Adesola Akinleye: Teaching Statement

I am an artist-scholar with diverse life experiences, being a first-generation college student, and of Yoruba and Celtic heritage. This informs and enriches my teaching philosophy. Positioned within Afro-Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, my pedagogy engages with dance through its relational, embodied nature. Afro-Indigenous worldviews uphold intra-action and relationality, as captured by the Lakota phrase Mitákuye Oyás'iŋn, "*we are all related*" and the Bantu, Ubuntu "*I am because we are*". This non-Western, paradigm challenges binary thinking, leading me to engage in interdisciplinary, practice-based, Place-based, and socially engaged education. I perceive dance and dance choreography as integral to exploring from this interconnected perspective. I suggest dance education allows us to create, explore, and question the ramifications of how we *dance* together, politically, socially, and artistically. My work, therefore, involves Place-making from macro places of leadership that create sites of education and learning to micro places of artworks and productions that invite audiences into the performance of dance. I envision dance as part of a larger family of practices that extends across art, media, and design. I aim to lead dance educational experiences that equip students with the tools to collaborate with artistic curiosity and civic co-creation.

I believe that dance education should be transformative, encouraging students to connect deeply with themselves, their peers, and the world around them through the embodied practice and critical reflection that is dance. My goal is to create learning environments that cultivate curiosity and foster a sense of community, where each student feels a part of a learning community in which they are inspired to develop their unique practice and lifelong movement techniques. Teaching at any level is about nurturing individuals to grow into their creative potential, honing critical and embodied thinking skills, and foster tools for a lifetime of learning. I believe a liberal arts education, with emphasis on adaptability, interdisciplinary inquiry, and responsiveness, uniquely equips students to engage with the challenges, possibilities, and roles of futures they might not have yet conceived of. My practice is guided by the relationality of my Afro-Indigenous worldview, which upholds the values of family (learning communities), polyrhythms (the rigor of paradox and multiplicity), and call-and-response (dialogical exchange of ideas and communication). I regard learning as a lifelong journey. Given this, I am also aware of the privilege it is to teach students because of the impact I could have on their lifelong educational trajectory and dance practice: a bad experience in their dance study could shut down a student for years both physically and intellectually whereas a well-crafted teaching experience is motivating and empowering. I strive to offer an authentic exchange with students and endeavour to craft productive learning spaces that are:

<u>Nurtured to grow</u> **-** Every student should feel they belong in their own educational journey. I aim to create an environment that nurtures diversity. Nature demonstrates that diversity is essential to life. In my teaching, I foster a learning environment that mirrors this natural diversity, where students with different backgrounds, viewpoints, dif-abilities, and creative expressions come together to learn, grow, and inspire one another. I create environments where the learning community feels brave enough to grow. This is vital because learning involves exploring the unknown and confronting the realization of what *we don't yet know*. This process can be unsettling, thus part of my role as a teacher and leader is to guide individuals through this experience in a way that makes uncertainty a trusted part of the learning process. The learning environment must feel welcoming for students' questions, bodies, and reflections.

<u>Physical literacy is a vital part of a Liberal Arts and Sciences educational offer</u> – I believe that everyone deserves a broad liberal arts and sciences education, and dance studies are an integral part of this. Education includes physical literacy, which involves students having dance

Technique that makes sense to them in their own unique body structure and culture. I provide students with a network of physical, anatomical, and philosophical tools in tandem with their personal cultural and social experiences. I incorporate theory into movement classes and vice versa, including teaching the value of practice-as/is-research approaches. My focus is on dance as a mode through which students express, contribute to, research, and find meaning in their world. I give formative feedback rather than just summative. This is to encourage students to approach feedback as an interactive tool for developing their work, referencing Liz Lerman's *Critical Response Process*. I perceive the physical literacy of mind-body and body-mind feedback as integrated processes of understanding that allow for different learning styles.

Embodied critical thinking - In the 21st century, students are learning dance within a university landscape enriched by a wealth of voices and perspectives (Feminism, Queer Theory, Africanist studies, Indigenous studies, Gender Studies) that create alternative models for exchange and encourage students to critically evaluate information and embrace the responsibility of having a voice in the co-creating of rigorous learning opportunities. Within this landscape, my role in a university setting involves sparking critical thinking and critical embodiment. I teach as the student's mentor and guide. To do this, I remain current in discourses within the field, and my own artistic practice/research, which allows me to model a critical engagement with study that understands learning as a perpetual unfolding.

I listen to each of my students in order to learn how to draw out their learning as an exciting engagement with dance study. I foster collegial and interdisciplinary relationships with the wider university to ensure my teaching resonates beyond the dance studio door. I believe teaching is a privilege, and I strive to offer students a sincere pedagogical encounter with me. I view my teaching, scholarship, service, and leadership as interwoven. As a dance artist-scholar, my scholarship informs my teaching, leadership, and service, and my pedagogical approach enriches how I engage with my research, leadership, and service activities. I believe an offering students study opportunities by engaging them with faculty research and artistic endeavours. This intra-connection supports keeping teaching current. It also allows me to educate student dancers through the praxis of a holistic approach that is artistic and scholarly with a commitment to the learning community and the wider community beyond the university.