

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: TRIUMPH OF DISRUPTION: A MOVEMENT
TO SUBVERT

Kwame Densu Opare, Master of Fine Arts, 2013

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Studies

Triumph of Disruption was an evening-length work performed on March 14-15, 2013 at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center in partial fulfillment of the M.F.A. degree in Dance from the University of Maryland's School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies. It was an artful attempt to show through dance and music, an epidemic of failure in America's methods of educating its youth. Using pop iconic imagery and popular music, Triumph was a funky, hip, and engaging journey entertaining the concept of Disruption as a method to alleviate the problems facing a particular group of young people. This paper is a documentation of my process, background research, experiences, and conclusions for this project.

TRIUMPH OF DISRUPTION: A MOVEMENT TO SUBVERT

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Preface

I never wanted to be a teacher. When I was a young person, teaching never made an appearance on my mental list of things to be. But ever since I was thirteen I have wanted to dance. I didn't see dance as a career for life or anything as a serious "adult" pursuit or a strategic goal; I just wanted to do it. I just wanted to dance and keep learning dance. It kept me occupied, to say the least. I couldn't wait to get to rehearsals. I loved being around the creation of movement and experiencing its intimate relationship with music.

As a child of African descent growing up in the community in which I did, Northwest Washington, DC, participating in African dance and drum was not uncommon. But for a small group of us, it was a necessity. We had clever ways to break into the dance studio and we were almost always there before it was open. As young people we created our own choreographies and mimicked our teachers, who were master dancers and musicians, in our performances. We felt slighted at times by adults who wouldn't take our suggestions or creations seriously. I remember that feeling all too well, even now, and I vowed then to never turn my back on young people. I promised to listen to and hear their thoughts and ideas. I never knew this vow would be part of being a teacher.

The sociopolitical climate in DC at this time, in the 1990s was rife with drugs and violence. Kids who were my age were being arrested daily and, sometimes, murdered. I, too, had a few run-ins with the law but never anything serious because I always had somewhere to go. There was always a show to rehearse for or a new dance or rhythm to learn. My love for the dance and music kept me in the studio and out of trouble.

However, when two of my closest friends, with whom I had been having this music and dance experience, were gunned down in the streets, one year apart from one another, it hit me hard and still resonates with me to this day. I now live in Baltimore City and I see the students that I work with having the same struggles and living in an environment similar to the one I was in the 80's and 90's. The vow I took all those years ago keeps me wed to the task of bringing the dance to these students so they will have the ability to escape and find some peace.

I did not attend public school in my K-12 years. I'd never even participated in one part of a day in the public school system. It was not until 2007 when I walked into a high school in Baltimore City that I would witness acts that would shape and mold my life and define my purpose from there forward. What I witnessed moved me full steam ahead into the role of teacher.

The dance teacher I was coming to replace was holding the first class I walked into, in the school library. Many of the chairs and desk were knocked over. The students were running around in a frenzy. There were fights and other altercations happening in different parts of the room. There was paper and other objects thrown about. “Teacher” is not an appropriate nomenclature for what I saw my immediate and subsequent role to be. Initially I reacted from a sense of my humanity and then my paternal instinct took over, compelling me to act. What I saw happening in the classroom was quite similar to what could be seen on reality shows about prison life and juvenile detention. That is how it appeared to me also; coming from the life I had outside of public education. These behaviors extended beyond what would be considered proper etiquette for a school environment; it was so wrong on multiple levels. The language, the vulgarity, the fighting, and the disregard for one another, for the elder in the room, and for the environment in which they were in was appalling to me as a human being. So I felt as though I had to act to stop this behavior at once. And that’s where my story of working with young people in Baltimore City public schools starts.

It is my belief that to see any real change in the K-12 education of youth of African origin then those changes must be a matter of substance, content and application. As we see with experiments like the Baraka School* in the documentary film *The Boys of Baraka* (Heidi Ewing, 2006), change of form without a content modification and shift

of substance yields trivial success. In a city like Baltimore, where I live and have been teaching in the public schools for over 5 years, there have been influxes of young white teachers from outside of the communities they are serving. The problem here is not one of ethnicity but of cultural association and knowledge of the real needs. These teachers (all teachers as well as administrators) need to become better skilled at how to implement culturally responsible and relevant curriculum. Then they need to implement it. Disconnecting African children from traditional African ways of thought and value is killing them intellectually before they grow (Kunjufu, 1982). In any society the type of education that is implemented will always go part and parcel with the “socio-politico-economic” context (Hilliard, 1997). As stated by noted historian and scholar Lerone Bennett Jr. in 1972: “An educator in a system of oppression is either a revolutionary or an oppressor” (Jr., 1972). If African American children are not offered an opportunity to reconnect with Africa then the future of that group of people is doomed.

My mission has been to give to these African-American kids the same opportunities that the arts and knowledge of my heritage and history gave to me. I want to give them something of themselves. I want to make them aware and give them the opportunity to explore their history beyond slavery and beyond the vicious displays of what it means to be Black as broadcasted by popular media outlets. I want to

inspire them out of an impoverished mindset that is aided by a system and method of education that does not cater to their proper development as students or as citizens contributing to the uplifting of their people and the community as a whole.

Triumph of Disruption is about providing young people with the opportunity to excel as world citizens through dance and performance. It's also about making others aware of what is happening in a lot of our schools and how this particular group of people is being affected. The lives of the cast drive the content.

In Triumph I wanted to show the possibility of an alternative to the methods being used to educate African-American youth and how when given the proper education they can surpass the standards currently set for their development. I also wanted the audience to experience what goes on in the classrooms of these students and what the stages of development look like once the alternative method of educating is introduced. The piece is based almost completely on my own experience in Baltimore City public schools.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to all those who work to make positive change in the world through the arts.

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Project Statement

Triumph of Disruption was an artful attempt to show through dance and music, an epidemic of failure in America's methods of educating its youth. Using pop iconic imagery and popular music, Triumph was a funky, hip, and engaging performed journey entertaining the concept of Disruption as a method to alleviate the problems facing a particular group of young people.

Research/Investigations

I have read extensively about the mis-education of American youth, particularly African-American youth. The books cited have been especially useful in my research and my preparation for this performance.

Mis-Education of the Negro (Woodson, 1933)

This book is a canon for the field of education. Written in 1933, it serves as a comprehensive look at how America dealt with educating African-Americans and how African-Americans in return responded to that education. Woodson details a systematic strategy to educate those of African descent in a manner that kept them relegated to a class of secondary citizenship as the servants of those in power. All the issues discussed in Woodson's book are still relevant to the climate of public education in America today. African-American children are still being educated to serve the economic elite and not to be productive in their own communities or for their own people. The system of education in America continues to perpetuate content that is historically and culturally irrelevant to peoples of African descent. The content and methods used instill, amongst other things, self-doubt, a lack of pride in self and those that look like you, a vicious self loathing, and a disconnect from all that pertains to you historically. Woodson makes this statement on page 4:

The so-called modern education, with all its defects, however, does others much more good than it does the Negro, because it has been worked out in conformity to the needs of those who have enslaved and oppressed weaker people. For example, the philosophy and ethics resulting from our educational system have justified slavery, peonage, segregation, and lynching. The oppressor has the right to exploit, to handicap, and to kill the oppressed. Negroes daily educated in the tenets of such a religion of the strong have accepted the status of the weak as divinely ordained...

SBA: The Reawakening of The African Mind (Hilliard, 1997)

Professionals do not understand African culture. Few have studied African culture even though cultural knowledge is the foundation of respect for the group. Cultural knowledge is also a factor in building the teacher student bond that is essential to a learning alliance.

Asa Hilliard talks about the historical context of African education dating back as far as ancient Kush. He lists and discusses problems with the education of African [American] people and what he feels are solutions. His approach and perspective closely mirror my own. Reading and referencing parts of this book help keep my vision and purpose for the work clear.

Black Children, Their Roots, Culture, and Learning Styles (Hale-Benson, 1986)

One reason for the high failure rates of some cultural minorities is the mismatch between the school culture and the social, cultural, and the experiential background of minority children. Thus, an improvement in the school performance of Afro-American and other culturally different children in public schools will occur if the curriculum and environment are changed and made to reflect more closely the particular learning styles and cultural background of the students.

This statement from chapter five, entitled *The Humanities As a Source of Black Culture*, is indicative of the premise of this book. Dr. Hale uses anthropological, sociological and psychological approaches in this work to highlight what she sees as the problems facing African-American children in education. With other chapters such as “The African Background Considered and How Culture Shapes Cognition”, Dr. Hale-Benson’s text helps to continually keep a large part of my work keenly focused on the importance of the application of lessons to Black children. I’ve found that teaching Black children from an African-centered perspective, where all lessons stem from African thought and process and are culturally and historically relevant, the success rate of transference and retention has been much higher. This takes into account the holistic approach of the traditional African pedagogical format where the arts are inherently a part of the formal learning process. Dr Hale-Benson also states in the opening paragraph of chapter one, *The African Background Considered*:

One of the unfortunate results of the American slave experience was the de-Africanization experience that converted the African into a Negro. The newly arrived Africans were prohibited from using their native language and were forced to adopt the English language along with its view of the universe. They were forced to learn words and systems of thought that defined their color as evil and their culture as heathen and savage. (Hale-Benson, 1986)

Awakening the Natural Genius of Black Children (Wilson, 1992)

In this book Amos Wilson deals heavily with the early childhood development of Black children. His is a psycho-socio-political approach. He uses comparative studies and empirical, quantitative research to prove his theories. This book aided my research by offering a model for conducting some of the comparative study and data collection/analysis that has been and will be useful to me as I move forward with my research around the subject of disruption.

The Myth of the Negro Past (Herskovitz, 1941)

The myth of the Negro past is one of the principal supports of race prejudice in this country. Unrecognized in its efficacy, it rationalizes discrimination in everyday contact between Negroes and whites, influences the shaping of policy where Negroes are concerned, and affects the trends of research by scholars whose theoretical approach, methods, and systems of thought presented to the students are in harmony with it.

This book is an in depth anthropological study of African people throughout the diaspora, written to deconstruct the myth that they have no past other than slavery. The book is an ethno-historical study of the experience of Africans from the time right before the slave trade started up until the mid twentieth century. With chapters like “The Significance of Africanisms, The African Cultural Heritage,” and “The Acculturative Process”, this work has been an important reference throughout areas of my study and I used this quote in the show to denote my initial presence in the “classroom” and the kind of message I was coming to deliver.

Countering The Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys (Kunjufu, 1982)

The book uses findings from an empirical study to describe, examine, and offer possible solutions to the problems of African American males in education. Kunjufu (Hanstein, 1999) has spent years observing in the classroom and is a nationally recognized educational consultant. He lists problems and delineates actions for solutions in this book. He is the co-author of SETCLAE (Self-Esteem Through Culture Leads to Academic Excellence), an Afrocentric/multicultural curriculum. This work aided me in staying close to the purpose of Triumph as I was in the processes of creating movement for each section.

From Idea to Research Proposal: Balancing the Systematic and the Serendipitous (Hanstein, 1999)

As tradition meets innovation, competing theories cause us to question the aesthetic, cultural, critical, historical, and pedagogical canons of the field. New ideas replace old ones and new language emerges when traditional discourse can no longer adequately express our ideas. When this occurs, the boundaries of dance knowledge give way and make possible the exploration of new territories. In this sense, the production of new knowledge is always generative- questions lead to answers and answers always beget more questions.

This statement is affirming and inspiring to me. It is directly parallel to my beliefs when it comes to dance and dance performance. As a classically trained dancer in West African technique, I had found it necessary to press firmly against the boundaries in order to produce work that is relevant and that addresses social issues of the day. When I began my style of dance and performance most West African dance was presented in a way that had been initiated by the National Ballets of those West

African countries more than 50 years prior. Furthermore, the content of the performances I grew up seeing and was still seeing did not connect with the African-American audience who were unfamiliar with traditional African lore and folktales. Concepts such as rites of passage, conflict resolution, and spirituality were definitely relevant to a young African-American student but the application of the “lesson” was typically unsuccessful. It is my belief that the age-old axioms and cultural protocols of African way of life need to be a part of African dance and in many ways are its purposes.

Weapons of Mass Instruction (Gatto, 2010)

This book was a constant resource for me throughout the creation of this work. Gatto’s experience as a teacher in New York City for over 30 years gives him incredible insight to how children respond to education in America. His historical references led me to other books and served me well in my progress with this work.

My observations of the Triumph cast were a big part of my research for this project. I will discuss this in further detail below.

The Process of Creating Triumph of Disruption

The Beginning of Moving to Subvert

The Movement to Subvert is a subtitle for my thesis. I thought it sounded clever and stated the intent of the work. But looking back, the movement to subvert actually denotes the five stages of development or the five-step process that I have noted occurs in the classroom from the time I enter until the completion of a lesson in Baltimore City schools.

The Meet

The Courtship

The Resistance

The Romance

The Realization/Ownership

The Meet refers to the moment that I first walk into the classroom. It's the moment that the students see me and I see them for the first time. This is an important moment. It's similar to the first entrance of a performer onto the stage or into the performance space. The audience responds and adjusts themselves to respond to the new energy in the space. The dynamic in the classroom is no different. As the teacher I must "get a feel" for the space and then adjust to it. The students do the same. I have to accommodate for the vibe of the classroom or, in some cases, the vibe of the students when they first enter the classroom. The students are socially and habitually pre-disposed to behave in a specific manner upon encountering someone new in their space. In my experience in Baltimore

this response has varied but there is always a poignant moment of acknowledgment between them and me before they break into their set patterns of behavior. This acknowledgement is usually a stare, or a break in stride, often occurring in milliseconds but profoundly noticeable nonetheless. As the teacher I must notice this acknowledgement, as it can determine how I interact with the students from the beginning.

I always observe first. Sometimes I have the opportunity to see at length what is happening in the classroom before I go in, but more often I won't get that opportunity so I have to be keenly observant as I enter. This is The Meet and is the first stage of the process.

The Courtship is next. I attempt to woo the students. I am trying to enchant them with knowledge of themselves, their/our history and my artform. This happens in the form of a lecture/demonstration. The lecture is usually a story relating to African history and their experience as African-Americans. The connection does not need to be a grand one or involve some great revelation. The kids are of African descent, so the connection they have to the history is inherent. But making the connection gets them interested, asking questions and making comments. African-American children are exposed to images in American media that lead them to dislike, hold disdain for, and completely disassociate with Africa. Therefore, most often, when I mention Africa there is an air of malcontent demonstrated by eye rolling, heavy sighs, slumping, slouching and turning away. But as I unfold the history and connections are made, the tension and dissatisfaction

transforms into interest. I quickly follow with a dance that is in some way connected to the history we are talking about that day.

As an Arts-Integration specialist I also use the time to connect the lesson to other content areas such as math, geography, science, etc. I may demonstrate the dance or show a video of it to introduce the students to it. The students always respect talent and the display of it will engage them, if only briefly. But now, I have their attention. This is The Courtship and it is the second stage of the process.

The Resistance is the 3rd step and is a crucial moment. All the storytelling and dancing will not make the kids forget what their experiences have always been in school and at home. They have emotionally positioned themselves to deal with adults, educators, and with school in general in a way that resists. They are accustomed to teachers not caring for them. They are accustomed to teachers not understanding them and speaking down to them. They are accustomed to the empty feeling they have after a day of proposed and supposed learning. Their resistance is their defense. They are also accustomed to, outside of school, having to be defensive. They are accustomed, far too often, to feeling no love or support at home and in their communities. These are our babies! They are as young as 10 and are dealing with mothers who are strung out on drugs or fathers who are incarcerated or have been murdered. They go home and there is no food. I have had students that I see for a morning class that tell me they haven't eaten since lunch at school the day before!

So they resist. Even one's most sincere efforts to show love, care and consideration get stonewalled. However, consistency is the key. As the adult, I have to know that this is all a front and that beneath is a child.

These are children that need and crave love, attention, and structure. So I press on. This is The Resistance and it is the third stage of the process.

The Romance

Often times in this stage, I chuckle to myself. The students are unaware of the moment that this transformation happens but I see it clearly. It is when they fall in love with the process of learning because they have experienced success. An example of this experience they share is when learning the South African Bootdance. I normally begin a dance residency with the Bootdance because it is a dance that gives the students the least amount of ammunition to resist. They do not have to change clothes, or take off their shoes. I have found that these two things are seen as extreme requests in the minds of the students and trying to get them to do so will deter me from my overall plan to disrupt. Plus, the Bootdance is aural, rhythmic and kinetic, so the students can feel and hear their progression. The Bootdance very much resembles Step Dance, which is a popular dance form in most or at least many African –American communities. And so students experience success because they have gotten a lesson that related to them, that was put into a context that they can understand and that places their needs and learning styles squarely in front. The smallest degree of victory inside the life of a student who has only experienced failure or, at

best, mediocrity is a grand triumph. Furthermore, a mere degree of victory is all these students need to become voracious learners. They begin to devour any challenge I place in front of them. A classroom community flourishes as they begin to look to each other for help and hold one another accountable for the task at hand. It's a beautiful thing to witness and an affirmation that these kids are in no way incapable of great things.

They trust me now and inside of that trust is the love. They look to me to lead the way and to continue to enrich their experience. They cannot wait to learn something new. This is The Romance and it is the fourth stage of the process.

Realization/Ownership

In this stage I begin to move away to allow the students to ask questions of themselves and for themselves in order to continue their development. It's similar to kicking the bird out of the nest when its time for them to fly, only in this instance, I am leaving the nest, but will perch on a branch nearby. I have witnessed this in the classroom when I sit back and stay quiet and let the students figure it out. What transpires may be a complex movement phrase or a question regarding some historical connection to the work. It is in this place where I learn the most from the students. I recognize their gifts and can see clearly their aptitude for not only learning but for creativity and innovation.

At this stage of the process they have realized that they can succeed. They realize their self-efficacy. They realize their mental power and

effectiveness individually and as a group. With the power that they have discovered that they possess, they begin to own their process of learning. They take ownership of their education and I serve as what I am truly intended to be, which is a facilitator of their dreams and aspirations.

These five stages are emulated in the performance of Triumph. Each segment was directly reflective of my experiences teaching in Baltimore City public schools.

The Meet = The Chaos

The Courtship = The Lesson

The Resistance = The Hate/Love Don't Live Here

The Romance = Cry Freedom 1

The Realization/Ownership = Cry Freedom 2 & The Bawa

When I had the initial idea for this piece, it was to be an all male cast. I understand the importance of my role in the schools as a male and I wanted to showcase that importance by exhibiting the triumph of a group of African-American boys from Baltimore City. I made flyers and distributed them. I also posted the information about an audition for boys, ages 11-18 on social media websites. Only two boys came to the audition. One boy was 16 and already so busy with sports and another dance group he was a part of that logistically it just wouldn't work. The other boy was 7 and lived in DC; so logistically that wouldn't work either, as we would be rehearsing primarily in Baltimore. I called the audition again a week later. This time eight boys showed. They ranged in age from 9-14. They were

excited, however they didn't have the experience to present the kind of movement and work I wanted to present in the time that I had to do it. I held on to the idea of an all male cast for only a little longer.

Diedre Dawkins, head of the dance department at Connexions Public Charter School in Baltimore, suggested that I try to work with some of the 7th grade boys at her school. This didn't work because the boys did not have the skill level needed. It was clear that in order to breathe life into the show I would need to work with some young people who had some experience with dance and performance. So Diedre and I had the idea to use the students who were a part of her dance program.

We started with about 9 girls and one boy. We lost 3 of the girls and the boy after the first day of working together. It is my guess that they were not up for the challenge and did not want to commit to the process. Now down to 6 girls, we moved forward with the process of creating the work. I felt really confident about the movement prowess of the girls and they inspired the progression of the work. I was, however still on the search for males. Not soon after, I taught a West African dance class at Coppin State University and there was a young man in the class. Afterwards he asked jokingly if I would adopt him. He was saying that he wanted to dance and he wanted me to teach him. Next week he was in rehearsal. Then another young man who had graduated from Connexions a year prior began coming to rehearsal. So now I had 6 girls and 2 guys. Perfect! I felt like I had the

cast I wanted. They could do the work. They needed help and development but they were all capable. And so we started.

My process of creating work always includes input from the artists I am working with. In this case that group included the members of my committee as well as the cast members.

I use the dancers and musicians to inform the work because ultimately it is their spirit that brings everything to life. The artists influence and help to shape the ideas and concepts for the work. In this work, the kids were portraying themselves in situations that they all had taken part in at some point or are a part of presently.

When I mention “the kids”, “the students” or “the dancers” I am speaking of the cast members. I use “kids” affectionately because through this entire process I’m aware that I served in the role of a father and mentor. And in true form to the dynamic of that relationship, they served as my teenagers and gave me all the drama and headache that comes with that role. Ultimately they all made me proud and happy for them. Watching them, I felt the joy I had when I was their age and having the opportunity to perform and be a part of a production of dance. Also watching them progress through each step of the work spoke to the fact that not only are they conveyors of but are the content of the theme and purpose of the show.

As I describe the process of each piece and I use the term “we”, I am referring to my committee and the cast.

The Solos



Figure 1: Opening Solo Triumph of Disruption

Projected quote:

“We want one class of persons to have a liberal education, and we want another class of persons, a very much larger class of necessity in every society, to forgo the privilege of a liberal education and fit themselves to perform specific difficult manual tasks.”

Woodrow Wilson 1909 to the New York City School Teachers Association

I feel that this quote is the quintessential reason for disruption and this is why I wanted to use it at the top of the show right before my solos. It is my belief that these beliefs of those in power are as prevalent today as they were over a century ago. I discovered this quote while reading John

Taylor Gatto's Weapons of Mass Instruction, which led me to Leipzig Connection.

The Build: The most difficult part of this entire process for me was putting myself in the show. As the director and choreographer I could not "see" myself and found myself constantly preoccupied with what the other dancers were doing. Karen Bradley told me "the kids are fine". That helped a little but it wasn't until she suggested that I work with Alvin Mayes and Alvin offered to help that I was able to fit myself in the work. He and I begin to develop my solo work and where it would happen in the show. In our sessions we always started with a conversation. The movement would develop from purpose and the meaning behind the moment.

The Performance: The opening solos have me entering the classroom, the schoolhouse for the first time. The downstage right special represents the building, the room, the physical and metaphysical space. I move in and out of the light to symbolize my discontent and my lack of desire to be a part of what seems to be an insurmountable feat at the time. These solos are meant to represent the emotions and trials of new teachers when they begin in Baltimore City schools and schools and schools like them.

The first section represents a clearing of the space and carving a place out for me to exist within it.

I walk out of the place. I reenter the place with a deep concern for what I have found but I am not yet sure of the enormity of the problem I have found.

I walk out of the place. I reenter the place now sure of an absurdity in the method and content of the student's education. It is a mind-blowing experience and it saddens me and I want to clear and rebuild. This is my instinct to fix, and to father change.

I walk out of the place. I reenter with resolve. I know now that I have an obligation to fight for the students, even if that means fighting them to fulfill that obligation. I am nervous, my hands are shaking and I touch the ground to symbolize that the work will start from the ground and to gather strength from the Earth and the spirit of the Universe. At the end of this section I release my hands to the audience and make the first eye contact. In this moment I mean to say, "here is my story" and "here is what happens in these classrooms".



Figure 2: Scene from 'The Hate'

Chaos



Figure 3: Scene from 'Chaos'

The Build: Chaos was the second piece we completed. I wanted to bring the audience into the environment that I experienced upon first stepping into that class in Baltimore City. I thought back to all the fights I saw in the schools I'd worked in and while I was growing up.

The first movement was taken from those memories. A wild swinging of the arms in circular motions both forward and backward from a plie' in second position best conveyed this for us and was introduced at another point in the piece. The aggressive flailing of the arms continues through the piece but in a more stylized and controlled fashion. There are stamped feet, change of direction and a drop to the floor, a roll on

the floor and a flutter of the feet from an extended arm prone position. All of this represents the behavior exhibited in many of the Baltimore city classrooms I'd been in. The aggressive flailing of the arms denotes the fighting, the stamping of the feet denotes anger and fit of temper, the change of direction from back then to front then a turn represents the unauthorized attempts to leave the classroom and being told to come back. In this particular movement phrase the hands are held behind the back to denote the restraint the students feel for not being allowed to do what they want. That ends with a barrel turn where the hands release and they fall to the ground, roll, then get back up. The going to the ground also represents a temper tantrum and it was inspired by an experience I had in a school where I taught. One of the students, when asked to get out of his seat and participate, got up, turned around and went to lie down on the floor in the back of the classroom for the rest of the class.

When the dancers get back up they go back into the aggressive flailing movement described above, to represent the cyclical nature of the combative behavior in the classroom. The last ensemble work done in unison of this piece attempts to convey more aggression, frustration, and discontent. The piece ends with the dancers going into individual fits of rage until the end of the music when they notice me for the first time.

The Performance: The piece begins with a loud and piercing sound of a bell and horn. I used both because different schools will have either a bell or sound of a horn to signal the start, end, or change of classes. I

wanted it loud so as to jolt the audience into the space we were creating and to have them be as annoyed as the students may be from time to time. The dancers began this section with a fight scene that escalated from gestures of anger and postures that conveyed dislike for one another. This soon escalated into a planned throwing of desks, which served also to clear the space for the dance to happen. We did not want to clear the desks completely because we wanted to maintain the environment of the classroom. The idea was to have the dancers dance in between the desks or in whatever space was available. The piece ends when the music stops.

The Music: for this piece I chose “Prime” by Marnie Stern, because it is a song that I have always liked for its complexity and drive. It immediately signals incessant chaos to me albeit a controlled. It reminds me of a bottled rage and I thought it perfect for this piece.

Class Intro



Figure 4: Scene from 'Class Intro'

The Build/Performance: This section did not come to life until about two weeks before the show. While working with Alvin Mayes, I discovered that I needed a way to enter the classroom. I didn't want any part of it to be pedestrian. The section "had to dance". I immediately thought of a movement phrase from a piece I had choreographed previously about the victims of Hurricane Katrina. The arms "collect" then the fist and forearm "knock down". The movement represents the assessment of a situation and the gathering of all that is good, then the knocking down of all obstacles with which the mover comes into contact.

The Music: Portishead, “Glory Days”. The song has a small part where the music changes and the lyrics “This is the beginning of forever and ever” are sung followed by “Its time to move on”.

The Lesson



Figure 5: Scene from 'The Lesson'

Projected Quote:

"When for instance, once sees vast programs of Negro education without the slightest consideration being given to even the possibility of some retention of African thought and speech that might influence the Negroes' reception of the instruction thus offered, one cannot but ask how we hope to reach the desired objectives."

Melville Herskovits, 1944

We chose to project this quote once I entered the classroom. It defines part of the purpose of my presence and my desire to make changes.

Immediately after, I say through playback, “Lets start here” then “draw” the continent of Africa.

The Build: This was the last piece to come together and by far the most challenging. It has the least amount of choreography but is the most important piece in the show. The Lesson had to bare the weight of expressing the content of the entire work and representing the meaning behind the title of the show. I had the idea about two months prior to the production but had a really difficult time breathing life into it in rehearsal.

I knew I needed to express the student’s disdain for Africa and anything having to do with Africa. I also had to show the overall apathy for school and the process of learning new things from a new person. I came up with the idea to draw Africa on the board and to have the kids react with a big movement while sitting at heir desks then another movement when I mentioned Gumboots for the first time.

We played around in rehearsal with me reciting the history of the Bootdance and relating it to the students while walking around the classroom engaging them as I normally would in a real life situation. I was truly opposed to this. I am not a fan of the genre of dance performance that attempts to delve into acting without a theater director, acting coach, or decent script and I had none of these things. With sound score already complete the show had the tone of hip, cool, and contemporary that I wanted to exhibit. If this section went into a skit it would have tanked the environment of cool by being overly pedestrian and unconvincing. I didn’t

trust my acting skills with such little time left. However, acting skills notwithstanding, when I spoke to the designers who watched the rehearsal they thought the content of the Bootdance story was just what the piece needed and were grateful for the history because they hadn't heard it. This reaffirmed the importance of the lesson for me and we decided to keep it in but to record my voice and have it play while I gestured and moved about the space of the classroom.

So we recorded my voice and then edited the story until the audio was just right. Next I had to determine how to move about the classroom during the playback and how to introduce the Gumboots. We decided that the story would not require anything more than slight hand gestures and my slow walking around the classroom, addressing the students with eye contact. Halfway through the story, when I mentioned why the gumboots were used I walked back to my desk and put the boots on, and started creating Bootdance-style rhythms to serve as a sort of soundtrack to the story. This rhythm also allowed me to cue the kids to move the desks. All the rhythm patterns were improvised and the piece shifts when the story ends and I move down center and stop the improvisation.

In every school I go to, no matter how unwilling or even hostile the students seem to be, talent always gets their attention. They slowly begin to react and show interest, even if only slight interest at first. The beauty is that they almost always grasp the essentials of the movement right away. It's a beautiful moment to witness but you can't let them see your

happiness with or they may lose respect for you and the process. So I move forward as if I expected them to catch on and to start participating as not to ruin progress made. So we decided to have the student's represent this by slowly getting up one by one and learning the Bootdance step I was teaching and getting it fairly quickly. But we had to represent the whole truth of those moments in the classroom and have one student who refused to leave their seat and another that insisted on being disruptive.

The Performance: The kids performed this section flawlessly, in my opinion. They ARE those kids in these real life classrooms so they needed very little direction in portraying these roles. Its important to note that even though their backs were to the audience while in their desks, they stayed in character, giving me the support to portray my role throughout the story and into the practical part of the lesson. Their faces exhibited disgust, impatience, boredom, and apathy. Rolled eyes, furrowed brows, sucked teeth, were all apart of their facial expression repertoire and it worked wonderfully. As I moved downstage to start the practical part of the lesson, on cue the dancers got up one by one with one remaining seated and we began the next section.

The Hate



Figure 6: Scene from 'The Hate'

The Build: This section was inspired almost totally by the music selection. I needed to show that even when there is a triumph there could be a setback soon to come. I wanted to deal with the impact of self-loathing and false self-identification and how it affects the student's ability to learn and participate. We found movement that uses a step back and a coming forward with the hands covering the eyes. The step is executed with each beat of the rhythm in the song. The step back represents a receding from a new idea and the new person away and the hand represents both a mirror and a veil. The mirror and the veil combined with the lyrics are meant to depict both a self-hatred and a false sense of self that fuels the loathing.

The Performance: The lyrics to the song are “I hate you so much right now!” and then a loud scream follows. This music comes in after a series of shouts by the students directed towards me after I tried to get one of the students to stop playing and distracting another student and to participate. The kids shout in typical Baltimore fashion, “YO, YO. YO-YO-YO!” As their teacher I am taken aback by their insolence but also a little frustrated and angry. When they start to move to the “HATE” song and movement I realize that its not really directed at me and I begin to understand what I’m dealing with.

When they finish with the scream and arms are extended in rage, I observe them then move to downstage left. I begin a solo that starts off matching their rage but then softens. After my movement softens I utilize movement that represents embrace and care. Next come the “touches”, softly on their heads or backs. Once I touch them they soften.

This section was inspired by an experience I had in a Baltimore City school working as a dance instructor in an after-school program.

I was leaving the building when I heard loud screams and desks and chairs being moved about. When I entered the room there was a teacher and a social worker and a young boy around 11 years old. He boy was enraged! He was tossing desk and whatever he could get his hands on. HE was trying to leave the room but they wouldn’t allow him. He would charge at the door then they’d block his way every time. I just looked at him and watched him carefully. When he tried to charge again I caught him. He

made his body taut as not to be held. After a short time he sat in a desk but was still fighting to get out. His eyes were red and welling with water. His stare was distant but focused. His jaws clenched as tears began to fall. I put my hand on his shoulder and I asked him to breathe. I promised him he would not be hurt and that he should try to calm down. I kept my hand gently on his shoulder and just breathed with him until he put his head on the desk and fell asleep. The social worker stood in amazement and said that no one has ever been able to bring him down off those episodes and how he would be connected to me forever because I did that. I thought it nothing special on my part at the time but I later realized the power of touch at the appropriate time.

Two of the dancers do not soften but remain with arms extended and perform a duet. Their movement is less rage but argumentative and confrontational. They are expressing to me that even though they recognize my attempts to show concern and consideration, it will not be easy and they will fight me on it. The two of the duet represent the whole even though the others have softened already. They finish and one student is still resistant; the lone male student.

The Music: As I previously stated, the music by The Neptunes (performed by Kelis) “Caught Out There” was the primary influence for this section. I didn’t know how to represent the self-loathing until I remembered this song. The second music is “Roads” by Portishead. There’s a Fender Rhodes keyboard slowly playing this tune that draws the

listener in and conveys a pensive sadness that matched this section most appropriately.

The Duet



Figure 7: Scene from 'The Duet'

The Build: This duet was to be a part of the show from the beginning. The percentage of Black men in k-12 education is very small. The old mantra “A boy needs his father” rings so true in the arena of education when it comes to African-American boys. With no strong and positive figure to emulate, Black boys most often find themselves with zero guidance and have no parameters with which to develop effectively within their communities. The father is often not in the picture for a number of reasons. In Baltimore the absence of the father in the home has typically been due to severe drug abuse, death, or incarceration. The boys often follow the paths of the older boys and men in their neighborhoods, or

simply emulate the images they see on television and in rap videos. It was important for me to highlight the necessary role of a Black male figure in the life of a young black male in the classroom.

When I touch the male dancer (Richard) he does not soften but moves as if he were a metal rod cemented to the ground. We lock eyes and he is noticeably filled with anger and frustration. He wants to fight. He wants to fight me, the school, the classroom, himself, he wants to fight everything and anything. His first movements are defensive and aimed at pushing me away. My response is movement that is stronger and more complex and executed with more proficiency. These movements represent me being the elder and having more experience and expertise but also present an alpha male presence to counter what the younger male has done. Machismo notwithstanding, I end the solo with a posture of embrace to symbolize my desire to squelch the boy's anger and hostility as well as any I may be starting to have. Richard responds with movement that is stronger than it was with his first solo. He begins by pounding his chest and does the rest of the solo with clenched fist. I respond with one pound of the chest but then release my clenched fist to open hands and softer movement. We both complete a movement together then run toward each other stopping at center both arms extended and nose-to-nose.

Richard and I developed these solos/duet in one rehearsal. I attribute his experience with performance and understanding the need of

the scene to the ease with which we were able to develop this. As with all the kids he needed little direction for this.

However, in the beginning I felt he was “dancing” the movements a little too much. I directed him to “dance” less and feel more, to use his understanding of the moment to bring his part of the relationship to life.

The Performance: On the last night of dress rehearsal, when I gave Richard the last note about his solo, I felt he went overboard with the emotion and it was hard for me not to laugh because it was like watching your much younger brother puff out his chest as if he had any chance of beating you at all. But after hearing the feedback and thinking about it, it was exactly what the section needed. Richard nailed it. I could feel the audience respond with a collective gasp when we met face to face at downstage center. On the last night of tech rehearsals I made the choice to wrap my arms around Richard and pound on the back before the final “touch”. I used this because it’s a typical greeting amongst Black men in the Black community, especially in sports and other forms of congratulatory expressions from one to another. I used it as that and as a way to shake him from his rage and get him to realize that I was on his side and wanted nothing but for him to succeed.

Love Don't Live Here



Figure 8: Scene from 'Love Don't Live Here Anymore'

The Build: This piece was another that was inspired by the music. The music said exactly what I was trying to convey in this section. The students are more ready to follow my ideas and me and are no longer against me but still have their doubts for the success of my efforts because they feel no matter what it cannot work. It represents the moment in the classroom where the kids feel as though they need to protect you from your own naiveté. It's as if they are saying " We see you trying to help Mister and that's cool but you in the wrong place to be doing that. That ain't what it's like here." The movement has some heavy pauses in it to indicate the start of the student's indecision to go with what I'm saying or follow the

path that's already been set for them. The movement is bigger and is meant to show the class still pushing me away but the energy is lighter and far less hostile or confrontational. There are a moments when the dancers concave deeply on one leg to represent the heaviness of the change of ideology and method and their inability to hold onto it or process it on their own. For some them it was difficult to maintain their balance on one leg and they "hopped" a little when they couldn't. At first I worked hard to remedy this but ultimately saw it as part of the meaning in the movement. That they couldn't maintain perfect balance represented their struggle with the newness of it all.

The piece begins when I deliver the last "touch" to Richard and after our duet and he finally softens. The ensemble then performs the entire section in unison to convey a shared emotion amongst them all. They end with a jump that lands on the floor.

The Music: Love Don't Live Here Anymore by Rose Royce was the perfect fit for what we were trying to say. Other lyrics in the song like "there's a vacancy" and "you've abandoned me" were also perfect and spoke specifically to the sentiment of the students in this section. "You've abandoned me" speaks to the adults and elders in the community that the kids now feel have left them to perish. "There's a vacancy" lets those same adults and elders know that they are needed.

Contemplative



Figure 9: Scene from 'Contemplative'

Projected Quote:

“Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation are people who want crops without ploughing the ground. There must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”

Frederick Douglass

This quote appears after the Contemplative section and before Cry Freedom 1. It gives energy to the ensuing Cry Freedom and prepares the student's for the struggle ahead. It also had meaning to the student's because Douglass is a prominent figure in the Baltimore's history.

The Build: This was an important transition piece of the show. We needed something to take us from the hint of indecision present in Love Don't Live Here to the point of the students saying "ok, I sort of get it and now I want it and what's more is I'm wondering why I haven't gotten this yet in school". So we added a state of contemplation. Initially I was to move around the space with intermittent moments of movement that the kids would respond to more and more until the next piece began. We decided to instead create this tableau of pensiveness. The kids go back to their desks and think. The end of Love Don't Live Here puts them in a state of deep thought and recollection. They are recalling their ancestry and heritage and awakening from what seemed to be some sort of nightmare. The Frederick Douglass quote projects in this place as a lead in to the next piece where the students start to realize their power and move to tack it back!

The Performance: The kids come up from the floor at the end of Love Don't Live Here as if they just awoke from dream and head back to their desks. I made the choice from a note I was given at the last dress rehearsal to move downstage toward center and watch them move to the desks. This way it would show me as a facilitator to this moment, but then I move upstage right to allow them to ponder and transition on their own. This is the place where I begin to let go and let the students begin to take ownership.

This moment represents the point in the classroom when the students begin to realize their capacity for learning and project this air of disappointment. The frustration and anger transforms to disdain for the education establishment, most immediately their school. They express desire to want more of the history of their people and to want more arts!

The Music: Portishead, Roads. We use this song again here for its music and its lyrics; “Can’t anybody see/We’ve got a war to fight/We’ve never found our way/Regardless of what they say”.

Cry Freedom 1



Figure 10: Scene from 'Cry Freedom 1'

The Build: The most freeing of all the dances thus far. The jumps are not bound nor are the arms in anyway. There is less rage and much more decisive and pointed movement. It is meant to symbolize a concerted cry for something better, a better way. It is also meant to symbolize a struggle, the struggle the kids have to be a part of if anything is to change. It must come from them. Too many adults making decisions in education that benefit the adults more they do the young people. The technical basis of the movement in this section comes primarily from a dance called Sorsonet. Sorsonet is from Guinea West Africa and it represents a deity that protects children. It is also done as a part of rites of passage for young

women. I thought it fitting to utilize this technique at this transformative moment. The moves are of course modified by the dancers with a tinge of raw American youthfulness via Baltimore City.

The Performance: This is a piece that we had the opportunity to perform in public before the show and is the most rehearsed. It is also the first completed piece that we had as a group. At the point in the show where it is performed it takes the show on a positive upswing because of the music and energy of the work. I wanted the audience to feel the change of energy in the students and their “newfound” drive for something more. I stand at the back (upstage) and am happy to observe this transformation because I know they are on their way to control of their destinies and they get it! I begin to move from upstage right to upstage center where my desk is. The dancers, who have performed facing front for the entire section turn upstage with their hands out as to say to me “We’re here, we’re with you, now what? Lead us!” I then get up proudly and lead them in the next series of movement. They continue and I move to my desk to put the Gumboots back on. They finish the section and I start rhythm patterns with the boots and this signals them to go get their boots.

The Music: Cryin’ for Freedom, Sweet Honey in the Rock. This song is an old favorite of mine. Sweet Honey sings this song with such vigor, and the lyrics are a perfect fit for the piece.

Cry Freedom 2



Figure 11: Scene from 'Cry Freedom 2'

The Build: The Bootdance was the first dance I ever performed as young person. It represents to me the overcoming of obstacles and the strength in numbers. It is almost always the first dance that I teach when starting a residency program at a school. It can be difficult to get a group of kids who never been in a dance class to take off their shoes and change their clothes or have the discipline to warm up and stretch. This becomes excessively difficult when you are in a classroom in the morning or the middle of the day. Also the Bootdance is so similar to the popular Step dance which most young people in the Black community are familiar with. So with their guard down I can introduce this important form of dance and

some contemporary African history as well. In the show when we perform it at this juncture the kids perform it expertly to show that the dances and spirit of their heritage is imbedded within them.

The Performance: After Cry Freedom 1 the kids go to get their boots after I prompt them with rhythmic patterns in my boots. They do not acknowledge me at first. The sounds they here are like a spirit call that they respond to by going to get their boots. There's never an indication in the show that they know where the boots are but they "just know" in this instance and they go, almost subconsciously to where they are and then meet me downstage and put them on then join in with the simple rhythm that I have started. So now we're back at the Bootdance lesson but now they're all in and we finish the dance in unison and with the prowess of those who've performed it countless times before.

The Bawa-Sinner



Figure 12: Scene from 'Bawa-Sinner'

Projected Quote:

A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.

Marcus Garvey

This quote is projected while the drums are playing and before the dancers enter for the Bawa. It was used to frame the student's reconnection with Africa and the importance of them knowing their history.

The Build: This work is a combination of two prior works that I choreographed. The Bawa is a traditional dance from Northern Ghana and the Sinner is from a piece entitled SinnerMan's Water Dance. SinnerMan was a piece I did to document in dance the experience of the victims of the

tragedy following Hurricane Katrina. In it there is a section called the “double-dutch” which is my interpretation of popular form of jump rope. While watching news footage of New Orleans following the time of Hurricane, I witnessed people who had lost everything still playing basketball and hopscotch and other games. This represented to me the resiliency and strength of the human spirit. I chose to emulate the double-dutch because it is so reminiscent of my experience as a child in the Black community and because of its complex kinesthetic nature. It is difficult to do in life and the interpretive movement we created is also difficult and requires plenty stamina to perform successfully.

The Bawa is a harvest dance from Northern Ghana in a region called Wa and traditionally done by the Dagaaba ethnic group. This dance was used because of its celebratory nature and its purpose being one that celebrates the harvest. In the work, we are celebrating the harvest of new ideas, concepts, and pathways. We are also celebrating a newfound freedom. Yao Ababio, Artistic Director of Asase Yaa Dance Theater and former dancer and drummer with the Dinizulu African Dancers and Drummers taught this dance to us. Dinizulu was the first American dance company to present Bawa on a concert stage.

The Bawa-Sinner mix came about because of the beauty we found in their rhythmical juxtaposition and the meaning of the corresponding dances that accompany them.

The Performance: In this piece we see the only costume change and hear the only live music. I lead the dancers out from the wing into a circle formation then I exit. This is to represent the student's realignment with Africanisms and the beginning of their quest to define themselves as a people of African descent.

The Music: Nina Simone, Sinner Man. Bawa Live musicians, Nana Kofi Malandela Zulu, Menes Yehudah, Changa Onyango, Akil Onyango. It was a bit of a challenge to work the live drumming with the musicians playing live on Nina Simone's rendition of the Sinner Man.

Designers

Production is an important part of dance presentation. It is my process when creating a show, to utilize the artistry of all those I recruit to ensure a dynamic and engaging performance. A knowledgeable and invested production crew is invaluable in this process and they help to garner optimum transference of ideas and concept to the viewing audience.

Set: Andrew Kaufman

In early conversations Karen Bradley and I thought it would be a good idea to transform the entire space into a classroom. Audience seating would become desks or folding chairs and we would project quotes and images around the theater. The idea here was to bring the audience as much into the experience of the classroom as possible. Logistically these ideas could not work due to the restraints of a shared program. With Andrew's help we were able to work it so that both programs could share the set and the stage crew could successfully change over during intermission.

We wanted to convey the image of the classroom fitting seamlessly into an abandoned lot. Baltimore's landscape is replete with entire blocks of vacant and abandoned homes and empty lots filled with debris. Many of the students I work with are born in these environments and have difficulty seeing beyond them. With an impoverished mind state, no matter what environment they are placed in, their purview of poverty commands their vision. I wanted this to be represented in the set. It was important that I let the audience see what the kids see.

We looked at a lot of images and traveled around Baltimore to get the feel for the city and to inform the process of building and appointing the set. The idea of the desks was reintroduced except this time they would be only for the cast. Later we decided to make the entire show take place within the classroom that we created. This was transformative for the direction of the show. It took the show out of the realm of being strictly dance and placed it within the genre of theater. The entire show happens in the classroom save the Bawa at the end. In the Bawa we remove all the desks to symbolize the students breaking free of the restraints of the common classroom.

We used debris to litter the stage and frame the set. In the last days before the show we decided to leave the Dununs (west African drums that the musicians play for Bawa) visible on the set. They blended well with the set and we thought the presence of them doubly served as the inherent presence of Africanisms within the African-American spirit.

Costume: Rebecca Delapp

Rebecca and I were in lockstep from the beginning. We wanted to create a look that was close to the student's uniforms in Baltimore City public schools. I wanted them, however, to be more interpretive of the uniforms and not an exact replica. Rebecca had the idea of using a modern, slim, athletic fit for the shirts and the pants. This idea worked. Coupled with the kid's self-adjustments of loose ties, rolled sleeves and un-tucked shirts, the costumes fit the statement of hip, funky and cool we were trying

to make stylistically. We went the same route for my first costume. We wanted a sharp look with flairs of contemporary African styling. Rebecca and the costume shop's idea to fashionably tie-dye the arms and add African print fabric to the pockets of the vest and down the middle of the shirt was right on point.



Figure 13: Cast in the Green Room before the show on opening night

The second costumes were designed in a contemporary African style. Each student and I had a different costume to represent individuality and a break from the uniformity of the school costumes.

Rebecca and I both did research for this and presented our ideas to one another until we found the looks we were trying to accomplish.

Lighting: Brittany Shemuga

Lighting has always been the most important part of the production element in my dance presentations. Once the music and movement is set, it is the lighting that aids in the telling of the story and the conveyance of emotion to the audience the most. Brittany and I had numerous discussions on exactly how to do this. We wanted to keep the early part of the show devoid of much color to convey the insipidness of public institution. We used specials in places to highlight the placement of the cast and desks in the classroom scene and during my solo sections. As the show went on and the transformations began in the storyline, we gradually added splashes of color. The transformation and adding of color begins its ascent in Contemplative with the look of early dawn into morning. By the time we reach Bawa the cast is lit at it's brightest and with the most color in the show.

Projection: Sarah Tunderman

This was my first time working with a projectionist. In the early stages I was not sure what to expect and did not know the scope of the projectionists' role and how I would utilize it in the show. As we moved along I would find that a lot of what I wanted to do with lighting could be handled more effectively with projection.

Sarah filmed parts of Baltimore and spent time with the students capturing footage in school and at our rehearsals. This footage was strategically projected in the show to aid the storyline. An example of this was the

footage of a Sun rising and the Baltimore skyline at dawn being projected as the lights were adding colors to create the same feel throughout the space. The projections of footage around Baltimore showcasing the many areas of blight did well to create the environment in the beginning of the show. Sarah and I were also in frequent communication on how and where we would display the very important quotes I'd pulled from my research.

Sound Design: Jeffrey Dorfman

This was also my first time working with a sound designer. I have always created, edited and arranged the music for the shows I produce. Jeff was brought on late in the process and helped considerably with the soundscape of the show. As an experienced sound designer Jeff was able to make additional edits that were needed in a way that would have taken me twice the time. Jeff is also responsible for mixing the music so that I got the exact sound I wanted for each scene. He was very supportive and his knowledge about sound in the theater helped to underscore some crucial moments of Triumph.

Personal Statement

Working with teenagers for my thesis was something that I expected might be challenging. I moved forward optimistically. I moved forward in this project with the same faith I move forward with in the classroom. No matter what, I just know the kids can do it. I believe in them, even when they don't believe. Foolish pride would not be totally an inaccurate assessment of what I possess at certain times on this journey. There were times I wanted to quit and change directions totally but I moved on with the faith I have in these kids and the power of the Dance. I also knew that if they got to the finish line their lives would be positively affected forever and I would not let them nor I rob them of that. Rehearsals were missed, and there were plenty times when we worked with a mere skeleton of the cast. Lateness was frequent and I almost always had to call or text the night before and/or the morning of a rehearsal date to ensure their presence. We lost some members because of commitment issues and lack of seriousness surrounding the work. Another male that was to be cast had expressed to me often how much he wanted to "dance for life and be successful in it". After numerous missed rehearsals and numerous chances given, I was unsure about his further involvement. It troubled me because I especially wanted him as a young man to have this experience. However, after coming to rehearsal for the first time in weeks and proceeding to bring his brand new sneakers into the studio and clean them instead of catching

up on what he missed, I had to cut him. This was much to my dismay but was best for the other cast members' process and necessary for the success of the show. Of the six cast members that made it to the performance, two of them "quit" three weeks before tech rehearsals began. After some long talks we got them back on track. One of them we almost lost two days before the performance because she refused to learn and rehearse parts of the show she did not know. Thankfully, we remedied that situation.

The kids triumphed and they did so because of their love for the dance and what they knew was their importance to the work. They fully understood their role despite being the real life embodiments of their characters. But, the dance and the knowledge of themselves elevated them above their peers and what had so often been their normal behavior. The dance and the knowledge of their heritage gave them pride and made them accountable to the process of presenting this work. They took ownership. These are their words. In the show when there is playback of the students speaking about their education and what's missing in it, it's all their words. When they speak of a desire for more lessons that pertain to them historically and culturally and how the dance positively affects their view of the education process, it is totally unscripted and mostly unprompted. They get it. They know, at the very least what motivates them to succeed and they want more of it. That is a triumph. This project was not intended to answer all questions or to be a total solution. It was only to present the possibility of an alternative method, a disruption of current teaching

practices and curriculum so that this particular demographic of young people can have the opportunity to succeed. In the end they disrupted statistical data and low expectations of them being Baltimore City youth.

What's Next?

Two teachers who attended the show have already approached me. They have asked if I would come work with their students who bare the same plight of the Triumph cast members. The cast has also been invited to perform selections of the work at the annual fundraiser of an important arts education organization in Baltimore.

My plan is to perform this again and to put the work on groups of students throughout Baltimore, Washington DC and other areas of the country that could benefit from the content of my work and the processes that are involved with presenting it. I would also like to transform the stage show into a short film and present it at schools in Baltimore and other cities.

My research is not complete and neither is the show. It is my feeling that other groups of young people should be involved in this work and be represented in the show. White children, for example are not affected by the mis-education in America's schooling in the same way that African-American students are. However, the omission of African history prior to slavery and the omission of contributions of African-Americans to America and the world altogether in education affect us all. Simply put, when we do not know the truth, we are destined to repeat mistakes made throughout history.

Something happened the day of the show that re-affirmed the importance of this work. One of the cast members from the other show on

the program stopped me in the hallway of the theater. He was a white male who looked to be in his thirties. He watched the final tech rehearsal and run of the show and congratulated me on a job well done. He mentioned how impressed he was with the kids' dancing and the show as a whole. I thanked him and began to walk away when he stopped me and continued to say that as he watched the show, it had never occurred to him that a people not knowing about their true history could affect the entire people so adversely. He then said that he thought back to when he was in school and realized that he never learned anything about African history prior to slavery or any great contributions African-Americans had made throughout civilization. My response to him was "yes, but you should have", and to that he nodded and replied "yes, I now feel I should've. Thank you."

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