

Accessibility, participation, belonging - Community Dance as pedagogy laboratory
UNCG Advancement of Teaching and Learning Grant

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion

Dr. Mila Parrish School of Dance

Community dance is now an established area of the dance profession and outreach exchanges are not a new concept. The challenge is in creating a coherent body of theory and practice-based learning experiences that engage the students in ‘real’ and meaningful academic dance study. New possibilities for academic learning inevitably bring challenges. When teachers and students move outside of conventional classroom settings to engage with the community they can expect to find different modes of delivery, approaches to learning, aesthetic values and evaluation, more flexible or fluctuating schedules and changes in the kind of leadership required.

Students need to learn how to work together, to co-operate as a unified yet individually responsible working group. Students need to see the entire learning experience in relation to and be considerate of the community sector that they are studying. The act of learning becomes enmeshed in the politics and ethics of society, and teachers and facilitators must attend to these aspects as part of the educative process. UNCG Dance faculty Dr. Jill Green (2000) aligns community dance with community politics and “the personal expression of social issues,” suggesting that relevance to people in the community, accessibility, participation, belonging and ownership of the artistic process are highly valued in a community dance program.

McGhee Valle encourages holistic engagement, the merging of students with each other and the ethical and moral issues in the world, seeking relationships between the class group and the various organizations and individuals in the community with which one intersects. In a 3- hour workshop with Diane B. McGhee Valle, dance education students, School of Dance faculty and myself will be introduced to foundations for community dance, concepts of ecological holism and the development of curricula plans addressing ethical and moral issues in the world drawn from McGhee Valle’s work with community partnerships, K-12 and university teacher education programs.

This content is not currently being taught within UNCG dance education classes. As a participant in the workshop, I will learn methods and skills which will support future research and coursework. The students will come away with ideas and understanding of Critical Response Process use when building an inclusive dance session with people of varying ages and ability levels.