

DANCING

across difference

PRACTICING DIVERSITY
IN DANCE

Course Design toolkit

Overview

The following is a course design toolkit aimed at dance Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) whose goal is to address diversity through the lens of studies in dance. This course design toolkit has been developed in the context of the project “Diversity in European Higher Dance Education”, co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Commission.

Our approach has been to create a course plan that not only meets the needs of the three partner dance HEIs (P.A.R.T.S., Manufacture and SKH) and their student community, but also acts as a blueprint that can be modified to be implemented in other institutions offering broader applicability across European dance HEIs. In this course plan toolkit you will find: templates for a course plan for the educational institution and a study guide for students, a bibliography, and a lexicon that defines key concepts used in the research that grounds the formation of this course.

Objective

[Course Plan](#)

[Study Guide](#)

[Bibliography](#)

[Lexicon](#)

To keep in mind....

Dear institution,

Thank you for embarking on this work. What follows are recommendations for how to best support the implementation and thriving of this course.

Who? This course is designed for students who are enrolled in a 3-year Bachelor dance program. The research has also brought our attention towards the need to lift competence and knowledge regarding diversity in dance in other contexts. Therefore, this course could be given as an elective or freestanding course and thus offered to students in other programs, or to freelancing folks who are part of the city's dance ecosystem. We suggest that there is a teacher who accompanies this entire course, but does not necessarily always teach in it. We recommend that the accompanying teacher is not the examiner but is present during examinations.

When? The course outline is designed to unfold over 12 weeks, in a part-time study mode. We encourage you to find a frequency, intensity, and continuity that works for your institutional framework and student community. We emphasize the value and relevance of a slower pedagogy and that institutionally tailored measures are made to ensure this. The course content and material can unfold over a longer time, offering a much sought-after continuity and prioritization of the work.

Where? We encourage you to cultivate relationships with the city's diversity where your institution resides. We think it is possible and meaningful to hone relationships to study environments and contexts that are not the day-to-day campus in an effort to de-center the location of learning.

Dear teacher,

The institution giving this course (Dancing Across Difference) is undertaking work to increase their accessibility, their capacity to host diversity, and to move towards a more socially just dance scene. Part of this work introduces knowledge and skills of diversity (inequity) related issues at our respective institutions to administrative and teaching staff so that students can access the best possible learning experiences. This need will be addressed by staff training offered by the institution and the formation of an on-site diversity unit. We recommend that Dancing Across Difference — its director, its teachers — have an ongoing dialogue with the Diversity Unit.

Dear Student:

The Study Guide is for you.

Course Plan

Dancing Across Difference → 7.5 credits

Entry Requirements

General Entry Requirements:

For studies at the first cycle, with the exception of Swedish 1-3 and English 6.

Selection

Students in the programme are guaranteed a place.

Language of Instruction

The main language of instruction is English.

Course Content

The student encounters relational practices that familiarize them with participatory pedagogies of diversity and social justice. The course creates a practical context for students to activate and co-curate these pedagogies in relation to the student's own dance background. The course consists of workshops, seminars and readings curated by students and course leaders.

→ Practices of Positionality • 2.5 credits

The student is guided in familiarizing themselves with pedagogies of positionality that unfold concepts such as intersectionality and modernity / coloniality. During the course, the student positions their dance backgrounds and cultural archives in relation to the dominant and minor paradigms of the art form. They also analyze the educational institution's positionality in relation to its modern / colonial context.

After completing the course the student is able to:

- demonstrate an ability to position their dance background
- identify and analyze the positionality of their educational institution.

→ Practices of Relationality - Dancing across Difference • 2.5 credits

This module uses existent and emergent lateral learning practices that emphasize relationality and difference in dance training. Students formulate for whom and with whom they are dancing through embodied experimentation with diverse performance formats.

After completing the course the student is able to:

- identify and implement examples of lateral learning in dance practices
- recognize and contextualize for and with whom they are dancing.

→ ***Practices of Transformation - Dancing Citizenship • 2.5 credits***

This module asks the student to practically investigate their dance practices' civic engagement and/or societal resonance, with a focus on the relation between minor and dominant forms of representation. The student is introduced to practices of transformation that cultivate spaces of joy, healing and resistance.

After completing the course the student is able to:

- account for the context, delimitation, sources and power potentials of their own practice
- identify logics of representation and spectacle in dance practices
- identify logics of honoring versus appropriation / extractivism in dance practices
- identify practices of resistance and healing in dance.

Teaching Forms

Teacher and student led workshops, seminars and readings.

Examination

→ ***Practices of Positionality • 2.5 credits***

Oral and written assignment

→ ***Practices of Relationality - Dancing across Difference • 2.5 credits***

Practical assignment

→ ***Practices of Transformation - Dancing Citizenship • 2.5 credits***

Performative, oral and written assignment

If a student has a decision from Stockholm University of the Arts about special pedagogical support due to functional variance, the examiner can decide on alternative forms of examination in consultation with the student.

Study Material

Study materials will be announced in the study guide and will not exceed 100 pages or 25 viewing hours. Reading is calculated at 5 pages per one hour.

Study Guide

Welcome to Dancing Across Difference

Program / course and year

Bachelor Program in Dance Performance / Dancing Across Difference, Year 1

The name of the course and credits

Dancing Across Difference • 7.5 credits

Study year

2025/2026

Course director

To be determined.

Teacher

To be determined.

Description of the course

During this course you will encounter relational practices that familiarize you with participatory pedagogies of diversity and social justice. The course creates a practical context for you to activate and co-curate these pedagogies in relation to your own dance background. The course consists of workshops, seminars and readings curated by you, your student-colleagues, and course leaders. The course is designed in three modules, of 2.5 credits for each module.

Schedule for Module 1

→ 2.5 credits

Week 01, Monday to Friday

9.30-12.15 • 13.30-16.30

Positionality groundwork

Teacher to be determined

Practices of Positionality • 2.5 credits

This week of collective study is grounded in reflecting on the positionality of the institution and you, as students. Present in the positioning of the institution is an investigation into the dominant aesthetics and theoretical lines of the BA, paying specific attention to the relations of power built over Europe's colonial history. What is the education's relation to knowledges and cultures which are absent from it? There is a further investigation into the dance BA's relation to the "contemporary", "global", dominant, urban/cosmopolitan, Western-centred dance field. Additionally, you are guided in a process of positioning yourselves, mapping the plurality of cultural embodied archives of dance and movement.

Week 02, Monday, Wednesday. Friday

13.30-17.00

Student-led study time accompanied by a teacher with specific knowledge of the study material content.

Teacher to be determined

Study

You select study materials from the bibliography and activate the materials through resonant study forms.

Week 03, Monday to Friday

13.30-17.00

Student-led workshops with teachers' accompanying.

Teacher to be determined

Sharing the archive

Suggested duration: 1 hour per student.

This is an opportunity for you to share your embodied archives through dancing, talking, mapping. You can invite teacher-accompaniment to sessions of your choice. During this period you develop the map that you will present orally for the examination.

Week 04, Monday and Wednesday

Deadline: Monday

Send in your written mapping of your own archive and the institution's positionality.

Examination: Wednesday

Orally present your map in small groups. Familiarize yourself with your group's maps so you can contribute to the conversation.

Schedule for Module 2

→ 2.5 credits

Week 1, Monday to Friday

9.30-12.15 • 13.30-16.30

Relationality groundwork

Teacher to be determined

Practices of Relationality - Dancing across Difference • 2.5 credits

This week of collective study further investigates how lateral learning is happening in dance. Looking through the positionalities that have been unfolded in the previous module of study, you articulate where, when and with whom knowledge is exchanged in dance practices. The focus of the week is on how relationality and difference are experienced while studying dance and while in processes of dance making.

Week 02, Monday, Wednesday. Friday

13.30-17.00

Student-led study time accompanied by a teacher with specific knowledge of the study material content.

Teacher to be determined

Study

You select study materials from the bibliography and activate the materials through resonant study forms.

Week 03, Monday to Friday

13.30-17.00

Student-led workshops with accompanying teachers'.

Teacher to be determined

Sharing the space

This is an opportunity for you to experiment for whom and with whom you are dancing. During this week you choose the performance and study formats that you will present during the examination.

Week 04, Monday and Wednesday

Examination

Presentation and conversation. In the examination you share your experiments with ways of studying and performing. In conversation with your colleagues and the accompanying teacher you situate your own work.

Schedule for Module 3

→ 2.5 credits

Week 01, Monday to Friday

9.30-12.15 • 13.30-16.30

Groundwork

Teacher to be determined

Practices of Transformation - Dancing Citizenship • 2.5 credits

In this week of collective study you practically investigate how your dance practices engage with the place and society you live in. How do minor and dominant forms of representation relate to your experience of studying and performing dance? The course introduces you to practices of activation that cultivate spaces of joy, healing and resistance.

Week 02, Monday, Wednesday, Friday

13.30-17.00

Student-led study time accompanied by a teacher with specific knowledge of the study material content.

Teacher to be determined

Study

You select an art work or dance practice context and use it to map context, limits, influences and power relations. In conversation with a study group and accompanying teacher, you identify logics of spectacle in dance practices and of representation, including the difference between honoring, appropriation and extractivism. The map and notes on conversations will be the ground for your final presentation and end essay.

Week 03, Monday to Thursday

13.30-17.00

Preparation

Teacher to be determined

Sharing in transformation

During this week you work collectively in small groups to select and host an experience of transformative social justice in dance – this can be either your own experience, or a performative study of another person's story and/or practice. You invite teacher accompaniment to sessions of your choice during the week. The map and notes on your conversations and experiences will provide the basis for your examination presentation in week 3 and the reflective essay in week 4.

Week 03, Friday

10.00-16.00

Examination

For the examination you host your colleagues, teacher and an examiner in the experience/story of transformation.

Week 04, Friday

Written assignment.

A reflective essay on the process of creating and hosting the examination.

During this week you continue to revise and finalize your reflective essay, due at the end of week 4.

Bibliography

Survey as study material

[Survey for students and alumni](#)

[Survey for teachers and staff](#)

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Lexicon : perspectives, principles, and methodology

The “Diversity in European Higher Dance Education” research principles and methodologies are indebted to those developed and employed by professor Gloria Wekker and her team on the diversity research “Let’s Do Diversity” (Wekker et al. 2016), conducted at the University of Amsterdam. The two research projects share two main underlying frameworks of decoloniality and intersectionality. Here, these frameworks are adapted to consider the specific manifestations of discrimination in the field of dance, paying special attention to that which the body knows and experiences.

Decoloniality and intersectionality

This research departs from the observation that each dance education institution enacts contextual-based forms of discrimination for their student community. This is apparent from what we, as alumni, teachers, staff, and directors of such institutions, see and hear from students. There are many variables that influence the creation of institutionally specific forms of constraint for the students’ passage through a school: the geopolitical location of each institution, the prevailing dance culture, the working language, the teaching community, and the curriculum choices. Furthermore, these constraints often express as forms of oppression that are structural, and therefore manifest independently of the intention and awareness of individuals. We understand these forms of oppression as intersectional, that is, they do not manifest independently of each other, but at the intersection of various axes of discrimination such as race, gender, and geographical and economic inequality.

Decoloniality is a perspective that allows us to see how the dynamics of power differences, social exclusion and discrimination (along the axes of race, gender and geographical and economic inequality) are connected to the ongoing legacy of our colonial history. Decoloniality also helps us understand the role of the University as a modern/colonial institution in the reinforcement of Western perspectives at the expense of the plurality of knowledges of the world. A decolonized university has open forms of expertise, and is open to intercultural and plural approaches to knowledge (Wekker et al. 2016, 10).

In this research project, we are trying to imagine decolonized dance schools. Yet, decolonial thinking recognizes that this cannot simply be achieved by changing the content of courses, training, and hiring practices, as those are already framed by structural imperatives. As it was the case with the University of Amsterdam, when looking at dance schools from a decolonial and intersectional perspective and posing the question of its hosting of diversity, many different layers come together. Some of these are linked to specific individuals, some to the school as an institution, and some are related to state regulations. We need to be aware of the cultural landscape in which all of this is happening and of the history that has produced it.

Modernity/coloniality

Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2007) first established the concept of ‘modernity/coloniality’ as two inseparable sides of the same coin. He referred to the relationship between the European/Western culture and other cultures, as twofold: on the one hand, it is an order of colonial domination. On the other hand, that colonial order is made invisible by presenting modernity as the totality of what is real: modernity/coloniality negates, excludes and conceals different ways of being and thinking. In other words: modernity/coloniality

creates a colonial difference between a dominant European/Western culture, and all the cultures that become othered under the colonial order. These ideas were further developed by decolonial thinkers such as Walter Dignolo, Rolando Vázquez, Catherine Walsh, and María Lugones, among others. They were also applied to the field of dance by Fabi Barba. In the context of this research, the relevance of this dual concept lies in asking: what forms of colonial negation, exclusion, concealment, or erasure are taking place in higher dance education institutions? Which ways of being, thinking, and dancing are allowed in these spaces, and which are not?

Cultural extractivism

Ecuadorian economist Alberto Acosta (2013) shows that one of the pillars of the colonial order is the global extractivist economic model. He provides a definition of “extractivism” as a mode of accumulation that began to be established on a massive scale five centuries ago, with the colonization of the Americas, Africa, and Asia by European powers. Since then, formerly colonized regions (today typically referred to as “the Global South”) specialized in the extraction of raw materials, while former colonizers (i.e., “the Global North”) focused on producing manufactured goods. This has led to the “paradox of plenty” (2013, p. 61), whereby Global South countries that are rich in natural resources seem condemned to underdevelopment and poverty, because their resources paradoxically fuel industrial development and prosperity in the Global North. Other authors have discussed various forms of “cultural extractivism” that mirror the extractivist economic model in other aspects of modern life. Argentinian arts scholar, and researcher in this project, Paulina Rosa (2024) understands cultural extractivism in dance as the extraction and commodification of human, aesthetic, and epistemic resources from the Global South for the advantage of the Global North. When we look at European educational institutions that recruit internationally, we remain alert to the possibility that an extractivist logic may (inadvertently) be at work.

Positionality

We understand positionality as a term that points to the place each individual occupies in relation to different axes of power inequalities in modern society (nationality, race, gender, age, bodily ability, ...). It refers to the position we occupy in the modern/colonial order, along the colonial difference. Given that most of us work, have worked, and/or have studied in the dance institutions we are researching, we believe our own bodies and experiences to be the finest instruments to perceive what is going on. We are therefore both researchers and informants. Yet, we recognize that we do not speak from a universal, disconnected, birds-eye perspective, but rather from a located, grounded one. Our positionality shapes our understandings, views, and sensing of the world and how we speak about it. The research group is composed of people with different capacities, positions, and experiences. We come into this research with concerns and ideas, from specific positions. Concerned by the erasure of difference and by extractivist logics, and aiming towards social justice, we come ready to be transformed by this work. Throughout this project, we are committed to practice critical self-awareness: constantly checking our expectations, making sure that we are not projecting our own individual assumptions.

Embodied knowledge

We approach this work in a grounded, positioned, and also embodied fashion; trusting our bodies when they signal that something is important. We use our bodily memories, and the memory of being among other bodies throughout our education, in order to inform our perceptions. Like performance studies scholar Diana Taylor (2003), we believe in the power of embodied practices (spoken language, dance, ritual) to transmit social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated behavior. Given that the great majority of the research group is composed of people with expertise in dance, we are aware of the importance of embodied experience in understanding as well as healing discriminatory experiences.

Contemporary dance

At a first level of understanding, we know that the term ‘contemporary dance’ generally refers to the present-day heir to what is often referred to by authors as “postmodern dance.” That is, the tendencies in Western dance production that developed, starting in the 1960s, as both a rejection and a continuation of the tradition of modern dance. On a deeper level, we understand ‘modern dance’ and ‘contemporary dance’ not simply as innocent designations for genres of Western dance, but as political categories that play their part in maintaining a historicist and Eurocentric approach to understanding reality. Dance scholar SanSan Kwan argues that, although ‘contemporary’ is a temporal designation, in the field of dance, it does not apply to all current dance practices. She explains: “In non-Western dance, ‘contemporary’ is a necessary qualifier when we do not mean to refer to traditional forms. Without it ‘Asian dance,’ ‘African dance,’ or ‘Native American dance’ is immediately assumed to be traditional” (2017, p. 45). The counterpart of that argument is that “contemporary dance” is by default assumed to be Western dance. As Indian dancer and scholar Ananya Chatterjea puts it, “the wonderfully unifying and legitimizing aesthetic category of ‘contemporary dance’ (really meaning Euro-American modern/contemporary dance)” (2013, p. 10) offers celebrated access to the global stage at the cost of erasing difference, and repeating the racial, gendered and colonial violence of the projects of modernity. Chatterjea denounces that, even when a dance scene presents itself as pluralistic and multicultural, often what really happens is that non-Western dance makers adapt to the codes of Western dance in order to have a place in that scene.

Diversity

In her work, feminist scholar Sara Ahmed has shown how the institutional-friendly term “diversity” has arrived at the cost of neglecting “other (perhaps more critical) terms, including ‘equality,’ ‘equal opportunities,’ and ‘social justice’” (2012, p. 1). In this research, we want to include these often neglected terms into our understanding of diversity. We aim to avoid the lack of intersectional and decolonial analysis that can lead to reducing diversity to the demographic representativeness of a group or category (gender and internationalization often being the ones favored by European institutions). In our framework, diversity is not only about including more students, staff, and teachers coming from international and/or marginalized groups and categories into the existing institutions. It is also about allowing their experiences, epistemologies, and worldviews to transform these institutions beyond the Eurocentric norm. We question how the institutional practices function to enrich or impoverish diversity, and how they can work towards social justice.

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