. Community is about building trust through the process of getting to know one another. An initial step I take in fostering community is by beginning each class with a check-in circle. I start by going around the circle asking each student to share their name, pronouns, and asking them one question to answer (ie. What is one thing that brought you joy this week?). This simple practice gives the space for each person to be acknowledged and heard, which supports inclusion and belonging. Also, through getting to know each other, a seed is planted for trust to start to form amongst everyone in the classroom. I further expand on the check-in circle practice and how it impacts the creation of community in chapters 3 and 4.

As hooks emphasizes in engaged pedagogy (1994; 2010), this trust can be built through the teacher sharing vulnerability with the students by taking personal risks. When the teacher sets the example by opening up about themselves, then the students are more willing to open up about themselves, like a reciprocal relationship. As hooks states, “When we all take risks, we participate mutually in the work of creating a learning community. We discover together that we can be vulnerable in the space of shared learning, that we can take risks” (2010, p. 21). Once a seedling of trust is established, those who are in community can take risks, learn, and grow together.

[18] Recently, the terms “inclusion” and “belonging” have been co-opted by mainstream culture (often times perpetrators of oppression) and are sometimes used as meaningless buzz words. I acknowledge that since these terms have been co-opted by oppressors, they can be harmful. I use “inclusion” and “belonging” in my thesis as a way to reclaim these words as a way to work towards collective liberation.

2.3.5. Educators using liberatory education praxis

These are the four elements of liberatory education praxis which have had the most impact on my pedagogical praxis, teaching practices, and thesis work. While this is what I have emphasized in my teaching, it is not the only way to integrate liberatory education praxis into education and teaching. Chatee Omisade Richardson, an educator and scholar, uses liberatory education praxis in her teaching and describes it "as an approach to learning that provides students with agency, acknowledges student realities and experiences, and also acknowledges oppressive policies and societal structures that may hinder their progression" (2023, p. 1). In her research, she received unfiltered feedback from former students, across various courses in psychology, history, and education, over many years of teaching, where she saw the impact that her teaching had on the students (2023). This kind of examination of her pedagogical praxis inspires me to continue my work and continually ask for direct feedback from students.

Camilla Stranger, a dance artist and educator, has used liberatory education praxis in dance education working with Black, working-class girls in the UK (2018). She clearly depicts her positionality as a white, middle-class woman, and how this impacts her teaching Black girls, who have different identities and life experiences than herself. Stranger uses a black feminist approach to liberatory education praxis in dance education. Dance is a way for Black women to fully express themselves, reclaim their sensuality from white cis-heteropatriarchy and restore their full humanity to transcend beyond the limitations of the current oppressive societal systems (Stranger, 2018). These are just a couple of examples of how other teachers have implemented liberatory education praxis in their teaching. I am motivated by their work and hope to continue the long legacy of liberatory education praxis by bringing it into my own pedagogical praxis.

3. WORKSHOPS: WHAT HAPPENED AND HOW THINGS WERE DONE

As previously touched upon, the workshops were a way for me to examine my own pedagogical praxis to ensure it aligns with my values of collective liberation and abolition. My main focus was working with cultivating community, which is the fourth element of liberatory education praxis. I explored how dance and movement practices could foster a caring community within the dance studio. Caring is a way of being that takes into consideration others, both human and more-than-human. Building reciprocity so that everyone is supported and cared for, where there is not only harmony but also accountability when harm and conflict arise. I wanted to intentionally home in on what was needed from me, as the teacher, to be able to cultivate a community where everyone felt they were included and belonged.

While my focus was on cultivating a caring community, all four elements of liberatory education praxis interconnect and influence each other. Many of the practices support multiple elements as there are no definite boundaries between them. Throughout chapters 3 and 4 I will highlight the four elements of liberatory education praxis, while continuing to bring the focus back to cultivating a caring community. Now I will dive into the workshops, explaining the context, my planning process, and what occurred during the contemporary dance classes and the partnering community practice sessions.

3.1. Workshop structure, planning, and contexts

The title of the workshops was *Contemporary Dance and Partnering Community Practice*. The three workshops had similar daily schedules, starting with a contemporary dance class, then a thirty-minute or one hour break, and ending with the partnering community practice. Each day was four to five hours long with the contemporary dance class being about an hour and a half, and the partnering community practice lasting for two to three hours. The reason I started each day with the contemporary dance class was to allow the students time to tune-in to their own bodies. This would prepare them for the partnering community practice where they would need to not only be aware of themselves, but also be tuned into their partner and the group at large. The classes were

also a chance for the students to become better acquainted with my pedagogical approach. Providing a gentle introduction to the open sharing, and potentially emotional work, that would occur in the partnering community practice sessions.

As briefly mentioned in chapter 1.2, I taught three workshops in three different contexts. The first workshop was hosted by Disco Riot and happened on 12-14 January 2024 on unceded Kumeyaay land in Turtle Island (San Diego, California, USA). The group consisted of twelve adult dancers and movers from the local community, ranging in age and with varying dance and movement backgrounds. The second workshop, hosted by Independance, took place in Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa (Auckland, New Zealand) on 2-3 March 2024. Similar to the first workshop, the students consisted of local adults from the community. The third workshop, which occurred on 8-12 April 2024 in Outokumpu, Finland, differed from the first two because the students were a class from Riveria, a vocational school, rather than being open to the local community. Through these workshops, the students and I questioned, **by putting into practice care, through touch, support, and observation, how are we dreaming into reality the world we hope to live in?**

When planning the workshops, I was most interested in making them accessible to the communities where I was teaching, which includes not only ensuring the content is relatable and relevant to the community but also crafting the schedule in a way that fits with the community member's schedules. The planning for the third workshop at Riveria was simple and involved collaborating with the school's program director, who offered five days that I could come guest teach the second-year dance studies students. I worked to make the content relatable and relevant by speaking with the director to find out the types of things the students were already learning and how my offering could expand and support their studies.

The planning for the first and second workshops was more involved and required more decision making. To set the dates and time that the workshops would take place, I worked with the program directors at Disco Riot and Independance to find schedules that would meld best with their communities. With Disco Riot we put out a preliminary survey giving time of day options to gather information on what would work best for those who were

interested in the workshop. This was very insightful and helped make the workshop available those who were interested in it. I also discussed with the directors about the content to see if they felt their community would want to participate and could benefit from what I had to offer. All of this planning shaped the workshops around the communities in which they were taking place.

The final component to the practical work for my thesis was facilitating a workshop for the thesis examiners and invited guests. This happened at the Theatre Academy at the University of the Arts Helsinki on 6 April 2024. This was a shortened version of the workshop which lasted for two and a half hours, where the emphasis was on sharing the workshop experience with the examiners and my colleagues in Helsinki. It was important to me that the examiners experience the workshop practices, as it enhances the work by making it more tangible and relatable. In this writing I do not have the space to elaborate further on the shortened workshop as the development of my pedagogical praxis was mostly impacted by the three main workshops.

3.2. Contemporary dance classes

Across all the workshops, the content for the contemporary dance classes was similar to each other and I made subtle changes to the content based on feedback and observations from the previous workshops. I will now look at the contemporary dance classes explaining what occurred and how the choices I made support liberatory education praxis.

Every contemporary dance class started with a **check-in circle** where each person shared their name, pronouns, and could answer a question I asked of them. Across the three workshops I used a variety of questions.

- What is one word to describe how you are feeling?
- Choose one color which describes how you are feeling.
- If you were an animal, what would you be?
- Share one good thing and one challenging thing from this week.

After the check-in circle, movement began with guided improvisation, which I called **warming-in** and could include shaking and bouncing, patting the body to wake up the

fascia, and yoga flows. The warm-in was a way to sense where the body was at and become aware of what the body needs. Then came **set movement exercises** which focused on properly warming up particular parts of the body to prepare for the more complicated movements. This led to doing **floorwork and inversion exercises** across the space, where the focus was on gradually building up to doing more complicated rolling, sliding, handstand, and cartwheel movements. To finish up, I taught an **ending combination** of set movements which incorporated things that were done earlier throughout the class. Lastly, there was an **ending circle** to cool down through guided improvisation and a chance to thank the students and each other for showing up to take class.

Ending combination (third workshop)
Photo by Nicole Oga
Three dancers in a dance studio with black floors and yellow walls reaching their left arm up.

Many of the practices and language I utilized while teaching the contemporary dance classes are not unique to liberatory education praxis, and they are used by many other dance educators across many styles of dance. I found that these practices were a way to bring abolition and collective liberation values into dance education, as they support the

four elements of liberatory education praxis - education as a practice of freedom, engaged pedagogy, holistic view of beings, and cultivating community.

I brought the first element of liberatory education praxis, or **education as a practice of freedom**, into my teaching by not reinforcing systems of oppression/domination. I let go of the idea that the teacher is the most knowledgeable person in the class and valued the students' knowledge just as much as my own. Dismantling this hierarchical system of oppression/domination could involve doing and saying less to allow space for other thoughts and ideas to permeate the space. For example, when teaching the first workshop, after completing the feet exercise across the floor, I asked the students if they had any comments or questions about what they just experienced. I intentionally left the prompt open ended to allow the students to openly share their experience without me shaping or framing it. One student commented how it felt easier to do the exercise when they allowed their head to move on the top of the spine, and the discussion continued with various other students chiming in to speak from their own experience. This is one example of me letting go of a problematic aspect of the teacher-student hierarchy where the teacher holds all the knowledge and must impart it upon the students, and instead I was able to actively listen and allow the discussion to flow based on the students' experiences. I had no urge to jump in and ensure the discussion went a particular way, instead I was most interested in being a part of the developing interactions and sharing of knowledge.

The second and third elements of liberatory education praxis, **engaged pedagogy** and **holistic view of beings**, were supported in my teaching by providing options for the students to choose from and encouraging them to navigate the movement in a way that worked best for them. Through giving multiple options for some of the movements, my aim was to allow the students to actively engage with the learning material and provide the students with an opportunity to exercise their own agency through choice. I stressed that even though there were set movements, the students did not have to precisely mimic how I did them. They could alter the movements to best suit their body. The way I showed and explained the movement was just one way of approaching it, which may or may not work for them. I used cues like "listen to the sensations that are coming up in your body" and "play with the movement and find what works best for your body". By repeatedly stating that the students could change the set movements to meet their needs, I was

acknowledging the students' lived experience, bodily knowledge, and diverse movement backgrounds that they bring with them into the studio. I encouraged them to trust their own body, its' sensations, and their embodied knowledge. Through this language and these actions, I demonstrated to the dancers that I acknowledge and accept the entirety of them, just as they are - seeing each person holistically.

The fourth element of liberatory education praxis, or **cultivating community**, was also supported through my teaching. The check-ins were integral for us, as a group, to get to know each other and begin building trust. Depending on the types of students in the class, this kind of individual sharing in a circle may or may not be suitable. When needed, I have changed the check-in circles to have students raise their hands if they would like to share, rather than having every person share. Check-ins are a common practice in many dance classes, and I have found them to be a useful practice within liberatory education praxis to promote the trust that is needed for creating a community. I will go into further detail on this in chapter 4.

3.3. Partnering community practice

Differing from the contemporary dance classes, the partnering community practices varied across the workshops. I chose similar starting points for all the workshops, but then allowed the practices to develop based on what actually happened, what interested the students, and what came up during the group discussions. The partnering community practices explored various partnering, support, and observation or witnessing practices, seeking to cultivate a caring community through dance, movement, and by simply being together. Through partnering practices, involving both touch and observation, the groups played with how being in community could radiate and affect their approach to dance, movement, and even life outside the studio.

The partnering practices come from many different dance, movement, and somatic practices, which I have encountered through different teachers in various settings – contemporary dance classes, Deborah Hay improvisation practice, contact improvisation, yoga, and many more. I do not claim them as my own inventions and do my best to give credit to those from whom I have learned them. Due to the wide variety of practices that were used during each workshop, I do not have space within my thesis to go in depth on

each practice. I have chosen to write in detail about particular practices that had the greatest impact and insights for my pedagogical praxis in relation to liberatory education praxis and cultivating a caring community. Appendix A contains descriptions of the practices I am unable to write about in the main body of my thesis.

The beginning of the first day of the partnering community practice involved the **creation of community agreements**. These are a set of guiding principles which bring into the space the things that each person needs in order to participate and defines how we wish to interact with one another. Community agreements, which are co-created amongst all members of the class, are shared values which everyone agrees to for the duration of the workshop. Collectively the group continually creates a space where each person can authentically express themselves through thoughts, feelings, and actions. From this place, each person can challenge their habitual ways of thinking to broaden their perspectives, cultivate more empathy, and continue to learn and grow.

These agreements were not set in stone, and could evolve and change over time. It wasn't about having to perfectly follow each agreement, because that kind of perfection is not realistic or achievable, but instead was about keeping the agreements within our consciousness to allow them to inform how we interacted with each other. The community agreements provided a way for us, as a group, to support each other and handle any conflict or harm that might arise. I learned this practice from the grassroots social justice work I have done with Asian Solidarity Collective, and this is used by many groups and educators across a variety of fields.

The process started with five to ten minutes for students to contemplate the below questions on their own.

- What do I need in order to be in this space?
- What support do I need?
- What are my values?
- How would I like to be treated?
- How do we want to interact in this space?

Then each person wrote down, on individual sticky notes, as many things as they would like to share and be a part of the community agreements. Once everyone had their contributions written down, the group gathered to share them and place them on the community agreements poster. We took turns saying one out loud and then placed it somewhere on the poster. Then another person chimed in, maybe because they had an item that related to what was already said or to add a new idea that had not yet been shared. This process flowed and continued based on the group's dynamics. I allowed there to be many pauses and silences to support people being able to think, process, and share in their own time.

In the community agreements co-creation process, I shared about the power imbalance that I hold as the teacher by stating, "Be aware of power and privilege." As spoken about earlier in my thesis, as a teacher I hold a different amount of power and responsibility. It was important to directly address this with the entire group to ensure they knew it was something I was working with while teaching these workshops. I took this as a chance to implement engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994) by being open and vulnerable with the students, which hopefully fostered the space for them to feel comfortable with sharing openly.

Revisiting the community agreements (first workshop)
Photo by Manuel Gonzalez
Six people in a dance studio with black floors and white walls. Two people walking up to the poster, one person pointing to the poster, three people looking at the poster.

For each of the following days of the workshop, we revisited the community agreements. Taking a few minutes to choose one or two that resonated with each person that day, and if anything new came up new sticky notes could be added to the agreements. Then we shared our choices by saying them out loud for the group. Each person had a chance to elaborate on why they chose the particular agreement. I incorporated these daily sharings as a way to support the continuing development of trust and connection between us. It was important that the group not only spend time creating them on the first day, but also revisited them every day to keep them in connection with the practices we were doing. The community agreements supported the fourth element of liberatory education praxis, or cultivating community, by setting the foundation for trust building and continually fostering that trust amongst the group.

After the community agreements were created, there was a short break to transition to the partnering practices. For the first and second workshops, I began the first day with the **pairs weight of the limbs supporting practice** – a partnering practice of holding and moving the arms, legs, and head of another person. It started with one person supporting and moving each arm, leg, and head of their partner. They explored taking the full weight of their partner's limb and explored the wide range of movements it could do, while their partner released all unnecessary tension giving their full weight to the supporter. This practice grew from the person who had their limbs being supported to them starting to initiate movement and take some of their own weight. Their partner explored providing different types and amounts of support.

Eventually the roles of each person were blurred and the weight sharing evolved into a duet where the partners moved together, listening to each other through the point of contact. After twenty to thirty minutes, the roles were reversed and the practice was repeated to allow each person to experience each role – supporting and being supported. Throughout this practice I used the below cues. These cues were inspired by yoga, contact improvisation, and Deborah Hay's practice of asking "What if" questions.

- What kind of touch am I using?
- What is the quality of my touch?
- Explore the full range of mobility in your partner's joints.

- What might feel good or be interesting for my partner?
- Release all unnecessary tension, exhaling to let go.
- See if you can let go and give all your weight to your partner.
- Notice the parts of the body that are touching the earth and allow them to be fully supported by the earth.
- What if I brought this kind of support and care into my daily life?

I repeated each cue many times during the practice as a way of giving options for the dancers to continue their explorations – both as the supporter and the one being supported. I was not guiding them to do specific movements, instead the questions created openings and opportunities for them to find what most interested them and meet their needs. I believe that these cues support liberatory education praxis by interweaving the elements of education as a practice of freedom and engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994) into the dance studio. They might support critical thinking and active engagement in the learning material to promote the students' agency and autonomy.

For the third workshop at Riveria, I had to create a version of this practice which involved less sustained contact between people. The students had informed me of a health epidemic at the school involving a disease that was spread through sustained skin to skin contact. It had been occurring for a month and a half leading into our workshop and they were still in the middle of coming back to using touch within their dance classes. Each student had varying comfortability with using sustained skin to skin contact, so to accommodate this I offered the option to either observe the practice or give impulses to their partner using intermittent touch. The person who was being supported would move their own limbs and their partner would give them impulses which could inform their movements. This variation on the practice took into consideration the current context that the students were in and allowed each student to participate in a way that worked for them.

Because of the varying durations of the workshops and the range of interests of the students in each group, the subsequent days for each workshop took different paths. I chose to incorporate different partnering practices based on what I observed and the group discussions with the students. I will elaborate on a few more practices that provided insightful learning experiences for my pedagogical praxis.

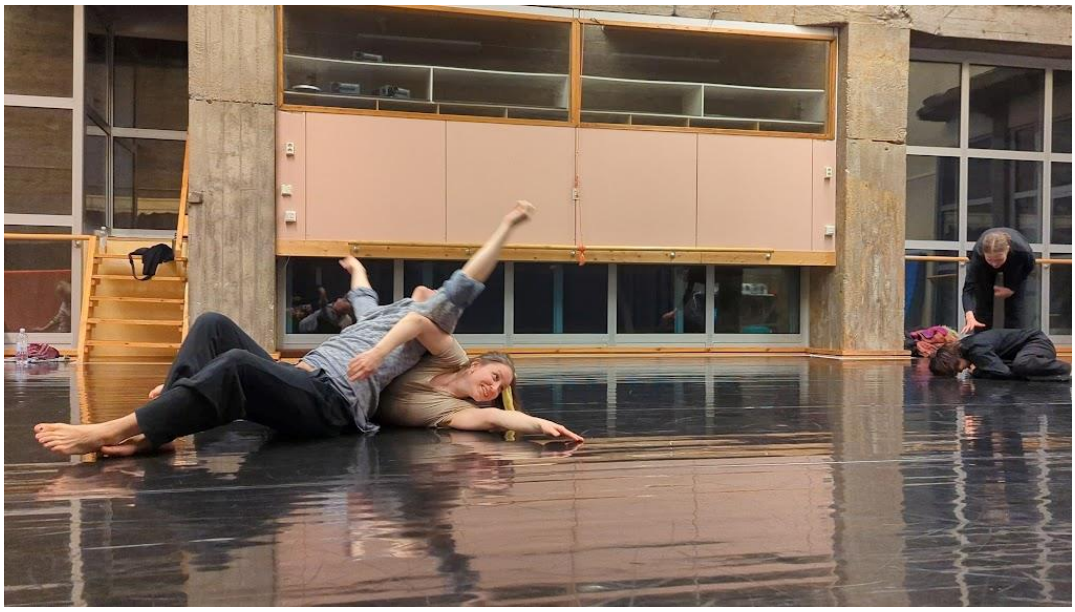
The second day of the first workshop included the **pairs choreography/score creation and sharing practice**, where the students worked together to create duets. I framed these as open-ended prompts where they could craft something that had set movement material or create a score, which is a set of rules that frame the improvisational movement. After 20 minutes of creation, the pairs shared their creation with the entire group. Each pair decided how they wanted to share their creation, specifying how they would like the group to observe, where they wanted the group to be in the space, and whether they would like any music playing.

For the sharing, I asked the group to consider, "what is the quality of my observing?" I wanted to encourage observation as a practice which was actively engaging with what was being shared instead of a passive watching. The emphasis of the pairs choreography/score creation and sharing practice was on collaborating to explore what most interested each person and intentionally observing each other's work. This process allowed us to form more connections with each other, investigate our interests with others, and learn from each other through witnessing. All of which supported the cultivation of community, the fourth element of liberatory education praxis.

During the second and third workshop, we did the **pairs eyes closed guiding practice**. One person had their eyes closed and was guided to walk through the space by their partner who had their eyes open and was standing beside them - holding one hand and placing another hand on their partner's shoulder or upper back. The practice began with these two points of contact because I believe it can create a sense of security for the person with their eyes closed and allows the person with their eyes open to communicate more clearly with their partner. I reminded them that they could open their eyes at any time, and although the focus was on communicating through touch, verbal communication was welcome and could be used at any time. I gave the below cues to the dancers, for both roles.

- What is the quality of my touch?
- How can I be clear with my communication through touch with my partner?
- Actively listening at the point(s) of contact

As the practice progressed, the person with their eyes closed was prompted to either choose to follow the signals their partner was sending or make their own choice – keeping in mind the question of "How can I be clear with my communication through touch with my partner?" and the idea of "Actively listening at the point(s) of contact". This continued to grow out of a walking practice and into more of a dancing duet, where the roles were no longer clearly defined and each person was fluidly moving between leading and following. No matter which role the dancers started with, there was listening and communicating through touch. After about 25 minutes, there was a brief discussion between partners and then the roles were switched and the practice was done again.



Pairs eyes closed guiding practice (third workshop).
Photo by Nicole Oga
Four dancers in a dance studio with black floors. One pair is rolling over each other across the floor and the second pair has one person on the ground in a ball position and the second person reaching down to touch them.

As previously mentioned, during the third workshop some students were not comfortable using sustained touch, so I created an option to give impulses and signals to their partner using shorter duration touch. The person with their eyes closed would receive an impulse from their partner to begin walking in the space. Then the person with their eyes open would periodically give impulses to guide them through the space. The practice developed similarly to those using sustained touch and eventually the person with their eyes closed made their own choices.

This practice required a lot of trust, as the dancers were placing their safety with another person and that person had the responsibility of ensuring their partners' safety. Because of this high threshold for trust, I chose to do this practice on the second or third day of the workshop rather than the first. Prior to starting the practice, I allowed time for the pairs to discuss what their needs were and share any information about injuries or other details their partner might need to know about. With this trust and responsibility, there was a heightened sense of support and care between the pairs, which I believe directly impacted the cultivation of community.

The use of **small group and large group discussions** occurred throughout the workshops. I gave time for the pairs to discuss their partnering and movement practices. This supported each dancer in speaking from their own experience and relating it to another person's experience. The smaller discussions were also a chance for students to continue to process what had happened during the practice and prepare any thoughts they would like to share with the group at large. These discussions provided space and time to continue to get to know each other better and build trust to support creating a community.

Small group discussion (first workshop).
Photo by Manuel Gonzalez
Four dancers sitting in a circle discussing with each other.

4. FINDINGS: OBSERVATIONS, FEEDBACK, AND REFLECTIONS

During my thesis workshops I gathered feedback using various formats – a personal reflection journal, which I wrote in after each day of teaching; electronic feedback forms, which were voluntarily filled out by the students from the three workshops; discussions and guidance with Eeva Anttila, my thesis supervisor; and collaboration and feedback sessions with my peers and fellow classmates. In this chapter, I investigate my findings by contemplating the various observations, feedback, and reflections, and how they impact my pedagogical praxis. I reveal what I have learned, contemplate the significance of my learning, and question what societal implications it may have.

4.1. What did I learn?

Across these teachings I was able to be in a continual "generative transformational evolutionary process" (McNiff, 2013, p. 66), where I planned, took action, observed, and reflected upon my pedagogical praxis to continue its growth. The action-reflection cycles (McNiff, 2013) fed into each other from each day of the workshop to the next, and from workshop to workshop. The cycles that began in the first workshop influenced and carried over to the second, and evolved into the third.

Through observing the students, I interpreted how they were receiving the various practices, which influenced the choices I made in the moment while teaching making on the spot changes to what was planned to best support the students and their interests. I also reflected on the various discussions that occurred throughout the day, which then shaped what I chose to do for the following day of the workshop. After each workshop was completed, I collected and analyzed the written feedback I received from the students. For further information about the questions on the feedback forms please see the appendix B. This feedback affected what I chose to do for the subsequent workshops. Through these action-reflection cycles (McNiff, 2013), I gained insights into what worked well to support the cultivation of a caring community, and what needed to shift or change to better foster it.

While my learning is a continual process which extends into many directions, I will focus on three main insights that I gained which directly relate to liberatory education praxis and cultivating a community. Through my observations, reflections, and the students' feedback, I found that my pedagogical praxis fostered feelings of inclusion and belonging, supported holistic growth, and cultivated caring communities. I connect the four elements of liberatory education praxis to my observations, but my findings are by no means exhaustive and I highlight what I found most important to my pedagogical praxis. Throughout chapter 4 there are quotes in italics from the workshop students. Those who consented to having their name shared are credited and those who did not remain anonymous.

4.1.1. Feeling inclusion and belonging

> *It felt like there was space for me to be myself and contribute to the group. The environment felt very inclusive.* – Lindsey (student from the first workshop)

It appears to me that the check-in circles, community agreement co-creation practice, and my intentional use of language all contributed to the space to allow the students to feel they were included and belonged. The students' written feedback supported my observations and I will elaborate on how each of these practices impacted the feelings of inclusion and belonging.

The **check-in circle** at the beginning of every day of the workshop was important to allow each person to be seen and heard, as one of the students from the second workshop commented.

> *Nicole took the time to learn our names and ask us what we needed at the beginning of each class. I felt seen and heard.* - Rose (student from the second workshop)

Being seen and heard supports people in feeling like they are included and belong in the space. It was not only a chance for me, as the teacher, to get to know each student, but also a chance for the students to get to know each other. It felt like opening the door for genuine relationships to form. The simple practice of gathering and sharing a piece of

who they were started the process of building relationships amongst the group members, which could eventually lead to the creation of a community.

Each workshop included the **community agreements co-creation practice** because it was essential for fostering a space where trust could be built and risks could be taken. It built upon the inclusion and belonging that was established in the contemporary dance class check-in circles by allowing each person to communicate what they needed and wanted for the partnering sessions. This communal creation process was a way to get to know each other better and establish a base line of trust amongst all group members. It was important to have a collective understanding of what each person needed in order to participate and how we, as a group, would like to interact with one another. Since the community agreements were co-created amongst everyone, each person's voice was included in the agreements, which fostered an environment where every person could belong.

My **intentional use of language** while teaching seemed to further support inclusion and belonging. One instance where I feel the language I used fostered an inclusive space was during the contemporary dance classes. While explaining the various options, I specifically used the word option and avoided saying modifications, easy or hard, and beginner or advanced. I found that using the word options leaves it open for any student to choose any option. If I used the words modifications, easy or hard, and beginner or advanced, it could create a value system that defines one version of the movement as being better or more advanced than another. This could lead to dancers feeling less than based on what option they chose, and could also box dancers into a particular choice based on their perceived level of experience with contemporary dance.

As an example, the combination had a shoulder roll that consisted of placing the full weight of the body across the shoulders and back of the neck to roll from the right side, across the shoulders and neck, landing on the left side (or vice versa from left to right side). Placing the weight of the entire body on the neck and shoulders may not be accessible for every dancer. When explaining the movement, I first showed the roll and then showed the option of swinging the legs around to sit up and then coming back to lying on the floor. I emphasized listening to what felt best for each person's body. I stated,

"Today it might not feel good for the shoulders, head, neck, or any other part of the body to have the full weight of the body on them. Choose the option that feels best for you today. Even if that means you are doing something different than what you did during any other class."

The various options I provided and the time taken to explain them seemed to work well, as one student reflected:

> *I did feel like I belonged, despite everyone having different abilities, there was no hierarchy. If I needed extra help, she took the time to explain the move.* - Rose (student from the second workshop)

I remember how Rose seemed comfortable with speaking up during class to ask for further guidance when learning the shoulder roll movement, and I was glad to see this feedback from them after the workshop was completed. The language the teacher uses can deeply affect the students' experience and shape how they perceive themselves. By intentionally choosing non-hierarchical language, my aim was to foster a space where everyone could be included and belong, no matter the depth of experience they had with contemporary dance or how their body was feeling that day.

Another way my intentional use of language may have supported inclusion and belonging was through the transparency that I was working with using non-codified dance terminology. All three workshops included students from a wide range of different dance and movement histories, which called for an attention to the types of terms and words I used. I openly shared, "I am working with not using ballet terminology within my teaching. It isn't that it is bad to use these terms, but since this is not a ballet class and we all come from different movement histories, I am trying to be aware of the terms I use." One student commented on the feedback form how this made them feel included.

> *I appreciated your clear explanation of movement and technique with an awareness to not use exclusively ballet centric language...I felt so included...While I have a little ballet background, that world feels very scary and inaccessible to me. I appreciate you using more layman's terms when instructing technique. You gave a lot of layers and made me feel empowered to use my own breath and weight to create the movements. There was less of an emphasis on aesthetic and more on fueling the body's natural desires through exploration.* – Melanie (student from the first workshop)

This attention to the types of words used in class acknowledged a wide variety of dance and movement backgrounds, bringing a holistic view of beings into the dance studio, and avoided marginalization of those who did not have ballet or Western dance and movement experiences. There are many ways to support inclusion and belonging within dance education and these are just a few examples of how I approached it by using liberatory education praxis within these workshops.

4.1.2. Supporting holistic growth

As written earlier, engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994), the second element of liberatory education praxis, emphasizes supporting the holistic growth of both the students and teachers which can lead to self-actualization, or becoming more in tune with who you are and your relationship to the world around you to live more fully in the world. In order to support this holistic growth, trust had to be built. The **community agreement practice** was an integral part of establishing the trust that was needed in order to enter into partnering practices that involved the use of touch between people. By co-creating and agreeing to the community agreements, the entire group was committing to a particular way of working together. It established boundaries to create safety and a common starting point to go into the partnering. Then from there each person could potentially step outside of their boundaries and take risks to support their holistic growth. One student shared about how their growth was supported.

> *My initial fear I had prior to the workshop toward partnering was lessened greatly. I believe the space created, rooted in safety, community care, and learning, allowed me to overcome previous fears I had in my mind which felt like major intellectual growth.* - Giovanna (student from the first workshop)

Since safety and community care were established from the start, I believe this student was able to go outside their boundaries and take risks to support their holistic growth. Without the foundation that was built through the community agreement practice, the partnering practices would have been experienced differently and students may not have been supported enough to go outside their boundaries and take risks to pursue their own learning and holistic growth.

During this process, I felt how my own holistic growth progressed as well. Through teaching I gained first-hand experience with incorporating vulnerability as a means to foster trust. On the first day of the second workshop, there was a group discussion where I was able to be vulnerable with the group. The dancers gave constructive feedback on the **pairs weight of the limbs supporting practice**, where they found it was difficult to go from being fully supported to having to transition into moving on their own. One student expressed that they had wanted to continue having full support from their partner for a longer time before having to move on their own. Another student wanted to continue holding the weight of their partner longer and really help them to sit up. I openly shared with the group that I was still working on improving and shifting how I facilitated this particular transition. I stated that I had not yet figured out a way to guide it that best supported everyone's needs. The discussion sparked another action-reflection cycle (McNiff, 2013) – what would happen if I took the student's suggestions and guided them to bring their partner to a seat and then their partner can start to initiate their own movements?

By sharing where I was at in my learning process, I felt honest and vulnerable. This showed the group that it is valid to not know and be in the middle of a process, even as the teacher. I believe this in turn supported the students in continuing to share openly. By being open about my vulnerability, I allowed space for students to also be vulnerable. While vulnerability can encompass more than just this type of honest sharing, I use this as only one example of how I was open about my feeling vulnerable within my teaching.

Through teaching the workshops my holistic growth continued to develop. I learned that I was comfortable making on-the-spot changes to the lesson plans. In previous teaching experiences I tended to follow what was planned, only making small changes based on my observations in the moment. This is not bad or harmful to do, but I found that it can be more supportive for the students if I am able to be flexible with the plans, even completely changing them when needed. For example, during the first workshop on the second day when we were reviewing the community agreements, I sensed certain interests were arising for the students and I was informed that some students had to leave early. What I had planned did not fully support their interests and with some of the students leaving early we did not have enough time to go through the partnering practice I had

planned. I openly shared with them that what I had planned was not the best fit for today and we were going to change things. Keeping the students' interests and needs in mind, I decided to do the **pairs choreography/score creation and sharing practice**. While I was initially nervous about completely changing the plans, being transparent with the students helped me to become less nervous because the students could better understand the situation. I was able to go past my boundaries and take a risk which supported my own growth and better suited the needs of the students.

4.1.3. Cultivating caring communities

> *Everyone was given open opportunity to speak, ask questions, etc. Never felt alienated or unable to speak.* - anonymous (student from 1st workshop)

Supporting inclusion and belonging created a foundation from which caring communities could be cultivated. I return to the idea that caring is a way of being that takes into consideration others to build reciprocity so that everyone is supported and cared for, which includes not only harmony but also accountability when harm and conflict arise. I found that a few of the practices really promoted the building of a caring community – co-creation and revisiting of the community agreements, discussions, and some of the partnering practices.

Based on the feedback I received from the students and my own observations, I found that the **community agreement practice** positively affected and shaped the space to support the cultivation of a caring community. Acknowledging and attending to each person's needs and wants supported being seen and heard, which contributed to inclusion and belonging, all of which fed into cultivating a caring community. A student from the third workshop shared how the community agreements supported them.

> *…making the community agreements together and discussing them made me feel I was part of the group.* – Saara (student from the third workshop)

The process of creating the community agreements set the foundation for a caring community within each workshop. I chose to share one of my agreements, "Silence and stillness are valid. We do not need to fill it with words, sounds, or movement. We can let it be." I intentionally brought this one into each workshop because it informed how the

creation process happened. In previous experiences, I have found that group dynamics can influence how co-creation processes occur. For varying reasons, some groups have a tendency towards fast-paced talking and sharing, which can be difficult for those who are more soft-spoken, think at a slower pace, or are more introverted. It can be helpful to set the environment from the start of the process to be one that allows for silences and pauses, giving space to think and reflect before sharing. By explicitly stating that silence and stillness are ok, I laid the foundation for community creation to occur by fostering a calm and open space where all participants can honestly share in their own time.

While this supported the students in these workshops, I recognize that not all groups will feel the same way. Other students might require more stimulating practices to spark the discussion and community building, or they may need different means of processing the information, like through drawing or movement. Depending on how the students respond to the creation process, I have to shift the practice to best support the students in the group.

For the first two workshops this practice worked well in cultivating a caring community, but I noticed that some students were less vocal than others and seemed to have a more challenging time speaking up in the larger group. As I reflected on this, I wanted to ensure every student was supported to share in a way that worked best for them and felt like they were a part of the community. To provide another way of sharing other than in a large group, something I changed for the third workshop was to do pairs or small group discussions prior to coming together as a whole group. I observed that these smaller discussions allowed people to become more comfortable sharing their ideas with others and gave them more time to think through how they would like to share with the entire group. Even if some students were not comfortable with verbally sharing in the larger group, they had a chance to be heard through discussing with a partner.

Revisiting the community agreements each day further amplified the cultivation of a caring community. It allowed students multiple chances to engage with and share their needs and wants. During the third workshop one student did not share their contributions to the community agreements during the initial creation. Then on the second day they shared and had a chance to add their contributions to the agreements. By coming back to the community agreements each day, students had many opportunities to share when they

were ready rather than having to conform to a particular and strict time line. It also kept the agreements in our consciousness and supported keeping them alive and evolving.

As mentioned earlier, I utilized **discussions**, both small and large group, across all the workshops to support reflection and processing of the various dance and movement practices. Processing the experience verbally with others can bring to the surface different thoughts and ideas than when self-reflecting, and supports the cultivation of community. On the feedback form, one student commented that they felt a sense of community during the discussions.

> *…in the discussions I felt connected to the others at times.* - Rose (student from 2nd workshop)

The student uses the phrase "at times", which could indicate that they did not always feel connected to others. I cannot and do not wish to assume what they meant by this phrase, but feel it is important to take this into consideration. For me it was not an aim for the students to constantly feel connected to others throughout the entire workshop. I believe this would be an unrealistic expectation that does not take into account how humans experience connection and relationships with others. I chose to use discussions because it supported community creation through actively interacting and building relationships with one another. During the small group discussions, which usually occurred right after finishing a partnering practice, I observed how the students were able to openly share with each other their experiences in the partnering practices. It seemed they could relate to how they each experienced it, comparing similarities and differences. For some of the workshops when there was an odd number of students, I participated in the partnering practices and small group discussions. I found that these verbal reflections enriched and deepened the partnering practices. I learned about my partner's perspectives, which widened my own perspectives on the practices.

The large group discussions, which usually occurred at the end of each day of the workshops, were a chance for us to come together as a whole group to share and process. Observations that the students made and I had not noticed came into my awareness, which supported me in my reflection and processing of the classes. I felt through sharing our experiences with each other a sense of community was fostered. In the future I want to

incorporate a wider variety of modes of processing, such as group reflection using visual arts materials and embodied reflection. I am interested in exploring how these varied reflection processes could further support the cultivation of a caring community.

On the feedback forms, a couple of the students shared how the **partnering practices** impacted them in feeling they were a part of a community.

> *I felt a sense of community especially during the partnering, and when there was a smaller group. I enjoyed getting to know my partners, and the ways they moved.* - Rose (student from 2nd workshop)

> *Over the course of the three days [of partnering], I felt a building sense of togetherness with the other participants and warm familiarity.* - Giovanna (student from 1st workshop)

The partnering practices supported the cultivation of a caring community by allowing time for being together, which fostered interactions and connections amongst the group members. Through partnering practices, like the **pairs weight of the limbs supporting practice** and **pairs eyes closed walking practice**, we got to know one another by using touch, movement, and observations to communicate and support one another. During the **pairs eyes closed guiding practice** in the second and third workshops, there was an emphasis on actively listening to the partner at the point of contact, actively listening through observing the partner, and communicating clearly through the touch. This practice allowed time for familiarizing ourselves with each other and deepening our attention to each other's communications. I saw and experienced how being in the space together, approaching movement and communication with curiosity, and having open mindedness allowed us to get to know another facet of each other. Interacting in this way brought out different aspects of each person and provided new perspectives. The partnering practices continued to build upon the trust that was established during the check-ins and community agreement practices by providing a way to become more familiar with each other.

What was most impactful in cultivating a caring community was time. It required taking time for the relationships, connections, and trust to build and evolve in order for a community to form. By the end of the first two workshops, which were three and two days long, I was just starting to feel a sense of community forming. Whereas by the end

of the third workshop, which was five days long, it felt like a community had been established. This difference may have been affected by the fact that the five-day workshop was with a pre-established group. Since they already knew each other before the workshop, this may have helped with the cultivation of community. During a discussion with the students of the third workshop, I asked how it felt to enter into the partnering practices with their pre-established group. One student mentioned that although they had already known each other for a year and a half, it felt like each time they went into partnering, especially with the use of touch, it required getting reacquainted with each person. It seemed that the underlying trust which came from already knowing each other could be supportive in community building, but it still took time to reestablish the connections and enter into the partnering practices.

The cultivation of a caring community required sustained amounts of time be spent interacting with each other. Spending time co-creating the community agreements set the foundation for trust to be built so that the group could go into the partnering practices. Then these partnering practices provided the space, time, and framework to continue to foster relationships amongst the group. Each day that we came together we had new experiences and had time to continue with the already established trust to eventually create a community together. There was no way to rush the creation of community. Time was needed to get to know each other, which could eventually lead to trusting each other. Then once there was enough trust amongst the group a community could begin. The only way to get there was through spending time together, getting to know each other. These dance and movement workshops provided an avenue for us to do just that.

4.2. The significance of my learning and its potential implications

By using liberatory education praxis within my dance teaching I have been able to cultivate caring communities. I have seen and experienced how the values and ways of being that come from abolition and collective liberation can foster a space where people can connect, interact, and trust one another to be able to learn, grow, and take risks together. This required time to get to know each other and could not be rushed. Intentionally interacting with each other in a supportive way allowed us to create a caring

space together. As one of the community agreements from the third workshop stated, “We create the space together.”

If we, as a society, want to create these kinds of thoughtful and caring communities, then we must allow time for them to blossom and develop. Allowing time to create caring communities is something that has been used by many abolitionists and social justice organizers, but I feel it is lacking in many dance education spaces. In dance, there can be an expectation of being comfortable with using touch and trusting another person with the weight of your body without spending any time getting to know each other. I believe this is harmful and potentially dangerous. I have experienced this within contact improvisation classes where I come into a space where I don’t know the other dancers and it is expected that we jump straight into taking each other’s weight without even knowing each other’s names. While I came out of these experiences without being injured or harmed, I did not feel like returning to these spaces. I believe if there had been more attention and time spent on getting to know each other, I would have felt more trust and felt like returning to the classes.

Time and space for caring communities to form is also lacking in Western societies. There is a constant push for efficiency and speed. While these ways of being can be useful in some cases, in my experience efficiency and speed comes at the cost of marginalizing those who cannot or do not conform to it. I feel there is a lot of rigidity and inflexibility built into our social structures, many times intentionally, to exclude and oppress certain types of people. Instead, if we, society, built our systems and ways of living in a way that chose to value, trust, and support every human and the more-than-human world in reciprocity, then I believe we would be in a much different world. In my daily life I find myself needing to intentionally slow down and take space and time to connect and be with others. Experiencing this kind of attention and caring during these workshops has changed how I live my daily life. So, I wonder, what if we applied this kind of active listening and caring attention into society? What would the world be like?

5. CONCLUSION

I believe that liberatory education praxis can be used to catalyze the changes needed to create a world where **all** are truly free. This is why I chose to examine it for my thesis and more deeply utilize it within my own pedagogical praxis. By doing various partnering, support, and observation or witnessing practices, I believe we brought into reality the dreams we hope for, creating a caring community where we support each other to grow and evolve. Getting to know ourselves better by being in community with others.

While my focus was on implementing liberatory education praxis to cultivate a caring community in the dance studio to see if we can bring into reality a part of the collective liberation dream, I recognize that each student will bring with them their own goals, which may differ from my own. Students may not hold the same values of abolition and collective liberation, and potentially may be at odds with my values. Even with these differing objectives and values, I believe that liberatory education praxis can support the students' learning and holistic growth. They leave space for students to exercise their agency and get what they need to out of the class.

While these workshops created caring communities within the dance studio, I feel I have not yet been able to extend these caring communities out of the dance studio into the world at large. I feel the workshops planted seedlings for living in alternative, unoppressive ways and I would like to continue this work to find ways of extending it to greater society to create societal change. I want to continue to develop the partnering practices and expand the workshops to a wider variety of people in different communities. I am inspired to question, what if every person in the world experienced this type of workshop? How would this change how we live in the world? Although realistically I cannot make every person experience this type of workshop, I can let these dreams affect how I live and what I choose to spend my time on, seeing what change I can create.

As previously stated, my application of liberatory education praxis within dance education is intricately intertwined and interconnected with abolition, intersectional black feminism, and antiracist praxis. My thesis is expanding on the work of past and present abolitionists, intersectional black feminists, and antiracist organizers, theorists, educators,

and more, opening doors to multiple avenues of thoughts and actions on how to create a socially just world. In the future I hope to walk through each of these doors to continue the ongoing process of reflection, evaluation, evolution, and enacting change to bring to life my visionary dreams. I see this thesis as a portion of the ongoing work that we must continue on the many paths towards collective liberation. Through reflection and self-inquiry, I shared my own experiences and thoughts, which I hope will inspire others to reflect and inquire about their own pedagogical praxis. Maybe even opening a dialogue with one another[19].

There is a long legacy of those who have been doing abolition and collective liberation work to dismantle systems of oppression/domination and create alternative ways of living (Davis et al, 2022; Elia, 2023; Kudesia, 2022). I have been inspired by this legacy and would not have been able to pursue my thesis without them. In this work I used the word "we", as I acknowledge that collective liberation cannot be achieved alone. I do not deny that as an individual I am capable of creating change, but I do know that to create a world where **all** are truly free, we must work together in community. I believe that each of us can, and will, continue to further this legacy to create the necessary changes for collective liberation, until all of us are free.

[19] Feel free to get in touch with me at nicole.marie.oga@gmail.com, if you would like to connect and discuss.

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APPENDIX A

Workshop Practices

Grounding practices

I began some of the partnering community practice sessions with a five-minute **grounding practice**. For the first workshop we did yoga breathwork practices and for the second workshop we did a body scan practice. I chose to do these practices first as a way to return from the thirty-minute break after the contemporary classes and allow each person time to consciously reconnect to their body and its sensations.

Individual point of contact improvisation

In the second and third workshops, I incorporated an **individual point of contact improvisation practice**. For about 10 minutes, the dancers were guided to consciously focus on a point of contact between a body part and the floor. I began by having them notice the parts of their body which were touching the floor. Seeing if all unnecessary tension could be released and allowing the weight of the body to be supported by the Earth. Then they chose one point of contact as a starting point where they began moving from, noticing what was happening at that contact spot. I used some of the same cues from the pairs practice.

- What kind of touch am I using?
- What is the quality of my touch?
- Explore the full range of mobility in your joints.

The practice could be perceived as a partnering practice between the dancer and the floor. While it did not involve partnering with another person, it prepared the dancers for the pairs weight of the limbs supporting practice. It introduced some of the questions and prompts used in subsequent practices. This guided improvisation practice allowed the students to play with touch and body mobility on their own prior to working with these ideas with another person. It prefaced the use of touch with a partner and gave an experience that the students could relate the partnering work to.

Individual guided improvisations

For the first and third workshops, I guided the students through a few improvisation practices. I gave various cues that they could interpret and take in as they liked. Similar to the grounding practices, I used these **individual guided improvisations** to allow time for the students to tune into their body's sensations before starting the partner work. It was also a chance to introduce some of the cues that would occur during the partnering practices. These lasted between 10-20 minutes.

During the third workshop I guided the students through an improvisation practice that incorporated their community agreement choices for that day. I gave the below cues.

- Noticing your body's sensations.
- What if I could get what I need right now?
- Return to your community agreement choices. Does this affect or impact what you are doing?

Weight towards and away

Inspired by some of the foundational principles of contact improvisation, I introduced the ideas of taking another person's full body weight through **weight towards and weight away** exercises. The pairs started standing back-to-back leaning in towards each other. Their shared weight was in between them and if either person were to step away the other person would fall. They took time to listen at the points of contact, which could be the upper back and back of the pelvis, and maybe the back of the head (depending on the heights of the people). Next the students tried making shelves with their pelvis and back so that their partner could lay across their back.

Then to practice weight away, they began by holding each other's forearms, bending into the knees, and leaning away from one another. This progressed to moving across the floor where they held one arm cross-laterally. One partner lowered the other to the ground and helped them back up. They would lean their weight away, both on the way down and back up, trying to use as little muscle tension as possible and allowing their weight to lean away to create ease in the movement.

Mirroring practice

In the third workshop I incorporated a **mirroring practice**. In pairs, one person would lead and the other person would be mirroring their partner. The person leading started by letting the movement come from a place of getting what they needed. The mirroring did not have to be an exact copy, but could be adjusted to support their own needs. Eventually the practice grew into the pairs interacting with each other. It was done as a way to partner through observation and witnessing rather than through physical touch.

Group improvisation practice

During both the first and third workshops I incorporated **group improvisation practices.** These brought together some of the cues from the other practices. It was a time for the group to interact with each other in a more free form setting. I provided a very open score with a few cues they could work from.

- Getting what you need.
- What if I could get what I need right now?
- Mirroring others.
- Giving impulses to others.

These practices lasted between 15-35 minutes long. I would say the cues throughout the practice until it developed to a point where I felt the cues were no longer needed.

APPENDIX B

Feedback form questions.

- Did you feel included in this workshop? (yes or no)
- What made you feel included or not included? Comments on why you felt included or not included during the workshop.
- Did you feel like you belonged in this workshop? (yes or no)
- What made you feel like you did or did not belong? Comments on why you felt you did or did not belong in the workshop.
- Did you feel like you were part of a community through this workshop? (yes or no)
- What made you feel like you were or were not a part of a community? Comments on why you did or did not feel like you were part of a community in the workshop.
- Did you feel your intellectual growth and learning were supported through this workshop? (yes or no)
- What did or did not support your intellectual growth and learning? Comments on why you felt your intellectual growth and learning were supported or were not supported in the workshop.
- Did the partnering community practices affect how you approached the set movement material during the contemporary classes? (yes or no)
- Comments on if or if not, the partnering community practice affected how you approached the set movement material during the contemporary classes.
- Please share about your experience during the contemporary dance classes (morning sessions). Any thoughts, feelings, insights, and feedback. Was there anything that really supported your learning? Was there anything that hindered your learning? Were there any exercises in particular that stood out to you?
- Please share about your experience during the partnering community practices (afternoon sessions). Any thoughts, feelings, insights, and feedback. Was there anything that really supported your learning? Was there anything that hindered your learning? Were there any practices in particular that stood out to you?
- How did the creation of the community agreements and re-visiting the community agreements affect or impact the partnering community practices (afternoon sessions)?
- How did the words or language used by Nicole affect you or how you experienced the exercises and practices? (both for the contemporary classes and the

partnering classes). Did any words or phrases stand out to you? If so, why did they stand out?

- If you chose to not use sustained touch for any of the partnering practices, did you feel included in those practices? What made you feel included or not included?
- Overall, were you satisfied with this workshop? (yes or no)
- Comments on why you were or were not satisfied with the workshop.
- Please share anything else that you would like about your experience.

APPENDIX C

Pictures from the workshops.

First workshop with Disco Riot

Pairs weight of the limbs supporting practice
Photo by Nicole Oga
Eight dancers working in pairs in a dance studio with black floors and white walls. One person laying on the floor and one person touching their partner's arm.

Weight towards practice
Photo by Nicole Oga
Two dancers, one person laying on the back of the other.

Silly group picture
Photo by Nicole Oga
Eleven dancers in silly poses.

Second workshop with Independence

Pairs weight of the limbs supporting practice
Photo by Nicole Oga
Seven dancers in a dance studio with grey floors and red brick walls. Four people laying on the floor, three people standing next to their partners.

Third workshop with Riveria

Pairs eyes closed guiding practice
Photo by Nicole Oga
Two dancers in a dance studio with black floors and yellow walls. Holding hands walking through the space.

Pairs eyes closed guiding practice
Photo by Nicole Oga
Two dancers in a dance studio with black floors and pink walls, standing one in front of the other with one dancer reaching towards their partner.

APPENDIX D

Additional Educational Resources

(to supplement the resources which were referenced in this thesis and for continuing the constant learning journey)

Books

We should all be feminists by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
Parable of the Sower by Octavia E. Butler
Rage becomes her: The power of women's anger by Soraya Chemaly
Between the world and me by Ta Nahesi Coates
Killing Rage: Ending racism by bell hooks
How long 'til black future month by N.K. Jemisin
All boys aren't blue by George M. Johnson
We do this 'til we free us by Mariame Kaba
How to be an antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi
Stamped from the beginning by Ibram X. Kendi
Born a crime by Trevor Noah

Articles

To Build a Future Without Police and Prisons, We Have to Imagine It First by Walidah Imarisha (https://onezero.medium.com/black-lives-matter-is-science-fiction-how-envisioning-a-better-future-makes-it-possible-5e14d35154e3)

Videos

The urgency of intersectionality | Kimberlé Crenshaw | TED
https://youtu.be/akOe5-UsQ2o?si=nXzsyloYQcDAcQFe

bell hooks on interlocking systems of domination
https://youtu.be/sUpY8PZlgV8?si=McSC5EarjzCqIuOO

The difference between being "not racist" and antiracist | Ibram X. Kendi
https://youtu.be/KCxbl5QgFZw?si=RPL9tjz0BgM-E2xG

Geographies of Racial Capitalism with Ruth Wilson Gilmore – An Antipode Foundation film
https://youtu.be/2CS627aKrJI?si=iDT-reFeoaY3RLuI