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# A Child's Dance of the Sankofa: Redefining, Reconstructing, and Reclaiming Identity

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# A Child's Dance of the Sankofa: Redefining, Reconstructing, and Reclaiming Identity



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Spring Semester 2005  
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SIT Brazil: Culture, Development and Social Justice

**Sankofa-**  
“We must go back and  
reclaim our past so we can move  
forward; so we understand why and  
how we came to be who we are today.”

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## Acknowledgements

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**Abstract**

The following research focuses on a major health crisis that exists within the black Brazilian population, that of identity and self esteem. The study will deal with the possibility of reconstructing black identity, through *dance*. Children are being socialized into a society whose system practically equivocates anything of Afro-descent, anything black, with negativity. This is a serious problem that is cultivated in a culture of violence, which is profoundly detrimental to the social and psychological development of a people. As such this is an offense to human kind. By using participant-observation and interviews the research traces how some empowerment, consciousness, and identity theories are practiced in Fundação Cidade Mãe's dance class, and how these affect the dance students' sense of identity and self-esteem. The research found that dance, if taught in a conscientious manner, provides children with the space and tools needed to truly reconstruct their identity and gain consciousness. In sum, the research poses the question: Can dance reconstruct black identity? The research then demonstrates the process and discusses the results.

## Definition of Terms

Socialization- “the process of internalization and assimilation of the social reality of the child; the norms of the society to which they pertain; the types of relationships that establish during the intellectual and social development.”<sup>1</sup>

Orixá- a diety in the Afro-Brazilian religion of Condomblé

Oxum- An orixá of Condomble. “Rules the river Oxum. Beautiful, vain, acquisitive, deceitful. Dances as if preening herself at a river bank—looking in a mirror and adjusting her adornments and clothing. Dances...holding her skirts and up on her tiptoes” (Omari, 21).

“Across the floor”- this is a dance term I use when referring to practice movements that, through the movement’s repetition, take a person from one side of the room to the other. This is usually done individually or in lines.

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<sup>1</sup> de Godoy, Eliete Aparecida. “Refletindo À Construção do Autoconceito e da Auto-Estima Pela Criança Negra.” Os Negros e a Escola Brasileira. Dec. 1999: 73-88.

“A socilaização, o processo de interiorização e assimilação da realidade social pela criança, as normas da sociedade a que pertence, os tipos de relações que se estabelecem durante o seu desenvolvimento intelectual e social (79).

## Literature Review

Pedagogy of the Oppressed discusses a method of teaching that is empowering and mutual to both the teacher and the students. Freire says this is possible through creating an atmosphere that does not use the system of oppression. Thus, the professor is not the sole source of knowledge; the students and professor are active participants in the learning process. As such, learning is not to obtain information, but to free one's self. "Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferal of information" (Freire 79). I use Freire because he presents an amazing model through which the oppressed may escape from their oppression. He says this is possible only through cognition and consciousness. One cannot teach and force-feed the desire for freedom, people have to learn that on their own. They learn consciousness by their own lives. This is why students and professors are equally valid in the learning experience. Dance perfectly reflects every component that Freire says is necessary to empower a people: mutual learning relationships, creativity, dialogue, and the desire to create consciousness.

Ferreira, author of Afro Descendente: Identidade em Construção, makes two points about black identity that so perfectly coincided with Freire's theory of pedagogical methods that I know that this way of approaching identity is correct. His main points include: The process of getting and learning identity is a process. If one takes the process away, one is left with a shell. People can be "developed socially, through a dialectic process in which the individual is as much the co-producer of his/herself" (Ferreira 44). His second influential point is that identity is not a static object, it is always changing and always under construction.

Newman, in discussing the issues of identity, notes that "a child eventually learns to modify his or her behavior to suit different people...With regard to social behavior, not only does the child learn to respond to the demands of many people, but he or she can also respond to

the demands of the community as a whole” (Newman 54). To combat the possibility of receiving obscured responses and to deftly accomplish this multivariate task, I use “multi-methodology”. In their work, Williams-Savin and Demo research whether it is possible to evaluate--scientifically, methodically, and correctly-- adolescent self-esteem. They conclude that although it is impossible to enter the minds of anyone, let alone that of an adolescent, and to indubitably determine self-esteem, it is possible to approximate this objective. The multi-methodology attempts to approach the child, using various procedures to obtain a more complete analysis. The methods they suggest range from behavioral observations, peer ratings, and interviews that explore self-feelings and actions. However, considering my limited time, I was only able to use two methods: participant-observation (which is similar to behavioral observations in that I am an observer. It goes beyond simple observation because I recognize that my presence actively affects the children, hence making me a participant. I also purposely take class with the girls, hence participation, for reasons I will later explain), and interviews, both formal and informal.



## Location Information

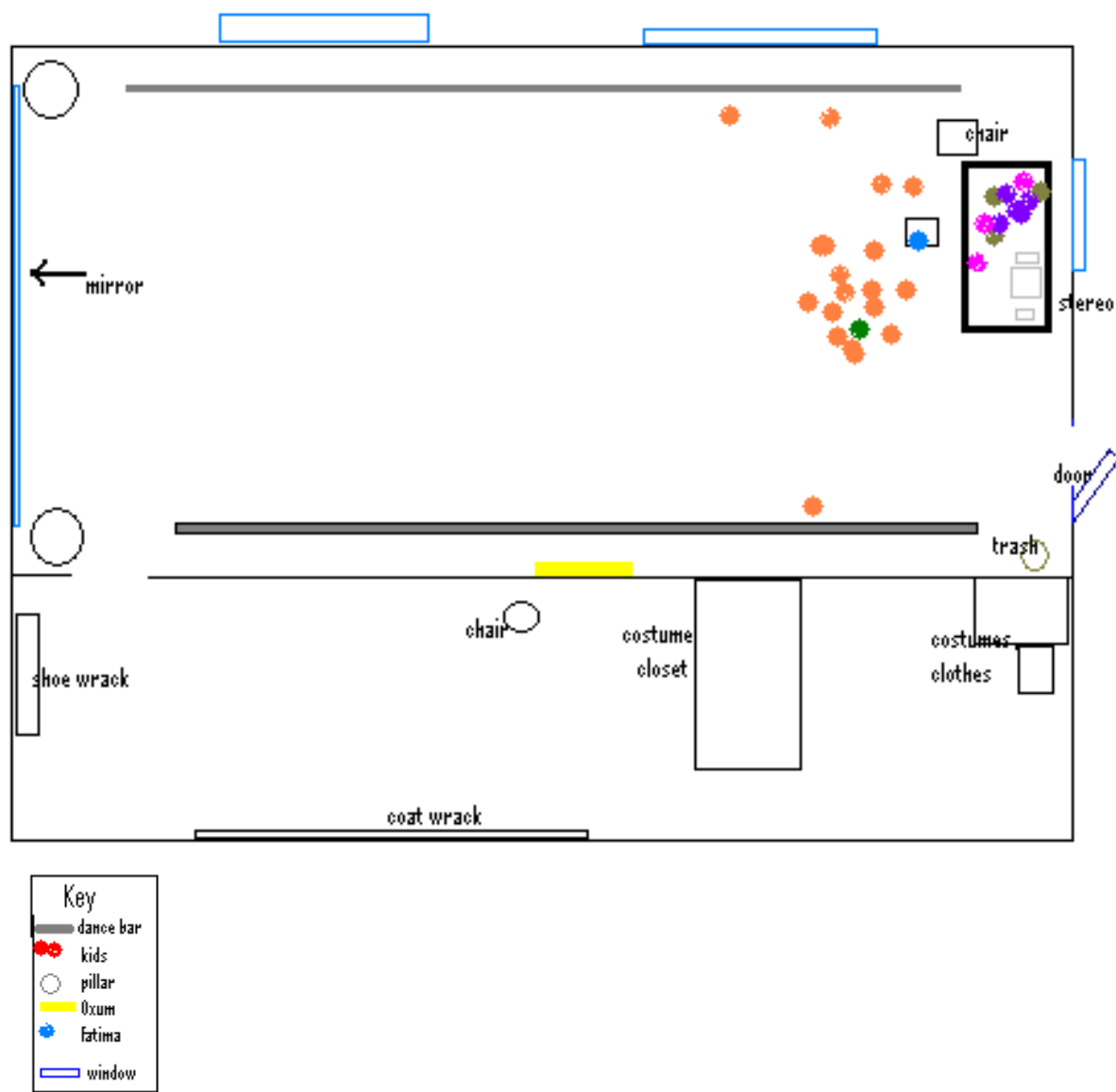
The study is conducted on the grounds of the program Fundação Cidade Mãe. FMC (Fundação Cidade Mãe) is located a 15 minute bus ride outside the center of Salvador, Brazil, in what is called Cidade Baixa, the lower city. People know how to find it because it is where the old bus garage is located (antigua garagem de ônibus). The objective of FMC is to “attend to children and adolescents who live in populated communities of the city of Salvador, and those living in the streets, generally by the force of extreme poverty, are exposed to violence in its multiple manifestations<sup>2</sup>” (FMC 15). Fundação Cidade Mãe’s reader says that one of its main goals is to attend to these children through the arts. This is done through departments such as dance, Capoeira, photography, video, painting, etc.

The dance class has a nice wooden dance floor, two metal dancing bars, and a mirror at the far end of the room (Figure 1). The room is equipped with a CD player with two speakers next to it. On the walls are posters of dancers, the majority of them white. There are only a couple posters that have black people on them. When asking Fátima about this she states that she has been searching for black dancers to replace the ones on the wall, but that they do not seem to sell posters of black dancers. The central art piece on the wall is a painting of Oxum, the orixá of fertility, love, and beauty. On the opposite side of the room there are three windows with bars over them. There is a secluded section which the girls use to escape during class, to talk and play. It is also where one stores old costumes, and the area the girls use to change into their dance clothes and place their shoes. The class usually consists of a maximum of 30 students.

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<sup>2</sup> “...para atender crianças e adolescents que habitam em comunidades populares da Cidade de Salvador e aquelas que, vivendo nas ruas, geralmente por força da extrema pobreza, estão expostas à violência em suas múltiplas manifestações” (FMC 15).

Figure 1



## Methodology

Identity is an extremely complicated and sensitive issue to breach. The fact that I am dealing with such a complex phenomenon, *involving children*, brought about a series of realizations that affected the methodology. First, because I am exploring the reconstruction of identity through dance, I have to find a way in which to capture the many aspects that compose this issue so that I will be able to explain it as thoroughly as possible. Secondly, I have to locate and present myself in such a way that the children feel they can confide in me. Because of their age I have to search for methods through which I communicate with them on their level, without leading them into answering in the “socially desirable” way; so that they can act as naturally as possible.

The research consists of information gathered from twelve dance class sessions, each lasting from either 8:30-11:30 a.m. or from 1:30-4:30 p.m., during which the researcher uses qualitative research methods of participant-observation. The last 30 minutes of every class is snack time with the students, in the cafeteria. This is a part of the educational experience. I spoke to Fátima almost every day before and after classes. I ended up doing my formal interviews with the children primarily on my last two days at FMC. I waited so long because I wanted the children to feel as comfortable with me as possible after being exposed to me for some time. This was very difficult.

My participation in the dance class, as part of the participant observation method, is extremely important in my getting to know the girls. Because I initially wanted to work with adolescents, I attended both morning and afternoon sessions for the 13-18 year old group. The 8-12 year old group I only got to know the afternoon session children, as I used this time to document important information and take some time off from the field. I go through the same

process of learning as they, occupy the same space, and assume the same role of student, all of which assists in their gaining confidence in me. I hope to not be intrusive to their natural setting, to encourage them to be as frank with me as possible. The other side to participating is that I too am able to have personal testimony to what the class is also experiencing (although my own experience differs by culture and age, I find that some sensations are not affected by these factors). There were times I wanted to simply observe and there were times when I really could do nothing but observe (to the girls' dismay and disappointment), because, in both cases, there were activities that were so culturally unique that I would not have been able to interact. I always explain to the girls when I was going to observe and assure them that it is because whatever they are doing, they definitely do *it* better. Observations are important for the simple fact that I get to see how the class is interacting, to see if and how the topic of identity and identity reconstruction is being realized.

I formally interviewed Fatima various times. With the children, the girls, I was able to conduct a total of 8 formal interviews. Their ages range from 8- 15 years old with FMC enrollment from one month to nine years! I ended up doing the majority of the interviews in pairs because it was difficult to get one girl alone away from her friends. I would ask them to please do not just say that you agree with what your friend said. Interviews are essential because they provide one of the only ways in which to gauge what the person is feeling, how the person is thinking. Only through interviews do I have the possibility confirm or negate what I experience through participant-observations. I take my observations and experiences and use these to construct questions that will hopefully allow me into the individual and will allow their own voice and interpretation. Every one of my interviews with Fátima did not come about from me asking a series of questions. When Fátima speaks, she answers above and beyond just about

everything I can think to ask. After every class Fátima and I sit down and converse or I sit and listen. The children, on the other hand, who are my main concern, I had to specifically consider. The two factors that affected how I chose my methodology, the complicated sensitivity of identity and the fact that I am working with children are extremely influential to the questions I ask and how I ask them.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The whole methodology section has reverence to and is influenced by the entire article of: Williams-Savin, Ritch C. and David H. Demo. "Conceiving or Misconceiving the Self: Issues in Adolescent Self-Esteem." Journal of Early Adolescence 3.1-2 (1983): 121-139.

## Introduction

“My sister...says that people here in Brazil do not know their history. The people do not reflect on what is the significance of being black” (Notto, 4A, 25-5-05). “She said that one time, when she was [in high school] that a professor said to her, ‘You are very intelligent for your color’...She “cried and cried and cried” (Notto, 5, 25-5-05). “On TV there’s this show called ‘Big Brother’. They never show the black girl...Brazil is atrocious with the lack of media representation of blacks. They *only* showed the long-haired, blond females! This was one of the few opportunities the media had to show Blacks positively and it was as if she did not exist” (Notto, 2A, 23-02-05). These are a few examples of some personal encounters I experience with this important issue of identity and self-esteem.

Black identity in Brazil is in a crisis. It has a violent history and a violent present of attacks, devaluation, negation, etc. “The interethnic Brazilian system negates the black segment of the Brazilian population, at the same time in that it has a dynamic of domination and exploitation of this same population. It is accustomed to expressing itself in relationships of domination and subjection, implicating a system of ethnic representations of idyllic content. As such, negative representations about black people are projected giving that group a sentiment of lesser value that serves the logic of domination and subjection<sup>4</sup>” (Loureiro 71). It is of imminent importance to recognize that this problem of identity is a major health issue that greatly affects the social and psychological development of black people. Institutional racism negatively affects black children by placing them in inferior positions. When blackness is so often held synonymous to

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<sup>4</sup> “O system interétnico brasileira nega o segmento negro da população brasileira, ao mesmo tempo em que tem uma dinâmica de dominação e exploração deste ultimo. Ele costuma traduzir-se em relações de dominção e sujeição, implicando um system de representações étnicas de conteúdo ideolico. Assim, sobre as pessoas negras são projetada representações negativas, dando a esse grupo um sentimento de menos valia, que serve as uma lógica de dominação...e...Sujeição.

inferiority and lack of motivation, it is not surprising that this socializes children to identify blackness as an un-included and negative position. From this position, one of three things will occur: 1) The child, who identifies as black, will develop a negative self-image, a negative identity. 2) The child will not identify as black in an attempt to disconnect one's self from so many negative qualities. Or, 3) the child will recognize that [s]he has the power to redefine black identity, to learn to associate with that recreated identity, and will have full claim over their own identity. Reactions 1 and 2 most often occur, which is why there is such a crisis of identity and mental health among the black population. Reaction 3 is what this study hopes to explore through dance. It is this reaction, number three, that I call the "Sankofa" method. The Sankofa bird is a mythical, West African bird that flies forward but whose head is turned around, with an egg in its mouth, forever looking behind itself. This signifies that in order to know one's present and one's future, one has to know one's past. It is only through understanding their past that black Brazilians will be able to redefine, reconstruct, and reclaim their identity.

## **What is Identity?**

For this section I desired to create a compilation, from interviews with the dancers themselves, to figure out just what is identity. It is crucial that one does not attempt to impose a school of thought onto real moving people. This is why the question, “What does the word identity mean to/for you?” is included. This is an attempt to find exactly where these girls are coming from, how they think about (or do not think about) the application of the word “identity”. The answers to these questions opens how they see themselves and their lives related to the concept of identity, and opens up a whole new venue of important analysis and consideration. I was surprised to find that age was not the key factor in determining if the girls could answer capably and knowledgeably. The answers to “What is identity?” spurred a plethora of answers, ranging from, “it is what makes a person that person”, a person’s personality, to “[‘The form in which the person appears.’]”. One girl I interviewed said that “it has to do with the identification card that you show when you want to get on the bus...identity had something to do with information about yourself, that is on a piece of paper, that one would need in case someone didn’t have information about you” (Interview #1, 11-5-05). I still greatly consider the children’s answers to this question of identity, however I did not have enough time to really delve into the topic to include it in this section. For that reason I will use more outside/academic sources to answer this question.

Identity is the expression of one’s self. It is the manifestation of one’s self, resulting from the environment in which one grows and the person’s ability to make a connection between their physical body and their mental relationship with the world. Ferreira puts the definition of identity more succinctly: “the manner in which the individual constructs their references of the world, including those through which (s)he can recognize her/himself as a determined



individual—their *identity*.” The key words whose concepts will re-appear throughout this study include “individual construction” and “determined individual”. “Individual construction” entails that the individual has power of and to their identity; that the individual is an active agent in determining what and what is not their identity. A “determined individual” is an empowered, in control person. This means that the person must recognize that they do have control, that she/he is entitled to control of his/her self. These concepts aptly demonstrate the importance and strength of identity.

The world, our everyday living space, is constantly changing and moving. We receive new stimuli and new information that we are constantly negotiating in order to create a balance between how we see ourselves and how the world perceives us. It is thus that identity is never a “fixed personal structure...It is a construct that reflects a *process in constant transformation*, whose changes of reference and new constructions of reality by the part of individuals, [is] determined by their participation in certain provocative processes of existential impact<sup>5</sup>” (emphasis given by myself) (Ferreira, 46). That is to say that identity is as much social as it is individual. Although identity is an individual manifestation, one not only learns one’s identity through social interaction, one is also considered as part of a social group when one interacts. Because identity, through social interaction, belongs to both the public and the individual, and identity becomes subject to the consequences of this interaction, it can be created, maintained, and even manipulated.

It is the manipulation of identity that is of primary concern, because identity can only be manipulated in light of a discrepancy of power among groups. In other words, manipulation of

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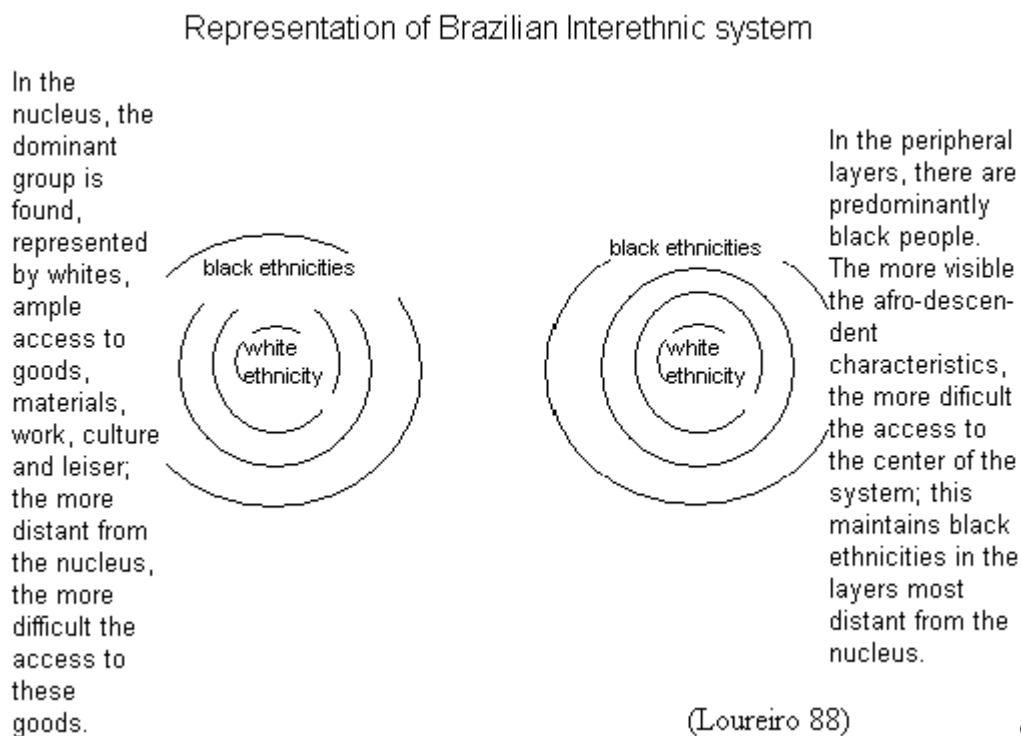
<sup>5</sup> “...identidade não é vista, aqui, como uma categoria a expressar uma estrutura pessoal fixa...É um constructo que reflete um processo em constante transformação, cujas mudanças de referências e a novas construções de realidade por parte dos indivíduos, determinadas por sua participação em certos processos provocadores de impacto existencial.”

identity can only occur when one group (or some groups) takes the role of oppressor and oppresses the other group (or groups). When this occurs we have the beginnings of a dichotomy of identity: one group's (or some groups) identity is "valid", hence desirable and/or acceptable. The other group (or groups) suddenly becomes "invalid" and undesirable and/or unaccepted. This has been the case in Brazil with European ethnic identity and Afro-Brazilian (black) ethnic identity. We could also include indigenous identities, another group who has been oppressed, but it is black identity that has really received the stigma of undesirable. Under this rubric we have the truncation of identity being an "individual construct" because the individual is stripped of power and therefore is not the one *constructing* identity.

Systems of oppression, enslavement of Africans after having exhausted indigenous population and labor have created these frameworks, these systems of interaction, and these systems reify and determine the mode of interaction that occurs within, without, and among groups. It is within these frameworks, within these limits of interaction, within these limitations of self-definition that groups form[ed] identities. As long as the "invalid" identity group also considers their identity invalid, as long as they continue creating their identity within the framework of the oppressor, whether it be consciously or sub-consciously, that group will be unable to create positive, in this case ethnic, identity. For populations that are currently in oppressed positions, validating and reclaiming identity is to empower.

## Issues of Black Identity

Black identity in Salvador, in Brazil, is in turmoil not because blacks are the majority population and also the majority of the poor. It is not because black men are an endangered group or that blacks are at the bottom of the social and economic totem pole. These are *consequences* of the problem of black identity and self-esteem:



The real problem is that blacks are not included in the *public* social interaction in which black identity is being created and constructed. Black identity has been stolen away from black individuals, from blacks as a whole. It was not stolen by force or confrontation, but by coercion and manipulation. Blackness became “bad” by default because whiteness became good,

<sup>6</sup> Title of figure: “Representação do system interétnico brasileiro”. Text on left side: “No núcleo se encontra o grupo dominante, representado por pessoas brancas, acesso amplo a bens materiais, trabalho, cultura e lazer, quanto mais distante do núcleo, mais difícil o acesso a estes bens.” Text on right side: “Nas camadas periféricas, estão, predominantemente, as pessoas negras. Quanto maior a visibilidade das características afro-descendentes, mais difícil é o acesso ao centro do system, que mantém as etnias negras nas camadas distantes do núcleo.”

successful, beautiful and free. The beauty, power, and freedom of blacks: the Quilombos, Palmáres and what these communities stood for; the Condomblé and capeoira, and the strength these ways of living represented, were forgotten and replaced with a white and/or whitening aesthetic. Or rather, they are displaced and made trivial:

“It is important that we comment that when nothing positive is found in the history of a group and in its past generations, it is not because these facts do not exist. It is clear that every culture, every ethnic group has people that detach (separate) themselves by their surprising acts, have their history, in which their habits win life and significance. As it so happens, then, that when a minority group is inserted into a system of domination and exploration, the history of the group is detoured, the men and women that make important movements of the group are omitted, and when this is not possible, they are cruelly transformed into ‘bad elements’, into ‘villains’; their culture is devalued and folkloricized...”<sup>7</sup> (Loureiro 54)

This is an extremely important point because up until now, I believe I have been giving the impression that the black population is a victim of an overt and apparent oppression, when the majority of the oppression is both systematic and *accepted* as the natural state of things. “The naturalization of racism and sexism in the media systematically reproduces stereotypes and stigmas, especially of black [girls], causing harm to the affirmation of their [ethnic] identity and social value<sup>8</sup>” (NOMMW 21). It is not only the media that “naturalizes” the negative connotations of black ethnic identity, it is the social structure that creates and allows the existence of such a media stance that the ability, the option to control identity, to possess it and own it has mostly been stripped out of black hands, only for it to be, in later generations, given up freely in return for some inclusion, as an escape from this alienated state of not being in possession of one’s community, of one’s identity.

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<sup>7</sup> - “É importante comentarmos que, quando nada de positivo é encontrado na história do grupo e em suas gerações passadas, não é porque esses fatos não existam. É clara que toda cultura, todo grupo étnico tem pessoas que se destacaram por seus feitos surpreendentes, tem sua história, na qual seus hábitos ganham vida e significado. Acontece, porém, que, quando um grupo minoritário está inserido em um sistema de dominação e exploração, a história do grupo é deturpada, os homens e mulheres que fizeram movimentos importantes para o grupo são omitidos e, quando isso não é possível, são cruelmente transformados em ‘maus elementos’, ‘em vilões’; sua cultura é desvalorizada e folclorizada”

<sup>8</sup> “Analysis and Proposals Network of Organizations of Black Brazilian Women Preparing for the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Conference Against Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. We, Brazilian Black Women. May. 2001: 13-46. Brazil

Many choose to run away from blackness, trying to “whiten” away from blackness. Kids do not want an identity that is inferior. They do not want to connect themselves with, to think they are connected to an identity that is considered inferior, that is always shown as a “bobo”, as “un-intelligent”, and “working for nothing” (Conversation between Shawnrey and Fátima, 21-5-05). “The socialization of the child occurs in charged circumstances at a high degree of emotion and, being this, without this emotional connection with other significances the construction of self-knowledge would be difficult” (de Godoy 78). Kids begin to identify with something “better”, with a “better” identity, with a more positive history, and with a history period.

“I ask Jessica and Mariana to describe themselves. They are confused. I do not want to lead them but they are young so I describe myself: I say I am nice, quiet, love to study, am black, pretty, etc. Jessica answered. The first thing she says when she describes herself is, “I am white”, she flips her hair back and repeats, “I am white, pretty...When I get older I want to be like my aunt. She’s also white. Or I can be like my other aunt, she’s ‘morena’. I can be morena too” (Notto, 16-5-05, 92B)

This little girl is eight years old and although she considers herself white, there are a couple of factors that contradict her claim. First, she is a student of Fundação Cidade Mãe and is taking what she calls “Afro-dance” because she wants to learn more about Africa. Why would she want to learn about Africa? Second, I do not know the neighborhood she lives in, but for her to be such friends with Mariana, and to be so comfortable in a classroom full of black girls is also interesting. I am not saying that as “white” she should be uncomfortable; I am just thinking back on my own personal experience here in Salvador and noting how different the “white” and black ways of living, because seeing as how “whites” tend to have more privileges and are not able to readily identify black experiences.

The social system creates great difficulties in the process of positive identity of black persons with their pertinence group. As a consequence, there is a preponderance of negative attributes felt as pertinent to the “I” found in the member of discriminated minorities. These negative attributes are created with the perverse objective to devalue the minority group, diminishing the positive identity of the same. Created

and sustained by a network of social relationships, these are just being interjected for the exploited minority groups, suffocating the positive identity of its members<sup>9</sup> (Loureiro 55)

They relate blackness, they connect the black identity as the dominant and oppressive group defines it. They associate this identity that they have (and do not want) with the same negative images that dominate media, history books, job system, etc. So what has happened to blacks is not that they do not have an identity anymore, it is that it has been so publicly denounced and so socially devalued that they do not want to associate with that identity anymore. Because to claim this ethnic identity is to say that you are bad, are not intelligent, and will be unsuccessful. One participant said this in an interview:

S- Are you proud of being black?

MJ- Yes, of course.

S- Cool. Was there a time when you didn't think that way?

(She didn't look at me. She closed her body off to me and sounded defensive when I asked the question.)

MJ- What do you mean?

S- There was a time when I was a little ashamed of being my color. I didn't think it was bad or anything, I just didn't want to be so dark. But now I love my color and everything about me. (I thought it was only fair that I give the true story about myself. It was good that I did because then she wasn't afraid to tell me how she really was.)

MJ- Yes. I thought people didn't like me because of my black skin, rough hair, and just being ugly.

S- Why did you think this?

MJ- Because of the kids.

S- What kids?

MJ- The ones in my neighborhood. They were White and everything and they would make fun of me every day.

The interesting thing is that identity, especially black identity, is double-pronged: it can be both "imposed" socially and/or personally felt. What happens with some people and their black identity is that they recognize that they are black because the world will not let them be otherwise. When it is "socially imposed" it is because for blacks, some more than others, this identity has a visible component that allows society determine, judge, and exert control over it.

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<sup>9</sup> "O sistema social cria grandes dificuldades no processo de identificação positiva das pessoas negras com seu grupo de pertencimento. Com consequência, há uma preponderância de atributos negativos sentidos como pertencentes ao Eu, encontrados nos membros das minorias discriminadas. Esses atributos negativos são criados com o objetivo perverso de desvalorizar o grupo minoritário, minando a identidade positiva do mesmo. Criados e sustentados por uma rede de relações sociais, eles acabam sendo introjetados pelas minorias exploradas, abafando a identidade positiva de seus membros." (Loureiro 55)

This characteristic of black identity has its origins in the slave days, where the values given to certain “colors” initiated people, who would nevertheless always be “black”, into a superficial, but very effective and divisive hierarchal relationship. What the person sees as one’s self (or attempts to see self as and then attempts to make others also believe), comes hand in hand with society’s already prepared stratification system. Society has been trying and succeeding in defining who and what is black.

### **Dance Space: 3 hours against the world**

The actual dance class provides the space and sets the scene for identity reconstruction to combat the negative connotations that are created for blacks. By these means, the dancers and Fátima are able to create an environment, a reality in the classroom, which assists in the rediscovery and redefinition of the world. Fátima and the girls have created a space that is unique to all the other spaces that these girls experience. Dance has allowed for a type of education that Freire says is the “the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination [that] denies that man is abstract...and unattached to the world...” (81). The notion of a people being abstract is dangerous because people can manipulate abstract concepts as they are unable to manipulate real-life persons.

A specific way in which dance denies the abstract notion of black people is by bringing their reality out of the hands of outsiders, those who can do nothing but theorize and speculate and placing that responsibility in the hands of the people who live this reality. Dance class gives these girls the opportunity and ability through the process of creativity. They creatively validate their lives, their history, their selves, and the things in their environment that make them and influence them: their identities (Freire). “There are three hours against the world<sup>10</sup>”, Fátima said on May 9<sup>th</sup> when discussing what she does as the professor of dance.

Through their theatrical dance, the girls show the lives they live. They look like a flock of dark birds. They would flock and wave from one side of the room to the other. Chitter-chatter for a few seconds, enjoy the conversation for only a few moments and take off again. It was a dance of chaos, their high pitched conversations escalating to short quick screams, some girls splayed out on the ground, while others, in two’s or three’s, then groups of six or seven,

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<sup>10</sup> “São 3 horas contra o mundo” (Notto, observation 9-05-05).



swooped down and gathered others up in a mass of running, screaming, jumping and gesturing. (Elaboration of Notto, observation 11-05-05<sup>11</sup>).

This theatre was pretty much left all to the girls and it was really interesting how things turned out. There were not scripts, the girls have no theatre training. What we saw, what they were doing was reenacting their everyday lives. It is phenomenal to see how characters emerged, what types of characters emerged, and to see what girl decided to be what character. They themselves decided if they wanted to be good or bad; mother, or daughter; gossip or teacher. The plots they created and the characters they involved were so complex that it I think it could only have been inspired by real world, their world situations. to continuation of (from successive building and escalating) violence in the scenes telling of every day life from where the girls come from” (Notto 86, observation 11-05-05)

I see this reenactment as a manifestation of a fight to escape oppression, in which the oppression is the naming of their world. These girls, through their movement and dialogue, when they involved me and Fátima in their reenactment, they were naming to us, naming to themselves their lives, their realities. When a person has power of naming, they can name the world thus defining and possessing. “If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus and existential necessity.” (Freire 88). When kids talk about their own situations, in which their words, in terms of their experience and understanding, they are also claiming, reclaiming, and renaming themselves and what it means to live in their neighborhood, to play their games, to see the crimes they see. They learn identity, black identity by living their lives and later having a space to tell and express their stories, their black culture, through dance or simply in the dance space. This gives them a means of expression, a way to express themselves, hence a proclamation of black identity. This is identity (re)discovery

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<sup>11</sup> “The overall theme/movement style was organized chaos. How the girls moved resembled a flock of birds that gets rocks thrown at them, they disperse, group together. How the birds look in the sky when they are searching for a way to create their flocks” (Notto, observation 11-05-05).

through their selves, and their reality through the reality of their community, their families, and their friends. They redefine themselves, taking the power away from the oppressors.<sup>12</sup>

There is a constant struggle between the world, what these girls live day in and day out. There is a constant give and take in the process of reconstructing identity. The space and opportunity are provided, but it is up to the students to make the choice between the noise and the silence, between the chaos and the order, between self-reflection and immediate reaction. They have the opportunity in the dance space to take advantage of these three hours and use them to combat the limited range of ideas and lifestyles that has been prescribed, described, and decided upon by a society that does not even recognize them as autonomous agents. They are given a choice experience three hours of silence as opposed to a world of noise; to experience relaxation and tranquility in light of the chaos; to explore options instead of being mandated by orders. These are a few of the alternatives that these girls explore through dance.

#### Silence vs. Noise, Relaxation vs. Agitation

Previously stated observations give a glimpse into the lives of these girls. One only has to walk down the streets of Salvador to experience this overabundance of energy, noise, and agitation. Stories from the dancers only confirm the almost chaotic existence that makes up their lives. This is why it is interesting and important to disclose that universally, the favorite part of the class for most of the girls was the relaxation period. Every interviewee revealed that the end of the class relaxation period was her favorite time. I find it extremely interesting that the part of class the girls most commemorate is that moment of peace and silence. They actually come to expect to have some quiet time. Many girls state that they do not have any other opportunity to experience this tranquility. One girl says that she uses this time to think about life, to think about

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<sup>12</sup> During the improvisation period the dancers and Fátima discuss the significance of the movements, gestures, words that they did during their creativity time. This even more definitely secures their position in naming their reality through their creativity.

class, to think about the day. This fact immediately demonstrates that dance is allowing the time and providing the means for these children to reflect upon their past and their situations. It is the silence and relaxation they find in dance that permits the dancers to stand apart from the constant hustle and bustle that probably distracts her from reflection, hence hindering the process of reconstructing identity. Another important fact to note is that the words used to describe the movements, the dance, are “light”, and “relaxing”. Even girls who did not particularly care for the light and relaxing dance movements describe it as such.

Orders vs. options, (de)limitations vs. choices

On May, 16<sup>th</sup> in the interviews, a few girls mentioned that they felt more comfortable when they dance in the dance class. Two girls, both whom have been in dance for over three years, both say that they do not feel embarrassed about themselves, do not feel ashamed and shy anymore to dance in this space with these types of dance movements. Over two-thirds of the dance students interviewed state that they enjoy more and feel free with the “Afro dance” they learn with Fátima. When I asked them if dance was different in the classroom than their homes every single child answered, “Yes”. The dance that has the most influence, that always comes up in a conversation about dance is pagogy. All but three of the girls interviewed say they prefer Afro-dance to pagogy. When one dances pagogy, they say, one has to do what the music says. One has to “break” their body to get the movement right. There was great emphasis put on the fact that in Afro-dance one is free to do whatever movement one feels and that no one will judge if one does a different type of movement. This is very important to many of the girls.

I find this fact very telling of the nature of the socialization that these girls experience. People assume that socialization, especially through something as fun and involving as dance, is natural and desirable. Yet here are these girls expressing their discomfort with the dance pagogy

because it places limits on how they would like to express themselves, on the movements they would like to do.

## How Does Dance Do It? The Practice

Before coming to Fundação Cidade Mãe I had the idea that one could participate in identity work solely through the dance movements themselves. My previous sections demonstrate the reality that for children, movement alone is not sufficient for identity exploration. In the [re]discovery of black, ethnic identity and self-esteem there is a great need for the dance space to be the place in which one feels uninhibited to self-express, share experiences, and validate their lives. The previous section discussed the dance space and how the space sets the scene for the girls. Now we will delve into the dance movements and consider how dance movements provide the girls the opportunity to redefine, reconstruct, and reclaim black identity. “Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation” (Freire 84).

“We were going across the floor when I notice that Fátima started doing movements that looked suspiciously familiar. It looked like she became more regal and floating. She was holding her arms in a wide bowl above her head. One hand and arm more inclined than the other and she was looking proudly at her hand, as if seeing something there that greatly pleased her. I thought it looked like an Orixá, and it was! She didn’t tell the students at first. We simply tried to copy the movement. And you could tell it was simply imitation...We tried a couple of times, terrible: feet stumbling and not finding the rhythms, arms flat and boring, etc.”

This is an example of what Freire would call banking, bank teaching. This is a way of teaching that “becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (Freire 72). Notice how the student and I are simply imitating. I remember feeling just plain weird and frustrated. I saw the movement and I tried to copy. It meant nothing to me, there was no connection with me and the movement. There was something Fatima had while she was dancing, while she was doing the movement that we just did not have and could not even pretend we had. What results from this method? It is action without the dialogue, without words, without understanding.

Then she said to really look at the movements. What does it look like? Kids say it looks sexy. Yes! [she says]. She starts moving her shoulder blades gracefully...the energy from this back-shoulder [movement] travels till the tips of her fingers...She tells them that this movement shows “femininity”, “seduction”...She pulls her arm from down low at her hips, ‘Pick up your mirror’. Her hand travels in a slow, wide arc from hip to head and then to the other side of her body, all the time looking into her hand. “I am so beautiful”, she says to her hand...“O! I’m beautiful, I am a goddess!” The girls giggle at this.

It is not just that Fátima was simply telling the girls that they were beautiful or should consider themselves beautiful. I had both the opportunity to observe and participate in has an element of importance that more than surpasses simple counter-evidence. It is contextualized and has origins both from realities of the girls’ lives and from black Brazilian life. It is this fact that makes all the difference. Fátima asks them if they know about the orixás. They dispassionately say they do know. She asks them to tell her who this Oxum was. They tell her, still not realizing the power that escapes their lips, still within the trap of accrediting the dominate/dominating culture. Even this only brings the dance, the talk, the historical significance to a certain level. The verbal dialogue with the teacher can simply be “parroting”. Physically dancing out a dance of their history after having this dialogue brings it to the next level.

This movement is “inspired” by Oxum, Goddess of fertility, love, beauty. She’s the goddess who always has a mirror with her. She is an Orixá of Condomble. She repeats the movements ...emphasizing that it’s a different type of seduction that’s “smooth” and “confident”. Then the last move she says you “dominate with the snake”. Know your path, know where you’re going with the serpent, she says.

The key in this observation is that Fátima used the orixá Oxum. This is something special and unique to Brazilian black culture that both anchors contextualizes. It is a fact that existed before the girls were born. It is an anchoring fact both in their culture and in their way of living. To have such positive and personal characteristics brought to life, through dance shows the girls that they already have a history of beauty and grandeur. It allows them to make a connection to their history, to their family’s history, to a positive history of blackness in Brazil. With Oxum, the girls will never have to worry about this figure suddenly being “out of style” or

obsolete because Oxum not only occupies the history of black Brazilians, she also continues to greatly influence Brazilian culture. They have now danced the dance of a powerful, beautiful figure which is part of their history. The dance created from the movements is fact of their beauty, not a conjured up out of the sky, not just an empty message, a verbalism.

This whole time the girls are listening and trying out the movements with these mental images, ideas and the movements change radically for many girls. The movements are not as stiff and wooden. Many girls...talk softly through the movements while going across the floor: "seduction", "mirror", "I'm beautiful" etc. (Work Journal 83-85)

What really and truly personally, individually connects the girl to her history and transforms her identity is her dialogue with *herself*, connecting everything: the movement, its history, its significance to her life, and her recognition of its significance. There were some girls who were very into the dance, the message, into claiming the beauty, the history, and the blackness. They put their own movement into the orixás movement and tell themselves, affirm to themselves, through the mediums of their history, their beauty. .

One must note that it is, the movements alone that helped to bring these girls to this realization. Dance is not simply movement because true dance seeks to capture and express the essences of a moment, a sentiment, an idea. This is impossible without some connection between the message and the movement. It is the dialogue that occurs during the movement that brings it to life, gives the movement dance-like quality so that it can have a reconstructive, transformative, and empowering characteristic.

"One movement that I took as an offering, somewhat humbling movement F. did not allow to be as such. The movement: 2 arms, slightly curved at elbows, hands slightly cupped as if holding water. Bring hands up past face and slightly in front of and above head to do a slow descent down. We were doing it as if we were bowing down and offering, but F told us to keep chest up and head up and keep eye contact with whom we were making the offering. Hence, it was a regal offering, almost an offering of the self, as if we were presenting ourselves, saying "this is what I am and it is beautiful". The other way Said, "Please take my offering. She wanted us to present, not humbly offer" (Notto, observation 12-05-05)

**Conclusion: Does it Work?**

“Blackness” does not need to be taught because these girls are black every single day of their lives. Even if they are not yet conscious, and are still psychologically denying their identity, their world and how the world sees them is black. There is no right way, no “better” way to be black. There is no way to “teach” blackness, or teach black identity. Black identity is socially constructed and right now society has created a terrible stigma around what is black identity. This is a reason many children, many people do not feel empowered enough to counter this construction. Through the process of creativity, they creatively validate their lives, their history, their selves, the things in their environment that make them, influence them, their identities.

This study is evidence that the issue of identity is one of the most complex concepts to explore. I originally concluded that dance was helping these girls gain more self-confidence, was giving them a venue through which they could boost their self-esteem, then they are on the road to reconstructing their identity. However, this conclusion met two problems. First, after speaking with a few of the girls, I found that a number of them did have self-confidence and appeared to have high self-esteem. However, they defined themselves and their beauty based on the approval and appreciation of other men, especially white men (Notto, observations 19-05-05). Many of the girls, when speaking about themselves and their self-confidence literally said that they felt (would feel) better about themselves when (if) a white man, with straight blond hair, and green eyes, approached them, even disrespectfully. They said they felt (would feel) undesirable and offended when (if) a old black man or a black men did the same thing to them. I find this both problematic and interesting when dealing with this issue because it seems that one can have positive self-esteem yet still be completely oblivious to the social-historical



implications of their actions and origins of thought. I believe that “the naturalization of racism and sexism...systematically reproduces stereotypes and stigmas, especially of black women, causing harm to the affirmation of their [ethnic] identity and social value” (NOBBW 21). The second occurrence that had me seriously considering my first hypothesis was my conversation with Fátima. She said that it is only through reconstructing identity, black identity, could blacks then have positive self-esteem. If one knows the positive side, the whole truth of their history and identity, then one will be able to make a positive and accurate connection with their identity.

Dance provides a frame of reference, a medium through which one may recognize one's rights: the right to space, the right to corporal awareness, the right to the knowledge of one's history, the right to dialogue. This is possible because the dance area itself provides the space and time to talk about one's story, to share what happens in one's life. Later, one is encouraged to ask “why?” Why do I live in this street and not in richer one. Why does the television put such a stigma on blackness? Why are Afro-Brazilian religions not accepted as positive? Why are so many of my friends and neighbors victims of sex crimes? Dance is an attempt to situate the children. The movements, the philosophy behind the movements, the spatial awareness, the origin and meaning of movements, the dialogue are all the components of dance that make it another step in the process of redefining, reconstructing, and reclaiming this perilous structure called black ethnic identity.

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## Appendix

### Personal/professional reasons for research

My whole middle school, high school, and college life, I have been surrounded, in the academic field, by people who identify as white and mostly are upper-middle class. When I first arrived in Arkansas for 7<sup>th</sup> grade, even though I had all A's on my report card, I was immediately placed in the "inclusion"/special education classes, where there just "happened" to be the majority, if not all, of the black students. I had to prove to my teachers that I was actually intelligent and they finally placed me in honors classes. I was always the only black girl in the class. I watched for years as my first classmates in Arkansas stayed in the "inclusion classes", the classes where it is always loud, the teachers, for some reason, cannot induce order, and a good portion of the people barely pass. After my second year of college I decided to study this. I went to a local Boys and Girls Club, wrote proposals, etc., and got permission to do my study: Adolescents' Attitude Toward Education. In return for allowing me to do my study there I offered my services of any of my skills. I decided to teach a dance class. It was there that I noticed an amazing phenomenon that was the power of dance, and actually any other art expression that engaged the children. The special aspect about dance, however, was that most, if not all of these African American children knew how to dance and had a lot of practice. Ninety-five percent of the dances were sexually suggestive, ninety-five percent of the song lyrics were both sexually suggestive and violent. All of the kids knew both the dances and the lyrics, and these were the only dances and songs they had around.

It was then that I realized how much of a socializing factor that dance, in particular, is for these children. Yet these children were dancing to what the popular media put out for them, what MTV and, sadly, BET put out for them and these seemed to greatly influence the vocabulary, mannerisms, identity of these children. I figured that the same thing was not happening in Brazil. Brazil has a historical dances, created by Afro-Brazilians that lack the extreme sexuality and violence of Afro-North Americans. I wanted to see how and if having these non-sexual, more Afro-cultural dances influenced the dancers, the children and their attitude towards themselves and education.

My personal and professional motives for this research are very intertwined. I love the arts, from dance, theatre, and fiction writing and have always worked well with children. I believe that the revolutionary way to educate is through the arts and with increased interest and awareness of media influence on socialization. In the end I found more than I bargained for. I found a place that uses dance as a positive socializing factor in which the children themselves are encouraged and empowered to redefine what dance means for them and express that, express their identity. I have spent too many years watching so many black North Americans being left behind in schooling, them not caring and simply not being cared about. I knew, I felt that the schooling system, as it is, is completely insufficient and useless. If one does not teach, if one cannot learn things that are relative and connected to one's everyday life, what is the point? I figured that dance, and other arts, as well as media analysis would be tools that would empower African Americans as well as Afro-Brazilians.

### **Justification**

I had honestly hoped that the justification for a study such as mine would be apparent from the data and theory that I presented, however, should the justification remain obscure, I will provide concrete reasons...For study: alternative and affective teaching methods. Teaching as a way of exploring to assist in the creatin and growth of human beings, of conscious citizens. Why dance?: it is teaching through the arts which already counter traditional learning styles, the traditional

I had originally planned to conduct this project at Ilê Aiyê because I wanted to be in a place, to dance a dance, to be surrounded by people who really and truly danced Black identity. Before this project started, before meeting Fátima, I believed that black identity could really only be found in “Afro-dance”. This meant that the movements, the music words, the instruments, the clothes, the hair, the jewelry all had to be saturated with “African-ness”, with “blackness” in order to truly instill Black identity. I write Black identity in this way for a reason. It is because I learned that my view was truly only one type of black identity, one method of expressing and creating black identity.

### Interview Questions

Portuguese:

1. *Qual é seu nome?*
2. *Quantos anos têm na Cidade Mãe?*
3. *Quantos anos têm você?*
4. *Participou em outra oficina ante da oficina de dança?*
5. *Porque escolheu dança?*
6. *Gosta de dançar?*
7. *Como se senti quando está dançando? Corpo, a mente?*
8. *Quais movimentos gostam mais? Pode-me mostrar como são? Por que gosta?*
9. *Que mudou de sua vida depois da oficina de dança?*
10. *Aula de dança é diferente que a dança da rua, bairro, casa? Por que?*
11. *Si você tivesse uma palavra só para descrever-se, qual seria? Explique.*
12. *Descreva-se.*
13. *O que significa identidade pra você? Qual é sua identidade?*
14. *Como você se identifica?*
15. *Você se acha bonita, inteligente, boa pessoa?*
16. *Que tipa de dança você está aprendido aqui?*

English:

1. *What is your name?*
2. *How old are you?*
3. *How many years have you been at Cidade Mãe?*
4. *Have you participated in any other department other than the dance department?*
5. *Why did you choose dance?*
6. *Do you like dance?*
7. *How do you feel when you are dancing? Your mind? Your body?*
8. *Which movements do you like the most? Can you show me? Why do you like them?*
9. *Have you changed since you started dance here? What changed?*
10. *Is dance class here different from the dance you do in your home, in the street, in your neighborhood? How? Why?*
11. *If you had one word to describe yourself, what would it be? Why?*
12. *Describe yourself.*
13. *What does the word identity mean?*
14. *What does the word identity mean to/for you? What is your identity?*
15. *Do you think you are pretty, intelligent, a good person?*
16. *What type of dance are you learning here?*

### **Limitations**

I ended up lumping both groups of dancers together, the 8-12 year old group and the 13-17 year old group because I would not have gathered enough information with only one group. Both groups had extremely interesting aspects and ideology to contribute about dance and identity. In some ways the maturity level of the child, in terms of consciousness, did not correlate with the child's age; in other words, participants in their childhood and adolescent periods both had participants who were unable to articulate their identity, and those who were. Both had participants who were extremely resistant to the option dance provided and lacked consciousness. However, there were some important issues that definitely influenced "why" the kids behaved as such and this fact directly correlates to the uniqueness of each childhood stage. Adolescents have issues and pressures that younger children just do not have to deal with. Young children, on the other hand, have their own, concerns. I was not able to explore this difference. I highly suggest that for future research possibilities.

Taking into consideration weekends, public holidays, and city bus strikes, I ended up spending only a total of ten days at FCM. Hence time was a definite obstacle. Identity is a very sensitive and private subject to deal with, and speaking with children about their identity is even harder because they are truly within the midst of socialization. Some children are just realizing that a world exists outside of their own world, so for some of these children, speaking about their identity was completely alien. Then add in the factor that a practical stranger was asking them such personal things. I felt I would have gained much better and more pure information if I had spent more time with the girls. As it was, I held off my interviewing to the absolute last moment, not because I was procrastinating. I left off interviewing of the children because I know they did not know me.

### ISP Experience

1. Could you have done this Project in the USA? What data or sources were unique to the culture in which you did the project?

I would not have been able to do this project in the United States most obviously because this is a Brazil program, created by a black Brazilians, with a focus on black, Brazilian needs and issues.

2. Could you have done any part of it in the USA? Would the results have been different? How?

Yes, I would have been able to do a similar project in the USA with a program that teaches black students, disadvantaged students through the arts, such as dance, photography, painting, etc. The results may or may not have been different. I believe that the results would have been slightly different, but I find that many of the issues that Afro-Brazilians go through are very similar to the issues that affect Afro-Americans, and perhaps the whole of the Pan-African community. They would have been similar in that across the board people of African descent, black people, tend to be in lower socio-economic positions. Blacks having been an exploited people all suffer the heritage of this exploitation.

3. Did the process of doing the ISP modify your learning style? How was this different from your previous style and approaches to learning?

My learning style has changed significantly. There were so many problems in my work that I had to really learn how to be more spontaneous and creative with my observations, my posed question, and with many of the other situations that arose. Also the amount of time allotted really changed my learning style in that I learned to really pay attention to tiny details, to really go for quality because obtaining large quantities of information opportunities is not an option. My previous styles of learning were more organized. I knew pretty much exactly when and from where the information was going to arrive. It was also easier because I did not have to combine secondary sources, other people's theory in the process. My work was pure ethnography. In this was I felt freer to approach the subject from whatever angle that pulled me the most because I was not limited by theory I was supposed to be using for a topic I was supposed to be broaching.

4. How much of the final monograph is primary data? How much is from secondary sources?

Primary data is 70%, 30% for secondary.

5. What criteria did you use to evaluate your data for inclusion in the final monograph? Or how did you decide to exclude certain data?

The information that I gathered from my secondary sources really shaped the direction in which the project was going to develop. People were stressing having a good rounded theory and very good secondary sources. After reading the sources I started seeing patterns

that was applicable in practice that brought the theory to life. The occurrences that I experienced were manifestations of the theory I was reading (or rather theories that were manifested in field occurrences) and I included these in my final monograph.

6. How did the “drop-off”s” or field exercises contribute to the process and completion of the ISP?

I had to find all the locations by myself. The drop-off started me out early with being unafraid to ask questions and directions. Field exercises just helped to prepare my mind for what I was going to have to do in terms of being prepared for just about anything.

7. What part of the MTFSS most significantly influenced the ISP process?

My work/observation journal most significantly influenced the ISP process because it allowed me to experience having to constantly write down information that I experienced. Having to write in this journal before this the ISP process prepared me: I knew what a better work method was for me, I knew that I get tired at night before I wrote, etc. I was prepared for these obstacles before the ISP and so was better able to find solutions for problems.

8. What were the principal problems you encountered while doing the ISP. Were you able to resolve these and how?

Always the most popular problem I had while doing my ISP was lack of time. I had too little time to be in my location for multiple reasons. First, the place where I thought I could do my project actually did not start until after my project was supposed to be finished. No one realized this because I was one of the first people to want to do dance at Ilê Aiyê after Carnival season. So, I lost a whole week looking for and trying to find another place that I could study dance and identity. The second time issue came from day to day issues: sudden holidays, bus strikes, extremely late bus arrivals. So in the end, instead of having three weeks to do my project, I was left with a total of about seven days. I have just had to make-do with the time I have. My project had to take another approach because the time I had available in no way would have permitted quality work. Another problem came from the fact that I had to procure another place to do my project. I had been preparing my secondary research and my primary hypothesis based on this place in which I was to do my project. When I found I could not do my project where I initially thought, I had to change a lot. I had to change my interview questions, I had to focus on other sources, etc. In sum, I had to change my project focus to encompass this change in location. I could have and should have tried to find out this information before. My lack of cultural knowledge about the grand influence of Carnival was very apparent here.

9. Did you experience any time constraints? How could these have been resolved?

Yes, I did not have as much time as I wanted to get to know the community I in which I participated. I didn't have as much time as I wanted to observe. These could have been resolved if I had had three weeks instead of seven days.



10. Did your original topic change and evolve as you discovered or did not discover new and different resources? Did the resources available modify or determine the topic?

Yes, as I answered in a previous question, my secondary sources pretty much shaped the direction in which I was going to treat my hypothesis and question. It helped to orient me with what research had already been done on my topic and I ended up picking aspects of my field experience that was related to some of the ideas that my readings were treating.

11. How did you go about finding resources: institutions, interviewees, publications, etc?

I found my institution (after the Ilê scare) by talking who was supposed to be my advisor. She gave me suggestions of places that supposedly dealt with identity and dance and I went to visit them to see if these places more or less had to do with my topic. Interviewees were participants in the dance class or the dance teacher herself. I did not have to find these people. I found publications by listening to other people talk about their subjects, some of the books they read. I read these books also if they sounded interesting. I spoke to both Damiana and Bill and received help from them after I told them briefly about my project.

12. What methods did you use? How did you decide to use such methods?

I used participant observation, interviews, and experimentation. Identity is such a difficult, complex, social and individual subject that I knew I could not just rely on my own observations from afar. I danced as well as observed the dancers first to experience what they were experiencing. Second, I danced with the dancers so that they felt that I was really a part of the class and not just some researcher. I did interviews so that I could really get the point of view from the dancers, or at least the point of view that they presented to me as a researcher. Finally, I created an experiment/activity to really put my hypothesis and experiences to action.

13. Comment on your relations with your advisor.

The person who was supposed to be my advisor did not help me at all. I ended up adopting an advisor who was absolutely wonderful. She was completely and unreservedly available for me. She treated me as a friend, study colleague, and daughter and helped me from beginning to end. She talked with me and to me the whole way through my research experience and was one of the main reasons that I felt ready to take on this project. Working with her did not only help with my project, it really opened my eyes to political and social issues, to self-reflection, and self development. The relationship, I felt, was completely mutual and reciprocal: she learned as much from me as I learned from her. It was collaborative and a true growing experience.

14. Did you reach any dead ends? Hypotheses which turned out to be not useful? Interview or visits that had no application?

I did not exactly reach dead-ends (my advisor did not let me; she always encouraged me to look deeper). I did, however, have to keep modifying my hypothesis and/or expectations of directly answering my hypothesis. I did not have any visits or interview that were not

applicable because when I looked deeper I found that what I initially thought was useless was actually a reflection of the complexity of my topic.

15. What insights did you gain into the culture as a result of doing the ISP, which you might not otherwise have gained?

I gained real life experiences of what we read about in our readers. It is one thing to read the horror, the happiness, the misery, the excitement, it is quite another to experience it and/or hear from the perspective of one who has lived the experience. My ISP experience allowed me to personally and organically connect with the circumstances in which many Afro-Brazilians find themselves.

16. Did the ISP process assist in your adjustment to the culture? Integration?

Yes, I know I am more adjusted and integrated into the culture because I had time to specifically spend time with and share their reality with these children. Hearing the stories of these children and thinking about the secondary sources, I feel I began to not only contextualize social situations of the people, but I was also able to just be a person and be a part of their lives in the best way I know how.

17. What were the principal lessons you learned from the ISP process?

I learned to have a lot of patience and perseverance. I learned to have a positive attitude no matter how many terribly wrong things have occurred because in the end things will turn out how they should. I learned disciplined flexibility, which means that although I was flexible I did not allow myself to stray from the main path of my research.

18. I would recommend that the student make sure that your research area is completely secure and will start in time for their project to start. Next, I advise that the student realize right away that the program is not going to do things for you. The program will assist, but it is up to you to find yourself a place to live, it is up to you to make contact with your advisor, and it is up to you to ask for what you need. If you have any doubt, ask.

19. I would take this project on again in a heartbeat, with joy. I actually plan on being able to do just that and really do the project justice.