Our Themes

**Place:** How shifting our location, condition and position shifts us. Where we are (geographically, mentally, emotionally, physically) informs who we are, what we could do, who we might be.

How can you use where you come from, where you are going, and where you are RIGHT NOW to navigate your personal GPS? Recalculating….

**Culture:** A personal variation on a universal theme; style. Being more than one thing, having more than one story, seeing in a different way actually supports us.

How can we build authentic connection, even more than just tolerance or acceptance?

Our Dance Forms

**Modern:** Many see modern dance as an on-going development of a delicious, rich encompassing vernacular dance form that, at its best, celebrates the joy and revels in the truth of physical expression. Modern dance is often about experiment; it is about pushing the limits (or not); it is often strangely dressed and bare-footed; it is definitely about discovering new ways of using music and sound in relation to movement. Dance has always been a way of integrating oneself into the music. Modern dance is not always mute. Words often accompany modern dance movements in one form or another.

Some describe the process of learning and making modern dance like this: “From the very beginning try to create something new out of what you have learned in relation to how your body works. Watch how other people move. Learn from criticism you receive, but keep dancing. One day, you will wake and you will be a modern dancer and you will know what you are - even if you still do not know what modern dance is.”

~ http://www.ridance.com/riwhatmd.html

**West African**

Kuku: Traditional celebration dance and drum rhythm from Guinea that is also played in Mali, Senegal and throughout the United States. The Kuku is a very popular rhythm in the United States in West African dance classes and companies.

Check out this video on youtube.com to see how you can use theme and variation on a traditional African dance to make something completely new and exciting:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9W5Lly9KZM

**Hip Hop:** Hip Hop dance evolved as a part of the hip hop culture. This includes a wide range of styles such as breaking, popping, locking, and krumping. What separates hip hop dance from other forms of dance is that it is
often improvisational (freestyle) in nature and hip hop dancers frequently engage in battles—formal or informal one-on-one dance competitions. Freestyle sessions and battles are usually performed in a *cipher*, a circular dance space which forms naturally once the dancing begins.

Breaking originated in the Bronx while the funk styles, most notably locking, popping, and electric boogaloo, came from the west coast during the funk era. They are called funk styles because they were originally danced to funk music rather than rap music but were integrated into hip hop when the culture reached the west coast of the United States. Though breaking and the original funk styles are different stylistically they share many surrounding elements such as their improvisational nature, the music they are danced to, and the way they originated from the streets within Black and Latino communities. These similarities helped bring them and other street dance styles together under the same subculture and helped to keep them alive and evolving today.

**Movement Class Notes**

**Core ➔ Distal**: Contracting the body in, on the floor or standing, and expanding the body out from the pelvis/lower abdominals. You can also use this idea when traveling in space: contract the space by moving in close to each other. Expand the space by moving away from each other.

**Roll Down**: Sequential lowering of the torso by arcing the vertebrae, beginning at the head.

**Sit bones**: the base of the pelvis. You can feel them when you sit on your hands in a butterfly position or sitting in a chair.

**Balance**: Stand on one leg. Hold one knee, feeling the crease at your hip flexor. Feel the sole of your standing foot reaching (rooted) down into the floor. Slowly turn your upper body towards your raised knee and slowly turn back. Engage your core (lower abdominals, pelvic muscles) and gluteus maximus to stabilize you standing leg. Reach the top of your skull into the sky. Relax your shoulders. Breathe.

**Movement Expresso**: A quick burst of energy through movement. This can be dance, sports, or even just wiggling around. This exercise can be useful in school classes when you feel yourself falling asleep. Talk to your teacher about it, though, so not to distract or upset the classroom.
Local Dance & Drumming Classes

Liz Lerman Dance Exchange: Teen and youth modern technique classes; Youth repertory (choreography learning) workshops; Youth-based community partnerships and training in facilitation; Teen training in Dance Exchange choreographic and community building tools

www.danceexchange.org  301.270.8763

DancePlace: Classes in Modern, African, Salsa, Hip Hop, Belly Dancing and more. There is a youth step team and African dance company. Very accessible from Red Line, Brookland stop.

www.danceplace.org  202.269.1600

Joy of Motion: Classes in ballet, tap, jazz, hip hop, belly dancing, modern, and many more. Also have many youth companies. Locations at Atlas Performing Arts Center, Dupont Circle, Bethesda and Friendship Heights.

www.joyofmotion.org  202.387.0911 – Dupont Studio

Maryland Youth Ballet: MANY ballet classes (ALL levels) as well as stretch, yoga and modern. Located nearby in downtown silver springs right off of Ellsworth.

www.marylandyouthballet.org  202.608.2232

Joe’s Movement Emporium: Classes in modern, hip hop, yoga, belly dancing, salsa, African, drumming and more.

www.joesmovement.org  301. 699.1819

Culture Shock: Hip Hop for ALL levels. Located at Strathmore music center in Bethesda.

www.cultureshockdance.org  Contact: Lisa Geter Norman, Youth Programming Director 202.577.1989, lisa_fsdc@yahoo.com

Kankouran West African Dance Company: Adult classes in West African dance as well as youth classes in drumming. They host an annual dance and drum festival, this year from September 4-6. Info at:

http://www.kankouran.org/cms/content/view/49/82/

www.kankouran.org  202.518.1213

Quotes and Thoughts to Remember

“…my job as an artist was to change the way I worked inside my culture, and by doing so, change the very tools I would be allowed to use in making my work.”

“Turn discomfort into inquiry. When defensiveness starts, learning stops. If you respect people, they will do better work. Through sequence, preparation, and patience, anything that needs to be said, can be said.”

Liz Lerman

“To get there, you must first realize you are there, and that everything you need, want or desire is working towards you.

Tao Te Ching

You are the sun. The clouds will come and go. You will always shine bright. Tu eres el sol.

Lisa Pegram
Tools to Build Dances

Theme and Variation: Theme and Variation encompasses utilizing the choreographer’s tools to build dances from simple movement phrases. It supports certain aesthetic and communicative concepts such as: difference is good, details matter and copying is creative.

1. Discuss what a choreographer considers to alter, adapt or change a phrase. Ex. Levels, space, dynamic or movement quality, repetition and direction.

2. Use these tools to make multiple variations on a simple phrase. Ex. Perform one part on a low level. Repeat one thing. Change directions. Move to another place in the room.

Build-A-Phrase: Build-a-Phrase introduces basic movement sequencing by linking simple movements in a multi-count phrase. Participants observe, learn, and combine movement, experiencing the satisfaction of participating in a simple but authentic form.

How to:

1. The leader introduces the exercise by doing a simple movement and then asks everyone to repeat it, saying something like, “Let’s make an arm dance, here is count number one.” From

2. The leader can continue to demonstrate the next counts, or ask someone to suggest a movement to add, or can begin to solicit ideas from the group based on a question or other prompt. The leader can watch for spontaneous gestures in response to such questions or can turn the responses into small movement assignments (e.g.: “Everyone, close your eyes for a moment and make a movement that suggests crossing a bridge.”)

Equivalents:

Each word in a text is assigned a corresponding movement. Equivalents can be used to introduce the idea of dancing-and-talking to those new to the approach (regardless of their level of dance training), as a way to explore the relationship between movement and meaning. It can be one element or the primary focus in a sophisticated level of dancemaking.

How to:

1. Start with a brief text, as short as a single sentence.

2. Assign a motion to each word.

3. Speak the text with the corresponding movements.

4. Each time a given word is repeated, perform its equivalent movement.

Be sure to think through and perform a beginning, middle, and end to each motion. In assigning movement to words, you can experiment with many possible relationships, including:

• Literal: a thumb to the chest = “I”
• Pun: fingers encircling the eye = “I”
• Associative: inspired by a memory or personal impression of the word
• Sound-based: inspired by the phonic or rhythmic quality of the word
• Arbitrary
Postcard/Detail: Using a prompt, the dancer visualizes, selects an image or draws a postcard that they will use to generate movement. They then search for specific detail within the image. Next they embody in physical shapes and/or movement patterns.

Round Robin: This exercise is a quick way to generate a lot of movement with a group of people.

How to:

1. Dancers stand in two lines facing each other: one line of “choreographers”, one line of “dancers”
2. The dancers are given a prompt to generate a short movement quickly.
3. They show their movement to their partner choreographers.
4. Their choreographer then adds a movement based on what they’ve seen and their prompt (music, prop, idea).
5. The dancers learn the new movement, add it to their phrase and then take one step to the right or left, shifting the line down so dancers are now standing in front of different choreographers. The line leader circles around to the end of the line.
6. After 4-8 rotations, dancers rehearse their phrase and all participants switch roles.

Tools to Build Community, Team or Group Unity

Blind Lead: This group exercise introduces movement partnering and presents an opportunity for individuals and groups to observe their ways of leading and following.

1. Lead or Follow: Gather participants in a circle and have them form partner pairs. To demonstrate the first step, “borrow” a partner and tell her to close her eyes. Say: “Now I’m going to take my partner for a walk,” and begin moving the “blind” partner around the space, demonstrating that she can be guided from in front (pulled), gently directed from behind (pushed), led by one hand or two, or by contact between various parts of the body. Emphasize that while leaders may change the point of contact, they should never let go entirely.

Participants decide who will lead and who will follow. They do the exercise for approximately 3 to 5 minutes. Tell participants to switch roles and continue the activity for an equal amount of time.

Ask “What did you observe.” After a few minutes of discussion, continue to step two.

2. Change Partners, Change Roles: Using a demonstration partner as needed, describe the new elements: Now leaders may bring their partners to a stop and walk away from them. At this point “blind” partners have two choices: 1) They may stand in place until another leader claims them; or 2) They may open their eyes, start moving and claim a partner who is waiting with eyes closed. Likewise a person who has been leading may either: 1) begin leading a new partner from among those standing and waiting; or 2) stop, close eyes, and wait to be led. One person may change roles several times. Emphasize that if you are standing still, your eyes should be closed. If you are moving, you should be leading someone, being led, or finding someone to lead.

Again, notice what you observe about being a leader and a follower.

Walk N Talk: Talking while walking is something people do all the time. This exercise draws on that common experience to acclimate dancers to the task of combining movement with the spoken word. Walk-and-Talk also helps people to discover their stories, and edit them down to their essential contents.

1. Practice Passes: Ask participants to position themselves along a wall facing into the room. Explain that you’ll be asking them to walk back and forth from their starting position across to the opposite wall; each one-way trip
is called a “pass,” so a round trip back to their starting positions consists of two passes. Have the group practice just walking first, asking them to make two passes, one pass, etc., a few times.

2. Simple Prompt: Now explain that you’ll be asking the group to talk out loud while they walk in the back and forth pattern that they’ve established, in response to some suggestions, ideas, or prompts that you’ll be offering. The object is simply to keep talking out loud. Anyone who runs out of things to say can try filler like “I can’t think of anything to say,” until something occurs to them. To get the group walking and talking, start with a simple prompt about something immediate. “Find an object in the room and describe it,” or “Describe what you’re wearing.” Simple ideas can be walked-and-talked in one or two passes.

3. Respond, Refine, Save: After a few rounds of simple prompts, you can begin building to a more complex, evocative, or emotionally potent prompt. Such prompts can relate to the goals at hand: the theme of a workshop or choreographic project, current events, or common concerns of participants. Example of such prompts are: “Describe a time when you experienced an injustice.” “Talk about a memory of birth, death or first love.” “Describe a special place you used to go to as a child.” When you arrive at this prompt, start by assigning participants to walk-and-talk their responses in four or five passes. Then ask them to repeat the same story or description, but state it in three passes, then in two passes. Finally allow participants only a single pass in which to speak the most essential version of their responses.

Sculpting & Fairy Touches: These tools promote specific physical contact between partners.

1. One partner becomes a living palette or clay while the other partner assumes the role of sculptor, or artist. The sculptor then gently places his partner in positions, moving him or her into interesting shapes. The clay partner holds his or her shape as much as physically possible, making adjustments or adaptations as needed.

2. Sculptor # 1 reaches a stopping point, observes his or her work and then finds a position or shape that relates to his or her partner.

3. Sculptor # 1’s stillness is the “frozen” partner’s cue to relax and assume the sculptor role.

Fairy Touches are similar in that one partner is initiated to move by the other. The difference lies in the initiation. During a fairy touches exercise, the initial Fairy Toucher only points (making gentle contact with his or her index finger) to the spot on the body where they want their partner to move.

Now the “clay” partner has more choice in how they will move their body part. Their goal is to isolate and be as specific as possible.


A Roadmap for Meaningful Dialogue

Building on discoveries from positive and negative experiences giving and receiving critique, Liz Lerman formulated a four-step method for facilitated group feedback which — unlike some models of critique — affords the artist an active role in the dialogue.

The Process engages participants in three roles:
The artist offers a work-in-progress for review and feels prepared to question that work in a dialogue with other people;

Responders, committed to the artist's intent to make excellent work, offer reactions to the work in a dialogue with the artist; and

The facilitator initiates each step, keeps the process on track, and works to help the artist and responders use the Process to frame useful questions and responses.

The Critical Response Process takes place after a presentation of artistic work. Work can be short or long, large or small, and at any stage in its development. The facilitator then leads the artist and responders through four steps:

1. **Statements of Meaning:** Responders state what was meaningful, evocative, interesting, exciting, striking in the work they have just witnessed.
2. **Artist as Questioner:** The artist asks questions about the work. After each question, the responders answer. Responders may express opinions if they are in direct response to the question asked and do not contain suggestions for changes.
3. **Neutral Questions:** Responders ask neutral questions about the work. The artist responds. Questions are neutral when they do not have an opinion couched in them. For example, if you are discussing the lighting of a scene, “Why was it so dark?” is not a neutral question. “What ideas guided your choices about lighting?” is.
4. **Opinion Time:** Responders state opinions, subject to permission from the artist. The usual form is “I have an opinion about ______, would you like to hear it?” The artist has the option to decline opinions for any reason.

**Vocabulary**

**NeoGeography:** Neogeography is about people using and creating their own maps, on their own terms, and by combining elements of an existing toolset. Neogeography is about sharing location information with friends and visitors, helping shape a context, and conveying understanding through knowledge of place. For example, imagine a map that highlights where you’ve traveled, where you’re going, or altered to reflect a feeling.

**Djembe Drum:** The Djembe with its wide range of tones, produced by its thick goat skin, tight tuning and shape, is West Africa's most popular drum, originating hundreds of years ago. Today it is found throughout West Africa but it is traditionally from Senegal, Ghana, Guinea, Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast amongst the Bambara, Mandingo, Malinka, Susu & Guru tribes. It is carved by artisans out of a solid lump of African hardwood into a goblet shape & has a goat skin which is tensioned with rope to a very high pitch.

Usually several Djembe players will be accompanied by a **Djun Djun** player. The Djun Djun player uses one or more double headed Bass Drums & a small bell or metal tube. The troupe of drummers is lead by a “master drummer” who calls in the various sections of different patterns by playing a motif that the drummers & dancers recognize as the signal to change to the next section. The Rhythms played are usually highly **Polyrhythmic** to accompany the dancers highly energetic footwork. Most songs & dances are about every day life. For example hunting or bringing in a catch of fish & the dancers will act out the story. Master drummers normally come from a family of performers & are groomed for a life of music & dance from early childhood. The dances & rhythms they learn have been passed down from generation to generation often over the space of hundreds of years.

**Polyrhythm:** is the simultaneous sounding of two or more independent rhythms. Traditional African music, particularly that of West Africa, is known for its highly complex polyrhythms and, unlike the examples given below, the downbeats do not usually coincide. Rhythms and counter rhythms evidence the common African cultural tradition of call and response, with different drum lines, other musical instruments, bodies and voices contributing rhythmic elements that complement and communicate with one another. This element of
instrumental, as well as vocalized, **call and response** is also evident in the polyrhythmic quality of jazz, a musical form with its origins in the African American community.

**Ago**: Ghanaian call meaning “I’m knocking”, “Can you hear me” or “Please pay attention”

**Ame**: Ghanaian response meaning “Come in”, “I’m listening” or “I am paying attention”

**Break**: Distinct change in rhythmic pattern that signals dancer to change movement

**Lappa**: Traditional cloth worn around the waist of women. Commonly known in America from its Senegalese name, Lappa, but has many other synonymous descriptions throughout West Africa.

**Cleave Poem**: A cleave poem form is an experimental form of creating or performing poetry that links two separate poems together.

How it works:
1. Read the left hand poem as a first discrete poem.
2. Read the right hand poem as a second discrete poem.
3. Read the whole as a third integrated poem.

In its most basic form it is three poems:
~~two parallel 'vertical' poems (left and right)
~~a third ‘horizontal’ poem being the fusion of the vertical poems read together.