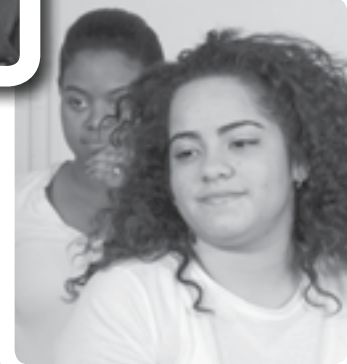


CHAPTER 12

Reflecting on Diversity and Blending of Cultural Aspects



The world is a big place filled with all sorts of wonders, not the least of these is the diversity of the human race. According to The American Dictionary of the English Language, **diversity** is “difference; variety or multiformity.” When considering diversity, it is more than race or ethnicity. One should also think about gender, disability, body types, age, religion, socioeconomic status, politics, and cultural traditions and values. Each of these can find expression in dance.

When looking at these facets of diversity as expressed in and through dance, students can look at who leads and who follows, who the power people are (teacher, choreographer, star, patron), who does the dance and for whom, and for what purpose. Where and when the dance is done will give much information about the people whose dance it is and what values they hold dear. Some **cultures** only dance in specific places and times, while others have dance fully integrated in their daily lives. Who is included and who is excluded from a dancing event is also telling about the culture of the group. All individuals should have the opportunity to dance and express themselves through dance. There are many successful dance companies that employ dancers of all abilities. These companies embrace abilities of all types and have come up with a new innovative movement vocabulary.

Each culture has its own set of cultural values that run deep. What a people group believes and the traditions they develop, define and differentiate them from other groups. These cultural values not only affect religion, relationships, clothing, and language, but also dance. What a people group maintains of their own culture as they come in contact with others shows the strength of the culture. What a people group borrows from other cultures and incorporates into their own shows how resilient they are.



One cultural value shown in the Eastern European Jewish dances is that unrelated men and women were not permitted to hold hands.

Blending of Cultural Aspects

Today there is a blending of cultures caused by economic needs and opportunities, instantaneous communication, and faster transportation. When people move, they must make decisions as to which aspects of their culture they keep, which aspects they change in order to adapt to the new culture, and which aspects of the new culture that they totally adopt. The reverse is true for the culture that receives the migrants. Does it change because of this contact? Some people are worried about losing parts of their traditional cultures to this globalization. One has to wonder what traditional Kathak teachers think about the **fusion** dance form called **Bollywood**.

Cultural blending and globalization also offers opportunities. An American belly dancer uses Middle Eastern music that incorporates a reggaeton (reggae mixed with hip-hop) beat. Listening to the new musical form of **world beat** one often hears American hip-hop rhythms or instruments from multiple countries. Imagine a didgeridoo (Australian aboriginal wind instrument) in a piece of jazz music. On the Internet video sites, traditional dance forms are joined by fusion dances.

Exploring this **cultural blending** can help our students to become truly multicultural. To become more multicultural, a student is tooled to be aware of, understand, appreciate, and be able to interact successfully with different cultures. In dance, this can take the form of a dancer studying another culture's traditional form to perform it as purely as possible. Fusion of different dance forms is another answer.

Cultural blending is not new. The following unit maps the cross-pollenization of traditions and dance that occurred as the Gypsy people group, the Rom, traveled from Northern India, through the Middle East, and into North Africa and Europe (Spain and Romania).