

EMBODYING RHYTHM NATION: MULTIMODAL HIP HOP DANCE AS A SITE FOR
ADOLESCENT SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

Embodying Rhythm Nation: Multimodal Hip hop Dance as a Site for Adolescent

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This exploratory study employed qualitative methodology, specifically values analysis, to learn more about how being involved within Hip hop dance communities positively relates to adolescent development. Adolescence was defined herein as ages 13-23. The study investigated Hip hop dance communities in terms of cultural expertise (i.e. novice, intermediate and advanced/expert) to look specifically at dance narratives (i.e. peak experience narratives and “I dance because” essays) and Hip hop dance performances. The primary purpose of this dissertation was to (1) explore how adolescents use multimodal Hip hop dance discourse for social-emotional development and critical consciousness, and to (2) understand how values of Hip hop dance history relate to adolescents’ uses of multimodal Hip hop dance discourses.

Social-emotional development is defined herein through intrapersonal and interpersonal processes which give a child the ability to establish positive and rewarding relationships with others; with which children experience, express, and manage their emotions (Cohen, Onunaku, Clothier, & Poppe 2005). Social-emotional development, according to the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004), permits a child to have the ability to (1) identify and understand one’s own feelings, (2) to accurately read and comprehend emotional states in others, (3) to manage strong emotions and their expression in a constructive manner, (4) to regulate one’s own behavior, (5) to develop empathy for others, and (6) to establish and maintain relationships (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2004). Critical consciousness

is defined herein as a sociopolitical tool in education which engages learners to question the nature of their historical and social situation by providing learners with a critical lens for "reading the world" (Freire, 1970; 2005). Freire defined the goal of critical consciousness, to be that students act as subjects in the creation of democratic society (Freire, 1970; 2005). Freire implies an intergenerational equity in education between students and teachers in which both learn, question, reflect and participate in meaning-making (Freire, 1970; 2005; Mustakova-Possardt, 2003). I used an activity-meaning system research design that involved sampling discourses across Hip hop dance history and sampling various discursive expressions by adolescents participating in different Hip hop programs.

This study sampled adolescents in a cross-sectional design sampling novice, intermediate and advanced dancers. Novice dancers were sampled from a large northeastern urban non-profit organization. Intermediates were sampled from a public charter school in the American Southwest, and advanced dancers were sampled from a 2nd generation historic Hip hop dance crew in New York City. This activity meaning system design included Hip hop dance pledges. The written genre included both "a peak dance moment" in narrative format and an "I dance because" essay. Teams of dancers were prompted to choreograph a dance routine with a social justice theme for the United Nations as their audience. Dancers were asked to perform an evocative, political piece about a social justice issue of their choosing (i.e. poverty, domestic violence, abuse, trauma, discrimination and/or racism). This dissertation compares data collected from written genres and dance video recordings of the performed choreography in order to compare across the written and movement modes of dance expression and also between varying levels of cultural expertise. I analyzed this database of texts, videos, and transcripts with values analysis. Values are principles people strive to live by, enduring moral codes, norms or

cultural cues that are believed (Daiute, 2014). Therefore, as a method of narrative inquiry, values analysis, is a way to identify narrative meaning as guided by worldview and interaction in the environment (Daiute, 2014).

The major findings of this research are presented in three results chapters that describe and discuss values expressed across the activity meaning system, mode and genre, and level of expertise. I have also included a fourth chapter on preliminary results based on pilot data from the novice participants of this study and a fifth chapter showcasing results of a case study. Values across participant discourses in the activity meaning system differed substantially, with major differences between global, institutional and individual stakeholders (Group A) in comparison to local stakeholders (Group B). Local stakeholders valued relationship skills, emotional expression, self-awareness, and preservation and development whereas the global, institutional and individual stakeholders (as measured in the pledges) valued preservation, critical consciousness and social-awareness. These differences showcase a distinction between dominant values with regard to stakeholder Group A values socio-cultural values whereas Group B expresses value for both socio-cultural and social-emotional values.

Results also indicate discrepancies between value frequencies across genres: pledges, written and dance. Preservation was most dominant in the pledges, self-awareness was most dominant in the written genre, and relationship skills was most dominant in the dance genre. There was a difference between the dominant values across written modes with preservation being 14.9% more frequent in essays than narratives, and self-awareness being 15.2% more frequent in the narratives than essays. These differences are important to note since they explicate why Hip hop dance provides affordances through multimodal expression. Results mean that the various modes of Hip hop dance expression are multifaceted and that the complex

meaning system permits for the development of various capabilities and skills.

Results of the study by level of expertise were multifaceted with critical consciousness emerging across all levels of expertise only in the dance genre. This result means that there is something about the activity of dancing in communities (i.e. the embodied act of performing dance captured in the video genre here) that stimulates critical consciousness among dancers. These findings have implications for educational, therapeutic and civic interventions with adolescent dance communities and also for the preservation and development of Hip hop dance culture.