
SOPH CARDINAL

They/Them/Theirs

sophcardinal@yahoo.com | <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sophia-cardinal-65236a184> | (480)-559-0163

Growing up as a closeted queer and non-binary dancer, I had virtually no representation of my identity in a dance classroom setting. In an art form historically structured from a straight, cis-gendered narrative, I never felt safe expressing all facets of my selfhood through movement. After integrating my identities into my movement generation processes, I recognized the need to curate dance pedagogy spaces where the nuanced complexities of the individual self have unconditional support to be explored. I integrate theories of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Nepantla Pedagogy* and Nyama McCarthy-Brown's *Critical Dance Pedagogy* into my individual praxis in technique, composition, and theory settings to connect identity, culture, and body into our processes of dance and dance-making.

My initial goal in the classroom is to establish a sense of community and co-creation. This is primarily achieved by integrating testimonios, which C. Alejandra Elenes refers to as "embodied narratives," along with *plática*. These informal conversations link our experiences to our identities, serving as an entry point for creating a communicative, compassionate, and collaborative space. Each class I teach begins in a circle, centering our bodies and minds. I ask the students to share their names and pronouns and respond to a daily question that fosters an embodied recognition of both who they are and where they are on that specific day. The daily question could involve executing a gestural movement to express their feelings or, more elaborately, could ask about a place where they have felt belonging that week. This structure establishes a ritual where students know they will have a consistent space to share, reflect, and center themselves in preparation for the day's content.

I value artistic and physical rigor that encourages students to find a sense of belonging in their movement while pushing their individual boundaries of growth. My movement vocabulary is rooted in urban forms of Hip Hop, with elements from Westernized contemporary and modern dance, emphasizing quick weight shifts, isolated gestures, and dynamic floorwork. I strive to direct my teaching toward all types of learners—visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. I verbally relay exercises and counts, demonstrate movement sequences, and provide tactile feedback to students who are comfortable with it, meeting each learner's needs. Consent for physical touch may change for specific individuals throughout a class. Whether tactile feedback comes from me or their peers, I always conduct a consent check to ensure students receive appropriate feedback. Cueing artistic expression is integral to breaking down movement sequences, allowing students to explore movement in a way that validates who they are. I invest in *plática* in each class to encourage discussion of how movement phrases exist in their bodies through physicality, artistry, and emotionality, to allow students to explore the given movement in a way that validates who they are through it.

Improvisation and dance-making are essential elements of my movement technique and composition courses. Drawing on McCarthy-Brown's *Critical Dance Pedagogy*, I encourage improvisational prompts decentered from Eurocentric approaches to movement generation. These prompts provide clear guidelines but foster openness to form, allowing students' cultural backgrounds to find a home within the class. This approach enables the rich and nuanced ways that each individual enjoys moving to deepen their relationship with technique and dance-making. I utilize writing, discussion, and reflection as additional bodily acts that weave testimonios into movement generation, consistently centering the body and self within movement generation. Incorporating bodily acts not specifically derived from dance-making creates a distinct space for verbal and written reflection, contributing to a deeper integration of selfhood and identity in understanding who we are through movement.

This integration of testimonio and plática is essential to my pedagogical praxis in theory-based courses. When engaging in historical studies of dance forms or seminar classes requiring verbal communication, it is imperative to incorporate analysis of voices, identities, and cultures not always represented in theoretical dance discussions. This necessitates centering LGBTQIA2+ narratives, non-Western dance forms, and BIPOC voices in our viewing, writing, analyzing, and reflecting on dance histories. While reworking curricula away from Western colonial values is crucial, I also integrate intentional plática that relates content to students' lives, promoting trustworthy spaces for discussion and reflection that encourage engagement with their social-political, cultural, and spiritual identities in theoretical work. Growing up as a queer and trans* student, I had little representation of my identities within my theoretical studies of dance, further insinuating that my identities were "other." My intentional integration of students' complex identities into their relationship with dance histories ensures that who they are has a home within the lineage of art forms they are studying.

The body is central to understanding our selfhood and identities. It offers a space of possibilities where movement, lineage, and culture intersect to support our individualistic development. Dance, as an art form, has the potential to be a space of intentional embodiment that invites us to navigate the in-between spaces of identity through the physical landscape of the body. I integrate bodily acts of writing, reflection, and discussion while exploring movement and dance lineage to help all aspects of my students' identities find a home within their bodies through movement creation. Current assaults on DEI initiatives, funding for equal access to education, and rights for queer and trans* individuals highlight the essential need to cultivate trustworthy spaces in dance pedagogy, ensuring students can discover a sense of belonging within their bodies and art form, even when that belonging may not exist outside those contexts. Belonging. Selfhood. Identity. As an artist, creator, and educator, I integrate these terms into all facets of my pedagogical praxis to create artistic spaces where authenticity and humanity are the foundations that allow the self to be understood through the body.