Dancing into Ubuntu: Inquiring into Pre-Service Teachers' Experiences of the Kpanlogo Dance

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Abstract

This inquiry describes the lived experiences of five Bachelor of Education students learning and teaching Kpanlogo, a West African dance. Each experience was conceptually analyzed with the Sankofa bird, depicted with its beak reaching back to retrieve a golden egg on its back. This symbol embodies the Ghanaian proverb, to go back, physically or spiritually, to retrieve what was once lost or forgotten. Such a framework orients us to the philosophy of Ubuntu, which posits that humanness is found and cultivated within community. What this inquiry reveals is that while it was awkward for some, it was possible for others to dance toward Ubuntu. In sharing these experiences, an example is provided for how we might introduce culturally relevant curriculum in teacher education programs. This inquiry thus describes what it was like to connect a learning experience, in this case the Kpanlogo dance, to the community in which it is situated.

Keywords: Culturally Relevant Curriculum; African Dance; Sankofa Bird Symbol; Ubuntu

Introduction

This phenomenological inquiry comes from a Master's thesis situated in a Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. Kahmaria Pingue initially was a teacher education student in Dr. Rebecca Lloyd's theories of learning class. It became apparent through reflective writing assignments that invited students to connect their personal learning experiences to their community, that Kahmaria had a deep connection to West African dance. Rebecca encouraged Kahmaria to share her passion with her peers in the teacher education program. Inspired by her previous experiences of cultivating meaningful and culturally relevant movement experiences in teacher education (Lloyd, 2012; Streit, 2016), Rebecca also created opportunities for Kahmaria and her peers to teach dance at a local school. When Kahmaria expressed to Rebecca an interest in graduate studies, she encouraged Kahmaria to write about her experiences of introducing West African dance in teacher education. This article thus provides a snapshot of what became Kahmaria's Master's thesis (Pingue, 2018). From this point forward, the majority of the text will be written in Kahmaria's voice, as a first person narrative, but know this...Rebecca's supportive presence is there, yet she has purposefully pulled her voice back to afford an opportunity for Kahmaria's light to shine.

We begin with an opening vignette which phenomenologically orients us, a strategy that van Manen (1990) suggests, to a day in which Kahmaria introduced the Kpanlogo¹ dance to her peers, five Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) students from her theories of learning class who expressed an interest to meet on a regular basis to experience African dance. Kahmaria writes:

I brought out my clothes basket full of multicolored kitenge and we all bent over it rummaging through the basket bubbling with fabric to find the colour and size we wanted to put on. "What mood am I in today?" I heard Amelia say as she tried to choose between a bright orange and blue kitenge. I watched as they confidently wrapped the fabric around their waists. They tied a knot in front of their stomachs, pulling it tightly, accentuating the curve on their hips. As the six of us stood in a circle, facing each other, we marched to the beat of the drum, first slowly and then gradually faster. They watched my feet. Every step I took, they took also. I put my hands on my hips, they followed. I moved my torso forward and then pulled it back to accentuate another rhythm in the music. I bent my knees to release the rotation of my hips and they bent their knees also. I watched as all five B.Ed. students pushed their hips forward and then pulled them back. Some used their shoulders and others did not bend down quite far enough. I bent my knees lower to encourage a deeper dip in their steps. Next, we swung both our arms out and upward, above our heads, as our feet moved in time with the drum beat. I asked them what it looked like (reminding them that they too could question their future students this way to make it more interactive). When I heard someone reply, "A bird," I agreed and responded, "Yes, birds are graceful creatures, just like a butterfly. Women are encouraged to be graceful and carry themselves with poise, which is what you are displaying in this dance. You are saying you are ready for life as a woman because you have learned the ways of a woman – with grace and poise, and a respect for yourself that enables you to walk skillfully with confidence." I demonstrated the African butterfly dance steps to the B.Ed. students who had been practicing with me for the past two weeks. I encouraged them to try moving faster. I also invited them to clap with me as we stomped to the beat, all the while clapping faster and faster, and marching in time with our clapping. Next, we added the extension of the arms again, waving our arms back and forth faster with our faster steps, with our torso moving rhythmically to the drum beat. "Now we're flying!" I exclaimed.

As we were listening to the African drums and were experiencing the flow of rhythmic movements, my thoughts began to question what it was like for these B.Ed. students to move through this dance, a traditional story of identity, and womanhood. I knew what it was like for me; a deep-felt passion which led me to teach African dance to adults in fitness classes, children in schools, community centers, and churches. If I could describe how I felt every time I watched an African dancer's movements, I would say that it is the rhythmic beat of the African drum, the joyous African dancer's energetic footwork and pulsating torso that continually provokes me to discover more about who I am. It ignites a quest in me to inquire who my ancestors were, where they came from, and fuels my desire to validate their knowledge and ways of knowing. I have come to realize that African dance allows me to keep alive what my ancestors lived.

¹ To get a sense of the meaning and origin of this dance please refer to the following references: Collins (2004, 2007) and Parties, et al. (2002, pp. 68-69).

What African Dance Means to Me

I wonder how my peers in my teacher education program feel about teaching African dance and other forms of culturally relevant curriculum? Will they feel unequipped like so many do in teacher education (Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2006; Brown, 2002; Mujawamariya, 2007)? Will they understand the dance in terms of its cultural meaning and history (James, Johnson & Enomoto, 2007; Grant, 2011; Hesch, 1999)? The purpose of culturally relevant curriculum is teaching with the students in mind. You cannot have culturally relevant curriculum without focusing on the culture of the students. Similar to Kerry-Berry's (1994) acknowledgement that African dance can be a vehicle for social change, I reflect back on what it was like for me as a child of African descent, to not only experience a predominantly white school system, but also a town that was very different from the island where I was born.

Back in the Day

The six-foot high snowplowed snowbanks at the end of our driveway in northern Manitoba was a far cry from the sunny, palm tree-lined streets of Montego Bay, Jamaica. On the island, I was accustomed to hearing Reggae music blasting from our neighbour's porch. In contrast, in Canada, I was getting used to hearing the sound of the wind blowing and rattling outside my bedroom window. Seeing snow for the very first time when I was five years old, and just beginning kindergarten, was mesmerizing. But it was not until my adolescent years that I discovered that what I was truly missing was not only the warm weather and sandy beaches, but also the rich culture I left behind on the island I used to call home. Being of Afro-Caribbean descent and growing up in a small northern Canadian community shaped my view of myself and kept me searching for a part of me which was inaccessible in my knee-deep, snow-filled backyard. Nor was it accessible on my tobogganing playdates, or found in my Sasquatch-feet fur boots. Even my exposure to Caribbean culture through a grassroots developed Afro-Caribbean association was not always enough to quench my thirst for the culture I craved. It did, however plant a seed of curiosity in me for African history, music and traditional African dance. Although there was always opportunity to socialize with other children and families of Caribbean descent in this quaint northern town, it only sparked a tiny flame that would grow into fiery passion for a part of my history, which was disrupted when my parents immigrated to Canada for a better life.

For some, the importance of culturally relevant curriculum may be debatable; however, I was craving it. "Culture gives *meaning* to who dances what, why, how, when, where, and with and for whom, in addition to the role of the dance audience" (Hanna, 2008, p. 492). I was drawn to African dance because it was a means of connecting with a culture I could not physically touch. As a product of the diaspora, I did not know my ancestors' language or their traditions fully, but *I could dance their dances*. I could connect with a part of me I did not know. Still, each movement meant nothing without understanding the story it was meant to tell.

At seven years old, while watching a troupe of Afro-Caribbean dancers in a local mall, in northern Manitoba, I was mesmerized. I sensed the meaning of each dance step. It came alive in me, spoken through the storytelling of movement, drum beats, silk woven kente fabric, adornment of multi-coloured beads, cowrie shells, and uniquely twisted head wraps. As I watched them twirl about in full-circle skirts, I was finally home. While it isn't the exact moment, **Figure 1** illustrates

an Afro-Caribbean dance performance similar to what I observed that day; a memory that I was inspired to recreate where I not only danced with the African Princess Troupe but also took the time to sew the colourful circle skirts that caught my eye.

Figure 1. Culture, Identity & Circle Skirts

The African Princess Dance Troupe, performing a Caribbean Calypso dance at the Odeon Events Centre, Saskatoon, SK (2011). Printed and enlarged with permission.

What I witnessed in the mall, as a young girl, was a visual representation of self (Hall, 1997), reflected and etched into my subconscious. It was an impressionable age for me and what I saw propelled me subconsciously forward in time, into the future and the fullness of what I wanted to become. I wonder if such a cultural sensitivity could be developed in others, also preparing to teach movement to children in schools. Could B.Ed. students learn about a culture by listening to African drums? What would it be like for B.Ed. students to experience the flow of movement, or the trance-like state of mind that is sometimes initiated by these rhythmic African-inspired movements? Would they feel the culture? Would they understand how there might be a need for this in schools?

Methodology

To embark on this journey, I was inspired by the methodological phenomenology of van Manen (2014; 1990), Lloyd and Smith (2015), and Smith and Lloyd (2019) to delve into the lived experiences learning a particular African dance. I invited, via our university ethics board approved process, the five B.Ed. students who I will identify with pseudonyms, namely, Gail, Helene, Aneka, Amelia, and Viola, who experienced a West African dance in teacher education to participate in an individual interview. I then analyzed the interview transcripts in relation to the conceptual model of the San-ko-fa Cyclical Wave cycles which I will soon describe.

A Conceptual Framework: San-ko-fa Cyclical Wave Cycles

To make sense of the emergent data in this inquiry, I was conceptually inspired by the Sankofa bird shown in **Figure 2**.

Figure 2. Sankofa Bird

(Retrieved from: <https://african-import.com/product-category/woodcarvings/floor-freestanding/page/2/>)

Printed and enlarged with permission.

Notice how the Sankofa bird is depicted as reaching back to retrieve a golden egg. The egg is gold, symbolizing value and a weighted worth. That movement of reaching back to retrieve something valuable is at the heart of the symbolic meaning. Broken into parts, San Ko-Fa, further meaning ensues: *San* – to return; *Ko* – to go; *Fa* – to look, to seek and to take. The roots of such symbolic meaning lie in the proverbial wisdom of Ghanaian, West African culture, which encourages its people to go back, physically or spiritually, to retrieve what was once lost or forgotten. It gives them permission to look back and re-discover aspects of their history and culture that is meaningful and holds value. To mobilize such symbolic meaning into a conceptual frame for this inquiry, I created a series of what I refer to as *San-ko-fa Cyclical Waves*, depicted in **Figure 3** which illustrate stages of what it might be like to understand another's culture.

Figure 3. San-ko-fa Cyclical Waves
By Kahmaria Pingue (2018)

Each wave represents the gradual growth for understanding the Other, with the most genuine acceptance of the Other being attained as the waves increase in size and direction. When one can reach a state of mindful awareness through meaningful movements, you have arrived in Ubuntu. It is more like moving closer towards a destination at the end of a continuum – not a center point.

South Africans refer to their collectivist mindset as *Ubuntu*, which is translated as: “A person is a person because of other people” (Bonn, 2007; Bernhard, n.d.). Ubuntu is a complex philosophy suggesting that *humanness* is found and cultivated within community. Reciprocity and helpfulness is foundational, and is reflected in the language in an Ubuntu-oriented society (Bernard, n.d., p. 11). This is evident in many aspects of their traditions, particularly in dance. Dance is included in their celebrations, self-expression, storytelling, acting, art, mimicking politics, conveying gender roles, and preserving their cultural norms. Both Ubuntu and African Worldview incorporate interconnectedness between mind, body and community.

This destination called or expressed as Ubuntu represents both the traditional communal African dance circle space where the healing, vitality and mental transformation happens, and the center of the mind where the dancers now can shift their thinking and transition into seeing the world from an African Worldview perspective and relate to the Other (Chibba, 2013). African Worldview (Mutema, 2003; Monteiro & Wall, 2011) dictates the values and cultural norms of African people. African Worldview thus nurtures a holistic approach to thought and consciousness with a communal, collectivist framework (Monteiro & Wall, 2011).

Bachelor of Education Students' Experiences of Learning & Teaching the Kpanlogo Dance

Each of the five B.Ed. student's experiences will be described in relation to the various phases of the *San-ko-fa Cyclical Waves* which represent the process of the Sankofa bird reaching back to retrieve a golden egg. Each experience will thus be analyzed in relation to its 'golden egg moment', i.e., what was 'fetched'. We begin with Gail, who struggled the most, and had very little to say about her experience and conclude with Viola, who demonstrated the deepest and most prolific connection to the philosophy of Ubuntu.

Gail: San – to return; Ko – to go; Fa – to look, to seek and to take

San: Stepping into the Wave

Gail is a B.Ed. student with very little dance experience, yet she was very keen for me to teach her African dance. She was so keen that she took the time to observe my instruction of a children's dance class at a local community centre. She saw this as an opportunity to try something new, move out of her comfort zone and write about it as a new experience in her journal for a B.Ed. class.

Ko: the Wave Ascent Begins

When the opportunity came to teach it at the intermediate school, she felt comfortable with the idea and volunteered. More practices would be required, but she was excited. Gail is of East Indian descent and expressed her love of all kinds of music, but also noted that African dance music was a very new genre for her.

It made me feel, I guess joyful and happy because I was really, really excited. Not to just learn it myself, but to teach it to other students and having them [sit] there looking up to [me] and them thinking, I guess in their minds, this is somebody who is a pro at this. But little do they know, I don't dance. I'm not a dancer. I just learned this a couple weeks ago. I guess that was the best feeling, I guess.

(Gail, Personal Communication, Feb. 17, 2016)

Gail knows she was timid about her dance abilities when she first started practicing Kpanlogo. After teaching the dance, she is tired but joyful as she thinks about how the students recognized her dancing skills. Now she is feeling proud about the way the students are looking at her; as if she is an expert dancer.

Fa: Returning to Fetch what was Forgotten

Her golden egg moment happened when she realized that, perhaps, African dance is not as complicated as she thought. In the past, she never considered herself skilled in African dance and certainly not skilled enough to teach someone else, yet now she can stand in front of students appearing as someone who has been dancing for a long period of time.

Helene: San – to return; Ko – to go; Fa – to look, to seek and to take

San: Stepping into the Wave

Helene is a Caucasian Canadian of European descent and has had experiences with various forms of dance in the past.

Ko: the Wave Ascent Begins

When asked about her reason for volunteering, she used the term “*expand*,” implying that African dance was a genre that could help increase her dance expertise. This showed me that she viewed African dance as an equally valuable discipline as the other dances she practiced. Growing up, she had extensive training and I could see the joy on her face as she talked about dancing.

...and that's why I think if they have something like that to explain the meaning behind it; the second they put that on, my hope would be that they would be more respectful. Like instead of not doing [any] of that [explaining] and [only] teaching them the moves, I could see boys in my practicum class right now, who would be, not disrespectful, but they [would] just joke around and not take it seriously, whereas I think if you give more meaning to something, [and] they put it on, it would help them. Hopefully [they will] be thinking in their mind okay, this is where this comes from I need to be respectful of that. I hope that they would do that.

(Helene, Personal Communication, Jan. 24, 2016)

Fa: Returning to Fetch what was Forgotten

Helene's golden egg moment pertained to the importance of teaching the meaning behind the movements. She believed simply telling students to be respectful of the dance was not enough and thought if they knew the meaning behind it, they might be more inclined to act respectfully. She alluded to the idea of having someone knowledgeable about the dance and the culture come into the classroom and share the meaning behind the movement so that when students put on a sarong, they would immediately get a more concrete understanding of where it originates, and the people attached to it.

Aneka: San – to return; Ko – to go; Fa – to look, to seek and to take

San: Stepping into the Wave

Aneka initially seemed to view African dance as a form of exercise and a social activity for making new friends. As I got to know her, I realized she had an attitude of openness toward learning the meaning behind the movements. She is of Middle Eastern descent and danced well. However, she was not always confident about her body image or about her dance capabilities.

Ko: the Wave Ascent Begins

At first for Aneka, learning the dance meant focusing on the steps. This was a means to get past her jitters.

I felt nervous, but excited to try it for the first time. The first time I felt a little...out of place, the way my body moves, and [when I noticed] how the instructor was teaching the steps, I felt ... my body was... not moving the same. So I felt a little bit weird doing the steps, but as I continued doing it and [with] the tips the instructor gave us, I felt more at ease.

(Aneka, Personal Communication, Feb. 8, 2016)

Fa: Returning to Fetch what was Forgotten

Her golden egg moment appears when she discovers a newfound positive body image. It also relates to connecting with the beat of the drum inside her heart. This internal beat was something she felt we, as human beings, all possess. She talked about a connection between the music and our internal beat. It was interesting to hear how she acquired it on gradual terms; first clapping and then *finding* the beat. It seems that the beat was somehow lost and needed to be re(turned) to. African dance instigates the turning back to the body, to a rhythm it once had. This is San-ko-fa, returning to fetch something of value that you once possessed, but have lost.

What I loved about it was that beat. In the beginning we took time to kinda find that beat, clapped to the beat and find that beat in your body. I think we do have that internal beat in your body. Like with our heart and with the rhythm so it kinda felt like you're matching the music to your internal body beat. You know, you can find that feeling inside you, the beat inside you.

(Aneka, Personal Communication, Feb. 8, 2016)

Amelia: San – to return; Ko – to go; Fa – to look, to seek and to take

San: Stepping into the Wave

Amelia is a B.Ed. student of Asian Canadian heritage. She was a bit nervous at first, but curious about learning how to do African dance and learning more of the history surrounding it.

Ko: the Wave Ascent Begins

I found her to be quite vocal and eager to articulate her perspectives on anything I asked. She was very open about how the dance workshops encouraged her to be a little more adventurous.

The movements, I found were, I guess the word I'm looking for is foreign. I don't typically move my body in ways that I learned from your workshop and it's not a bad thing; it's just not something I would regularly do by myself. I'm very blockish [and] there was much more hip movement than I [am] used to, so I was rather rigid at first. It was quite different but, it grows on you. I got used to it, and I got more accustomed to it, and it worked out much better in the end.

(Amelia, Personal Communication, Feb. 22, 2016)

Fa: Returning to Fetch what was Forgotten

Amelia's golden egg moment comes at the end of her teaching experience, and there seems to be a shift in her thinking. The unfamiliar movements she describes as 'foreign' as she is observing them as an outsider looking in begin to 'grow' on her after a few more practices. Sankofa encompasses re(turn)ing back to the physical or kinesthetic aspect of the body through dance. It was interesting to hear Amelia talk about her body's lack of flexibility, but then witness her newfound comfort in each dance movement.

Viola: San – to return; Ko – to go; Fa – to look, to seek and to take

All of the B.Ed. students who participated in this project experienced the stages of the San-ko-fa Waves. They all had to ascend and overcome insecurity or discover something new about themselves to reach their golden egg moment; however, something deeply meaningful emerged in Viola's journey.

San: Stepping into the Wave

I'm Caucasian right, so why would a white girl sort-of-speak, you know, teach an African-style dance? It was literally a thought that I had in my mind, but [Name of First Author] was so open and inviting to experience this, you know, so I thought yeah, I want to know what it's like. I want to put myself out of like, outside of my comfort zone.

(Viola, Personal Communication, June 29, 2016)

Viola is invited into the wave but is hesitant because of her non-African heritage. She is contemplating if she really belongs in the dance circle, even after the welcoming invitation by the dance instructor. Viola begins her ascent up the San-ko-fa Wave as her own ideals about who should dance push back against her.

Despite her self-doubt Viola participates anyway, and discovers something that interests her. Viola then becomes excited about her experience with wearing African printed sarongs. In a real way, we see and recognize ourselves in the things of our world. And things tell me who I am. Bruno Latour (1992, 2007) and Peter-Paul Verbeek (2005, 2011) suggest that things, especially in their technological state, have agency just as human persons do. Thus, in our encounter with things, we experience the moral force they exert on and in our lives (van Manen, 2014, p. 307).

There is a good feeling that comes with wearing the cultural garment suited for the dance you are partaking in. Perhaps Viola was beginning to get the fullness of what it is to be emerged in that culture. She was gaining a sense of inclusion with "the Other". Possibly this creates empathy. Perhaps a deeper sense of understanding is being fostered when you can see yourself as a part of the whole.

Empathy, through dance, creates an intersubjective space where individuals, whether acquaintances or strangers, enter into intimate relations with each other. Through this space, individual differences are often melded into one collective feeling and experience. This experience of being connected and the establishment of relationships through dance are viewed, in various therapeutic modalities, as predominant catalyst for therapeutic change (Monteiro & Wall, 2011, p. 239).

Connecting to Mother-Earth & the Motherland I think I chose not to wear socks. I wasn't in shoes. I think I was barefoot. I love walking around barefoot. I like that contact with the ground. And it's not every day that I dance barefoot. So uh, definitely, to connect on that level, you know what I mean?

(Viola, Personal Communication, June 29, 2016)

Experiencing the connection between earth (the world) and the body is an African-based concept that resonates in the testimonies of many who partake in African dance. Interestingly, it is often one of the first questions asked by a beginner – whether they need to remove their footwear. I noted that the novice participant is making inferences about the way African dance is done, and as a perception, I felt it owed further exploration. According to van Manen, there are some small details that we miss which require us to look deeper and glean more details (van Manen, 2014). Viola was dancing in a gymnasium of a school, yet she found a connection to African culture and customs by dancing barefoot. She seemed to automatically sense that the best way to get the most out of the experience was to “do as they do.” Viola envisioned the benefits of more natural time and space had she the opportunity to dance as my African ancestors danced, in West Africa, feeling the red earth beneath their feet, the dust arising as they shuffled on the earth's surface, as the rhythm of the drum beat pulsed in the air. We were not outside on the grass in a natural environment, or even in a dance studio, which may have been more conducive for dance, but Viola intuitively discovered that wearing a sarong and dancing barefoot was not only the proper attire for the dance, but also good for her soul.

Ko: the Wave Ascent Begins

Everything was going by really fast. It's like, ok we are with a group of kids and boom, boom, dance routine, ok next, switch! I know it was just like constant, constant, constant, so, definitely yeah. So it felt like I had no sense of time and if I did, it was just going right by me.

(Viola, Personal Communication, June 29, 2016)

While teaching, time seemed fluid for Viola. She describes a constant flow of activity, yet the task at hand was not taxing as she described time passing quickly. I wondered if this was due to her being more fully engaged. She seemed focused as an instructor and wanting to accomplish what we set out to do. I wondered if her focus was aligned with her connection to the dance, its meaning and possibly discerning its relevance for students. She was determined to ensure that the students got something out of our efforts in the school that day.

Fa: Returning to Fetch what was Forgotten

I remember specifically, there was one group, I think they were all boys, and I had this dance move that they ended up calling “slam dunk” and they just went with it. They were just having so much fun, and chanting “slam dunk!” That's what resonates with me the most; it was just how much fun they were having. When it was moments like that, it was fun 'cause I saw they were engaged, getting into it, you know. When it came to that group of boys specifically, and the way that they were just so responsive and engaged and they were having fun, and when they were doing the slam dunk and they were chanting all the time, it wasn't done in a way that was, you know, meant to be disrespectful, or mocking. Sometimes kids do that, right. They can be a bit mean, but they were really enjoying themselves in the present moment, and that is also what I sensed from them. That was the

best moment for me, because I saw that they were genuinely just going with it, you know; just going with the flow and enjoying the movement. I think ah that's what got me the most.

(Viola, Personal Communication, June 29, 2016)

Viola's golden egg moment was when she made a connection with the students in this particular group. This was her connection to the Other through African dance. The students who were open to the lesson became the most memorable to her. They touched her heart because they were taking a step towards understanding of African dance and the culture by personalizing it and "*genuinely just going with it*". They coined their own term for that particular dance move they were learning which demonstrates that they were truly making an effort to be involved in something that they may or may not be familiar with. In their efforts to make it fun, they were stepping in a direction of deeper acceptance of the dance, the Other, and a step towards Ubuntu.

Engagement is an important part of the learning process. The dancers must feel *connected*. This is the *meaning behind the movement*. Without the meaning: the why-am-I doing-this-connection to the dance, the dancer is literally just going through the motions. Those dancers who are able to identify with the cultural meaning behind what they are learning will have a deeper understanding and appreciation for the dance, the culture and the people who do the dance. Those that participated, but did not make the effort to make it meaningful, were less likely to show retention about the African dance lesson.

CommUNITY in Togetherness

In keeping with the traditional circle formation, Viola comments on the non-judgmental atmosphere that it fosters among the group. There is an acceptance found in African dance, in spite of cultural differences.

I feel like there was more connection when we were all just dancing together in a circle, or in a line where we were all trying to do it together. Whether we were clumsy or not, or if we were successful or not, in being able to do it all, the idea was that we were all together. We were doing it together.

(Viola, Personal Communication, June 29, 2016)

Viola's energy level is high and she remains positive throughout our discussion. As she speaks, I can tell that she left our dance workshop and her African dance instructing experience confident, and willing to stretch her teaching abilities for the sake of students who may be craving culture.

I'll take it in the classroom. You know, definitely go out of my way and teach different things. Am I an expert? No. Like, right now with class [she is currently employed as an elementary school teacher] I'm learning. I'm teaching the kids how to rap. Am I a rapper? No (laughs). [My attitude is] like listen guys, we're gonna try this out. If it works, it works; if not hey, we're going to learn something from this...So definitely trying new things is what I'm trying to get at. I want to put myself out there. I want to try new things. I started a Zumba program at my school so [we're] learning different dances, and I want to put myself out there and get the kids to realize that, you know, we're different and that's cool.

(Viola, Personal Communication, June 29, 2016)

Viola is open to experimenting with different types of music and dance genres she is not familiar with. There is a sense of bravery about her ambition to step out onto the front lines and do what she must. She exudes an attitude that what she is doing is a heroic act for which she will sacrifice anything, and “*go out of her way*” for the sake of her students’ education. She is prepared to try new pedagogical strategies in spite of the possibility that her lesson plan may be unsuccessful. I sense that Viola is challenging herself to go above and beyond her contracted duties to insure that students leave her classroom with exposure to a variety of cultures because she wants them to experience the same level of acceptance that she now knows. She says that she wants them to know “*we’re different and that’s cool.*” For Viola, difference in the Other is to be celebrated. She weighs the benefits of her efforts on what the students will gain. There is an enlightenment about Viola’s quest to learn about and share a culture that is not her own. Her thoughts reflect the Ubuntu philosophy which professes that no particular culture is above another, but rather places the Other on an equal plain with their own. Viola will now take this onward in her journey towards Ubuntu.

Conclusion: Ubuntu Bound

Engaging in an African cultural dance, such as Kpanlogo, is a form of culturally relevant curriculum. It is a dance that needs to be ‘remembered and returned to’ by students of African descent to ground them in their cultural identity, as dance is one part of their ancestral heritage that may make learning engaging. Kerr-Berry (1994) explains,

In the elementary or secondary school setting, African dance can function as an enormously rich tool for teaching children about cultural differences. From an Afrocentric perspective...as an embodied experience, African dance has the power to reach and transform children on a very deep and meaningful level. (Kerr-Berry, 1994, p. 26)

Culturally relevant curriculum can give meaning to education, and can be utilized in the education of B.Ed. students to connect to the Other, who are reflected in their diverse student population. By doing an African dance, such as Kpanlogo, in a Bachelor of Education program, we can inform a B.Ed. student’s personal and professional journey to finding ‘humanness’ through collective, community-based Ubuntu-influenced pedagogy. Capturing the essence of how beneficial African dance and culture could be for B.Ed. students and the institution of education, we conclude with this message: A journey to Ubuntu may be one that is filled with many waves to hurdle – ascents, crescents, and descents – but there will always be shining golden moments to take away with you, propelling you and pushing you onward in the continuum...if you remember to return and fetch what you have forgotten, what is most valuable to you.

In an education system which does not always seek to, nor understand how to incorporate the culture of its students in the daily curriculum, we offer this inquiry to stir up the world of pedagogy and to interject the possibility of using a West African dance like Kpanlogo in the classroom. We assert that the learning experiences of the B.Ed. students in this research project could serve as a scaffolding of future possible outcomes when teachers allow their students the opportunity to experience, not only West African cultural dance, but the dances of various ethnicities in a meaningful way. In sum, this inquiry describes what it is like to journey to Ubuntu, an experience that is possible for any classroom and any teacher in any institution of higher learning. We just need, as a collective, to create more opportunities for dipping our feet into the Sankofa Wave.

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