

# **What is Black Dance**

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This dissertation explores and analyzes *What is Black dance* and the role that Black dance plays in the professional development of teaching artists in Black arts' educational organizations preparing Black dancers for careers on the concert stage. *What is Black Dance* has evoked controversy among dancers, scholars and critics since the 1960s. Defining Black dance is complicated by the racial origins of Black dance and the racialization that Black dance has encountered and continues to encounter. In this study teaching artists working in urban arts academies demonstrate their knowledge in pedagogy, choreographic works, rehearsals, and performances. Teaching Black dance history, culture and choreographic processes creates and utilizes Black cultural aesthetics, informed by Black people's culture, identity, history, and experiences to debunk racialized myths about Black dance as an art form. I use qualitative Focused Ethnography and data collection methods of focus groups, *Apajo, an African cultural gathering*, and individual interviews to engage participants in the examination of research questions. This dissertation through a focused ethnography approach reveals the ways in which professional teaching artists understand Black dance as an art form that uses the aesthetics of Africa, the Diaspora and Black America when developing pedagogy and choreography to prepare Black dancers for careers on the concert stage.

*Keywords:* aesthetics, dance, choreography, focused ethnography, teaching artists, Black

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## Preface

First giving praise and thanks to God for all His blessings and challenges on this journey and for getting me to this point of completion.

Thank you to all the dance ancestors who paved the way for me and made it possible for me to live out my dreams. Thank you to all the dance artists and dance organizations who continue to preserve, produce and celebrate the work of people of African descent.

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## **Abbreviations**

CLO	Civic Light Opera
HU	Howard University
IABD	International Association of Blacks in Dance
DANCO	Philadelphia Dance Company
HBCU	Historically Black College and University
HDAT	Hill Dance Academy Theatre
FE	Focused Ethnography
PHILADANCO	Philadelphia Dance Company
PSDA	Philadelphia School of Dance
CAAD	Collegium for African Diaspora Dance
BPT	Black Performance Theory
CRP	Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

- Listed as they appear in Dissertation

## 1.0 Chapter One - Introduction

*I am because we are; and since we are, therefore, I am.*

~ Somé

I was a junior in high school, when I first saw and experienced Black concert dance at The International Association of Blacks in Dance Conference and Festival. Although Pittsburgh had African Dance companies, there were no academies or companies training students in Black Concert Dance. I began training at the age of 3 in a white studio in, a predominately white suburb. From the beginning, my mother was determined to find a dance academy that had at least one Black teacher and other students that looked like me. She found an open Jazz class at Point Park University taught by Tomé Cousin, my first Black teacher but it was an open style class and not an academy training in all styles of dance. As a former dancer, she understood that I needed training in Ballet and hopefully from someone who was Black. She continued her search and found Ms. Leslie Anderson Braswell, former principal dancer of Dance Theatre of Harlem, a Ballet instructor at the Creative and Performing Arts High School and the only Black ballet teacher in Pittsburgh teaching at Civic Light Opera Academy (CLO). That is where I continued my training until I attended Howard University (HU). In my fifteen years of training, Ms. Anderson was my only Black dance teacher.

In 1999, The International Association of Blacks in Dance (IABD) held their Conference and Festival in Denver, Colorado. The conference was established by Joan Myers Brown, Founder, Executive and Artistic Director of the Philadelphia Dance Company, DANCO (IABD, 2020). Dancers from major Black Dance Companies, and students from colleges and universities were in

attendance. I share this story because it was at the IABD Conference and Festival that I was first exposed to a level of Black dance by people who looked like me. Because of this exposure, I realized that I could do what I witnessed throughout the conference for four nights on the concert stage (Bourdieu, 1997; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). At that moment, Dallas Black, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance, Dayton Contemporary Dance Company and many other companies gave me hope, and a shared voice that I did not have, prior to that experience, as an aspiring dancer (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). The conference was unapologetically Black, and I felt like I belonged. Although, I was dancing with a pre-professional Black dance company in Pittsburgh, I had no idea that there was a larger universe of Black dancers, companies, and career opportunities for a young dancer like me (Levine and Nidiffer, 1996; Mc Donough, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Stanton-Salazar and Spina, 2000; Bandura, A. 2002).

### **1.1 Black Dance and Howard University**

Upon returning to Pittsburgh, I began applying to colleges and universities. I knew that (1) I wanted to pursue a career in dance and (2) I wanted to attend a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). Howard University, at that time, was the only HBCU with a major in dance. It was under the mentorship of Howard University's Dr. Sherrill Berryman Johnson, 1947-2010, better known as Dr. J, that I learned the importance of preserving the foundations and legacy of Black dance. Dr. J. passed on to each generation of Howard University Dance majors the commitment and responsibility for upholding the integrity of the art of dance, while enriching the next generation as mentors and revitalizing the Black Dance community at large. In a card, received from Dr. J. that read, *Let the Creativity of Life unveil in its Management for doing it all,*

Dr. J. was telling me, as I explored starting a dance academy, to give my vision to the Creator and the Spirit would direct me (Gottschild, 2003). Sherrill Berryman Johnson was a wordsmith, choreographer, Fulbright scholar, teacher of the Katherine Dunham Technique, and advocate of critical scholarship on Black dance and issues that impact Black communities. She was my mentor. Dr. Johnson shepherded the annual International Association of Blacks in Dance (IABD) from 1999 to 2010 (Images of Cultural Artistry, Inc., 2018). The conference, that gave me my greatest exposure to Black dance, has for thirty-two years, honored Blacks in dance and legendary Black dance artists. IABD's very existence recognizes that if we, as Blacks in dance, do not endeavor to preserve and promote dance by people of African ancestry and origin then there is certainly no other group who will take on this responsibility (IABD, 2020).

I was excited with my HU choice; however, it was not long into my first year of dance when I realized that my understanding of Black dance was complicated (Gottschild, 2003). The term Black dance often evoked controversy and heated discussions with Black dancers, and artistic directors (Meyers et al., 1992; Gottschild, 1996, 2003; Chatterjea, 2004; DeFranz, 2002, 2004, 2014). I welcomed the experience to study, audition, and perform with some of the most noted Black dance master artists in the field. I devoured the history and contributions made by Black dancers and choreographers along with the exposure to the knowledge of the beginnings of dance on the continent of Africa (Welsh, 1996). I would often tell others that “anyone that was Black in dance came to HU and I was privileged to study, learn and network with national and international Black dance artists. This vast exposure created a depth and authenticity of Black dance; however, it also left me with more questions about Black dance. What I called and experienced as Black dance, I did not see with white dance companies on the concert stage (Allen, 1988). The African centered work being produced on HU dancers was often discussed under a



cloud and filled with questions. In many conversations, artists pushed away from the use of the term Black dance as a description of their work (Gottschild, 2003). I recall, examples of this, in many of our feedback conversations and discussions by Black peers in the dance world. These dancers did not want to be a part of the conversation of Black dance or be labeled as such for fear of limiting their opportunities. Even though, we were aware of Black dance, we were also very aware of the controversy of Black dance. However, because we attended a HBCU, where we were taught our history and the importance of our culture, we also understood the importance of Black dance.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

This dissertation explores and analyzes *What is Black dance* and the role that Black dance plays in the professional development of teaching artists in Black arts' educational organizations. *What is Black d-ance* has evoked controversy among dancers, scholars and critics since the 1960s (DeFranz, 2002; Dixon Gottschild, 2003; Malone, 1996; Welsh, 2001). Black dance artists continue to respond with mixed thoughts to questions about definitions, what the concept conveys about the work of Black dance artists and the value of authentic voices naming and claiming Black dance works (Long, 1989). Defining Black dance is complicated by the racial origins of Black dance and the racialization that Black dance encountered and continues to encounter (Albright, 1997; Banes, 1993; Burt, 1998; Manning, 1998).

My interest in this research grew out of the realization that as the founder, CEO and Artistic Director of Hill Dance Academy Theatre (HDAT), our mission is steeped in preparing students for careers in Black dance and the curriculum is built on Black dance traditions. My

mission in this work comes to life through the work of professional dance artists in the academy. Teaching artists demonstrate their knowledge in pedagogy, choreographic works, rehearsals, and performances (Asante, 1990). Within the academy, my goal is to provide evidence of why, this body of work, Black dance is intentional and foundational to preparing the next generation of Black dancers for the concert stage. The history, culture and choreographic processes should chronicle Black dance history and culture (Asante, 1990). Teaching artists, working together, can create and utilize Black cultural aesthetics, informed by Black people's culture, identity, history, and experiences to debunk racialized myths about Black dance (Asante, 1990; Welsh Asante, 1996). In preparing Black dancers for careers on the concert stage, teaching artists should understand Black dance pedagogy and experiences that engage choreographers, students and audiences in the experiences of self-identification (Karenga, 1980). For HDAT's teaching artists, their pedagogy represents what Karenga outlines as developing *cultural character* which includes the history, religion, motif, ethos, economic, political and social organizations of a people (Karenga, 1980).

As a Black woman, leading a Black arts educational organization, I am intentional in my commitment to Black dance. Black dance is essential to preparing Black dancers for careers on the concert stage. I have invested fifteen years in providing dance education with the mission *to develop and train dancers in Black dance traditions, expand knowledge and contributions of Black Dance traditions and create emerging professional dance artists who will sustain dance in the Black community* (**HDAT's** Mission, 2010). This mission speaks to a deep respect for the rich legacy of Black dance culture and traditions. It is important that my research adds to the body of knowledge on *What is Black dance*. As this research develops, I will inevitably be immersed in

larger conversations about the racial history and issues that Black dance artists encounter (Gottschild, 1996, 2012).

This research will also provide HDAT's teaching artists an opportunity to be reflective of their pedagogical processes and how they connect Black history, culture, contributions and legacy of Black dance in choreography and performances (DeFranz and Gonzales, 2014). This study will benefit and inform other arts organizations preparing Black dancers for careers on the concert stage.

To conduct this study, I asked the HDAT teaching artists to work together and challenge, question, and explore their views about how they engage Black dancers. In the study, they explore Black dance as a performance, the process that drives and encourages aesthetic liberties and discovery of providing creativity and artistic excellence (Gottschild, 2012; Osumare, 2018). The teaching artists explore how Black dance informs pedagogy to create and set choreography on Black dancers aspiring to be the next generation of Black dance professionals on the concert stage (DeFranz and Gonzales, 2014).

### **1.3 The Purpose of Study**

In the education and the preparation of most teaching artists Black history, culture, and traditions have not been included in college and university dance programs (Woodson, 1933). As a Black dance artist and a Black woman, I believe that the history, culture, traditions and choreographic processes of Black dance and the contributions of Black dance artists should be a part of a teacher's professional development. However, it is difficult to teach what has been misrepresented, misunderstood, or unrecognized (Hillard, 1998). *Sankofa*, an African word from

the Akan tribe in Ghana, represents a metaphorical symbol depicted as a bird with its feet firmly planted forward and its head turned backwards. The literal translation of *Sankofa* and the symbol is “*it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind*”. The Akan people believe the past serves as a guide for planning the future and it is this wisdom in learning from the past which ensures a strong future (Belafonte, *Sankofa* Institute, 2017).

In discussions of Black dance, the issue of racism and its long history continues to be a part of the conversation. Similarly, when the term Black dance has been used to label performances, it inevitably separates those performances as being different from other dance, for instance as the opposite of white dance (Gottschild, 2003, 2005; DeFranz and Gonzales, 2014; Osumare, 2018). As Gottschild states...

Until racism and white privilege are no longer an everyday issue in American life, I believe that there is good reason to use a terminology of difference (black dance, black dancing body) that allows us to honor the contributions and the vast riches that peoples of African descent have brought to American dance culture, and life (2003, p. 14).

## **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This dissertation examines the understandings and meanings of *What is Black dance*. Teaching artists, in Black arts educational organizations, explore and reflect on Black dance. In their works, they examine the history culture and traditions, Black life experiences, individual, personal expressions, understandings that create movement, and choreography. The historical experiences of enslavement, colonialism, segregation, discrimination, as well as the social, cultural, political and economic inequities, provide Black dance artists with a vast canvas to speak

their authentic, and diverse lived experiences. Therefore, creating through dance different choreographic meanings of their works set on Black dancers (DeFranz and Gonzales, 2014; Gottschild, 2004; 2014; Manning, 2001; Osumare, 2018).

#### **1.4.1 The Role of Black Artists**

What is the responsibility of a Black artist? Is it to the work of art itself, to pursue an object perceived as an island of form or symbol with little or no reference to other life experiences that lends itself to urgent, relevant social interpretation; is it to identify and promote one's self as an individual seeking recognition and/or commendation, to prove humanity and/or worthiness to others, or to advance the total liberation of all African/Black people (Kirby, 2009). The idea that Black artists have a responsibility to their community (Du Bois, 1926) is captured in the African Proverb, *I am because we are; and since we are, therefore, I am* (Somé, 1997; Mibiti, 1989). Black artists must contribute to the history, culture, artistry, and geniuses of Black dance excellence so the next generation of dancers can aspire to learn and interact with masters and legends in Black dance (Perpener, 2001; Gottschild, 2012; Osumare, 2018). Teaching artists can translate this depth of culture and dance artistry in their pedagogy, curriculum and engagement of students in classes.

### **1.5 Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Culturally relevant pedagogy is embedded in the traditions, cultural artifacts, images, and history of Black people. There is a deep culturally ingrained belief that all that teach and work as

Black dance artists are responsible for knowing, teaching and passing on, through dance, the rich history and traditions of Black people in all their pain and glorious celebrations (Perpener, 2001).

Brazilian scholar, Paulo Freire (1972) suggests that self-awareness begins by identifying personal beliefs and values which reflect the political, social, and economics of society and one's culture and that people bring their own knowledge and experience into the process. The personal identity is merged with the collective identity, so becoming more aware of how this affects developing choreography and pedagogy is important for teaching artists' progress toward self-awareness. Creating culturally relevant professional development promotes equity and supports and encourages teaching artists to broaden their understanding and knowledge of Black dance choreography, pedagogy, and performances (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000).

## **1.6 Research Questions**

The research questions examine:

- RQ1) What do dance teaching artists, in an urban setting, know about Black dance? How do they define Black dance?
- RQ2) How does their teaching, choreography, experiences and performances reflect their knowledge of Black dance?
- RQ3) Is preparing Black dance bodies for the concert stage important? How do teaching artists use Black dance when creating pedagogy, choreography, and the development of Black dancers for careers on the concert stage?

## **1.7 Methodology**

This study utilizes a qualitative Focused Ethnography (FE) methodology. This methodology is widely used in healthcare research; however, focused ethnography can be applicable to explore specific cultural perspectives held by subgroups of people within a context-specific focused framework (Higginbottom et. al, 2013). Focused Ethnography was selected as a means to explore the culture of *What is Black dance* and specific aspects of how Black dance is understood and practiced by teaching artists in Black urban arts organizations preparing Black dancers for careers on the concert stage. Focused Ethnography data collection methods include focus groups, *Apajo* and individual interviews to engage participants in the examination of research questions on *What is Black dance*.

## **1.8 Limitations and Delimitations of the Research**

In this study, the limitations included: (a) participants in the focus group and *Apajo*, are teaching artists employed by HDAT. They have experienced HDAT's artistic culture that supports Black dance in developing choreography, pedagogy, and Black aesthetics. When asking the teaching artists to participate and share their understandings of Black dance it was a voluntary invitation, not a demand, with the understanding that they were free not to participate. (b) IABD member dance artists who have worked with HDAT are known in the study as Alpha group; IABD member dance artists who have not worked with HDAT are known in the study as Beta group. The Alpha and Beta participants, although members of IABD and are knowledgeable about Black

dance, they are in the study to provide for diversity of responses to protocol questions on *What is Black dance*.

## **1.9 Summary**

The question of *What is Black Dance* has been the subject of controversy among dancers, scholars and critics for nearly sixty years. Research on the topic continues to create mixed ideas, by Black dance artists, about definitions of Black dance (DeFranz, 2002; Gottschild, 2003; Malone, 1996; and Welsh, 2001). In this study, teaching artists share and expand their knowledge of Black dance, Black dance culture, identity, personal, social, and emotional experiences of Black dance.

The literature review of books, journal articles, videos, performances and newspaper reviews exposed the vast reach of Black dance artists and their contributions to dance. The literature provided details of racism endured by Black dance artists from enslavement to present time. Focused Ethnography data collection methods included focus groups, *Apajo* and individual interviews to engage participants in the examination of the research questions on *What is Black dance*.

## **1.10 Overview of the Dissertation**

Chapter II is a review of Black dance literature. This review explores the definitions of Black dance, aesthetics, historical analysis of social and political uses of the concept, and value of



Black dance in choreography and performances. The literature examines personal conflicts that Black dance artists experience with the use of Black dance as a means of describing their artistic works. The institutional racism embedded in the concept creates, for many Black dance artists, a rejection of the concept and often a total denial of any reference that defines them as Black artists. This dissertation examines how white critics and audiences denigrated the work of Black dance artists with the use of racial stereotypes, prejudices and actions that defined Black dance as inferior art. The literature also examines culturally relevant pedagogy and choreographic works, Black sensibilities, African and Black dance practices.

In Chapter III, I look at the use of focused ethnography to explore *What is Black dance* and the cultural nuances of Black dance. This chapter also examines the design for addressing research questions using methods of focus groups, *Apajo*, and individual interviews. This chapter includes my role as a participant researcher, a description of participants chosen, the data analysis process and study limitations.

In Chapter IV, I examine the results of the focused ethnography conducted to explore the meaning of *What is Black dance* as described by the participants in the study and their understandings and use of Black dance in their pedagogy, choreographic works, and preparation of Black dancers for careers on the concert stage.

In Chapter V, I present the discussion of the findings of *What is Black dance*. The chapter identifies implications for Black dance practice, discussion of the limitations of the study, areas for future research and practice implications for *Hill Dance Academy Theatre* as a Black arts organization with a mission to sustain Black dance.

## 2.0 Chapter Two - Literature Review

*Dance is a series of “rhythmically patterned movements performed by a sentient being”.*

*~ Katherine Dunham*

*What is Black dance.* This has been a subject of discussion in the world of concert dance since the 1960s. The phrase Black Dance has been used to define a range of dance styles whose origins include the tribal dances of Africa, the dances of the enslaved in West Indies and the American Deep South. The term was for centuries a branding by whites of Black artists and their work as something "other", or inferior to, performances of white artists (Allen, 1980; Gottschild, 2003; Howard, 2008).

The literature review explores the history of Black dance artists, their choreographic works, performances, and challenges encountered to bring their works and performances to the mainstream modern dance concert stage (DeFrantz, 2002; Emery, 1988; Gottschild, 1996; Haskins, 1990; Long, 1989; Manning, 2004; Perpener, 2001). The historical beginnings of Black dance in West Africa, the Diaspora and the United States are reviewed in the literature (Adamczyk, 1989; Thorpe, 1990). The racialization of Black dance, from enslavement to present day, and its impact on careers of Black dance artists are consistently demonstrated throughout the literature (De Franz, 2002; De Franz and Gonzales, 2014; Gottschild, 1996, 2003; Perpener, 2001). The relationship of Black dance culture and history is examined as pedagogy for culturally responsive arts education, career opportunities, cultural identity, agency, equity, social change, transformation and social justice in education (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Perry, 2010; Tatum, 2007; Freire, 1973, 2002; Gottschild, 2008; Sherrod, 2016).

Primary sources that address Black dance are limited. Reliable documented sources, prior to the mid-twentieth century, are minimal and few research centers or major libraries contain specialized collections chronicling African American dance performance (DeFranz, 2002).

This study examines Black dance sources in academic and online journals, Doctoral Dissertations and Master Thesis from 1990s to present. Concepts used to describe Black dance include West African dance, African dance, African American dance, Black aesthetics, Black performance and Black performance theory.

In this study, I capitalize the term Black, when I use it as a reference to those who are Black Americans, and or of African descent or when writing in the voice of the participants to refer to persons of African descent. When writing in reference to sources in the literature, I use the word Black as it appears in the source, which is usually in lower case. As a Black dance artist, a Black woman, Black scholar, and Black nonprofit entrepreneur, I use Black as a meaningful and significant identifier (Holloway, 2005).

## **2.1 Black Dance History**

Dance has been a central form of artistic communication for Black people in the United States since enslavement in the 1600s (Emery, 1988; Gottschild, 1996; Welsh, 1996). It was a means of expression, communication, and storytelling for enslaved Africans as they journeyed across the Atlantic and settled in the West Indies and the United States. African dance has been an essential link for American Blacks to a history and past that was taken from them (Emery, 1988; Fields, 1992, Malone, 1996). The horrors of the Middle Passage and enslavement did not destroy the memories and the importance of dance in African cultures (Hazzard-Gordon, 1983, 1990;

Holland, 2002). For the enslaved Africans, dance in America became a way to connect with the Spirits and traditional African religious experiences (Gottschild, 2003). Dance reminded them of their past and provided a sense of freedom as they adjusted to their new world in America (Haskins, 1990; Hazzard-Gordon, 1983). For the enslaved African, the opportunities to dance in religious church gatherings was different because many Christian denominations saw dance as the work of the devil and sinful. Worshipping gods and contacting the ancestors through dance was forbidden (Haskins, 1990). The inability to practice cultural religious traditions was hard; however, in some Protestant churches, the slaves were allowed to participate in the ring shout dance. The ring shout was a spiritual dance. The enslaved Africans would shuffle their feet as they moved in a continuous circle until they were overcome with the Spirit. In the slave quarters, dancing and celebrations would take place, in the absence of drums, since drumming had been banned, using buckets, logs, and tubs (Emery, 1988). Dancing, singing and music became a part of the daily work on the plantations (Haskins, 1990; Emery, 1988). In African culture dance is a spiritual and sacred force that links all aspects of life (Hazzard-Gordon, 1983,1990; Welsh Asante, 1996). For the enslaved Africans to dance was to be free and it was a means of preserving African cultural traditions, spirituality, and identity (Heckscher, 2000; Jonas, 1992).

### **2.1.1 Minstrel Shows**

The minstrel show was a popular form of entertainment from the 1800s through 1900s and were performed almost exclusively by whites who developed performances that depicted racist caricatures of Black life. The minstrelsy dances became entertainment for whites and the shows established stereotypes of Blacks with demeaning images of Blacks grinning, shuffling, eating watermelon and acting dumb (Haskins, 1990; Emery, 1988).

The extensive contributions of Blacks to dance in the United States and the Diaspora cannot receive the breadth and depth deserved in the space and time of this study; however, the writings of, Gena Dagel Caponi, 1999; Lynne Fauley Emery, 1972, 1988; Barbara Glass, 2007; James Haskins, 1990; Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, 1990; Richard Long, 1989 and Jacqui Malone, 1996, provide an expansive review of dance as contributed and performed by enslaved Africans and Blacks. This review examines the minstrelsy era, which took place during the early 1800s to the late 1990s, because, in this period of history, racial stereotypes of Blacks in dance were accepted as the norm (Emery, 1988). Whites were drawn to Black dance; yet they were shocked by what they deemed to be undignified postures and overt sexuality of Black dancing. Finding a way to enjoy Black dance while still distancing themselves was required of them to subvert their natural instinct for enjoyment while conforming to societal norms of the times (Gottschild, 2003).

For virtually the entire nineteenth century, the minstrel shows became the country's most popular form of entertainment and a reflection of its racism. The minstrel shows, however, was but one of a long succession of methods by which white Americans condemned African-derived dance and yet tried to assure themselves of an opportunity to watch it or participate in it (Glass, 2007, p. 29).

The irony of the minstrels was that Blacks were able to perform them on concert stages but to do so they had to become caricatures of themselves, symbolized by applying blackface makeup on their natural Black skins to perform demeaning images (Caponi, 1999; Emery, 1988; Glass, 2007; Myers and American Dance Festival, 1988).

### 2.1.2 1920s to 1950s

Black dance artists, aspiring to careers on the concert stage, were challenged by images and perceptions of what they could bring to audiences. Dances such as tap, soft shoe and jazz were accepted as “normal” for Black dancers (Emery, 1988; Haskins, 1990). From the 1920s to the 1950s, Black concert dancers such as Asadata Dafora 1890-1965 from Sierra Leone, Katherine Dunham (1909-2006), Pearl Primus (1919-1994), Talley Beatty (1918-1995) and Donald McKayle (1930-2018) paved the way and waged battles for Black dance artists aspiring to perform on concert stages (Perpener, 2001; Emery, 1988; Gottschild, 2012). The artists contributed their personal understandings about the life and the human condition for Blacks. Beatty’s choreography focused on his unique technique of expressing and incorporating his racial identity, racial injustices, discrimination, and the inequities of the Black experience within modern choreography that spoke to his personal sensibilities. Dunham created a vocabulary of movement, known as Dunham technique, an independent modern dance technique combining classical ballet, West Indian and African dance movements (Perpener, 2001). Primus’ notable contribution was her presentation of African dance traditions to life, with grace and dignity that allowed Blacks to understand, accept and value African culture and heritage in its authentic form. Her work helped to tear down the stereotypes and primitive concepts of Africans (Emery, 1988). McKayle’s works were concerned with the human condition and human values. This was exemplified throughout his career in his commitment as an educator using dance to create transforming artistic practices and impact social inequities (Perpener, 2001). The choreographic works of Dafora’s *Awassa Astrige/Ostrich*; Dunham’s *Southland*; Primus’ *Strange Fruit*; and McKayle’s *Rainbow ‘Round My Shoulder*, address the social, political, economic, and cultural conditions of the times and highlight the important role Black choreographers played in the development of American modern

dance. (Emery, 1988; Haskins, 1990; Lacy, 2000; Long, 1989; Perpener, 2001). Many more Black dance pioneers, in their Modern, Ballet, African and Afro-Caribbean choreographic works elevated dance aesthetics from their culture and heritage to maintain their sense of identity and humanity during difficult and dehumanizing experiences (DeFranz, 2002; Emery, 1988; Glass, 2007; Haskins, 1990; Osumare, 2018).

### **2.1.3 1960s to 1970s**

The sixties were an era of Movements. Many Black artists, across all art forms, recognized that the arts could be a vehicle for social change. Dance scholars felt that many Black artists viewed “Black” as a mark of identity during these times. In dance, this orientation emphasized connections between everyday experiences and artmaking to embrace multiple movement idioms and a range of expressive approaches in the representation of “Blackness” (Osumare, 2018). Du Bois and Locke emphasized the notion of art as a channel to express the implications of cultural identity and advance the race (Richard Greene as cited in DeFrantz, 2002). The Black Arts Movement promoted racial pride and ethnic cohesion and inspired a new renaissance in African American artistic and literary expressions. The Movement was the infusion of African aesthetics, a return to a collective cultural sensibility and ethnic pride that was evident during the Harlem Renaissance. Black dance was viewed as a means of linking the aesthetics and politics of dancers affiliated with the Black Arts Movement, the cultural arm of the Black Power movement. The role of Black artists and the purpose of art should be relevant to the needs of the community in which it was created, and the goal of art should be to improve social and political conditions of the people to whom it is addressed (Ongiri, 2010). Art is for the purpose to remind us of the depth and breadth of our history and to encourage us toward community uplift and development (Van Deburg, 1992). Many artists

of the Movement welcomed the opportunity to provide the stories, shared experiences and cultural aesthetics of Black people. By the 1970s, Black dance had come to be defined, by artists, as work that was explicitly engaged in the act of Black self-identification (DeFranz, 2002; Emery, 1988; Johnson, 1971). The themes in modern dance were a reflection of the times and a response to a racist American society (Emery, 1988; Lacy 2000; Malone, 1996; Perpener, 2001). Larry Neal (1971) in his book *Reflections on a Black Aesthetic*, states that African American identity is born out of a struggle with racism, urbanity, and the consequences of slavery are the direct legacy of the Black Arts Movement's struggle to redefine African American cultural production.

#### **2.1.4 1980s to Present**

The contributions of choreographic works by Black dance artists in this period of time are enormous. The artistic practices are represented in the works on the concert stage and the consistent exploration by dance scholars and national dance organizations to ensure that Black dance artistry is respected, valued, connected and rooted in African traditions and humanity.

The literature on Black dance artists and their works during this period focuses mainly on artists and companies whose names and works are known in the world of dance. The limited documentation of Black dance artists neglects the depth of artistry created, developed and performed during this period. De Franz's (2002) *Dancing Many Drums Excavation in African Dance* outlines Black dance history in the introduction where the title clearly informs the reader that *African American Dance is a Complex History*. Given this reality, there are artists, events, companies and collective moments of hope that I believe warrant being noted in this research on Black dance history. Many of the sources are drawn from stalking any mention of Black dance, the names of Black dance companies and performances and events relevant to Black dance. Having



identified that method as one unconventional means of sourcing the literature; however, there are dance scholars currently researching the history of Black dance from the later twentieth century and early twenty-first century. The continuous studies of DeFranz and Gottschild provide opportunities to link Black dance histories with current dance practices by choreographers, companies and artistic directors. Gottschild's (2012) publication, *Joan Myers Brown & the Audacious Hope of the Black Ballerina A Biohistory of American Performance*, provides the story of an artistic dance legend. Gottschild details the personal and professional story of Joan Myers Brown, founder of the Philadelphia Dance Company (PHILADANCO) and the Philadelphia School of Dance Arts (PSDA). Joan Myers Brown developed, nurtured and launched the careers of countless Black dance artists. Gottschild expertly details their careers and concert performances with major dance companies such as Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Dallas Black Dance Theatre, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble, and Ronald K. Brown, Evidence to name a few. The story of one woman's journey as a Black dancer chronicles her impact on the world of dance as she consistently thought of ways to advance the dance careers of Black students, DSDA, emerging and professional dancers and PHILADANCO, choreographers, executive and artistic directors. Joan Myers Brown's accomplishments in Black dance span sixty years for the dance school and fifty years for the company. Her contributions to Black dance have been imbedded with her vision for a just artistic society in Philadelphia, the US and the world.

Like Gottschild, DeFranz (2004) in *Dancing Revelations Alvin Ailey's Embodiment of African American Culture*, examines one of the most celebrated dance companies, Alvin Ailey American Dance Company, and the vast repertoire of their choreographic works. The legacy of Alvin Ailey is chronicled with an authentic understanding of Ailey, the artists, and his commitment

to developing an African American presence in dance (Long, and Byrd, sentiments on back jacket of *Dancing Revelations*).

## **2.2 Black Dance**

Scholars have worked to define “Black dance” in complex and diverse ways. While some have used Black dance to refer specifically to African American dance. Other dance artists challenge and dismiss the use of the term Black dance to describe their artistic work because, they argue it separates, labels and pigeonholes their work as different, and less than that of white dance artists (Allen, 2001). Ruth Howard (2008) contributing editor of *Dance Magazine*, openly challenged and dismissed Black dance as a term that sets the doers apart as separate and unequal in artistic validity. The work created by African Americans is too diverse to be compartmentalized and uniformly labeled (Howard, p.137). Many Black dance artists of the 1960s and 1970s did not align their work with the movement. Dance cultural studies scholar Richard Long (1990, p. 7) describes Black dance as...

Dance that is generated in a culture or cultural milieu is called Black and may be called Black dance and these cultures include of Sub-Saharan Africa, the Africanized areas of the Western hemisphere, such as Afro-American, Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Cuban. Black dance is a cultural aesthetic that unifies the non-verbal work of people of African descent throughout the diaspora. Black dance should not be mistaken with Black dancing bodies but instead refers to a tradition of movement which nonverbally articulates a Black ethos.

Dance historian, Emery circumscribed Black dance to dance performed by African Americans in the United States and Katherine Dunham (in the Forward to Emery's second edition text) extended the definition of the term to mean the dance forms of people of African origin (Emery, 1980, viii).

Carol Johnson, founding editor of the 1971 magazine, *The Feet*, poses that Black dance be defined as:

Any form of dance and any style that a Black person chooses to work within. Since the expression "Black Dance" must be all inclusive it includes (1) dancers that work in the very traditional forms, the more nearly African styles, (2) the social dance forms category that are indigenous to this country which include tap and jazz dance, (3) the various contemporary and or abstract forms that are seen on the concert stage and (4) the ballet which must not be considered solely European (Allen, 1980).

In the 1990s Black dance began to be referred to as having an Africanist aesthetic that linked the history and theoretical hallmarks of performances to Africa and the Diaspora. This understanding of Black dance emphasizes the linkages between the experiences, artistic and personal expressions that define Blackness (Amin, 2011; DeFranz, 2002; Gottschild, 1998, 2003). Gottschild (2003, p.14) also states...

I do not believe in "black dance" and to a lesser extent, "white dance"—or even a black or white dancing body. *They are cultural milestones not racial markers.* However, I cannot ignore or escape these terms. My strategy for going beyond them is to move through them. Furthermore, I recognize, with love and gratitude the vast riches that peoples of African descent have brought to American dance, culture, and life. The black dancing body has infiltrated and informed the shapes and changes of the American dancing body. Until

racism and white skin privilege are no longer an everyday issue in American life, I believe there is good reason to use a terminology of difference (black dance, black dancing body) that allows us to honor these contributions.

This bold call to continue to reference the work of Black dance artists as Black dance is a challenge to societal and cultural institutions. This challenge demands the dismantling of institutional and systemic policies and practices that denigrate and suppress the creations of Black artists with demeaning language, stereotypical images and social and cultural inequalities (Allen, 2001; Osumare, 2018).

Ishmael Houston-Jones, in 2012 curated, *Parallels* which focused on choreographers from the African diaspora and postmodernism “in the age of Obama”. Houston-Jones invited diverse dance artists to exhibit performances all focused on the theme of Black dance at Danspace in New York City. The goal of the performances was to show the diversity of work that African American choreographers were making parallel to what was considered as Black dance, hence the name *Parallels* (Sirin, 2012). Houston-Jones, thirty years prior, in 1982, curated “Parallels” again at Danspace, asking, “What is post-Alvin Ailey Black Dance?”

In 2012, Houston-Jones returned with the questions, what is Black dance, does it exist and if it does exist, how is it defined (Seibert, 2012).

The quest to define *What is Black Dance?* was the focus of questions that Zita Allen, dance journalist asked forty years ago...

Allen 2001, has anyone noticed that since the term “black dance” snuck into our vocabulary several decades ago, it has remained undefined? Yet, in spite of the fact that this label has no clear definition, it has acquired a power almost as great as its meaning is obscure. Allen asks a series of questions about black dance. Is it a black choreographer’s

work performed by black dancers? A white choreographers work done by black dancers. Or a black choreographer's work danced by white dancers? Must it always have a black theme? Is it ever abstract? Is it modern, jazz, tap or ballet? Is it only found in America, or can this label apply to works performed by Senegal's National Dance Company, or Cuba's Conjunto Folklorico, or any other company consciously trying to preserve its African heritage? Or is "Black Dance" just an empty label devised by white critics to cover that vast, richly diverse, and extremely complex area of dance that they know all too little about? Does "black dance" really exist? And if it does, just who is qualified to define it? Eleo Pomare states, I don't think I create black dance. I think I create works that are hybrid forms of our experience as blacks. I don't limit myself to dealing with just black themes, black music. No one would tell Pearl Lang that she was creating Jewish dance or Jewish art, white critics rave about white choreographers without imposing ethnic breakdowns (Allen, 2001).

Osumare, (2018, p. 10) writes that she explores "black dance" to mean the individual and collective dances of any genre performed by Black peoples anywhere in the world.

Many of the earlier questions about Black dance persist today. Takiyah Nur Ami (2011) Black dance scholar, in her article, *A Terminology of Difference: Making the Case for Black Dance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and Beyond*, has explored the debate on the meaning of Black dance with a summary of important historical and current references to the use of Black dance.

Debates and discussions on "Black dance" continue today at conferences, festivals, symposiums, roundtables (Collegium for African Diaspora Dance CADD 2014; DeFranz, 2014; Greene, 2010; Osumare, 2018). The International Association of Blacks in Dance, since 1997, have presented *The International Conference and Festival of Blacks in Dance (IABD)*. The Conference is the largest gathering of the Black dance community in the world. Saunders Thompson, IABD's President and CEO, in a 2019

interview explains the importance of the organization in ensuring the rich legacy of dance in America. “If IABD did not exist, the history, identity, and legacy of the individual and organizational contributions to black dance through dance artists, dance traditions, and company artistic/executive founders would be lost. Who would tell the narrative then?”

## **2.3 Aesthetics**

Aesthetics is a perception of the senses and the values given to art, culture and nature over time within different cultures. A system of aesthetics must be developed within the culture of the people and mirror their humanity, diversity and artistic expressions and traditions (Dennis, 2015; Gwaltney, 1993).

### **2.3.1 Black Arts Movement**

The concept of Black Aesthetics, a cultural ideology, developed in America alongside the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s and produced the Black Arts Movement that endowed the artists and viewer with self-affirmation and cultural authority that promoted Black separatism in the arts emphasizing cultural production for and by Black people (DeFranz, 2002). The theorist Larry Neal (1986) proclaimed that the Black arts were the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. He argued that young writers and artists should confront the contradictions arising out of the African American’s experience of racism and marginalization in the West (Nelson, 2007; Perpener, 2001). The development of a Black Aesthetic was seen as crucial to the development of an African American identity at this revolutionary moment in

American politics. Artists were called upon to seek a new aesthetic in opposition to the white western one, and not to ignore their Black communities (Fuller, 1971).

### **2.3.2 Africanist Aesthetics**

As defined by Holloway (2005) in *Africanisms in American Culture*, Africanisms are “elements of culture found in the New World traceable to an African origin”. The term places emphasis on the significance of African retentions and syncretic processes that are handed down by cultural traditions and are embodied within the individual and community (Gottschild, 1996; Perpener, 2001). Africanist Aesthetics identify African and African American dance, presence, elements, trends and phenomena that developed out of the culture of the African Diaspora. Africans and their collective communities constitute the African diaspora. The African diaspora refers not only to the Americas, but also to global migration over millennia. African communities can be found historically in Asia, Europe, and Australia. Large communities exist throughout the Americas (North, Central, and South) and the Caribbean (Holloway, 2005; Welsh, 1996). The Africanist elements that distinguish African American dance from European dance styles and have influenced American dance include: paired opposites, polycentrism/polyrhythm, high affect juxtaposition, ephemerism, and aesthetic of the cool (Gottschild, 1966 and 1998; Luana, 2018; Thompson, 1974; Willette, 2012). The Africanist aesthetic is a set of qualities in art, that come from African art. Robert Farris Thompson’s (1974) observations of art in central and western Africa and Kariamu Welsh Asante’s observations of dance as seen in American dance, is not any particular aesthetic of any one group of people from Africa, but rather a blend of common elements across many different groups (Welsh, 1996). The Africanist presence in American culture has shaped America and played a significant role in defining the American aesthetic.

Luana (2018) expresses the tragedy, in *What Makes That Black, the African American Expressive Culture*, of not knowing how much the Africanist aesthetic is woven into the fabric of American art, culture, and life. Gottschild (1998) describes this as *invisibilized*, a phrase she coined to stress America's systemic denial and exploitation of the contribution of Blacks to society. Gottschild (1998) uses a metaphor in *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance Dance and Other Context* to identify the reach and depth of Africanisms in American life when describing the politics of exclusion as Africanisms are inextricably dreadlocked into weave of the American fabric, and like that hairdo, cannot be undone without cutting off both black and white strands at the root and diminishing the potential quality of life for us all (p. 9, 10).

### **2.3.3 Black Aesthetics/African American Aesthetics**

Black aesthetics is a relatively new name for an old form of intellectual and cultural work (Taylor, 2010). Taylor's research directs Blacks to become self-conscious in creating a Black aesthetic that states *Black is Beautiful*. Luana, 2018, describes the African American aesthetic as a sensibility that Blacks must study within their own traditions realizing that there is no monolithic perception or single element that constitutes the African American Aesthetic.

The aesthetic is a profusion of questions and a culling of answers from a select sensibility, from a specific compositional approach. In the arts, cultural rules of beauty and proportion empower the senses (Luana, 2018). Taylor espouses the importance of Blacks knowing who they are and the gift that they will always be.

African American Aesthetics/Black Aesthetics have been appropriated, assimilated and creolized into American mainstream (Gottschild, 2003; Luana, 2018); however, Luana and Taylor advocate that Blacks develop a critical consciousness and comfort in their African



American/Black skin in ways that cannot be taken away while remaining committed to beauty as the vital work of Black aesthetics (Luana, 2018; Taylor, 2010).

Aesthetics and beauty number among the seemingly limitless subjects of both dance and philosophy (Harris, 1996; DeFranz, 2005). The examination of the aesthetics of beauty, as it relates to Black dance, clearly will raise questions about who makes those determinations of norms that will govern artistic production and evaluation; however, Taylor is interested in the broader questions about art, beauty and expression of Black aesthetics (DeFranz, 2005; Taylor, 2010).

### **2.3.4 Black Performance Theory**

DeFranz and Gonzales describe in *Black Performance Theory* (BPT), the work that has been underway for more than thirty years to define Black Performance. Black performance theory focuses on the meanings of Blackness. In BPT, the authors show how the many iterations of Blackness can be formed by performance and revealed within unlimited performance frames. Black performance theory is recognized as a circumstance enabled by black sensibilities, black expressive practices and black people (DeFranz and Gonzales, 2014).

## **2.4 Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Extensive research details how Brown and Black children tend to receive an education void of their history and culture. More recently, educators have come to realize that when schools negate the students' cultures, they deny students the key resource they bring to education (Stone and Norbit, 2009). Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) recognizes the importance of including

cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of cultural groups (Ladson-Billings 1994; Gay, 2018). Culturally responsive pedagogy, for Black students, emphasizes the strength of their cultural birthright, positions Black students as powerful agents of change and the heirs of the rich and complex heritage of the African Diaspora rather than the deficient “other” needing to assimilate into a “superior” culture (Darlene Hammond et al, 2007). Educational leaders are encouraged to support teachers in developing culturally relevant practices within their curriculums, programs and expectations of students (Landson-Billings, 1994 and Simms, 2013; Gay, 2003).

CRP in Black dance educational programs provides opportunities for students to experience, reflect and know the rich contributions of Black artists to dance. This approach to learning will help students aspiring to careers in dance to see the legacy that has been forged for them and address questions about do I belong in dance. W. E. B. Dubois in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chapter 1, *Of Our Spiritual Strivings*, describes what he perceived to be a fundamental “two-ness”. A “double consciousness of Blacks...two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength keeps it from being torn asunder”. This *double consciousness* is a sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (Du Bois, p. 3). Black students aspiring to careers in dance must understand who they are and be confident in their identity. The continued racism and social injustices in dance keep Black students constantly on guard and asking insecure questions. CRP in dance curricula would allow Black students and all students to know and experience the vast contributions that Black dance artists and companies have made in shaping dance from Africa to America. Katherine Dunham's dance career included, long before CRP, in 1965 an understanding of the importance of education, art, culture, and self-

knowledge as central to developing and sustaining feelings of self-esteem that could permanently change lives (Perpener, 2001). Primus (1960s), like Dunham, created educational opportunities, for emerging dance students conveying Black culture as a tool to identify with African and Black dance culture (Perpener, 2001). In 1960, Joan Myers Brown started Philadelphia School of Dance Arts and in 1970, she started Philadelphia Dance Company. In an interview for her author, Joan Myers Brown, echoed a similar sentiment, that the new dance company would allow Black youth an opportunity to study the classics of dance in addition to the arts of their natural heritage (Gottschild, 2014).

## **2.5 Social Justice**

As stated earlier, CRP addresses concerns of social justice in dance pedagogy. It is essential that dance educators, parents, administrators, boards and stakeholders outside of the educational setting recognize that they have a role to play in creating a dance world that is more equitable and compassionate (Risner and Simpson, 2010). Risner and Simpson's research recognizes that social justice issues in studios and classrooms for student's pre-k through high school are linked to providing curriculum that recognizes the contributions of Blacks and dancers whose work has been invisible in dance. Paulo Freire (1970, p. 54) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* espouses that no pedagogy is truly liberating if it is distant from the oppressed. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for redemption.

The task of creating equity throughout dance is also central to dance education in Higher Education. It is in higher education where prospective teachers of dance typically first encounter discussions about social and cultural issues in dance. During the past decade under-representation

has continued to be a major theme in dance literature related to social and cultural issues (DeFrantz, 1996a, 1996b; Gottschild, 1996; Bennefield, 1999; Jackson & Shapiro-Phim, 2008; Risner, 2009). DeFrantz (1996b) and Thompson (2010) note the injustice of under-represented populations in major international ballet companies, while also acknowledging the powerful contributions of contemporary choreographers such as Dwight Rhoden, David Rouseve, Ronald K. Brown, and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, that challenge social norms. For these choreographers they use their works to create awareness of social issues, create change, and to expose racism, inequality and social injustices. The next steps for educators would be to develop pedagogical approaches to bring social justice learning to dance studios and higher education.

## **2.6 Racism and Black Dance**

After World War I, the lynchings and race riots of 1919 brought Blacks face to face with violence and some of the most vicious injustices and racism imaginable (Perpener, 2001). However, the Harlem Renaissance and gradual movements of Black dancers making their marks as performers and choreographers helped to establish the move toward Black artists on the concert stage. The politics of racial and cultural difference played a role in determining access (Perpener, 2001; Haskins, 1990). The dancers struggled to get the resources and access to mainstream facilities for training. The dance public were critical of their performances and viewed their modern dance works as marginal (Perpener, 2001). Dance artists studying the complicated relationships of the white world with Black modern dance artists wonder why the whites love Black culture but demeaned the artists, loved Black dance but deemed the Black dancers as marginal, denied them opportunities and denigrated the Black body (DeFranz, 2002; Gottschild,

2003). The answer to this question is the ongoing power of racism and its perpetual grip on world consciousness (Gottschild, 2003, p. 5).

Stereotypical images of Blacks perpetuated by white dance critics, who wrote about Blacks and sexual movements of dance performers, led to critics defining what they did not understand or were ill prepared to address as Black dance (Allen, 1980; Gottschild, 2003; Perpener, 2001).

### 3.0 Chapter Three - Methodology

*You have something glorious to draw on begging for attention. Don't pass it up. Use it.*

*~ Lorraine Hansberry*

This study uses the methodology of Focused Ethnography to look at *What is Black dance*. The use of focused ethnography seeks explore to cultural nuances and ways in which Black dance experiences, culture, traditions and meaning are defined by professional teaching artists when developing pedagogy and choreography on Black dancers preparing for careers on the concert stage. To begin the study, focused ethnography methodology is described. The research design for addressing questions is also presented including the role of researcher, a description of participants chosen, the data analysis process and study limitations.

#### 3.1 Research Questions

This study endeavors to address the following questions:

- RQ1) What do dance teaching artists, in an urban setting, know about Black dance? How do they define Black dance?
- RQ2) How does their teaching, choreography, experiences and performances reflect their knowledge of Black dance?
- RQ3) Is preparing Black dance bodies for the concert stage important? How do teaching artists use Black dance when creating pedagogy, choreography, and the development of Black dancers for careers on the concert stage?

### **3.2 Focused Ethnography**

Ethnography studies situations in real time, as they occur in their natural setting to gain an in-depth perspective of the overt or explicit dimensions of culture that are known and cognitively salient to members of that culture or subculture (Fetterman, 2010). Ethnography is a process of learning about people by learning from them (Roper & Shapira, 2000). Ethnography is used by a number of disciplines such as anthropology, education, nursing and others.

Focused ethnography is a recent modified form of ethnography, that works well in applied situations. It was developed to provide researchers with the benefits of ethnography in a way that reduces the need to spend extended periods of time in the field (Wall, 2015; Higginbottom, Pillay, & Boadu, 2013; Knoblauch, 2005). Focused ethnography usually addresses a unique problem within a defined arena and is conducted within a specific cultural subgroup (Knoblauch, 2005; Mayan, 2009; Morse & Richards, 2002; Roper & Shapira, 2000). In focused ethnography participants may or may not know each other; however, they share common behaviors, practices, experiences and they have a shared cultural perspective (Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013; Mayan, 2009; Morse & Richards, 2002).

Examples in the literature of focused ethnography research in the social sciences are few. I was not able to locate any studies using focused ethnography research in the arts although there are extensive studies in the arts that use traditional ethnography research. Focused ethnography, however, does differ from traditional ethnography in that the field visits are short and within specific time frames and or non-existent (Morse, 2007). Participants selected for focused ethnographic research are located in one place and limited to specific times and events and they have specific knowledge and or experiences of the topic being investigated (Crookes & Davies, 1980). Focused ethnography also differs from traditional ethnography in that research questions

relate to or describe experiences within the cultural area under investigation and are focused on *what*, *why*, and *how* questions that address shared values, relationships, practices, patterns, engagement, areas of constraints, and sustainability of a specific group or population in relationship to the cultural area being studied (Walsh, 2009). Focused ethnography uses data collection methodologies such as individual or group interviews, and focus groups that are, with the consent of the participants, usually recorded and transcribed verbatim. Field notes can also be used to collect data that are recorded and transcribed per consent of the participants. The researcher in focused ethnography studies is usually in the role of observer-participant and special attention is given to remaining objective and eliminating personal biases while in this role (Knoblauch, 2005). Focused ethnography is usually conducted within the researchers' work environment and is convenient to participants (Higginbottom, 2004b). The analysis of data in focused ethnography includes review of recorded transcripts, ongoing data assessment using computer assisted qualitative data analysis software such as NiVivo to complete coding, sorting categories, and patterns (Roger and Shapiro, 2000). The data analysis is focused on developing answers to the research questions and creating recommendations for the study.

This qualitative research study uses focus ethnography to investigate specific beliefs and practices held by practitioners on *What is Black dance* (Magilvy, McMahon, Bachman, Roark, and Evenson, 1987). This study focuses on the phenomenon of Black dance culture, specific knowledge about the culture of Black dance as it is identified in African culture, the cultures of the Diaspora and Black American culture (Higginbottom, Pillay and Boadu, 2013).

Focused ethnography will be used to investigate the cultural and artistic field referred to as Black dance. This term, as used in society has presented cultural and artistic conflict for Black dance artists when describing what is Black dance and referring to the work of Black dance artists



(Knoblauch, 2005). Focused ethnography is seen by Cruz and Higginbottom, 2013, as a useful tool to gain an understanding of the specific experiences of Black dance as an art form that expresses the way of life and being of people from Africa, the Diaspora and Black America.

### **3.3 Role of the Researcher**

Characteristics and methods of focused ethnography include the conceptual orientation of a single researcher; in this study I will function as the researcher/observer. This role will allow me to observe participants, enable on going relationships with participants and observe multiple data gathering sessions. My role also includes that of the interviewer probing participants using a semi-structured interview process with questions relevant to the research questions (Spradley, 1979). The study design includes three focus groups, an *Apajo* session, and individual interviews. To ensure that the three focus groups received the same information, instructions and directions were read to each group. The dissertation overview and methodology were explained. Participants were reminded that the sessions were being taped. I introduced the transcriber who would take notes and document the content of the discussions to ensure accuracy of data shared as well as to observe non-verbal interactions and the impact of the group dynamics (Spradley, 1979). I read ground rules and sessions began. At the end of the focus group sessions I shared with the participants the next steps that I would take in analyzing and coding the data and reminded them of the date for the upcoming session.

### 3.4 Research Participants

The fourteen participants in the focus groups were sent the researcher's designed demographic form (Appendix A). The participants in the study were aware that their identities would remain anonymous; their names would not be used, and they would be given pseudonyms in data collection, analysis and final reporting of the study. The focus groups used the interview protocol (Appendix B) designed to ensure that enough data would be collected to enable the researcher to answer the inquiry questions posed within the study (Knoblauch, 2005). The three focus groups and *Apajo* were video recorded. The discussion in each focus group began with open ended questions about who they considered family, dance careers and how they came to *HDAT*. More focused questions followed, with the intent to give voice to the participants who are affected by the research study (Spradley, 1979). Twelve national dance artists participated in the individual interviews, and they had a different, yet similar, interview protocol with a more direct reference to *What is Black* dance (Appendix C). The focus groups and *Apajo* were held at HDAT, a venue and environment that was familiar and allowed participants to feel safe. The individual interviews were conducted via Zoom and phone and recorded electronically using a conference call service. No interview was conducted without receiving the written consent of the participants. As researcher, I transcribed, verbatim, each interview after they were completed (Knoblauch, 2005).

### 3.5 Methodologies

#### 3.5.1 Focus Groups

Twenty-seven teaching artists, twenty women and seven men were invited, via email, to participate in the focus groups. Participants included teaching artists who worked with HDAT students over the past 15 years setting choreographic works and providing master classes, workshops, residencies and studio classes.

Three focus groups included two groups of five participants and one group of four participants. The timeline was flexible; however, the groups spent two and a half hours working together (Knoblauch, 2005). The participants in each group were self-selected based on dates and times that worked best for their schedules. The participants included three males, nine females and one who identified as binary, the ages ranged from 21 to over 65. Racially the group included two white women, two Africans, one male and one female, and ten African Americans. Two groups included one Zoom participant. Focus Group 1 and 3 had a participant in Chicago and California respectively. The California Zoom participant was in the *Apajo*. The participants knew each other from their work with HDAT or their work as dancers and creatives in Pittsburgh. The group included teaching artists, choreographers, dance academicians, and professionals with careers in dance for twenty-one to thirty-five or more years.

The use of focus groups employs guided, interactional discussion as a means of generating details of complex experiences and the reasoning behind participants actions, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes (Kitzinger, 1994 & 1995; Morgan and Kreuger, 1993). This approach presents several benefits since the participants professional practices include diverse genres of dance, they can speak to different understandings and meanings of *What is Black dance* and what they do can be

understood from multiple explanations, behaviors and experiences (Lankshear, 1993; Morgan, 1988). It is important to realize the diversity of thought that participants bring to the inquiry process as experts regarding how they see and define Black dance (Race et al., 1994). The focus groups were designed to engage the participants in a dialogical research process where they would interact, share personal knowledge, describe authentic experiences of people, culture, identity and aesthetics (Kitzinger, 1995). This process allows participants to critically communicate their reality and to engage in re-creating knowledge, transforming their understandings of themselves and their work for change (Race et al., 1994, Freire, 1970, Vinha, 2011).

### **3.5.2 *Apajo***

To encourage a more community, family-oriented, "let's speak our truth" about *What is Black dance*, as *emic*, one who is a cultural insider and has an understanding a particular culture (Chi-yue Chiu, 2015 and Fetterman, 2015), I felt a need for an African centered approach to achieve this goal. Gay and Kirkland, 2003 speak to the importance of researchers recognizing the social and cultural identities and needs of participants by creating ways to affirm cultural identities and minimize intimidation and feelings of being uncomfortable. I shared my vision for a more African centered space with an African friend. She said, "you want a gathering to occur where people feel free to be their authentic voice with no holds barred...you want an *Apajo*". In Nigerian culture this is a time when people, with different thoughts and ways of acting, work on shared issues or concerns. In the African traditions, food is central to the event (James, Nigieran custom, 2019).

The goal of the *Apajo*, was to gain a more expansive and cultural exploration of *What is Black dance* and to delve deeper into themes that were developing in the focus groups with little

depth and focus. The following themes needed more reflective thought, interactions with more constructive, and transformative dialogue. The researcher becomes a bricoleur (i.e. a person who creates or constructs; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), one who links data together like pieces of a puzzle until all components join to create the personal and cultural experiences of the participants.

### **3.5.3 Delving Deeper**

#### Example I

Group 1 response...

Question... Is Black dance a genre?

(Participant 4) No, Black dance is not a genre and they felt that it is, was diminishing the phrase of Black dance. I don't know if genre is the right term. It's more internal than that. When I think of genre it puts boxes around it.

Group 2 response...

(Participant 10) felt it was a genre and was very emphatic about it...

Each participant expressed why they felt this way with different statements. One participant said, I think it's a genre from what it's born from-because it comes from oppression. Dance and music goes into oppression and joy. Black dance comes from a pure place it comes from a higher power.

Group 3 responses

The group agreed that Black dance was not a genre

(Participant 12) One participant, originally from Africa stated, No, it's bigger than that. I'm biased...all dance sprang from Africa.

(Participant 13) I think it's important for others to recognize it for what it is. "Here in our city, they don't understand the traditions in Black dance. Black dance is bigger than that. There is a subtle, ignorance, about the lack of understanding of Black dance.

### Example II

(All participants) Conversation about expectations of Black dance companies and academies... when working with Black dance companies and academies there is higher expectation and demand for excellence and discipline

(Participant 1) pointed out that when working with Black dance companies and training with Black dance academies there was always a different type of discipline and work ethic

(Participant 13) stated the reason for this is because we as Black people always have to be better than our counterparts because others think our work isn't the best quality or at the highest standard.

### Example III

...In each focus group this surfaced without any prompting or questions, but in each group, there was the connection of Black dance to the spirit and spirituality of people.

...Three participants discussed how their style of African and Afro-Caribbean dance is rooted in spirituality in the context of the movement and traditions, you can't have one without the other.

...Another participant shared that in her style of Modern Contemporary dance everything she learned was rooted in the context of spirituality of the Black church and growing up in the church and with a strong faith base is where she pulled her choreography from.

The *Apajo* invitation was sent to the fourteen participants and thirteen accepted; one had a schedule conflict. The participants arrived at noon. The day included food and was scheduled to end at 5:00 pm; however, the participants continued sharing personal thoughts, experiences, questions and contradictions about *What is Black dance* until 6:00 pm.

I intentionally designed two morning groups each with six and seven participants based on dance genres, experiences, and shared or contrasting ideas from previous focus group responses. The afternoon plenary session was designed to be conversational with open-ended questions that flowed from the morning group exercises on Black dance and the prior focus group conversations. This process of creative interactions brings participants together to discuss key themes from research and the meaning of data or key ideas generated of shared practices, and meanings of the Black dance culture in previous conversations (Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013; Mayan, 2009; Morse & Richards, 2002). The conversational design promoted an environment that allowed participants to jump in and out of the conversations with their personal reflections and concerns. There was a reverence, an Africanism, that when certain participants spoke a respectful silence occurred that acknowledged their voices, expertise and cultural wisdom (Holloway, 2005).

The participants ended the session with a sense of having exhausted the topic (Knoblauch, 2005). An African elder asked the group to circle around Ayisha and pray. After the prayer, they said their goodbyes with hugs and well wishes as I distributed gift cards thanking them for their time, knowledge and authentic expressions of *What is Black dance*.

### **3.5.4 Interviews**

Since HDAT's beginning, over seventy plus national artists have worked with students setting choreographic works, teaching master classes, workshops, and residencies. In my role as an emic, as a performer, choreographer, artistic director and executive director, I wanted to engage more seasoned national dance artist in the exploration of *What is Black dance*. These artists represent a broader professional reach (Knoblauch, 2005); they are performing with national Black dance companies, artistic directors of dance companies, and they work with arts education programs that are preparing dancers for careers on the concert stage within their companies or with other national Black dance companies.

One group worked with HDAT's students as choreographers, master teaching artists, and artist in residencies. The second group had not worked with HDAT students; however, they would provide comparison data on *What is Black dance*. The two groups had common experiences of being members of the International Association of Blacks in Dance and they were working with Black dance arts organizations preparing the next generation of Black dancers for careers on the concert stage.

For the Interview phase of the study, the IABD artists are identified as Alpha and Beta Groups. The seven who worked with HDAT are Alpha participants and the five that did not work with HDAT are Beta participants.



The interview protocol questions were designed to enable the Alpha and Beta participants to describe their professional work with Black dance. The responses of the Alpha and Beta groups were deep, rich, and moving. It was important that the interview space allowed them time to share, reflect and present events and cultural phenomena in their authentic voices to questions about *What is Black dance* (Stringer, 1999).

### **3.5.5 Procedures Followed**

Once approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Pittsburgh was received, I emailed potential participants inviting them to consider participating in my research study. Based on participant responses to participate, I then asked them to complete the informed consent form. Each participant completed the form before participating in the study.

Participants met in three focus group sessions and the *Apajo* group in HDAT dance studios. The participants were recorded electronically as they interacted with each other (Knoblauch, 2005); two individuals were connected to the groups via the electronic Zoom conference recording service. The individual interviews took place via Zoom (Zoom Video Communications, Inc, 2020).

## **3.6 Data Analysis**

The study uses Leininger's Four Phases of qualitative data analysis. Phase one includes the detailed analysis of raw data, including recorded and transcribed focus groups, *Apajo* and individual interviews, observations, participatory experiences, and field notes. In the second phase, data are coded and classified as they relate to the domain of inquiry and research questions. I used

NVivo12 software for organizing data and assisting with analysis. In phase three, data are examined to discover saturation of ideas and recurrent patterns of similar and different meanings and interpretations. The fourth phase of data analysis includes interpretation and synthesis of findings. The researcher explicates and confirms major themes and new theoretical formulations (Leininger and McFarland, 2006).

The data analysis began with the design of the research questions and my committee's suggestions to strengthen the research questions stronger and develop an outline for the focus group sessions. After each focus session, I made notes on the conversations, and the ideas or comments that were interesting or needed to be revisited. The transcripts for the focus groups and the *Apajo* were given to me immediately after each session. I watched the video recordings a day or two after receiving them to see if there were any additional thoughts that were missed in the transcripts or in my notes. After reviewing the transcripts and videos, I began the process of coding and looking for recurring words and initial categories in the focus groups and *Apajo*. The individual interview responses were transcribed verbatim within two days following each interview. Listening to the Zoom recorded interviews, I was able to start and stop the interviews for ideas, words and or sentiments that I might have missed in the first transcription of participant conversations (Higginbottom, 2013; Knoblauch, 2005; Millen, 2000 Morse & Richards, 2002). Once all the interviews were transcribed, I added them to the focus groups, and *Apajo* transcripts and began the process of coding and looking for recurring words and initial categories throughout the data. In the first round of analysis, I highlighted common throughout all interview transcripts. In the second-round, I circled common categories. Following these two rounds of tedious coding, the data collection categories were expanding and supplemented with new categories and the data

was becoming too extensive for a manual process. After consultation with my advisor, I moved to coding software to code the data.

### **3.6.1 NVivo 12**

After reviewing different software options designed to assist with qualitative data management, I chose NVivo 12 (QSR International, 2014). All transcripts, focus groups, *Apajo*, and individual interviews were uploaded to NVivo 12. This process helped the researcher to remain consistent in emphasizing key points during coding and I began to see relationships across the data. Researchers using NVivo 12 software have the capacity to organize and code unstructured information and it is a tool for making sense and organizing data during the process of analysis (Spencer et al., 2003; King, N. 2004; Beddall-Hill, N., Jabbar, A., & Shehri, S., 2011). When using NVivo 12 software, if a word or phrase appeared more than 10 times, I determined, for the purpose of this study, that there was a relationship or depth to the phrase pattern. I then determined how the words and phrases connected and what themes were emerging. I began to see, based on the responses to the questions, repetition and comparisons emerging from the data.

In the next phase of analysis, I searched to identify categories emerging from similarities or relational ideas and thoughts in the codes. Figure 1 describes manual coding of categories, NVivo 12 software categories, patterns and themes.

## NVivo 12 Coding

### Manual Coding

- Read transcripts from three focus groups
  - Each line of focus groups and *Apajo* transcriptions were coded manually line by line
- Re-read each transcript, coded key ideas with circles, squares & yellow highlights

## NVivo 12 Coding

### NVivo Categories

- Entered transcripts from three data sources into NVivo
- Reread transcripts from the three methodology groups to create 10 categories that were re-occurring

### NVivo Patterns

- Reread the 10 categories and began searching for patterns that had a relationship to one another

### NVivo Themes

- Reread the patterns and those that had the most relationships began to emerge as themes

**Figure 1 Data and Analysis Process**

### 3.7 Ethical Concerns

One of my priorities throughout the study was maintaining ethical standards to ensure the validity and reliability of the research process. The risk to human subjects associated with this study were minimal; however, I was concerned about HDAT's teaching artists feeling put upon to participate in their roles as staff and that they could not speak openly about Black dance given the fact that the Black dance world is small (Smith, 2003). In the letter of Informed Consent, I stated why they were selected as potential participants, that their participation was voluntary, and they could drop out of the study at any time. Participants personal interactions and individual sharing of responses to interview questions by participants in the focus groups, *Apajo* and individual interviews are confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to identify responses of participants. Opening each focus group, the *Apajo* and interviews with a script minimized opportunity for bias. The script helped me to focus my introductions of the research and the topic *What is Black dance* so that I did not compromise the participants and their ability to present their understandings of *What is Black dance* (Yin, 2011; Gubrium and Holstein, 1998).

### 3.8 Summary

This chapter outlined the research methods used to answer the research questions. A review of the procedures, study participants, data collection and specifics of how the analysis was conducted. Twenty-six artists participated in the focus groups, *Apajo* and individual interviews. The demographics of the three focus groups and *Apajo* participant by focus group are represented in Tables 1, 2, and 3. Demographics include years as a dancer, gender identity, marital status, race,

age, education, dance genres, current professional work. *Alpha and Beta participants* are represented in Table 4 and 5 by dance artists that are members of the International Association of Blacks in Dance (IABD) and those who have worked with HDAT as Alpha group and those who have not as Beta group. Their demographic information includes current professional experiences, dance genres, education, gender identity, race and age.

### **3.8.1 Participant Analysis**

Summarizing key attributes in Tables 1, 2, and 3, the focus groups and *Apajo* participants are employed as teaching artists with Hill Dance Academy Theatre during the fall, spring and summer seasons. The participants are trained in all genres of dance representing classical Ballet, Jazz, Modern, Postmodern, African and Afro Caribbean. Their professional careers include teaching in public schools, charter schools, and the magnet performing arts middle and high school. The participants' professional dance training ranges from experiences in professional dance companies, independent dance artists and higher education degrees from certificate to doctoral programs. Their professional dance careers include continuous work on stage as dancers, artistic and rehearsal directors and entrepreneurs in roles as executive directors of companies and schools. The participants are diverse: ages ranging from 21 to 65, racial and ethnic identities include Black, African, African American and White and genders include non-binary, female and male. The tables do not represent participant years with HDAT; however, as employer, HDAT's data shows 10 participants have been employed as teaching artists for ten of HDAT's fifteen years and 1 participant have been engaged as a visual artist with HDAT for fifteen years, photographing HDAT's dancers in local performances.

**Table 1 Focus Group 1, October 27, 2019**

Person*	Yrs./ Dancer	Gender	Marital Status	Race	Age	Education	Dance Genres	Professional Work
1*	11- 20	F	S/NM	W	26-34	BA	Modern/Horton & Graham, Ballet & Jazz	TA CAPA High School, independent artist
2*	20	F	D	A	45-54	BA	Modern/Horton	Executive/Artistic Director Dance Company, Former Company Member
3*	50	F	M	A	65 +	NA	African	Executive/Artistic Director Dance Company
4	11- 20	F	M	W	26-34	Doctorate	Ballet & Jazz	Faculty Univ. Pittsburgh
5*	21-35	M	D	B	26-34	BA	African & Afro Caribbean	TA Pittsburgh Public Schools

*Notes.* \* = person attended *Apajo*; Marital Status/SN/M=Single Never Married, D=Divorced, M=Married; Race/A=African, B=Black, W=White; Education/ND=No Degree, BA=Bachelors, Grad.=Graduate, NA=did not answer

**Table 2 Focus Group 2, October 27, 2019**

Person*	Yrs./ Dancer	Gender	Marital Status	Race	Age	Education	Dance Genres	Professional Work
6*	21-35	F	D	B	35-44	College/ND	Afro Caribbean	TA Pittsburgh Arts, CEO Visual Arts
7*	21-35	M	M	B	45-54	Master's	African/Afro Caribbean	Faculty Univ. of Pittsburgh, Executive/Artistic Director Dance Company
8*	35+	F	W	B	55-64	BA/Grad/ND	African/Afro Caribbean/ Mod/Horton & Graham	Circus, Former Executive/Artistic Director Dance Company
9*	3-5	Non-Binary	S/NM	B	26-34	College/ND	Hip-Hop/ Contemporary	TA High School
10*	3-5	F	S/NM	B	21-25	Ailey Certificate	Ballet, Mod/Horton & Graham	TA High School, Rehearsal Director & independent artist

*Notes.* \* = person attended *Apajo*; Marital Status/SN/M=Single Never Married, D=Divorced, M=Married; Race/A=African, B=Black, W=White; Education/ND=No Degree, BA=Bachelors, Grad.=Graduate, NA=did not answer

**Table 3 Focus Group 3, November 3, 2019**

Person*	Yrs./ Dancer	Gender	Marital Status	Race	Age	Education	Dance Genres	Professional Work
11*	35+	F	M	B	55-64	College/ND	Ballet	TA High School,
12*	6-10	M	M	A	65+	College/ND	African	TA Pittsburgh Public Schools, Independent visual artists,
13*	21-35	F	M	B	45-54	BA	Mode/Horton & Graham	ED/AD Dance Company, TA Pittsburgh Public Schools
14*	11-20	M	S/NM	B	26-34	Master's	Jazz, Mod/Horton & Graham	Independent artist

*Notes.* \*= person attended Apajo; Marital Status/SN/M=Single Never Married, D=Divorced, M=Married; Race/A=African, B=Black, W=White; Education/ND=No Degree, BA=Bachelor's Degree, Grad.=Graduate Degree, NA=did not answer



**Table 4 HDAT/IABD Alpha Group**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Professional Area of Dance/years of Black company's existence</b>	<b>Dance Genre(s)</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Age</b>
<b>A January 8, 2020</b>	Associate Director Black Dance Company, Choreographer	African, Afro-Caribbean, Modern, Ballet, Hip-Hop, Jazz, Tap	BA	F	B	45-54
<b>B January 28, 2020</b>	Founder & CEO Black Dance Company & Choreographer	Modern	BA	M	B	55-64
<b>C January 30, 2020</b>	University Faculty, Rehearsal Director & Arts Administrator	African, Modern	Masters	F	B	35-44
<b>D January 31, 2020</b>	Founder and Artistic Director of Black Contemporary Dance Company, Faculty at High School for Performing Arts & University Professor	Modern/Horton	BA	F	B	55-64
<b>E February 1, 2020</b>	Assistant Artistic Director Black Dance Company, University Professor	African, Afro-Caribbean, Ballet, Jazz, Modern-Horton & Graham	BA	F	B	55-64
<b>F January 17, 2020</b>	CEO of Black Dance Theatre and Foundation, & University Professor	Modern	Master	F	B	35-44

*Notes.* \*= person attended *Apajo*; Marital Status/SN/M=Single Never Married, D=Divorced, M=Married; Race/A=African, B=Black, W=White; Education/ND=No Degree, BA=Bachelor's Degree, Grad.=Graduate Degree, NA=did not answer

**Table 5 IABD Beta Group**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Professional Area of Dance/years of Black company's existence</b>	<b>Dance Genre(s)</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Age</b>
<b>G</b> <b>January 31, 2020</b>	Dance Consultant, Funder		BA/JD	F	B	45-54
<b>H</b> <b>March 27, 2020</b>	Founder and Artistic Director of Dance Company	Modern-Horton & Graham	Doctorate	M	B	35-44
<b>I</b> <b>April 1, 2020</b>	Professor Higher Education/High School	Ballet, Modern	Doctorate	F	B	55-64
<b>J</b> <b>April 4, 2020</b>	Professional Dancer, Administrator, University Professor	Ballet, Dance Theater	BA	F	B	55-64
<b>K</b> <b>April 10, 2020</b>	Administrator, University Professor	African, Ballet, Jazz, Modern	Graduate & Post Graduate	F	B	45-54
<b>L</b> <b>April 17, 2020</b>	Founder and Artistic Director of Black Dance Company	African, Afro-Caribbean, Ballet, Jazz, Modern	5 Honorary Doctorates	F	B	65+

Notes. \*= person attended Apajo; Marital Status/SN/M=Single Never Married, D=Divorced, M=Married; Race/A=African, B=Black, W=White; Education/ND=No Degree, BA=Bachelor's Degree, Grad.=Graduate Degree, NA=did not answer

## 4.0 Chapter Four - Results

*You can start late, look different, be uncertain, and still succeed.*

*~ Misty Copeland*

This chapter contains the results of the qualitative Focused Ethnography (FE) study conducted to understand the cultural meaning of *What is Black dance* and answer the following research questions:

RQ1) What do dance teaching artists, in an urban setting, know about Black dance? How do they define Black dance?

RQ2) How does their teaching, choreography, experiences and performances reflect their knowledge of Black dance?

RQ3) Is preparing Black dance bodies for the concert stage important? How do teaching artists use Black dance when creating pedagogy, choreography, and the development of Black dancers for careers on the concert stage?

Included in this chapter is the data analysis consistent with FE that address cultural questions about what do teaching artists know about Black dance, how do they use their knowledge of Black dance when developing curriculum, performances, and preparing Black dancers for careers (Blomberg and Burrell, 2002). The chapter details the FE used to understand the cultural phenomena as outlined in the practices of teaching artists working in the dance sector utilizing Black dance as performance (Munhall, 2012). The local participants in the study are HDAT's teaching artist and as the researcher, I had access to them; however, for the national artists, I was able to access them through several national Black arts organizations.

## **4.1 Data Collection**

Three data sources: focus groups, *Apajo* and individual interviews were used to collect data. I conducted three levels of analysis collecting data from 14 focus groups participants, 13 *Apajo* participants and 12 interview participants. In level one, manual coding was used for the focus groups, *Apajo* and individual interviews; in levels two and three, I used NVivo 12 qualitative software to organize data in (a) categories (b) patterns and (c) themes. The three focus groups and *Apajo* data were transcribed and recorded by Zoom video conference service. The focus groups and *Apajo* participants were seated in a circle for all sessions as the researcher facilitated the questions and interactions in the focus groups and *Apajo*. The individual interviews, for Alpha and Beta participants, were conducted by Zoom conference service with the researcher reading the interview questions and the participants responding to each question. The interview protocol questions were different from the protocol questions used for the focus groups and *Apajo*. The questions differed in order to allow for more in depth inquiry of the Alpha and Beta participants as Black professional artists with extensive experiences as choreographers, company members and Blacks in dance. At each level of analysis, comparisons were used to draw down the data until themes emerged from the data.

## **4.2 Data Results**

For this study, Leininger's Four Phases of qualitative data analysis was used. The phases used to collect the data included: (1) Collecting and documenting raw data, this included video recordings and transcripts of focus groups, *Apajo* and individual interviews, observations,

participatory experiences, and field notes; (2) Identification of descriptors and categories according to the domains of inquiry and research questions using NVivo 12 qualitative software to organize data; (3) Identifying patterns and contextual analysis, discovering saturation of ideas, and recurrent patterns; (4) Identifying themes and theoretical formulations and recommendations. The transcribed data were coded line by line for similarities and descriptions in relation to the research questions and purpose of the study. For data analysis, 10 categories were identified: Activism, Black Dance, Connectivity, Cultural Expressions, Family/Village, Black dance Future, I am Who I am, Literature, Aesthetics, and Spirituality. Data from the above categories were coded line by line resulting in recurring patterns that included: Pattern of Black Expression and Movement, Pattern of Identity, Voice and Truth, Pattern of Legacy, Pattern of Spirit, Pattern of Story Telling, Pattern of Aesthetics, and Pattern of Diversity of Black experiences. In the final phase of data analysis, the patterns were analyzed line by line in the context of the field interpretation for thematic clarity. This process resulted in the following two overarching themes. Theme 1: *Black Aesthetics is the Artistic Quality and Essence of Movement*. Theme 2: *Honoring the Legacy, keeping our History Alive and Moving Forward*.

#### **4.2.1 Theme 1. Black Aesthetics is the Artistic Quality and Essence of Movement**

This theme supports research question 1. What do dance teaching artists, in an urban setting, know about Black dance? How do they define Black dance?

Black Aesthetics is the beauty of movements intended to stir the soul. The artistic quality, creative process and essence of movement gives it aesthetic value. Black aesthetics addresses and delineates the meanings, interpretations, goals, and objectives asserted by Black artists engaged in the process of creating and producing movement. The aesthetics focus on the meaning and

interpretation of dance works. The concept of Black aesthetics considers not only how and why works are produced, but the spiritual, cultural, political, and economic contexts in which the works take place and the issues and events that prompt the movements. The Black aesthetic is an expression, a way of giving meaning to movements.

When asked to describe Black dance and how Black dance is defined in their choreography, participants did not give a Black dance is definition; however, they described how the aesthetics of Black dance are used in choreography. They discussed the importance of Black cultural experiences, the stories, history, social, spiritual, emotional and political messages of resistance and using movement to depict social injustices.

*There is a historical, emotional, spiritual aspect of Black Dance.* (Participant 7)

*Spiritual...everything is derived from spirit in each person; guides who we become, we all have a calling, balance spirit, mind, body; energy of spirit, artists are critical to that spirit.*  
(Participant B)

*Spirit...Black dance evokes the spirit.* (Participant D)

The participants shared that the spirit in dance is a source of power, that energizes their movements. The spirit is the creative force that pushes them emotionally and physically.

One participant, when asked to list five descriptors of Black dance defined *her* essence of Black dance.

*The value in the movement of Black Dance is interchangeable and the prioritization of the value is dictated on the moment. Black dance is a tool of cultural retention, performed nuances of our experience, vocabulary of continuity and spirit, healing and good.*  
(Participant F)

The descriptors that are her essence of Black dance spoke to ancestral memories and experiences that were filled with notions of hope, care, satisfaction, lasting and spirit led.

Other participants shared...

*It is an expression of culture in the fullest sense, there are no limits* (Participant 5)

*It is infused in important parts of life; it is always present* (Participant 4)

*For Blacks, dance is not separated from everyday life* (Participant 6)

*It's freedom* (Participants 1 and 2)

*It's a gift from God* (Participants 8 and Participant 3)

*Black dance is a form of spiritual expression* (Participant 12)

*My choreography speaks to the Black experience, just as a Black woman. Black dance is a way in which we understand and approach the movement. Black dance is how you interrupt the movement – how you move inside the movement.* (Participant 2)

To these participants Black dance is a means of communicating, expressing culture, and spirit filled freedom. Dance is the African experience that is one with life.

Participants struggled with personal understandings and at times there was a sense of frustration as they tried to individually state what Black dance is. One participant shared...

*People want to put Black dance into a bubble void of technique—that Black dance is just something free style---no, it is the intent of the choreography and how it is contextualized...[Black dance] is not random it cannot be discounted...technique, innovation, style...Term technique is often associated only with ballet...we need to disassociate the word technique to just ballet* (Participant 7).

Another participant in a somber, yet passionate voice...

*Our people need a healing of African minds...healing, redemption, how do I say this...Black dance has been taken away from who it belongs to...*

*Black dance needs to be back in the hands of who it has been taken from... this conversation is difficult because...we need all different images of Mary around the world...Black dance saves our children...Black dance helps our children experience joy...some people want to take our traditions from us...respectfully [Black dance] it is spiritual...giving back to our community...[it replaces] consistent images that are white, white, white...this has impacted our people...(Participant 6)*

The participants were forthright and open in their conversations and expressions of racism in dance. They shared from their personal experiences the difficulties, ignorance and pain of having to constantly establish the value of their work.

The only white participant in the *Apajo* shared ...

*As a white person, I recognize that there are issues related to being a white person in Black dance spaces (Participant 1)*

An African elder speaks and he creates a circle of reflections that summarize the sharing in moment engulfed in African wisdom. His message in the circle reminded the participants that racism is alive and well and it is not about to die soon. However, he stated with such pride that Black dance is our legacy to carry and move forward.

*People with power and egos used their power to subjugate...that is why we have racism...it is about racism, prejudice, what we have gone through has been so devastating and it is getting worse...Black dance is our legacy to carry on and move forward...because we want the race to keep moving on and give back...we need to give our preservation to our young*



*people...grounded in our Black experience like HDAT and Legacy Arts...Black dance is healing and empowering, necessary survival, Black dance is inclusive of technique, non-technique...all technique...Black dance preceded this nation...dance came from the sounds of the earth...we have to feed our children...(Participant 12)*

The call from the elder encouraged the participants to guard the gift of Black dance and so that the children would have shoulders to stand on.

#### **4.2.2 Theme 2. Honoring the Legacy, Keeping Our History Alive and Moving Forward**

This theme supports research question 2. *How does their teaching, choreography, experiences and performances reflect their knowledge of Black dance?*

This theme also supports research question 3. *Is preparing Black dance bodies for the concert stage important? How do teaching artists use Black dance when creating pedagogy, choreography, and the development of Black dancers for careers on the concert stage?*

Honoring the legacy, keeping Our History Alive and Moving Forward occurs when Black dance artists recognize the intersections of Black dance culture and movement practices that includes the dance traditions of Africa, the Diaspora, Black social dance and concert dance that allows Blacks to keep our history alive. This line of dance lineage and movements connects the past with the now and Black dance artist recognize that the future of Blacks in dance is theirs to define.

Some dancers and choreographers use dance to tell a story, make a statement or create a beautiful work of art. The following participant describes the power to raise awareness and that the history of a people is reflected in the dances they do.

*Black dance tells the experiences and stories of African people their civilization that gave the world greatness; we are responsible to tell the stories of our genius and to dismantle the systems that have defined us as less than. (Participant B)*

When working as teaching artists, choreographers and performing artists it is important to be authentic and to utilize history to define contributions made by Blacks to dance.

*As part of the legacy, I must keep the works of Tally, Johnson, Primus alive and at the forefront of students' knowledge; the students at DANCO can keep the history and culture alive; we must understand that there must be a conversation about the work, why you want to do it and how the work connects to the legacy; it is bigger than just the choreography; we have to create a platform for the next generation of dancers & connections to the artists makes an even bigger statement; purpose Pearl Primus left me a task, a purpose to carry the legacy; it is exciting and scary. (Participant E)*

Black Dance is a conversation that choreographers create through dance. These conversations provoke feelings, and ideas that empower dancers to communicate through the movements.

*Everyone who is Black is dancing. You can trace all movements back to African Dance. There's something special about Blacks doing any type of dance. We have a special way of moving, feeling. Music is dance. The less that I am able to dance, I try to translate to my dancers, the soul, emotion of dance---it's almost untranslatable. Black dance is powerful. (Participant 11)*

The teaching artists described their roles as critical to sustaining Black dance. It is required of them to pass on the history and contributions of Black dance to students. They are concerned about traditions of Black dance that often are lost in doing the work and they believe it is important

to tell students about the dance contributions of Dunham, Primus, Ailey, Horton and countless others who came before them.

*I think it's from the heart. It's a gift from God. You have to think about how you identify yourself as a dancer. When people call me, Mama, (a name of respect), it makes me work harder. I always tell younger people you have to be very careful, to speak for the culture, you have to respect someone who has been there before you. Respect is the key, dedication, work hard. You have to pull it together with discipline. (Participant 3)*

*It is important for students to know their history; I wish there were more archives of older works; they can develop voice from the stories and experiences of Black dance, history, storytelling, passing it down, there is power in the history and power of voice and movement. (Participant D)*

One participant shared that when observing Black students in a class they appeared lost and unable to make personal connections with movement vocabulary that emanated from Black cultural traditions of dance.

*Knowledge of Black dance gives you identity, confidence and pride as an artist, for example teaching at Tish, the Black students were creating movement that was clearly not them and they didn't project any purpose they were just moving. For these students they were not connecting movements to Black history, Black culture, Black experiences and Black aesthetics. I felt that they needed to know more about their cultural identity in order to understand the movements being created in the dance. (Participant C)*

One participant focused on the importance of providing students with the knowledge of Black dance traditions of Africa, the Diaspora and American Blacks. This awareness would provide

dancers with knowledge, historical context and contributions that Black dance artists have made to dance.

*I'm a preservationist. In the Afro-culture of dance. HDAT gives me a space to make sure I'm teaching children about preservation and context. All of the dance preservationists are white. Anytime I teach...one day context, the next day dance. (Participants 6)*

Honoring the legacy and keeping our history alive and moving forward is a message that Participants reflected throughout the data. *Torchbearers* responded unanimously to this as a strong value for Black choreographers when asked how important is understanding/knowing/ & experiencing the contributions of Black dance to the preparation of students for careers on the concert stage and why or why not.

*It is critical to understand the enslavement of Blacks from Africa. It was a deliberate attempt to destroy a people, lineage and history. People who came from so much to be forced to create from nothing. Victimization created ways to tell our story. Black dance helps us to tell our story. Everything happens for a reason. A civilization that gave the world greatness--we are responsible to tell our generation, your generation about our genius--to dismantle the systems that have you less than you are--the origins of the human diaspora--we need to understand our history to get to our humanity. (Participant B)*

This participant comment came from a *Torchbearers'* passionate request to share our history, authentic voice and pass on the legacy of Blacks in dance and that knowledge gained is really bigger than oneself.

*It is important—it informs your individual artist voice and how you move through the industry of dance when asking for funding, presenting/performing to have knowledge of the boxes, to know what people have done to break through the barriers. For the concert*

*stage, for performing it helps you to develop your identity and how you move. My university helped me to develop my own perspective in which I work—the work becomes bigger than myself—this is needed to provide a context of legacy, community—Black dance adds to your marketable skill sets. (Participant C)*

#### **4.2.3 Digging Deeper**

The *Apajo* session came about because as researcher and *emic*, I felt that if the participants were given time, space and permission to speak their deepest, most conflicting and personal thoughts about *What is Black dance* that their voices would expose what I sensed every day working with them. As teaching artists, they present a deep commitment to the rich and diverse contributions that Black artists in dance have made to an art form that they are passionate about and dedicated to passing on to Black students aspiring to careers in dance. The *Apajo* was my attempt to get them to speak their individual truths about what they understand personally and collectively about a legacy that not only HDAT has inherited but as HDAT teaching artists they too have inherited. Table 6 highlights the *Apajo* conversation where, for nearly four hours, the participants discussed *What is Black dance*. The conversation included passionate thoughts, personal understandings, connected ideas, and questions in search of answers to help them understand and define these dance traditions. The conversations were free flowing, like dinner table conversation; however, everything said related to *What is Black dance*.

The *Problems* section provides some thoughtful insights about why the term Black dance elicits feelings of conflict for some Black dance artists. The ideas represented speak to issues of identity and that anything Black is inferior and not valued. These thoughts raise the issue of collective branding of *all* Black people as monolithic. The participants spoke openly that Black

dance has been and continues today to be shrouded in *Racism* and that Black dance is one response to racism and one means by which the choreographic process addresses continued systemic and institutional racist practices and injustices. The *Questions* asked by participants created a sense of empowerment, critical thinking, self-determination that we can change the Black dance narrative. After all, for us *Black dance* is our story, our cultural identity and our artistic excellence.

**Table 6 What is Black dance**

*Focus Groups/Apajo exchange of thoughts, experiences and truths*

Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• some Black artists do not want to be boxed in by the concept</li> <li>• aesthetics of black dance is questionable, limiting, appearance of black people as monolithic</li> <li>• duality of race/double consciousness</li> <li>• artists say, “they just happen to be Black” but their works are cultural, social, political experiences of Blacks</li> </ul>
Racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• black dance is not a concept in Africa that people would understand</li> <li>• racism...why using “Black” is problematic, key words become a response to long held racist views about anything that is black is inferior</li> <li>• racialization of dance comes from white people</li> <li>• Choreographic process not understood by whites</li> <li>• social, political climate creates context for definition</li> <li>• you can’t do Ballet because you are Black</li> <li>• calling it black dance perpetuates racism</li> <li>• black people did not originate the term black dance</li> <li>• black dance responds to racism</li> <li>• How do we quantify and qualify our heritage when our roots as so entrenched in the history of enslavement</li> </ul>

**Table 6** *What is Black dance (Continued)*

*Focus Groups/Apajo exchange of thoughts, experiences and truths*

Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is there a cannon of work that provides depth of thinking about black dance</li> <li>• more research is needed</li> <li>• can we define for ourselves what we see happening with dance set on Black bodies as black dance</li> <li>• character dance...European dance groups like original Tamburitians or Irish groups fought to preserve their cultural dances</li> <li>• Do white dance artist focus on excellence; is this an issue for them when performing or is it just the choreography of the work... what happens in the white world of dance; examples of “work” at schools &amp; other programs where they are not concerned about excellence of the artistic product</li> </ul>
Black dance is	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• needed for preservation of history origins/history/culture &amp; context</li> <li>• fluid and open to receive new forms of dance created by blacks</li> <li>• black dance is infinite</li> <li>• a sense of Black dance grows out of experiences of choreographers who are Black</li> <li>• excellence, disciplined, empowers</li> <li>• holistic, part of your whole being</li> <li>• expansive not open to strict definitions of dance</li> <li>• cultural identity</li> <li>• soulful in all genres of dance/classical or not</li> <li>• black dance makes the spirit alive in your body</li> <li>• preservation of our culture</li> <li>• black dance expresses the spirit and stories of Black people</li> </ul>

#### 4.2.4 Additional Data Analyses

The *Alpha and Beta participants* provide a broader, deeper context as practicing Black dance artists who are also engaged in the mission and vision of IABD to respond to *What is Black dance* (Knoblauch, 2005). The questions as outlined in Appendix C were designed to assess Black dance from their personal, professional and national experiences as Black dance artists in Black dance companies.

Of the 12 *Alpha and Beta participants*, when asked protocol question one: In a litany format, *what five descriptors would you say Black dance is*, this participant did not respond. The following list given by *Alpha/Beta* participants represents what their responses to the litany of *Black dance is*. The responses are listed in the order of greatest number responding to each word.

##### Spiritual/6

- Cultural/5
- Experience, authentic, life, history/5
- Emotional/4
- Legacy/4
- Energize/3

##### Mentioned/2

- Polyrhythmic
- Holistic
- Soul
- Inclusive



- Broad/elastic
- Community
- Artistry/excellence
- Political

Mentioned/1

- Consciousness
- Defining
- Grounded
- Aesthetics

Aesthetics was mentioned only once; however, the question may be asked of the above responses, would any of the words used as descriptors of Black dance be deemed aesthetics. The participant in Beta group that stated, “I don’t believe in Black dance”, explained,

*For me it’s philosophical point, because I don’t believe it exists so I can’t give you descriptors for what doesn’t exist for me and this is why I say that; he then gave five descriptors: (a) it’s a classification ascribed to people, without clear definition (b) white scholars have ascribed the term to Black dance as an adjective that states how Black people overly emot on stage (c) it is laden with religious and spiritual themes from the Christian canon (d) it overly values physicality through emotions and music that is virtuosic and to whites, it is void of depth and thought, social theory, and analysis through movement (e) it’s deeply involved in music of the white western European binary and trinary forms and it gets at polyrhythms, and all that Brenda Dixon Gottschild advocates in her book Digging*

*the Africanist Presence; white people have ascribed to the term to separate Black people out, you cannot study Black dance or take a Black dance class.*

The above response by the Beta participant does resonate with many of the thoughts, experiences and truths outlined in Table 6 in the areas identified as Problems and Racism.

#### **4.2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter contains the results of the FE method used to study the issue of *What is Black dance* as experienced in Black dance performances and in the preparation of Black dancers for careers on the concert stage. The study used Leininger's (2006) Four Phases of qualitative data analysis to provide answers to the research questions. Focused ethnography provided an opportunity to gain a better understanding and appreciation of *What is Black dance* professionally, and the role that Black dance plays in society.

Consistent with Leininger data analysis and prior to using NVivo 12 software, I manually coded the focus groups and *Apajo* data. Fourteen codes emerged from the data and constant comparison analysis was used to define relationships between and within the codes. From Leininger's data analysis of developing categories, patterns and themes, two themes to emerge: (1) *Black Aesthetics is the Artistic Quality and Essence of Movement* and (2) *Honoring the Legacy, keeping our History Alive and Moving Forward*.

In Chapter V, the qualitative findings are examined as they align with the research questions and the literature outlined in Chapter II. This chapter includes a discussion of major findings as related to the literature on *What is Black dance*. Also included is a discussion of Africanist, African American and Black aesthetics. Practice implications for Hill Dance Academy Theatre as a Black arts organization with a mission to sustain Black dance are also explored.

## 5.0 Chapter Five - Discussion

*For I am my mother's daughter, and the drums of Africa still beat in my heart.*

*~ Mary McLeod Bethune*

This qualitative Focused Ethnography (FE) study looks at *What is Black dance*. The study reveals the ways in which Black dance experiences, culture, traditions and meanings are defined by professional teaching artists when developing pedagogy and choreography for Black dancers preparing for careers on the concert stage. This chapter includes a discussion of major findings as related to the literature on *What is Black dance*. Also included is a discussion of Africanist aesthetics, African American and Black aesthetics; the discussion looks at the importance of Black dance as content in culturally responsive pedagogy for social and cultural transformation. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, areas for future research and practice implications for *Hill Dance Academy Theatre* as a Black arts organization with a mission to sustain Black dance.

This chapter discusses the results of the study and provides research data that answers the research questions:

- RQ1) What do dance teaching artists, in an urban setting, know about Black dance? How does teaching artists, in an urban setting define Black dance?
- RQ2) How does their teaching, choreography, experiences and performances reflect their knowledge of Black dance?

RQ3) Is preparing Black dancers for the concert stage important? How do teaching artists use Black dance when creating pedagogy, choreography, and the development of Black dancers for careers on the concert stage?

The study *What is Black dance* was designed to allow participants to identify what they know about Black dance, how do they use their knowledge and understanding of Black dance in developing, pedagogy, choreography, and preparing students for careers in dance. Participants responded to the inquiry questions with descriptors of Black dance, stated why it is important to know and understand the history, culture, traditions, techniques and contributions of Black dance. Two themes emerged from the data and the findings will be discussed as they relate to the Theme I: *Black Aesthetics is the Artistic Quality and Essence of Movement* and Theme II: *Honoring the Legacy, Keeping Our History Alive and Moving Forward*.

## **5.1 Interpretation of Findings**

### **5.1.1 Black Aesthetics is the Artistic Quality and Essence of Movement**

Black Aesthetics is the beauty of movements intended to stir the soul. The movements' artistic quality, essence and creative process gives it aesthetic value. Black aesthetics addresses and delineates the meanings, interpretations, goals, and objectives asserted by Black artists engaged in the process of creating and producing movement. The aesthetics of Black focus on the meaning and interpretation of the works. The participants expressed that the concept of Black aesthetics considers not only how and why works are produced, but the spiritual, cultural, political, and economic contexts in which the works take place and the issues and events that prompt the

movements. The participants recognize Black aesthetics as expressions and ways of giving meaning to movements.

The study participants did not provide a definition for the term Black dance. When asked for descriptors to define Black dance, the participants gave descriptors that would represent Black aesthetics. In Chapter II, the term Black dance is defined and discussed in the review of the literature. The identification of Black aesthetics gives value and goodness to the works of Black dance artists (Taylor, 2010). The use of FE provided participants an opportunity to understand and appreciate the nuances and unique role that Black dance plays culturally in society; participants were able to understand the impact and importance of Black dance to different styles of dance and the historical legacy that has developed in dance because of the contributions of Black dance artists (DeFranz, 2004; Glass, 2007; Luana 2018).

The findings present Black dance as a form of communicating cultural experiences, stories, history, social, spiritual, emotional and political messages. Participants highlighted historical issues and concerns with the term Black dance and the ways careers and performance opportunities are impacted by racism and social injustices because of the early use of the term (DeFranz, 2002, 2014; Gottschild, 1998, 2003; Knoblauch, 2005; Mayan, 2009; Morse & Richards, 2002; Roper & Shapira, 2000).

The understanding of Black dance aesthetics as identified by participants, recognizes that Black dance is a gift of the spirit (DeFranz, 2014; Gottschild, 2003). Participants described Black dance as a spiritual experience and being overcome spiritually in movements that sparks confidence when performing (Gotschild, 2003). In African culture, the spirit is embodied in all aspects of life and it empowers creative expressions that may be spontaneous as *in getting the spirit*, or *doing the happy dance* (DeFranz, 2014; Gottschild, 2003).

### 5.1.2 Honoring the Legacy, Keeping Our History Alive and Moving Forward

Honoring the legacy of Black dance requires a cultural responsibility to accept and own the uniqueness of Black dance. This occurs at the intersections of Black dance culture, history, techniques, traditions and artistry linked to choreographic works, and stories of Africa, the Diaspora and African American culture. The participants were unanimous in their response to the importance of preparing dancers with knowledge about Black dance artists and the contributions that have been made by dance ancestors and those who are still on the dance journey. Heritage and movements connect the past with the now. Black artists recognize that the future for Blacks and their artistic journey is theirs to define (De Franz, 2014; Luana, 2018, Gottschild, 2012).

In valuing historical legacies, Black dance artists recognize that there are distinct Africanist aesthetics and cultural knowledge in Black dance that is linked to the African Diaspora (Perpener, 2001; Gottschild, 1998). However, it is well known now that the artistry and works of African aesthetics are also an extensive part of the fabric of American culture (DeFranz, 2014; Gottschild, 1998; Luana, 2018).

Black dance is always Moving Forward. The African drumbeats, the heavy pulsating beat of the tuba in the *Second Line*, down to the music beats of hip-hop are the calls that move dancers forward. The future for Black dance artists is wide, deep and open to the abilities and creative geniuses that the ancestors have given us. Moving Forward is linked to *Sankofa* that teaches that we must go back to our roots in order to move forward. In reaching back we reflect on the past and remember what we have lost can be reclaimed and re-purposed.

Moving Forward is a statement of commitment and perseverance to Black dance, its aesthetics, and to the ancestors whose works give us life (DeFranz, 2014; Gottschild, 2003, 2012; Luana, 2018).

*In moving forward, it is critical to understand the enslavement of Blacks from Africa. It was a deliberate attempt to destroy a people, lineage and history. People who came from so much to be forced to create from nothing. Victimization created ways to tell our story. Black dance helps us to tell our story. Everything happens for a reason. A civilization that gave the world greatness—we are responsible to tell our generation, your generation about our genius—to dismantle the systems that have you less than you are—the origins of the human diaspora—we need to understand our history to get to our humanity* (Participant B).

### **5.1.3 Conclusions**

In the data collection activities, the term Black dance was intentionally not defined; however, when participants were asked to list descriptors of Black dance, they provided a cultural understanding of Black dance that would be described by dance scholars as a cultural art form using African and Black Aesthetics (Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013; Higginbottom, 2013; Millen, 2000; Muecke, 1994). Of the aesthetics identified by the participants, the aesthetic of the spirit is fundamental in the culture of Black dance and elicits confidence, power and soul.

All participants stated without hesitation that it is important for students preparing for careers in dance to understand, know, and experience the contributions of Black dance. It is essential to be grounded in the history, traditions, culture, classic choregraphical works of Black artists and their legacies. This knowledge gives the dancer, when performing, an authentic movement voice, a connection with the spirit and audience.

For Black artists in dance, the racialization of dance continues to impact careers, performances, education, and funding. However, there is a burgeoning response from scholars, in

the disciplines of performance arts, philosophy, history, education, business, management, theology, cultural studies, who are beating back racist and stereotypical practices in dance and the arts with transformative narratives, aesthetics of Blackness and *Kujichagulia at ti tudes* to self-determine and define Black sensibilities that are borne out of Africa, the Diaspora and Blacks in America.

Finally, this study's findings have illuminated the vast reach and depth of Black artistic, social, and cultural practices that have impacted and are America (Luana, 2018, Gottschild, 2003; DeFranz and Gonzales, 2014). Blacks in dance have a story to choreograph from Africa, the Diaspora and down through the ages of how *Blacks Created Expressions of History, Culture, and Traditions Through Movement*.

#### **5.1.4 Implications of Findings**

*What is Black dance* was like opening a geyser that exploded with questions and reflections on the practice of Black dance from Africa to present day. The results of this study, *What is Black dance*, opened moments of reflection with HDAT's teaching artist participants, the *Alpha and Beta groups*. The thoughtful engagement of participants, and the early and current work of dance artists pushed me, as researcher, to think about how Black artists in dance can impact the dance sector with authentic, yet diverse voices, about the world that we have chosen for careers. Additional work describing Black dance, along with a more in-depth exploration of the following areas: (a) education for careers (b) historical practices of Black dance organizations (c) new partners in dance (d) theory building/scholarship/research and (e) shifting the racial narrative and paradigm, would expand understandings, practice implications, identity, and growth of the importance of Black dance.



### **5.1.5 Education for Careers**

In training 3 to 18 years of age with an Africentric, developmentally age appropriate curricula, steeped in the contributions of Blacks in dance, HDAT intentionally teaches dance through the lens of CRP. This educational model is used as a means of documenting the history and contributions of Blacks in dance, and instill discipline, fun, the cultural aesthetics of the Nguzo Saba, Black National Anthem, and experiences of Blacks in dance on concert stages. Career development also includes residencies, master classes, visits to higher education dance programs, conservatories, second companies, conferences and IABD. In classes and studios, identify the next standout student dancers—you know them the dancers that you cannot help but watch because there is something that draws you to them—a spirit and soul that is in their DNA.

### **5.1.6 Historical Practices of Black Dance Organizations**

Explore opportunities for regular interactions with leaders and peers in Black companies, academies, colleges and universities for cultural checkups and personal and professional growth. A sampling of ten Black dance companies established between 1958 and 1995, collectively share 443 years of dance practice. The depth of practice, performance and dance knowledge shared by these ten companies makes a powerful statement about their expertise and excellence of dance artistry. *Blacks in dance have an amazing story to tell.*

### **5.1.7 New Partners in Dance**

Black communities need dance in areas of fitness, health and nutrition from the youngest child to seniors. Education needs dance *but* not as we know it today. Get outside of the traditional modes of dance and partner with schools with a mindset of dance as career/dance as science/dance as painting/photography/dance as technology/coding/codification and dance as health/mentally, physically and spiritually to only name a few.

### **5.1.8 Theory Building/Scholarship/Research**

This is not new. It is underway at CADD, simmering on university and college campuses with dance major programs, Black dance scholars and IABD. They are pushing the envelope and exposing the elephants in the halls of academia. How can you take the conversations from academia and bring them into studios, symposiums, master classes, arts organizations, community programs, foundations, health care, and corporations where dance lives in many different ways, forms, spaces and places.

### **5.1.9 Shifting Control of the Narrative/and Paradigm**

The pain of racism is deep. The voices of Black and Brown artists in dance are needed to shift the stories, views and thoughts about the works and contributions of Blacks in dance. The choreographic works of Blacks in dance can communicate values, traditions and beauty. However, it will take the intentional and consistent faces, authentic and diverse voices of Blacks in dance to

create, revision the stories, and occupy spaces and places that we define, control and brand with the genius that is Blacks in dance.

## **5.2 Contributions to Dance Practice**

In exploring dance practices, there were no research studies identified that have explored the concept of teaching artists in urban dance academies using Black dance to develop pedagogy, choreography, performances and the contributions of Blacks in dance preparing Black dancers for careers on the concert stage. The literature on Black aesthetics is a developing field of research. Participants in this recognized and identified the use Black aesthetics by dance teaching artists to create culturally responsive pedagogy in areas of dance history, cultural traditions, techniques, repertoire and classics of Blacks in dance. My study has value for dance practice in areas of preparation of Black dancers for concert careers; engaging dance practitioner's and Black dance organizations for models of sustaining Black dance arts and shifting racial narratives and paradigms with authentic and diverse voices of Blacks in dance. It would seem appropriate to continue to explore, develop and expand scholarship on Black aesthetics as used in dance practice and performance.

## **5.3 Limitations of Study**

The focus groups, *Apajo* and individual interviews were excellent ways to gather the participants to explore *What is Black dance*. Each method worked well and allowed for open

conversation and responses to the protocol questions. However, I have identified four limitations of the study (a) The *Alpha and Beta participants* are seasoned dancers and administrators and their knowledge of Black dance is based on years of experiences. Some were performing during the time periods outlined in the history of Black dance when the term first surfaced. Bringing the two groups together would have allowed them to share and experience similarities, differences and new learnings about *What is Black dance*. It would have been an opportunity for the younger teaching artist to interact with artist who in their own careers are trail blazers, and dance artist who have made significant contributions to Black dance and are legends whose shoulders the teaching artists now stand on because they paved the way as Black dance artists. (b) Although the Alpha and Beta participants had more experience in the world of Black dance as artists, they were very diverse in their thinking and ownership of what is Black dance as artists. The research may have given a different impression because only two stated that they did not accept the concept when asked to describe Black dance. (c) A third limitation of this study is not interviewing the students, the ones that the study affects to discuss how their teaching artist and choreographers who were interviewed are passing down the technique and history of *What is Black dance*. (d) Observing the teaching artists in studio classes to experience how they actualize Black dance in their pedagogy, technique and choreography as they worked with students. If these limitations (c and d) were a part of the study, the interactions with focus group participants would have provided an expansion of ideas and responses to the protocol questions. Interviewing the students would have provided insights to CRP methods used, and the student's voices and assessments of the curriculum and processes used in preparing them for careers in dance. The ability to observe teaching artists in studio classes would have provided observational data to support their use of CRP. These

limitations would have been of value to the study data; however, the methods utilized did provided significant data on *What is Black dance*.

### **5.3.1 Recommendations for Future Research**

With limited scholarship on Blacks in dance there is a need for more dance scholars and research on the practice of Blacks in all genres of dance. This would include academies, performing arts schools, conservatories, colleges and universities developing culturally responsive curriculums in the history, practice and aesthetics of Blacks in dance. Dance scholars working in diverse disciplines would offer the field new and expanded research, writings and publications, in areas of aesthetics, history, culture, performance and practice. Teaching artists preparing the next generation of dancers can engage students in training from an Africentric cultural knowledge base, with experiences, techniques, traditions, aesthetics, dance classics and career opportunities to succeed in the world of dance.

This study was limited in scale; however, a new study with an increase in the numbers of Black dance academies, in urban settings, would provide additional data on how studios prepare students for careers in dance. The new study would continue to explore what teaching artists know about Blacks in dance and how do they use their knowledge in developing pedagogy, choreography and performances. The list of aesthetics identified in this study as descriptors of *What is Black dance* would be used in comparison to descriptors identified in the new study. Future studies would expand knowledge, explore rubrics in pedagogy, identity patterns of core curricula and methods of career preparation for students aspiring to careers the concert stage.

The International Association of Blacks in Dance is an asset to Black artists in dance, next generation Black students and emerging Black professional dance artists. It is essential that IABD

has the capacity to continue supporting the contributions and legacy of Black dance artists and that Black professionals in dance support IABD. This study highlighted the importance of IABD and the advocacy work that they do on behalf of Blacks in dance. Joe Nash said it best, *the dancer needs to become an intellectual guardian for her/his art form* (Osumare, 2018, p. 332). Blacks in dance *futures* in scholarship, research, practice, contributions and professional growth are linked to the mission of IABD.

### **5.3.2 Implications of Findings for HDAT Practice**

This study began to explore what teaching artists know about Black dance and how they use their knowledge to develop curriculum, choreography and performances as they prepare Black dancers for careers on the concert stage. These are important questions. HDAT's developmentally designed curriculum is rooted in the mission, *to develop and train dancers in Black dance traditions, expand knowledge and contributions of Black dance traditions, and create emerging professional dance artists who will sustain dance in the Black community*. To actualize the mission, HDAT created a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and curriculum that provides knowledge content in dance history from dance out of Africa to today. HDAT's curriculum is holistic, developmental, and age appropriate learning uses Black dance as the core, while linking and integrating other areas and professions that support and sustain the artistry of dance, dance aesthetics and education in Spirit, Mind, and Body. Dance traditions and contributions of Black dance artists in diverse genres of dance include techniques, integration of multi-disciplined learning, evaluation of performances, intensives and field experiences. Knowledge of classic choreographic works and repertoires developed and performed by Black dance artists and companies are presented in the pre-professional program. The curriculum includes opportunities

for student engagement with master Black dance artists and major Black dance companies locally and at IABD conferences. After fifteen years, and as the organization grows, it is important to discern, *is HDAT delivering on its mission as an academic program that utilizes Black dance as its core curriculum*. HDAT's dance arts education program is well regarded by those that have encountered it; however, HDAT believes that the program would be stronger if we articulate what we do, why it works, and why it matters by documenting: (1) core dance components of skills and techniques (2) interdisciplinary relationships of career options that provide expanded opportunities and preparation for careers in the arts (3) provide greater exposure and awareness of our programs to Pittsburgh's arts sector and most importantly (4) educating and developing the potential of the whole person, Spirit, Mind, and Body as a human being for life. The research from this study will position HDAT, as a Black dance education program, to address how teaching artists develop pedagogy, techniques, performances, and career readiness using Black dance as the core curriculum. Documenting this study will provide HDAT, dance practitioners, scholars and dance academies the opportunity to assess, evaluate and provide feedback on HDAT's educational program model. The findings of this study support HDAT's vision and mission. As the academy grows, and moves into the future, HDAT will continue to prepare Black students, for careers in dance and careers that support dance focused on artistic excellence and intentional aesthetics that illuminate Beauty.

HDAT has, for fifteen years, provided dance programs that support its mission. This has been done with a small staff and parents who are undeniably committed to the program and their children. This has not been an easy journey. One of my mentors, Joan Myers Brown, states in her Biohistory, *there is nothing that is etched in stone, but the one thing that remains the same is the struggle---always the struggle* (Gottschild, 2012, p. 189). The struggle, that constant advocacy, on

behalf of Black dance education for Black youth, is worth it because *it is in that struggle or challenge that I give voice to **HDAT's** story.*



## Appendix A - Demographic Survey

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Age Category

\_\_\_ 21-25      \_\_\_ 26-34      \_\_\_ 35-44      \_\_\_ 45-54      \_\_\_ 55-64      \_\_\_ 65+

### Dance Genre

\_\_\_ African    \_\_\_ Afro Caribbean    \_\_\_ Ballet    \_\_\_ Hip Hop    \_\_\_ Jazz  
\_\_\_ Modern    \_\_\_ Horton    \_\_\_ Graham    \_\_\_ Tap    \_\_\_ Other

### Education

\_\_\_ High School    \_\_\_ Some College, no Degree    \_\_\_ Associate Degree    \_\_\_ Bachelor's Degree  
\_\_\_ Graduate or Professional Degree    \_\_\_ Postgraduate    \_\_\_ Doctorate Degree    \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Gender

\_\_\_ Female    \_\_\_ Male    \_\_\_ Other

### Marital Status

\_\_\_ Single, never married    \_\_\_ Married    \_\_\_ Separated    \_\_\_ Widow(er)    \_\_\_ Divorced

### Race/Ethnicity

\_\_\_ Black African    \_\_\_ African American    \_\_\_ Hispanic/Latino    \_\_\_ Asian  
\_\_\_ Indian    \_\_\_ White    \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Years Dancing Professionally

\_\_\_ 3 to 5    \_\_\_ 6 to 10    \_\_\_ 11 to 20    \_\_\_ 21-35    \_\_\_ 35 +

## Appendix B - Focus Groups Interview Protocol

### Focus Group

**Note:** Important to provide consent form before beginning

#### ***Moderator Introduction and Purpose of Focus Group***

Hello. My name is **Ayisha Morgan-Lee**, **thank you** for taking time to participate today. We'll be here for two and half hours.

Title Study.... *Black Dance*

We are here today because, I am doing a dissertation research study that will explore development of dance artist who may be teaching artists, choreographers, professional dancers in Black arts educational organizations. The study's methodology will include focus groups, a *Apajo (a pay jo)*, or gathering workshop and one to one interviews. The data will demonstrate understandings and retentions of Black dance, its history culture and traditions, the use of Black experiences, individual and personal voices/expressions and understandings that create choreography, movement and transformational experiences for setting Black Dance works on Black dancing bodies studying for careers on the concert stage. As a professional dance artist who has worked with **HDAT** you fit the qualifications for the study.

I will facilitate the discussion today asking questions and moderating the discussion. Allegra Battle will transcribe, by taking notes, and I will also tape record the focus group. The identities of all the participants will remain confidential. The recording allows us to revisit our discussion for the purposes of writing the dissertation.

### ***Ground Rules***

Let me begin with a few ground rules for the focus group.

1. Everyone's opinion is valued and it's ok to disagree with one another
2. I want to hear from everyone so only one person speaks at a time so we can also capture a true written transcript of the discussion
3. Don't feel like you have to answer every single question, but I'd like to hear from each person during the focus group
4. This is a confidential discussion and names of participants will not be included in the final dissertation. I am stressing confidentiality of the process because I want an open discussion and for everyone to speak openly
5. There are no right or wrong answers just different opinions. State your truth even if you're the only one who says it. But if you do change your mind, let me know
6. If you need a break, let me know
7. Are there any questions?

### ***Introduction of Participants***

I will go around the circle so each person can give me some personal background info about themselves.

#### **Personal Background Info**

1. In a few sentences please tell me about yourself?
2. Who do you consider family, how do you define your family?
3. How did you come to ***H DAT***?
4. What is your dance background?

- a. Where did you study?
  - b. State how would you identify yourself in the dance field?
  - c. State how long have you been a dancer, choreographer, teaching artist, dance educator?
5. Why did you become a dancer, choreographer, teaching artist, dance educator?
  6. What role has dance played in your life?

### **What is Black Dance?**

7. When you hear the word dance, what do you think of and what does it mean?
8. When you hear Black Dance what comes to mind?
9. What can you tell me about Black Dance?
10. Can you share with me some examples of Black Dance? Have you ever shown expressions of Black Dance?
11. Who do you know who shows expressions of Black Dance? Where does Black Dance come from?
12. Based on what you have shared about black dance is it unique?
  - a. Would you say it is a genre?
  - b. Is Black Dance a connected universality?
  - c. Or is it unique to the African American and Black culture?
13. How does Black dance serve as a form of self-expression?
14. How do you express Black Dance in your choreography?
15. How do you prepare to incorporate Black dance in your choreographic work?

### **Black Dance As Meaning**

16. What do you try to communicate to your audience through your choreography?
  - a. What is your intent?
  - b. How does the audience influence your choreography?
  - c. Do you try to leave your audience feeling something?
  - d. Do you always have a message to convey?

### **Influences of Black Dance**

17. Have there been influences in your development of Black Dance choreography?

### **The Role of Black Dance**

18. Is there a role of Black Dance in society?

19. Does Black Dance tell a story? If yes what story?

20. In what ways does your understanding of Black dance imitate society?

21. How important is the political, social, economic, and cultural context to understanding the work of the choreographer when presenting Black Dance ?

22. In what ways can choreographers raise public awareness of social injustices?

### **Current State of Black Dance**

23. How would you define the status of Black Dancers and choreographers today?

Retaining Black Cultural Traditions

24. For you do you see any cultural connection to Black Dance? What about retaining cultural traditions?

### **Dance Education**

25. What components, if any, of Black Dance should be included in a dance curriculum/academy?

### ***Wrap-Up***

Are there any areas we did not discuss that you think are important to know about Black Dance?

Do you have any questions about this focus group experience, or any other comments that you would like to make?

## *Nest Steps*

Following the focus groups...

- I will analyze and code the data
- I will then invite all the focus group participants back for the *Apajo* (*a pay jo*), or the Gathering workshop on Sunday, December 8 at **HDAT** from 1-3:30PM.
- You will receive an invite to the *Apajo* & you must confirm your attendance to me by email, [amorganlee@5678hdat.org](mailto:amorganlee@5678hdat.org) or text, 412.266.5410
- Please mark your calendars now to participate in the *Apajo*

## **Thank you**

Again, thank you for coming. You have shared good information. It has been a pleasure facilitating this focus group with you. Thank you for sharing your thoughts.

## Appendix C - National Participants Interview Protocol

1. In a litany (list) format reply to... What five descriptors would you say Black dance is; how would you prioritize those 5 descriptors and why you chose that order?
2. In your work as a dancer, how do you participate, and or react to conversations about what is Black dance? Is this conversation important to the work of Black dance artists and describe why or why not?
3. As an artist who teaches within your dance organization...How do you use Black dance to create performances, choreography and student engagement with Black dance
4. How important is understanding/knowing/ & experiencing the contributions of Black dance to the preparation of students for careers on the concert stage and why or why not?
5. What is IABD's role in supporting Black dance artists and what challenges do you face in supporting Black dance artists.
6. Knowing our work, in developing student careers in dance & the push back that we often receive as a Black arts organization with a mission to sustain Black dance artistry, what advice or directions would you give me as I move ***HDAT*** into the future?

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