

EMBODYING DANCE: CONVERGING SELF, VALUES, AND IDENTITY

DANCE EDUCATION AS A PERSONAL JOURNEY

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my beautiful daughter Mia. Keep on dreaming.

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Abstract

Dance education programs represent more than just taking a ballet and modern dance class. It is a learning dance community where the prime motivation is the artistic growth of the student. This research investigates how participation in a high school dance program can foster a student's dance identity. Through critical arts based inquiry with students, in relationship with my own story of apartheid as a dance teacher and choreographer, this study analyzes dance experiences when exploring movement phrases, learning choreography, and creating and performing dance work. I conducted 2-3 semi-structured interviews with 10 graduates of my dance program over a span of five years to investigate the impact of a high school dance program on student efficacy. Interview questions explored how their participation in a high school dance program influenced their self-perceptions of artistry and dance identity. The arts based methodology of create, rehearse, perform, and reflect is a choreographic process used to guide students in finding their own movement and voice, as components of their own personal dance journeys. Findings of this research revealed that participants defined dance identity as having the freedom to express and communicate their own voice, feeling safe to explore, developing discipline, and never giving up. Dance gave them the confidence and the opportunity to create and innovate. The findings of this research are important to inform, drive, and sustain both current and future dance programs. Dance education programs are an intervention that supports disadvantaged marginalized students in high school. Students execute and perform when they feel they are valued. Dance making is expressed as an epistemological strategy of embodiment of the self and recognizes that each student has a story.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the concept of dance identity and its influence on student personal growth and artistry.

Research Statement

This research investigates how participation in a high school dance program can foster student's dance identity. Through critical arts based inquiry with students, in relationship with my own story as a dance teacher and choreographer, this study analyzes dance experiences when exploring movement phrases, learning choreography, and creating and performing dance work.

Research questions. The following questions guide this study:

What can we learn from graduates of a high school dance program about dance as a journey of authentic self-expression and creativity?

What is the dance experience for students when exploring movement phrases, learning choreography, and creating and performing work?

The Road Map of the Study

If students are not able to transform their lived experiences into knowledge and to use the already acquired knowledge as a process to unveil new knowledge, they will never be able to participate rigorously in a dialogue as a process of learning and knowing.

(Paulo Freire 2000).

The purpose of this dissertation in practice is to explore the concept of dance identity and its influence on personal growth and artistry. First, what is dance identity? I have chosen to begin by dissecting dance identity through my personal lens of growing up under apartheid. Dance was

transformational in my life. It continues to provide meaning to who I am as a moving artist, educator, and social activist. In my many ways dance was my intervention to apartheid.

This study addresses five categories: dance identity, voice, benefits, personal growth, and artistry. This study attempts to learn from the dance experiences of graduates in a high school dance program. How did participation in the high school dance program forge the dance identity of the participants and what were the influences on personal growth and artistry?

The theoretical framework of this research is framed through critical arts-based inquiry. This study is informed by dance scholars, and educators, Dewey (1934), Novack (1990), Freire (2000), Eisner (2002), Fraleigh (2004), Katz (2008), Hanna (2008), Shapiro (2008), Snowber (2012), Albright (2010) and Sheets- Johnstone (1966/2015). These thinkers have influenced my approach to dance as embedded in the social-cultural context of participants' lives. Shapiro (2008) recognizes the role of dance in "exploring the human condition" and its contribution to social justice. Dance is embedded in the social-cultural context of participant. Dance educator, anthropologist, and dance writer Cynthia Novack (1990) captures this in her book, *Sharing the Dance*:

A primary means of understanding, knowing, making sense of the world comes through shared conceptions of our bodies and selves and through the movement experiences society offers us. Movement constitutes an ever-present reality in which we constantly participate. We perform movement, invent it, interpret it, and reinterpret it, on conscious and unconscious levels. In these actions, we participate in and reinforce culture, and we also create it. To the degree that we can grasp the nature of our experience of movement, both the movement itself and the contexts in which it occurs, we learn more about who we are and about the possibilities for knowingly shaping our lives. (p. 8)

The methodology I propose is framed within the constructs of *create, rehearse, reflect, and perform*. When improvising, and creating choreography, the participant comes with her/himself, family, ancestral cultural values, and knowledge to the creative process. This knowledge that one brings to dance practice, coupled with the theoretical inquiry, informs the emerging personal dance journey road map.

I believe dance is a personal journey. Each student in my dance class is on their own pathway. Every student comes with his/her values and self-identity into the dance studio. Just as dance defined who I am, in my journey from apartheid to the Pacific, the voices of my students are speaking through their movements to define who they are. According to Leavy (2015), “Like theatrical performance, dance can be used to create emphatic connection, raise awareness, educate, and promote social justice” (p. 149). The lived experiences of my participants alongside my lived experiences comes to its fruition when we are doing dance.

The House at Bokmakierie

Who dances, where do they dance, and why do they dance? These questions came to me early in my career as a dance student and feminist in Cape Town, South Africa. During apartheid, the political climate in South Africa was tense and explosive. The racial stratification of dance under apartheid dance was largely imperialistic, taught by white teachers who designed a curriculum for white bodies and provided access only to white students. No matter, how I tried, I could not escape apartheid. My oldest brother constantly reminded me that nothing could come of my dancing because there was no opportunity for colored girls in South Africa. You were expected go as far as you could in education, get a job and by the time you reach 21, plan for your wedding. My mother would tell me that she was putting away household stuff for my trousseau. This is when

parents over time collect household goods for the intended marriage of their daughter. I was not interested in any of the traditional rituals of marriage. I wanted to dance and go as far as I could in my education so that I could be free and provide for my family.

My first dance class at the age of seven was offered at a community center on the outskirts of my home in Cape Town. I had my first sense of empowerment when I could stand on one leg, twirl around, control my balance, and learn how to fall.

Dance at the community center engulfed my life. I loved going there every day and working hard. I stayed until the doors closed and then rushed off home for dinner. Although the group leaders at the community center had a limited knowledge of dance it never bothered me because all that mattered was their passion and commitment to the community. I took ballet and modern dance for my entire high school span and it ignited a fire within me to move; dance became my refuge and escape, an escape to create movement without any judgment.

As a young woman, dance consumed my life and in many ways, became my refuge. It saved me from the streets and from myself. It allowed me to escape to a world where possibilities were endless and mistakes forgiven. It was a place where ideas were tried and sometimes tossed out, then quietly evolved into new ones. I was hungry to learn everything I could about dance because it made me feel worthy.

I found other ways to fulfill my passion for dance. Every afternoon I escaped to the library, which was situated across the field from my house. The library was this small one-story house surrounded by trees across the vlei (river) from Bokmakierie. I borrowed every book on dance I could find. I learned about the great ballets and modern dancers, with names and places I had never heard of as a young child. I would look at the book

and imitate the movement. I remember being excited that I could learn the vocabulary of ballet and dance. My mother, as my guiding compass listened to my endless chatter on dance. As a teenager, I was choreographing and staging shows for my family and friends and soon got the neighborhood involved. As I reflect on this, I realize that the teacher and choreographer in me had its making in the house at Bokmakierie.

My Awakening

Dialogue cannot exist without humility (Paulo Freire, 2000).

My high school in Cape Town was the beginning of my activism. It was a politically active school, as most non-white schools were in the Western Cape. South Africa colonized by the Dutch in 1652, and then later by the British in 1822. The Afrikaner Nationalist Government implemented apartheid in 1948. I was in high school when the 1976 protest began against the mandate that Afrikaans, the language of the oppressors, be taught in all non-white schools. School children protested this mandate and the struggle began to bring down apartheid. The British largely influenced the educational system schools with offering of only British literature. I loved my English classes because we studied Shakespeare and the classics. One of my English teachers read the stanzas from Shakespeare with a voice that was so clear and so concise that his words crafted a picture in my mind.

During the height of apartheid my school was the first non-white public high school to offer ballet as a subject; it came with controversy because a white South African ballet teacher taught the class. Ballet was offered in all the white schools, but my high school was the pilot school in the Western Province to offer ballet as a subject for nonwhite students. My ballet teacher, Mrs. Fiske, a white South African, was trained by the University of Cape Town Ballet School and performed with Capab Ballet Company,

the all- white professional ballet company in South Africa at that time. Only six of my classmates took ballet class in my high school while the rest of the class took Latin. This was a new educational journey for me.

Amelia Du Toit, an Afrikaner, founded the Silverleaf Performing Arts in 1973 and her goal was to provide free dance training for non-white students. As a teenager, I got my supplemental ballet and modern dance training from Silverleaf every Saturday from 9am to 4pm. Mrs. Du Toit brought in different dance teachers from the community who volunteered their time to work with us in ballet and modern dance. As I studied modern dance at Silverleaf Performing Arts, this new way of moving and articulating provided me with the opportunity to express movement dynamics and perspectives in a new way. Modern dance, a rebel to ballet, awoke my soul, desires, and passion. The embodiment of the movements transported me to a place where the conflict of my inner struggle was pressing and therapeutic to dance.

I discovered that I enjoyed creating movement phrases, especially finding my own mixed movements which was based in my dance training and the rejection of some my training, a fusion that stemmed from my social-political context which embodied my ideas, conflicts, and experiences. This dance fusion compilation represents my experiences, both edgy and liberating. Now in the 1970's, ballet dominated the dance scene in South Africa. Ballet was the ideal and modern dance was the stepchild. Although I appreciated my foundational training in ballet, the call for me to modern dance was stronger.

During my senior year at high school, Professor Dulcie Howes, the founder of ballet in South Africa was the adjudicator for my final ballet exam. She recommended

that I study ballet at the University of Cape Town Ballet School Diploma program. I turned this opportunity down because I was already attending the after-school ballet program at the University. The country was in strife with protest and unrest. I could not see a future for myself in an all-white training diploma program. Mrs. Fiske, my ballet teacher, thought I was crazy, but there was an awakening happening within myself. It was clear to me at the time that there was not going to be a colored dance student performing the lead in Swan Lake. My last after-school ballet class at University of Cape Town Ballet School (UCT) was when I graduated from high school. I wanted to explore modern dance.

My Educational Dance Journey

Apartheid defined my educational dance journey but it never defined my spirit. According to Daragon (2015), “Based on our values and beliefs, we embody ways of knowing about, participating in, and contributing to the teaching and learning of our students—a dance teacher identity” (p. 25). I came to dance because I saw a picture of a ballerina performing a jump in ballet termed a “grand jeté” I wanted to fly, and it meant freedom, abandonment from rules and segregated signs.

During apartheid, the entire society was segregated. For example, there were segregated churches, beaches, hospitals, restaurants, parks, and movie houses as well as theaters. You were segregated by the color of your skin and segregated signs indicated white and non-white facilities and public spaces. Amidst all this there was a brave dance teacher who defied these signs.

A friend who attended the Ivy McDonald Ballet School in Cape Town introduced me to Miss McDonald. I recall her as this petite Scottish ballet dance teacher with the

most beautiful legs and ballet point. Her pointed toes arched all the way over. I was mesmerized by her skill and quiet demeanor. Miss McDonald performed and executed the ballet movements with such grace. Her passion for the ballet inspired me to study ballet. The ballet movement transported me to another world and it made me believe that anything was possible. These brief dream moments when I felt I could do anything were short-lived because I had to travel back and forth to the dance studio on segregated trains. One apartheid policy, the Group Areas Act of 1950 (McLachlan, 1985), geographically segregated residential areas per race; where people lived, worked and how they traveled (p. 77). I took my first Royal Academy of Dancing ballet exam under the guidance of Ms. McDonald. Regretfully, the ballet school was forced to close by the government due to the attendance and participation of non-white dance students at the ballet school. During apartheid non-whites students could not take dance classes with white students. Ms. McDonald refused to comply with this law instead she voluntarily closed her school and recommended few of us to ballet teacher, Mignon Furman, at the University of Cape Town (UCT) Ballet School.

I attended the University of Cape Town Ballet School when I was in high school. The bus ended at the border of the non-white area, with no colored buses going up to the University of Cape Town Ballet School. After school, I had to walk several miles to my ballet class. My mother was a domestic worker and could no longer afford the fees. She informed the ballet director and sometime later, not exactly when, we got a note stating that an anonymous donor agreed to pay my after-school ballet fees. I remember not understanding what anonymous was and had to look it up in the dictionary. Still to this day I have no idea who it was. This generous and kind act by someone who cared enough to pay for my ballet fees touched me in such a way

that despite the darkness of apartheid, I felt there was someone who cared and believed in me. Therefore, as a dance teacher myself now, I am advocating for all students to have access to dance.

Dance Roots

My dance practices have their roots in my childhood dance training at the community center just outside my home in Cape Town, South Africa. My recollection has glimmers of positive experiences embedded within an abnormal society under apartheid. In reflecting on my current practice as a dance teacher, this background leads me to understand the importance of a safe place to create movement and a safe place for my students to grow and fail.

The Power of a High School Dance Program

Where can students dance? I teach at a Title 1 public high school in Hawai'i, which means that the school receives federal funding to improve the academic disadvantaged achievements of its students. For a school to receive Title 1 funding, at least over 47.2% of the students must be on free and reduced lunch. Many of my students in high school cannot afford to take ballet or modern dance classes outside of school. Private dance studios prices are exorbitant and out of reach for many of my students, which limits access to who dances. Some of my students stated that participation in a public-school dance program "made them feel a lot more confident not only physically but also emotionally. It gave me the place and space to grow as a teenager" (Dance Participant. 1). Therefore, as a dance teacher, I am a firm advocate for all students to have access to dance.

Who dances now? They are students interested in trying out ballet and modern dance, they are football players wanting to increase their flexibility and range of motion, they are the serious dance students wanting to further their dance technique, and they are

students just wanting a safe place to create. Regardless of one's dance experience or lack of it, participating in dance classes is about everyone's growth. All students should have to access to dance. My position is that dance is a personal journey. Students develop at their own pace when dance is a personal journey. And if given the space, each student can explore, fail, and innovate.

Identity and Apartheid

According to Parker J. Palmer in *The Heart of a Teacher, Identity and Integrity in Teaching*, identity is defined as follows:

By identity I mean an evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self: my genetic makeup, the nature of the man and women who gave me life, the culture in which I was raised, people who have sustained me and people who have done me harm, the good and the ill I have done to others, and to myself, the experience of love and suffering-and much, more. In the midst of that complex field, identity is the moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am, converging in the reducible mystery of being a human (p. 17).

During the apartheid era, the word identity had a negative connotation because of its divisiveness and hierarchal racial stratification. Your identity was defined for you. I marvel at how in Hawai'i most people can list their ethnic identity. They can recite their heritage and even break it down to quota. During apartheid, this was the complete opposite. How could you be proud of a label given to you by the oppressors that was used to divide people? The term 'colored' is an identifier for people in South Africa, referring to mixed heritage. These are the indigenous people of the Cape, the Khoisan's, coupled with slaves from Africa, settlers, and Asian slaves. My identity left me with a lot of conflict and confusion.

Dance Identity

What is dance identity? My identity was defined for me by the apartheid system, which divided and conquered by race. Although it gave me the label of “colored,” it never owned me because dance was my refuge and my escape. My dance identity took shape with that first movement at the community center in Athlone, the conflict and pain of fighting to dance as a teenager, the traveling by train to the outskirts of Cape Town City to take ballet classes, at a dance studio where the owner broke the permit system to provide nonwhites access to dance, the performances in my neighborhood, the choreography and staging of dance concerts for family and friends, and my sheer will to dance. My dance identity is evolving and transforming; it is filled with possibilities. In essence, dance was my intervention to apartheid.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

The Curvy Path

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the concept of dance identity and its influence on student personal growth and artistry. The dance journey process is not linear, it can be rewarding, frustrating, often unravelling, and filled with anticipation of where the process is going. Contributions by dance scholars such as Katz (2008), Li (2011), Hanna (2008), Snowber (2012), Albright (1997) and Samson (2008) on dance education, embodiment, choreography, and improvising, inform this study. This review of the literature focuses on concepts of self, identity, and artistry within my interest in dance as an art based inquiry.

Providing Context for a High School Dance Program

I teach ballet and modern at a public high school dance program. I choreograph and direct a performing student dance company after school to promote the dance program. The dance students enrolled in the dance program range from 9th to 12th grade. No experience is required to study dance, and most of the students have no prior dance training. Students who sign up for dance classes at the school earn their fine arts credit which is required for graduation. The dance program grew from a single modern dance class in the cafeteria to four classes offering ballet and modern dance. The dance program is home to students who want to explore ballet or modern dance. The aim is to offer students the opportunity and the access to dance. This access includes formal dance training, access to explore movement, access to explore their movement voice and, access to choreograph. I teach at a Title 1 school which means most of the students are disadvantaged and cannot afford dance classes at private studios. Also, this is important to me because during the apartheid years it was difficult for me to obtain access to just explore

movement or choreograph. Many students have graduated from this high school dance program over the eleven years of its existence. Most of the participants of this qualitative study danced throughout their high school careers and this study will provide insight into the experiences of the participants.

Why a Personal Journey?

Because I teach in a public high school I teach anyone who walks through that door. No one is turned away, regardless of their dance experience. Each student has a story, they come to the classroom with their cultural values, aspirations, and conflicts. I work with the students I have, and the dance is created sometimes by their stories. My focus on dance education over the many years has navigated away from turning students into dance technicians. But instead, focusing on teaching and guiding them through their newly acquired skills of movement elements, and choreographic devices into finding their own voice. Dance technique is important because it builds your dance vocabulary and it allows you to perform incredible feats with your body, but there is more to dance than just technique. Snowber (2012) states, “The lived body is the felt body where we make connections to the multiple sensations around and within us” (p.55). I express dance making as an epistemological strategy to embodiment of the self. I recognize that each student has a story. In the process of creating movement and dance making, each student can create knowledge. Barbour (2009) states that “knowing can be creatively living in the world” (p.2). Students who take dance a class for the first time are having a lived experience. Every time dance students go over movement phrases again and again, they are having a lived experience. Sheets-Johnstone (1966/2015) expresses that “the meaning of dance comes alive for us only as we ourselves have a lived experience of the dance” (p.2). What is needed is to listen to your body and honor your stories, for this is the beginning of the personal

journey. Arts educator, Leggo (2008) shares:

There is no separating the personal from the professional. As a teacher, I do not leave my home and family experiences behind me when I drive to campus or when I enter the classroom. And I do not leave my past either, I am the person I am because of the experiences and people and places that comprise my life and living. (p. 91)

Historical Overview of Dance Education in the United States

In the 1930's early modern dancers such as Doris Humphrey, Martha Graham, Hanya Holm, and Charles Weidman converged on Bennington College Summer School, in Vermont to explore movement. Margaret H'Doubler, pioneered the first dance program at Wisconsin University in 1926. Her contemporary Isadora Duncan, spoke of her as a "dance teacher [who was] both a mystery and a legend" (Ross, 2000, p.145). According Hanna (2008), H' Doubler came from a physical fitness background and with a degree in biology that framed her movement classes around the skeletal-muscular system (p. 492).

According to Ross, (2000) H' Doubler's theoretical contribution to dance education was large influenced by John Dewey. Her philosophy stressed "the kinesthetic sense" as means of experiencing what is inside and outside (p. 125). Words similarly expressed by countless dance teachers over time came from H'Doubler: "If inner and outer rhythm are one, communication is rich and complete, if not the dance is likely to be too physical, too much of the body rather than the mind through the body" (Ross, 2000, p. 9). The dancer moves in harmony and balance when there is mind and body integration. Dewey (1928) states, "The full realization of the integration of the mind and body in action waits upon the reunion of philosophy and science in art, above all in the supreme art, the art of education" (p.19).

When you teach dance as a performance it dissipates as quickly as it is created. It was in the impact of the teaching and performance that resonated with H'Doubler's students. In the early 20th century the dance classrooms of H'Doubler's were dealing with issues of women's health, freedom, physicality, and public image that explored the emerging issues about social identity and women's efficacy (Ross, 2000, p. 145).

In the seventies, within the United States, dance scholarship blossomed in the arts and humanities. In the eighties dance education split off from physical education to house its own dance degree departments. In the nineties, the US government funded "artist in residence" program within schools working with other disciplines, such as dance notation, dance kinesiology, dance making and dance and physics. It was the time of collaboration (Hanna, 2008).

According to Hanna (2008), nonrepresentational art in the 20th century flourished and dance mirrored these forms, with the abstraction of movement (p. 492). Improvising with abstract movement forms suggested that attempts were made to extrapolate the emotions and feelings from the movement. During my dance, undergraduate years, I have distinct recollections of being told to forget about my social context, apartheid. This was difficult for me because I could not forget a system that had impacted my life.

In the eighties, I choreographed a piece, titled "Cell" in which I used a metaphor of an animal caged in a cell, with a spotlight representing a cell on a darkened stage. Initially, it was critical dance piece depicting the entrapment of the Self in the oppressive system. Now, reflecting on it decades later, it was also an auto-ethnographic snapshot of my artistic identity at the time.

The theoretical work of John Dewey (1934) and Elliot Eisner (2002) has heavily influenced arts education and created the importance of creativity, expression of agency, and lived experience suggesting that learning occurs through the body (Hanna, 2008). According to Dewey (1934), “in short, art, in its form, unites the very same relation of doing, undergoing, outgoing and incoming energy, that makes an experience to be an experience” (p. 208). When my students are working on their choreography projects, they undergo a process of improvising and exploring movement. Once they feel comfortable with the movement, they perform their movement phrases to the class. This creating and exploring of movement is an experience, and the performance is also an experience. Dewey (1934) states, “A work of art elicits and accentuates this quality of being a whole and of belonging to the larger, all-inclusive, whole which is the universe in which we live” (p. 214). This passage by Dewey (1934) suggests that we create our experiences, our situations and conflict out of which they are derived. The dance piece that is choreographed by my student is embedded with his or her experience, such as his/her situation at home. This implies that you cannot remove the dance from the social cultural environment of students lived experiences.

Exploring Dance

According to Mira Liza- Katz (2008) dance can be many things to many people: It can be a discipline, a practice, a ritual, an exercise, a form of prayer or meditation, a kind of storytelling or seduction, or a medium for artistic expression. In addition to being a powerful means of knowing oneself and communicating with others dance can also be a way to develop cognition and support identity formation (p. 12).

This definition by Katz (2008) suggests that dance serves multiple roles and purposes in one’s life. Mira-Liza Katz, author of *Growth in Motion* (2008) conducted a

study on dance in the educational context. She wanted to know in what ways were participation in dance connected to young women's identity. Secondly, she asked how dance contributed to social, cognitive, and emotional growth of young women. She was also curious about how does the nature of learning dance helps student learning both in and out of school. (p. 14). Katz (2008) researched these questions by using ethnographic, multimodal, and discourse strategies. She used a wide assortment of data sources such as focus groups, interviews, student journals, photographs, artist statements, field notes, and videotapes of dance. Her research provided insight into how young women made connections between dance and their everyday lives (p. 14). Katz (2008) argues that participation in dance was connected to the development of identity. The young women in the study stated, "that learning dance gave them control of their bodies and minds and it improved their mental state" (p. 15). On this topic, Stinson, Blumenfeld-Jones, and Van Dyke, (1998) contend that "dancing helps students to get in touch with their bodies and express their feeling more easily than through the written or spoken word" (p.5). Samson, (2008) a dance educator in New Zealand discusses that educators need to consider the many lived experiences and diverse cultures which shape the identities of the students they teach (p.213).

As a dancer and teacher of dance, I suggest that one can only reach this state once you feel safe to explore, create, rehearse, and reflect. This sense of safety allows the dancer to move beyond a personal space, opening the doors of the unknown.

A Place of Belonging

In Zhao Li's (2011) study he worked with two dance teachers and 12 dance adolescents, which were randomly selected from 50 students who attended a school for the Arts. Li's (2011)

study concludes that the self-identity of male adolescent dancer's changes and interchanges through the public lens. (p.18). He conducted interviews, observation of co-ed dance classes, and attended rehearsals and performances. Li's (2011) study of adolescent male dancers showed how willing they were to share their good experience of dance with their friends and get other students to sign up for dance. Li state "They moved beyond accepting dance to loving the physical challenge and artistry of dance" (p. 7). According to Li (2011), dance students established a sense of belonging and identity, feeling comfortable among others in the school (p.19).

This is a phenomenon I see every year with my students. The dance studio is a home, a sense of place and belonging. Dance students find the dance studio to be their haven, a community where the exploration of movement has no boundaries. This is affirmed in Zhao Li's (2011) study. His participants stated, "that they were confident, not necessarily because they were good dancers, but because they valued what they did in class and enjoyed dancing" (p. 19).

The dance program at my school represents more than just taking a ballet and modern dance class. It is a learning dance community where the prime motivation is the artistic growth of the student. Students execute and perform when they feel they are valued. It is important that the dance program provides a place where students can make mistakes, explore, and transform their movement voice. I repeatedly share with my students that dance is a personal journey, and for them never to compare themselves with anyone else, because each one's individual dance journey is different. Students at Central High School choose to sign up for a dance class. Dance is an elective, they elect it. This is liberating for the student and the teacher because the student wants to be in that dance

class. Dance educator Brown (2008) states “I plan a safe and fun environment in which the participants can express themselves freely through dance” (p. 154). This resonates with my own dance pedagogy.

Li (2011) asserted that once the male dancers became stronger as performers, understood their bodies, and took dance seriously, all stereotypical views that males should not dance faded. The mere “involvement in dance became part of their identity” (p.19). Again, I see this in my own work. For example, some of the male dancers in my dance program have taken dance class to increase flexibility, while others took it because it helped to improve their performance with sports. Risner (2008) states “for those boys and young males in dance education, however, choosing to dance may be an important vehicle for challenging dominant notions about gender, privilege, sexual orientation, and the body” (p. 93).

Inner Realms of Movement. According to Katz (2008) the young women in her study shared that dance helped them “develop control over their mind, body, and interactions” (Katz, 2008, p. 15). Another participant shared that dance took her mind off her problems: “You’re in the moment and you’re not thinking about anything else that’s going on. To me dancing is my form of therapy” (Katz, 2008, p.16). As a dancer, and dance teacher, I have observed that movement seems to allow students to escape the realities of life. In dance class, you forget what is happening outside the walls of the studio. The focus is internal; a personal journey.

Katz (2008) states “the dancers’ sense of control and their capacity to use dance to construct safe spaces were powerful tools for developing a sense of agency and self-efficacy outside the studio” (Katz, 2008, p.15). I have observed that dance provides students with the self-confidence and tools to cope with conflict outside of the dance studio. One of the participants in Katz’s study expressed how the effects of dance helped her to cope with the stresses of life. Katz

(2008) concludes, “for these young women, their continued involvement in dance seems to have given them an unusual capacity to take stock of their own growth across time” (Katz, 2008, p.15).

We Dance our Stories. In my observations in dance class, some dance students have difficulty or apprehension on where to start with the movement phrases. For when you dance, you are vulnerable, you open your personal space to new ideas and forms. Creating a dance through the process of improvisation is an organic way to communicate the voice of the body. For some young dancers, this process can be nerve wrecking, scary, or just liberating. We dance our past, present and future. Once we begin moving in dance, we speak and write with our body, manipulating gestures into various forms and shapes. This embodiment is our moving book, our moving identity. We dance our stories; our body the canvas, is painted by the forming, and shaping of movement and absorbed by our experiences, gently divulged through movement phrases. Katz, (2008) states, “embodied learning allowed these young dancers to support one another’s learning and growth by sharing information not only through language but also through their bodies” (Katz, p. 16).

Finding the movement to create a dance piece. According to Hanna (2008), “While dancers and their audiences can sense the feel and command of the human body in dance, the mind stirs the imagination, directs movement, and makes sense of feeling” (p. 497). When you create a dance, you may have an idea or you may just improvise. Sometimes improvisation leads to movement phrases that encompass something that is tangible. Students enjoy choreography because the process of improvisation leads to their own movement style and finding their own dance identity. Other adolescents may want to observe the improvisational process underway by their peers before they join the group. Students normally create dances based on how they feel or

what they experience. These feelings and experience are used to find the movement to create a dance piece.

Hanna (2008) stressed, “As students embody abstract concepts in dance-making, they can explore their transcendent, aesthetic, physical, social, emotional, and intellectual selves” (p. 502). Dance concepts that are introduced through movement phrasing help students find a way to make sense of the movement. This process engages the student in composing, dissecting, and crafting phrases that eventually leads to finding their dance voice. When you are writing a paper in English class, you are rewriting and making improvements, what Eisner, (2002) calls “editing.” The arts go through this same editing process of refinement, accentuating nuances, and making the necessary subtle changes that may stir or provoke you.

Students and the community often ask me the following questions: How do you create a dance? What is the inspiration for the movement? What comes first, the movement or the music? Snowber (2012) states, “Movement has the capacity to touch us physically and emotionally at our roots, provoking the deepest emotions, from love to fear to joy to abandon” (p. 56). Dance is a multifaceted, multi perspective process; it is my escape and my refuge. As a choreographer, the movement comes first and then I find the music to support the dance. Sometimes the piece may be performed in silence. According to Eisner (2002), “Representation can and often does begin with an elusive and sometimes evanescent idea or image” (p. 6). When a choreographer creates dance and the movement truly originates from the dancer, this is what I term as organic.

Ann Cooper Albright, (1997) author of *Choreographing Difference* states, “Unlike most other cultural productions, dance relies on the physical body to enact its own representation. But at the very moment the dancing body is creating a representation, it is also in the process of actually forming that body” (p. 3). The body is at the center of

creating a dance, for you dance what you know. And what you know is movement that comes from within you. What lies within you gets its impetus from your own personal stories and cultural values. I share with my students that the movement is within you. Just listen. My position on the process of creating dance is that when the music comes first the choreographer may be swayed to interpret the music instead of having the music support the dance. This process is different for other choreographers. There is no one way of creating a dance.

Exploring the Relationships Between the Novice and the Experienced

Albright (1997) states that: “In dance, the choreographer uses human bodies to create a physical experience and theatrical images that exist in a world of her own making” (p. 33). My observation of novice dance students improvising with movement is that the process becomes easier when the student is in a safe, comfortable space. This design sometimes may help both advanced and novice dancers because it allows the advanced dancer to slow down and incorporate the energy and sense of the novice dancers. This symbiotic mechanism of mutual dependency may be stifling for some but enlightening for another.

Dewey (1934) expressed that: “The outline of the common pattern is set by the fact that every experience is the result of interaction between a live creature and some aspect of the world in which he lives” (p. 65). Challenging both the novice and the advanced dance student lies in the structured exploration of the novice dance student to explore his/her dance voice, and at the same time provide the freedom for the advanced dance student to explore the limitless physicality and connection of the movement. Dance students benefit when there are diverse choreographic skills in the class because it helps and guides the novice dance students and it helps the advanced student with the aesthetic

qualities of the choreographic process. This symbiotic relationship between the advanced and novice dance students leads to discussions around aesthetic movement choices. This relationship is a key element of how I structure and run my dance classes at Central High.

Mind and Body

Albright (1997) states “Dance is more than just long legs, pretty face or specific movement. It also tells us about the social value of the body within a particular culture” (p. 5). In observation, dance students listen to the body and eventually understand their body. It is not how high they kick their leg or whether they look pretty when doing the movement, but the cohesiveness of the mind and body integration that illuminate a thought or emotion delivered through the body. These cultural values perpetuate stereotypes such as dance only uses the body, is frivolous and fleeting, and there is not much thinking going on. In the public-school setting dance is marginalized and is the first to be cut when there are budget shortages. Why is dance not as valued as the core subjects? Is it because of the stereotypes that prevail? High school dance students are so conscious about their bodies, which was expressed by one of the participants in my study, saying that “dance physically keeps you in shape and helps connect your mind, body and soul” (Dance participant, Rye, 2015). Dance students are attracted to the physicality of the movement and the meaning and challenge that is attained through the movement coupled with the balance that dance provides.

Creating Movement

When you create movement, or work on choreography you begin with the idea; this idea is communicated to the body through tangible movement. Embodiment is defined as “a *tangible or visible form of an idea, quality, or feeling*” ([Dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)). Everyone who walks into the dance studio brings with them their stories, values, and cultures. When you dance, you are

present in the movement. According to Fraleigh (1987), “Dancing requires concentration of the whole person as a minded body, not a mind in command of something separable, called body” (p. 9). When dancers internalize the movements into their bodies this process is an experience that varies from dancer to dancer. Exploring movement elements in a class setting is another experience, which sometimes may be shared experiences. The dance process of creating, rehearsing, and reflecting is my journey when I am creating dance. This embodiment of dance allows me to share stories associated with the movement. I bring the self and stories to this dance experience and create new experiences. My personal dance journey is embedded in my socio-political context of apartheid.

Dance Studio in Athlone, Cape Town during Apartheid

I opened a dance studio in Athlone during the early eighties which was at the height of apartheid. The location was deemed a non-white area under the apartheid’s Group Areas Act. At the dance studio, I offered modern dance, jazz, and ballet for younger students after school. Members of the community supported the dance studio because it was place for dance students to advance their training and for adults to escape the stress and realities of the apartheid. I recall teaching many dances classes a week, it was challenging but satisfying because I knew that the dance studio provided access to dance.

White people could attend an array of dance studios in South Africa because of their race. They had white privilege. At the time of the “struggle” in South Africa, there were protests, walkouts and resistance that permeated the community. The term “struggle” refers to the resistance and fight against apartheid. As all who dedicated their lives to the struggle, the arts played a vital role.

I recall choreographing a dance titled *Children of Africa* for my dance students from the studio. This piece was choreographed for the Arts and Resistance Festival in Cape Town. But it

never was performed because the white nationalist government banned the Arts and Resistance Festival because it was considered subversive to the state. When I came to the Pacific, my personal dance journey motivated me to fight for access to dance for all students.

Choreographing “Madiba.” Sansom (2008) states that “Dance can be used as informative and political literacy, where the body becomes the sites of social commentary using memories of personal experience and social construction” (p. 215). Nelson Mandela was gravely ill and it was reported that he had very little time left and I felt a compelling need to teach my students in Hawai‘i about Mandela. When questioned whether they knew of him, some had heard of him, others knew nothing. I shared my experience growing up under apartheid. When Mandela was in prison he was so inspired by the poem “Invictus” by William Earnest Henley. Out of the discussions and sharing came the choreography for the protest theater dance piece “Madiba.” It starts with movement phrases performed to the first two stanzas of emancipated South Africa’s anthem, Nkosi Sikelel Africa (God bless Africa) followed by African drums. One by one dance students performed and recited the “Invictus” poem. At the opening of the winter show on December 5, 2013, Mandela died; backstage there was not a dry eye.

My dance journey from apartheid to the Pacific has taken many paths but what remains steadfast is my commitment to bring dance and voice to those who are disadvantaged and marginalized. Dance was my escape and refuge, during the years under apartheid. It was my voice. My diverse dance students need their speaking bodies and voice to explore their dance identity.

Dance Mechanisms

Choreography is an individualized process embedded in the dance experience, culture, values, and philosophy of the dance maker. Fraleigh (1996) states that “the creative process of

forming a dance begins with the power to give image to movement” (p. 181). The mechanisms used to *create, rehearse, reflect, and perform* are a cyclical and sometimes jumbled process that is required to choreograph. Which means that creating and exploring movement for creating a dance piece is challenging. Just as with writing an essay, some days you have a lot to say and other times you are stuck in the writing process. Therefore, the word “jumbled” means that you might know how the dance might end in your choreographic cycle but are stuck with how to start the movement.

Another mechanism is improvising. This involves moving your body and taking it wherever it wants you to go. There is uncertainty in improvising because the movement outcome differs, which may be okay when you are playing with movement. Once you have the movement in your body and in your muscle memory, you might structure it into movement phrases. What happens when you play with the movement? Are you leaning towards a certain movement element? Are you a shape, space, time weight or oriented dancer? What happens when you move into spaces of uncertainty in the movement. These are thoughtful questions that can at times be revealing, but can also lead to more uncertainty. This is the create phase of your dance journey. You may not have answers and you are not expected to; it only feels organic and it feels right. When you are in the dance making process, you are collecting another form of data, that will shape your dance signature and possible define your dance identity.

Eisner eloquently states (2002): “A fundamental concern of anyone working in the arts, whether painting, composing music, writing poetry, or engaging in dance, is to create satisfying and expressive relationships among the “parts” that constitute the whole” (p.73). This mechanism of exploration in finding the balance between the “parts” or is what makes the choreography frustrating and invigorating. This duality sometimes creates conflict, gentle or

harrowing tension, and this blend makes the movement interesting to observe. I tell my students that tension can be beautiful. We learn from dance scholars Katz, (2008), Li (2011), and Snowber (2012), that students who participate in dance are in the process of knowing and becoming.

Another mechanism is when the students are creative partners with their teachers during the choreographic process. Chappell (2012) discusses identity shifting, when students lead the class and the teacher plays a supporting role. In my classroom, this often occurs when students are creating their choreography and leading their peers through the composition process. I marvel at the opportunity when a student who has become an expert in a movement phrase kinesthetically, collegially demonstrates and breaks down, the movement phrase to share with his/her peers in the classroom.

Dance Reconstruction

When I reconstruct a dance from the past, the movement and dance phrases may be same in its shape and form as the original choreography but each dancer brings new meaning and voice to the dance reconstruction. As a choreographer, I may add new nuances to the dance reconstruction, tweaking and manipulating the movement for I am seeing it again through a new lens. This process is transformational for the dancer and choreographer.

We write our stories with our bodies. Dance scholar, Snowber (2012) states that “we dance the questions, we write the questions, and we go back and forth from our limbs and torsos to finding breath in our words on the page” (p. 54). Snowber (2012) states that “Our lives are a dance in progress, as we are informed, formed, and transformed in the rich palette of lived experience” (p. 58). I believe that when you dance, you bring yourself to the movement, which

encapsulates your stories, values, culture, and beliefs. With dance, you explore and question these values, culture, and beliefs. On this topic, Sheets-Johnstone (1966/2015) states that:

A dance, as it is formed and performed, is experienced by the dancer as a perpetually moving form, a unity of succession, whose moments cannot be measured: its past has been created, its present is being created, its future awaits creation. (p.16)

Another point for me is that dance is an embodiment of each dancer's personal journey. For we dance our struggles, stories, conflict, and joy. My epistemology is that you are shaped by your experiences and you dance who you are. Where you come from defines you, but it does not own you. Dance making is a phenomenon and the choreographic process an ongoing cycle of *create, rehearse, reflect, and perform*; a personal journey. The next chapter discusses the arts based methodology of *create, rehearse, perform, and reflect*.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Exploring Voices

In telling the stories of my dance participants and my personal narrative I sought to identify methodologies such as arts based inquiry, auto-ethnography, and narrative analysis to bring to life the voices and lived experiences of my participants. In the end, I borrowed from these approaches to create my own arts-based methodology of create, rehearse, reflect, and perform, modeled on a choreographic process that I practice with my students. Contributions by Leavy (2015), Snowber, (2012), Eisner (2002), Sheets-Johnstone (1966/2015), Fraleigh, (2004), and Albright (1997) on self, identity, dance embodiment, and phenomenology inform this study. My research study begins from this sense of embodiment. Which means embodying dance, embracing a tangible form of an idea, quality or feeling into the movement.

Arts Based Method

The arts based method of create, rehearse, perform, and reflect is a choreographic process that I practice in my classroom with my students. I tell my students that your body is the pen and you are writing with your body. Dance is an embodied art form. Snowber (2012) states that “we don’t have bodies we are bodies” (p. 54). Dance and movement methods are how our own bodies construct meaning, helping us to explore the self, and shaping our personal dance identity. Dance is representational, a mode of inquiry which is part of the social –political context. During the apartheid years, dance transformed me it helped me to escape momentarily the realities of an oppressed regime. According to Snowber (2012) dance is more than just steps back and forth, “dance is a way of knowing” (p. 54). Dance is language that has the capacity “to connect body,

mind, heart, and, soul, and imaginative thinking” (p. 54). The arts based method of *create, rehearse, perform, and reflect* is a choreographic process that I use to guide my students through finding their own movement voice and personal journey. When you are improvising, and creating choreography, you come with yourself, your family, your ancestral cultural values, and knowledge to the creative process. This knowledge that you bring to your dance practice, coupled with the theoretical inquiry, informs the emerging personal dance journey road map.

The art based methodology is created and practiced in the dance classroom. It is evolving and fluid. This process helps the dance students find their choreographic movement voice. *Create, rehearse, perform, and reflect* is a dance choreographic process that works in collaboration with the teacher. The dance student is not on their own trying to unravel the movement. With guidance from the teacher, the novice dance student may initiate the movement to create phrases. This process takes time, especially with novice dancers who need guidance and encouraging constructive critique to take the movement even further. After practice/rehearse, the initial create movement process may take form. The dance teacher needs to understand just how much feedback to provide to take the novice student to the next process. The arts based methodology is not strict in its form. It is fluid and evolving for an experienced dancer may go right ahead and create, reflect, rehearse, and reflect. This process is taught so that the dance student, the choreographer, creates-organic movement. Where does this organic movement come from? It comes from within the dance student. This is where an insightful dance teacher helps the dance students take their stories and embody them. The choreographic process is a personal journey. As the dance teacher, I teach my students that they learn about themselves, their environment, and the world in which they live. Dance making looks to construct meaning out of their stories, their conflicts, and the cultural values of the dance students. What makes this

process of *create, rehearse, perform, and reflect* unique to each dancer is its adaptability and flexibility.

The aspect of critical arts based inquiry is the questioning, probing, and critique that the choreographer undertakes after going through this process. Examples are: What am I as a choreographer trying to convey? What does word “trapped” represent to me? How do I transform it into movement? How do I make it work? How can I convey my statement about social justice?

How is this art based methodology of *create, rehearse, perform, and reflect* process transformational for the dance student? It takes the dance student from a place of understanding that their stories can be transformed into movement. The body is the form of representation, and the movement is the embodiment of a story or an idea. When I reflect upon my own choreographic practice every time I create movement it comes from an idea, an encounter, or just from my own angst. These emotions are transformed into movement; it is tangible because I feel it. This movement is conveyed to the audience through performance. In creating the dance piece, I personally have transformed stories, ideas, thoughts, or emotions into a physical movement through the choreographic process. This is transformational to me and I suggest, has been transformational for my students.

Research Methods

Using a critical art based inquiry approach to tell my story as a dance teacher and choreographer, as well as the stories of former students who participated in a dance program, I conducted 2-3 semi-structured interviews with 10 graduates of my dance program to investigate the impact of a high school dance program on student efficacy. Interview questions explored

how their participation in a high school dance program influenced their self-perceptions of artistry and dance identity.

Bias and Positionality

My positionality as the former dance teacher of my participants creates a bias in my epistemology because I taught the participants of this study ballet and modern dance and they have danced in productions that I have choreographed. I am an insider/outsider into the world of dance education because as a dance researcher it provides me with an insight into the dance making and creating of dances. I am an outsider, because I teach at the only high school that provides formal ballet and modern dance training in the state. I am the outsider because I am fighting for the survival of a dance program. I bring a unique perspective to the research study because for years under apartheid I was fighting for access to dance and now once again I am arguing for access for my students. Dance classes at private studios are expensive but if you attend our public high school dance classes are free. The key mechanism at my school is having access to dance. Another mechanism is the continual offering of ballet and modern dance as a fine art elective for graduation. Lastly, another mechanism is a caring committed teacher who will own the dance program. I use the word mechanism and process sometimes interchangeably but when discussing the school system, I use the term mechanism as the component that needs to be in place in order to sustain a dance program.

Participants

The participants of this study were chosen because they danced at the high school dance program of which I am the founder and current teacher. All the former dance graduates participated in the ballet and modern dance classes and performed with the dance company at the high school dance program. Out of the ten students, seven are females and three males. The ten

students performed in multiple dance pieces and the participants spent at least one year or more with the dance program. All the participants performed in student choreography and all contributed to student movement studies. I contacted the former graduates by text, telephone, and email and asked them to participate in my research study. Participants of this study are ethnically diverse; Filipino, Japanese, White, Micronesian-White, Japanese-Mexican, Filipino-White.

Interviews

I have conducted 2-3 semi-structured individual interviews with ten former students to investigate the impact of a high school dance program on student efficacy. Before conducting any of the formal interviews, I met with some of my former students individually and caught up with what they were doing in their lives. Some of the participants are in college and dance is still in some form in their lives. Seven of the participants were interviewed face to face, and three who are out of state, I interviewed by FaceTime and telephone. I conducted follow up interviews for clarification and participants were generous with their time. All participants checked the transcripts for accuracy. In the interviews, participants reflected upon their experiences in performing dances, and they referred to existing data such as photographs, programs, dance blogs, interviews, and videos. I know my participants well and they appeared comfortable with me. The interview process was filled with humor, wonder and a healthy exchange of reflections.

Data Collection

I examined past student work examples of the 10 participants (photographs, podcasts, and public video recordings of dance performances, and student written work) to understand student development within the learning process of movement phrasing, choreography, and performance. The participants in my study performed in multiple dance pieces during their time with dance program. I viewed dance rehearsal videos and performance tapes to see the choreographic

process and learning process of my dance participants. All the dance participants reflected upon their dance journey in form of reflection notes, video reflections, and dance blogs.

Over the years, I have collected an expansive dance photo gallery and selected certain dance photographs for observation and reflection. At the time, the public radio and television station interviewed some of the dance participants and myself for upcoming dance performances. I transcribed the interviews for analysis. Included in the data collection are rehearsal notes, performances notes, and playbills as well as reflections of the dance participants' journey and reflections on my own dance journey.

Arts Based Inquiry

Figure 1

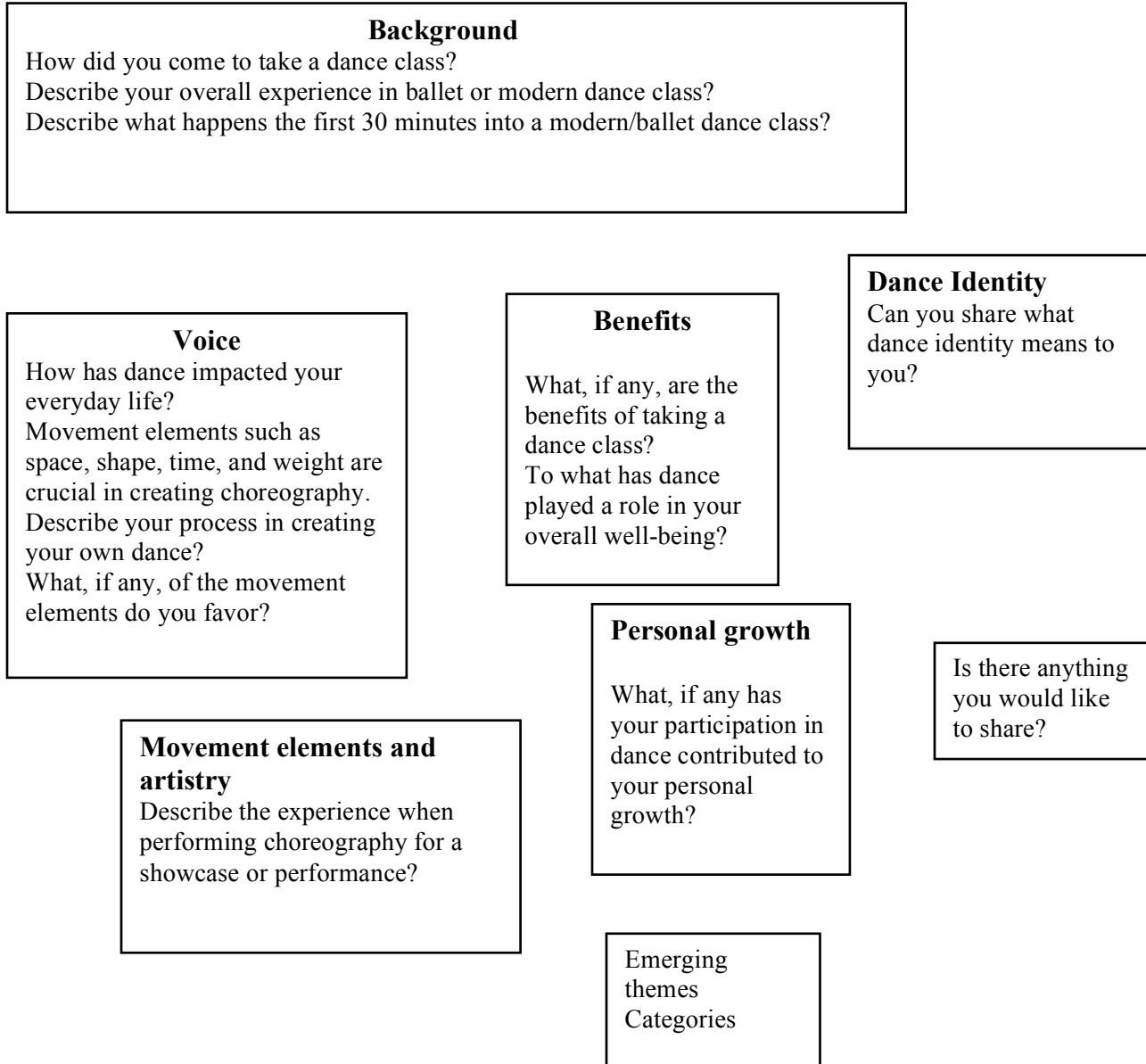


Table 1.			
Summary of Participants			
	Ethnicity	Graduated	Years of dance experience at the high school dance program
	Micronesian and White	2014	4
	Filipino	2013	3
	Filipino and White	2013	3
	Filipino	2015	3
	Japanese	2013	3
	White	2015	3
	Mexican and Japanese	2012	3
	Filipino	2015	4
	Japanese	2010	3
	White	2010	1

Table 2						
Existing Dance Data						
Pseudonym	Videos dance pieces winter and spring dance concerts	Program Winter and spring dance concert playbills	Reflections Audio Written Video	Blog Website	Interviews Television Public Radio	Photographs
Liz	x	x	x	x	x	x
Peter	x	x	x	x	x	x
Risa	x	x	x	x		x
Kai	x	x	x	x		x
Lee	x	x	x	x	x	x
Emma	x	x	x	x	x	x
Asha	x	x	x	x		x
Rye	x	x	x	x	x	x
Nell	x	x	x	x		x
Cole	x	x	x	x		x

Chapter Four

Dancing the Research

Spatial Pathway: Framing the Study

This study is informed by dance scholars, and educators, Novack (1990), Freire (2000), Eisner (2002), Fraleigh (2004), Katz (2008), Hanna (2008), Shapiro, (2008), Snowber (2012), Albright (2010) and Sheets-Johnstone (2015). The research questions that informs this study are:

What can we learn from graduates of a high school dance program about dance a journey of authentic self-expression and creativity?

What is the dance experience when exploring movement phrases, learning choreography, and creating and performing work?

In what directions do you want the movement to flow? Your spatial pathway is the students guide when creating choreography. Choreographers play with direction when creating movement, the spatial pathway tells the story. Dancers are constantly evaluating their own performance and Eisner (2012) states, “In the arts, the locus of evaluation is internal, and the so-called subjective side of ourselves is utilized” (p. 10).

I ask my students why they make certain movement choices in their choreography? and how do they know when to bring the dance to a close? What are their spatial pathways? Questions that choreography students ponder and explore through movement. Albright (2010) discusses “the physicality and experience of the body in the context and contours of its role in mediating between representation and identity” (p. 5). The data analysis in this chapter provides insight into the stories, spatial pathways, and experiences of my former students at a high school dance program.

Data Analysis: The Dance Journey Map

In gathering, sorting, and compiling data from this study, I discovered that my former participants ‘dance’ again as I constructed and found meaning in their words. Merriam (2009) notes that, “qualitative research is interested in how meaning is constructed, how people make sense of their lives and their worlds. The primary goal of qualitative research is to uncover and interpret these meanings” (p. 29). With this data, I am the choreographer researcher interweaving through different elements of data analysis and striving to create the final dance. You draw from various sources to create a dance. The impetus maybe the choreographer’s conflicts, experiences, or stories. The data analysis process is very much like the improvisational stages of creating a dance. You have an image in your mind but no idea where it will go. I pre-categorized my interview questions and, during the initial data analysis new categories emerged, just as when you explore movement with your body, more movement possibilities emerge. This is the same with the analyzing the data for this chapter. In this chapter, the data analysis process draws from the voices and stories of my participants to create the final dance journey map. Therefore, it was important to define dance as a personal journey, not only what it means to me through my dance journey as well as how other scholars frame it. In the chapter I define what it means to the dance participants of this study. As well as share the responses of my participants under the various categories that I discuss below.

Data Analysis Process

Patton (2002) states that “inductive analysis involves patterns, themes, and categories in one’s data” (p. 453). During phase I, I created to guide my first read of the data. These categories were aligned with my research questions: dance identity, benefits, impact, voice, and artistry. I went through the data sets intensively and looked for emerging themes and words. For the

second round of analysis I color-coded the responses to the questions and placed them all together. This process helped with creating categories. I went over the categories and I ended up with a long list and then combined the categories.

As I went through the data, certain words just stood out. When you choreograph, you may come up with a dance motif or certain movement phrases that becomes your movement signature. In the third round of analysis, I created a word bank of descriptors used by my participants. Out of this structure, categories and sub-themes emerged. Responses from the participants on how they came to take a dance class revealed yet another category, “Why Dance?” What follows are the responses of my participants under the various categories and, as these categories reveal themes, sub-themes and patterns related to the research questions guiding this study. Saldana (2015) calls this process In Vivo coding when you honor the voices of your participants. I utilized the existing data from radio interviews, reflections, and notes to add to the stories of my participants.

Data Analysis is Just Like a Modern Dance Class

Data analysis is just like a modern dance class. You prepare for your floor-warm up, just like you prepare to find the details in coding, as your warm-up your body with movement the emerging details and themes emerge. With practice in a dance class the movement becomes familiar and you find yourself able to elongate the movement a little longer. The muscle memory helps to transfer movement from one place to another just as you would make cross connections between your data. Qualitative researcher Janesick, (2011) states that, “Analysis of data is very much like the dancer’s floor exercises” and that “the interpretation of the data by the researcher is like the dancer’s act of performance” (p. 203). This process can only occur after practice,

reflection, rehearsal, and then performance, which is the same mechanism for data analysis I have adopted for this study.

Dance as a Personal Journey

What do I mean that dance is a personal journey? When you learn to dance, and learn different techniques, dance forms, and styles, you bring to these new dance techniques and forms yourself, your beliefs, customs, culture, and conflicts. To be explicit, you bring your stories to the movement. Eisner (2002) states that a student's "personal signature" is important because you create your own meaning, your own personal dance signature. It is by dancing and experiencing dance that elicits responses that may be transformational and informative. For example, Migdalek (2012) looked at theory and auto-ethnography and questioned the norms that are embodied in movement. In his choreography "Gender Icons" he deconstructs assumptions about gender.

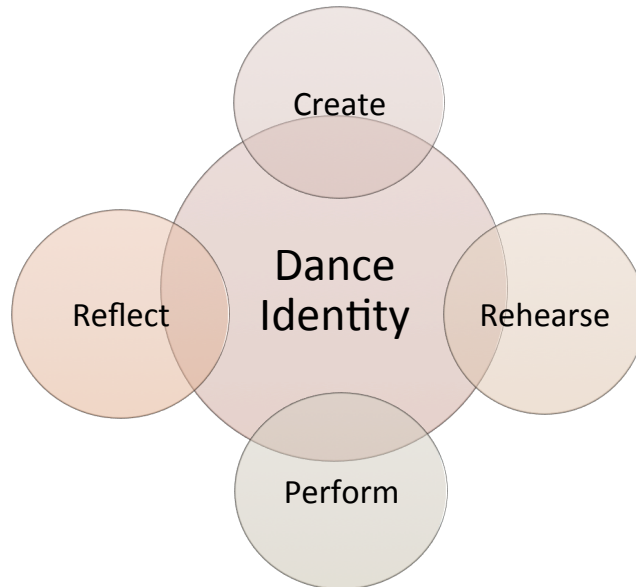
Dance scholar and choreographer Sheets-Johnson (2015) expresses that, "It is the lived experience which is of paramount significance. Through the lived experience, we arrive not only at the sense of a particular dance but also the essence of the dance" (p. 2). Sheets-Johnson (2015) claims that we discover through the lived experience that dance is a created phenomenon. This concept inspires me to ask what social phenomenon am I looking for in my research? I return to my position of dance as a personal journey. When I choreographed the dance, "*Night Creatures*" over eleven years ago, the original dancers lived the experience, they were engaged and present. This dance piece is a regular in my dance repertoire, and I have recreated it several times. With each dance reconstruction, there is a different cast, the shape and form may be the same, but the work is different. Because each dance student brings something to the movement, they bring their stories and varied movement perspectives. I have evolved as a choreographer; therefore, the

dance piece stands on its own with each dance reconstruction process. This lived experience is part of my personal dance journey.

I constantly tell my students that dance is a personal journey. The dance studio is a safe environment where you can explore, create, and reflect. You are working on your own body, understanding, and learning ways you can improve, condition, and listen to it. One of my favorite sayings in class is that, “Your body is your temple, treat it with respect.” My rules are simple: respect yourself, respect others, and respect your environment. I remember seeing in the faces of my beginning dance students, sheer excitement to start class and in others, apprehension of the unknown. An example is reflecting on one of my dance students who danced with me for four years. She started as a 9th grader with no dance experience, dressed in her black leotard and tan tights. When performing a plié’ at the ballet barre, I observed her poise, alignment, and overall deportment, and I knew instantly that she had tremendous potential. Dance participant, Liz, was shy, nervous, and had heard about the dance class from her older sister who previously took the class. She embraced the ballet and modern classes, and in her junior year went to the American Dance Festival at Duke University. In her senior year, she had the dream and motivation to audition for Julliard School of Dance.

Choreographic Process: Dance as a Personal Journey

Figure 2



- **Create:** Exploring and improvising. Exploring the movement elements of shape, weight, space, and time. As the movement unravels, create the movement phrases.
- **Rehearse:** Rehearse the movement phrases and make adjustments.
- **Perform:** Perform the movement phrases
- **Reflect:** Reflect on your phrases and start the process again.

Create, Rehearse, Perform, and Reflect. In Figure 2, I illustrate the choreographic process of create, rehearse, perform, and reflect. This process is not in any strict order for one may create and reflect or one may rehearse and perform. It depends on the skill set and whether one is an experienced dancer or novice dancer will determine the process on the personal dance journey. However, novice dancers are encouraged and guided to pursue the cyclical process of creating a dance. Sometimes, in my observation, novice dancers begin with reflection. They need a place to start and usually a reflective prompt starts the process. When novice dancers are in the create phase, they are exploring and improvising. This process continues until they come up with movement phrases. Once the novice dancers have internalized the movement phrases, they rehearse it, and then they perform it. After performing the phrases, novice or experienced dancers stop and reflect upon their process, then they start the process all over again which leads to expanding their movement phrases, eliminating, embellishing, and manipulating the phrases until they have an organic movement study. An organic dance study means movement originating and creating from within yourself.

The Final Curtain

At the beginning of each dance performance for our winter and spring concerts one or two graduating seniors share their experiences of the dance program. I offer no input into the writing of the story, I hear it for the first time on stage. Dance Participant, Liz, (2014) described at the end of her senior year “that dance is not a hobby but a passion that she plans to pursue dance as a career.” Liz shared that she improved because she was challenged every day. Liz is now studying dance in college. At the end of each performance the entire dance company stands in semi-circle on stage and say their name and grade. This is part where the audience asks

questions of the students and me. Audience participation, is a tradition after all dance company performances that I honor with my students.

Explaining the Dance Descriptors

I created a word bank from the words of my participants. These dance descriptors just stood out boldly as my former students described and shared their experience of the dance program. Under the category of voice, the dance descriptors were: *impact for the good, confidence, body alignment, sense of pride, body awareness, keep your passion and challenging*. When I see, and read these words the visualization of body alignment and posture comes to into play; there is the image of a dancer who proudly presents herself/himself with confidence.

Under the category of dance identity, the dance descriptors were: *being yourself, trust, being safe, express yourself, communication, discipline, never giving up, individuality and structure*. These words resonate to the self; they define the dance students who define themselves and need the freedom to express themselves, but also define the clear goals and parameters for that expression.

The next category is artistry, and the dance descriptors were: *choreographic process as nerve wrecking and exciting, trust, explore, adrenaline rush, pride, perform, vulnerability, organic and scary*. These words describe the choreographic process and performance. Choreography especially your own organic dance piece, can be revealing because you are sharing yourself. Performing or presenting your choreography can be a mixture of joyous pain.

Another category is personal growth, and the dance descriptors were: *empowerment, trust, freedom to create, confident, weight loss, humble, resilience, personal journey, growth, and dance makes me happy*. Words that express the personal dance journeys of students who

overcome movement challenges, confront their limitations, and still pushes ahead because dance is fulfilling and empowering.

The last category is benefits and the dance descriptors were: *body conditioning, trust, make friends, flexibility, weight loss, body awareness, connects the mind and body, family, dance community, finding yourself, increase range of motion and relieves stress*. Some of these words relate to the kinesthetic and physical aspect of dance. Many students enjoy dance because of how it makes them feel. Some dance students spend time during recess or lunch just going over movement phrases or pirouettes to perfect them. Dance technique can be frustrating for some but it can be easy for others. Students often tell me that by immersing themselves in the dance technique they can escape and immerse into themselves. The mind and body approach to dance, especially in regards dance technique is important because one needs balance to execute the movement with optimal proficiency.

Dance Descriptors

Figure 3. Words used by dance participants to describe their experience in a high school dance program



Photographs of former dance graduates and myself

Why Dance?

Many of my students took a dance class because they heard about the dance class from a friend or family member, some saw a dance performance, and others just wanted to try it. One participant just wanted to take a “fun elective.” Dance participant Peter, (2015) stated that his sister recommended the dance class. He recalls the first day of school running by the dance studio and, “checking out the dance class and thought I must be crazy if I take a dance class, but I loved it.”

Other students came with the impression that the dance class was a hip-hop class as described by dance participant, Rye. “I took a dance class called creative dance and I thought it was any kind of dance, I thought it revolved around hip hop as well, but it ended up being modern dance class, and it was really fun.”

Nell (2016), who studied dance at an outside dance studio stated, “As soon as I knew that they offered dance at my high school, then I decided to definitely take the dance class because it was good way to balance out my curriculum and keep up with my passion.”

Dance participant Kai, (2016) took her first dance class her sophomore year. She was interested in musical theater and stressed that, “I knew that I needed to start dancing because musical theater is based on singing, acting, and dancing, but I was never a dancer. So, I took ballet because I heard that that was the foundation of dance.”

At one point, students who enrolled in social dance for a semester could get a physical education credit. This is no longer the case. Dance participant, Lee, (2016) danced in high school for three years and reflected that dance was a fine arts high school requirement and “when I was in high school, there was a second part that was required for physical education. I decided to take dance that would fulfill that requirement, but after that I fell in love and took every dance class

that I could.” Another participant was on the school’s swim team and took dance because she thought it would make her a better swimmer; she states, “I ended up leaving swimming to dance” (Dance participant, Risa, 2015).

Over the years, I had many athletes in my ballet and modern dance classes. I recall one year when male dancers were taking a ballet class recommended by their coach and others heard about it from their friends. When the school’s quarterback took the class, it was the impetus for other athletes to join. The stereotypes of athletes who dance fell apart when dance students were athletes as well. These dance students came from a wide range of athletics: baseball, football, wrestling, soccer, tennis, basketball, and volleyball.

Dance participant, Cole (2016) danced in high school for just a year. He was a dance athlete who right after dance rehearsal would head over to his track or soccer practice. Cole enjoyed the physicality of movement. He shared that, “I like dancing because it allows me to express myself through my athletic and technical abilities.” Dance athletes who dance are immersed in the complexity of movement phrases, they try to find their place within the dance classroom. How do they improve their kinesthetic skill through movement? In my observation of dance athletes, this comes with practice, especially in the ballet class where you are dancing for yourself. Ballet is not a team sport, because you are working on your posture, alignment and, learning a new vocabulary. Once the movement is in your muscle memory, you can focus on gaining muscular flexibility. Dancers work on being long and lean; I always tell my students to “think about growing from the top of your head and extending it,” and, “At all times keep your pelvis underneath you.” These are phrases and statements I say repeatedly in the dance classroom. Dance athletes, just like all my dance students, present challenging mechanisms. How can I help them to improve their range of motion? What are they doing incorrectly when they

land from a jump, especially if they land out of jump or jete' onto a straight leg. In my observation, once dance students find their place within the classroom and find their movement voice they can express how they feel through the movement. Cole describes that "dancing to me is being able to take movement and turn it into something more, to express feeling and emotion. It is a way of communication that requires the whole body and not just the mouth to speak words or phrases" (Dance participant, Cole, 2016). Participant Nell (2016) describes how "dance allows me to escape the world and gives me a moment of cathartic release and free expression."

Dance Identity Defined by the Participants

When participants of my study were asked what dance identity meant to them, the responses were overwhelmingly diverse. All the participants in the study responded that dance communicates how they feel and express themselves. One of the participants who studied with the dance program for four years described dance identity as the following:

Dance identity to me just means being myself and bringing everything from my life into the movement. I wanted to be the artist in the family and make someone proud. I always felt like I was the one that was mediocre in my family and once I joined dance, that was my voice to show everybody that I can succeed in doing something and dance was it for me. (Dance participant, Liz, 2015)

Another participant expressed her thoughts on dance identity as the following: "Dance identity? I think that's basically what you use to express yourself" (Nell, 2016). Emma (2016) stated "You express yourself through the movement that you are given so that it can give you a sense of individuality and expression." Participants responded to dance identity questions in such diverse ways. How they defined dance identity and what it meant to each of them revealed the pivotal role dance played in their lives.

Being Safe. One of the young men, Rye (2016) studied ballet and modern dance classes for four years in high school. He had no prior ballet and modern dance classes before high school. He performed with the after-school dance company to promote the dance program. He described dance identity:

When you just feel comfortable in the dance room. You don't have to be shy in anything, especially dance. This room, this dance room, has been a safe place for me for all my high school years, and I've never, ever shamed to dance in front of anybody (Dance participant, 2016).

Another dance student described dance identity as a safe place to create art and that it stems from place that allows you to bring yourself to the movement.

I believe dance is a place where you feel safe. No one's going to judge your movements through this amazing art. I think that whatever you are going through, your troubles in life, you can express it in this art. I believe that is what means to me (Dance participant, Asha, 2016).

As a dance teacher and choreographer, it is important that I create a safe environment in the studio for my students to explore and improvise.

Dance as a Form of Expression and Communication. In my dance classes I tell my students that you write with your body. You communicate with a flinching gesture of your hand or a twist of your torso as you pass from one movement to another. Dance as a mode of communication is different for everyone. A gesture that evokes awkwardness may be enlightening to another. Lee, (2016) one of the participants of this study defines dance identity as an “expressive a way to communicate things that the English vocabulary just couldn't express”. One of participants stated that, “dance identity is basically an expression of you as an

individual,” whereas another stated that when you learn movement you make it your own: Dance identity is what you bring to a class or a movement that a teacher gives you. When a teacher gives you a movement to do, you don't just simply do the movement. You try to make it beautiful in your own way and try to make it your own so that you can show yourself through your movement (Dance participant, Risa, 2016).

What kept emerging from the participants interviews was that whatever was going on in their personal lives, it is expressed through dance. Dance is the place where dance students can let go as stated by a dance participant: “Just taking everything that has happened to you, the good and the bad and being able to express everything that you're feeling or thinking through each of your movements.” These comments show that dance is a place for dance students to communicate and express who they are through movement.

Dance Identity and Discipline. There are many reasons why my dance students are attracted to ballet or modern classes. Some enjoy the repetitive movements and the opportunity to try the movements repeatedly. Others come for the structure, discipline, and challenge that is required in a dance class, and, some prefer a dance style. Kai, (2016) danced for three years in high school and loved ballet because it gave her structure. A ballet class starts with a ballet barre, which is a series of designed movement to warm up the body and improve the technique of a dancer. Following ballet barre is center work and ballet phrases across the floor. This format is repetitive, strict, and somewhat formal; but for some students this formality provides structure. Kai explains, “When I step into a ballet class I always know what's going to happen and that brings peace to me” (Dance participant, Kai, 2016). She struggled with pirouettes, got frustrated but never gave up and when she eventually could master a double pirouette, I remember the joy in her face at this accomplishment. Dance participant, Kai, (2015) shared that with “ballet,

there's structure and it's very strict, and there's not as much room to play, but I like ballet because my personal life doesn't have very much structure. It's kind of chaotic.”

Never Giving Up. Dance can be challenging especially in high school. I observed many novice dance students who are nervous that they might “mess up” as my students tend to coin it. There are the fears of making a mistake, but once they are comfortable with the movement they will go over and over that movement until they have mastered it. I tell my dance students that if you make a mistake, make a wonderful mistake. Dance participant, Emma, danced for three years in high school and loved anything theatrical. She had the opportunity to take ballet and modern dance classes and expressed that she defines dance identity as, “When you're not afraid to do something. When you're not afraid to try something out in our choreography brainstorming sessions in class” (Dance participant, Emma, 2016). In high school, students are concerned about what others are thinking and saying about them. This in my observation can sometimes be debilitating and cause students not to dance outside of their personal space. Emma expressed this challenge as:

When you're not scared of what other people think of you, you are just interested in how it's going to turn out and want to do your best. I think that's when you have a secure identity and, what you're doing is dancing, and not afraid to try. Because if you try and you fail, then you just do it again. It doesn't matter because it's practice. Then if you succeed, you find out that it's beautiful and there was no reason to be scared in the first place (Dance participant, Emma, 2016).

Confidence

All the participants said that dance has impacted their lives for the positive. One participant stated that dance has helped to prove to people that there is a voice through

movement. “It has impacted my everyday life the most with confidence. I become more confident in who I am as a person and more confident within the body that I have because of how accepting dance as an art form is” (Dance participant, Lee). Dance is described as giving one of the participants more confidence in her posture, body alignment, presence, and a sense of pride. “I walk with my shoulders straight and my back is straight and makes me look proud. It makes me feel more confident when I walk into a room if I have my back straight” (Dance participant, Emma, 2016).

Body Awareness

Dance is a nonverbal art-form that places the body at the center of its representation (Albright, 1997). When I teach dance, I teach that you must work with your body and not against it. By that I mean that you should listen to your body. When it hurts, stop, and listen to where the pain is coming from. Understanding your range of motion is the beginning tenet for a young dancer to expand her/his movement vocabulary. Dance participant, Rye, (2015) expressed that, I lost a lot of weight. I'm more fit. You know, I can move around faster, quicker. I'm more agile. Dance just impacted me in ways that if I didn't have it today I would probably be a really, lazy person. I wouldn't have any motive to wake up in the morning and do what I need to do, but dance is there because that's something I love to do every day. (Dance participant, 2015). For other dance participants taking dance class is a way to stay in shape and gain flexibility. Dance participant Nell states that, “It is a good way to exercise and keep your body going, but it's also a good way to just keep your passion.”

Benefits

When dance participants of this study were asked, what were the benefits of taking a dance class the responses varied from “flexibility, toning of the body, artistic movement to

finding yourself and, understanding your body to increased range of motion, confidence, self-exploration and, expression, family, and community.” In a modern dance class the structure is floor warm-ups, body conditioning, center work, improvisation, and phrases across the floor. The class begins with meditative centering of the body and moves to a slow progression that allows the body to explore various movement phrases.

Participants of this study expressed many benefits to taking a dance class. One benefit is that taking part in a dance class helps you to develop yourself as a dancer. You also find your artistic voice through the dance journey. It helps you to practice for that audition. (Dance participant, Nell, 2016). Another benefit is exploring your body and being aware of its limitations. This exploration allowed Lee: “to express myself in a way that I didn’t know possible and especially finding out who I am as a person... [it was a] journey of “self-exploration and becoming confident in who I am” (Dance participant, Lee, 2016).

Dance as a personal journey provides each student their own pathway, “dance helps you to find yourself” and makes you aware of your “strength and weakness” you see what you can “improve on physically and mentally and it helps you to connect to your body” (Dance participant, Peter, 2015). The physical journey with their body was a process for all participants of this study. The rigorous requirements of the dance class, coupled with mental and physical stamina, improves flexibility, tones the body, and connects the mind and body. This discipline “increases your range of motion, and allows you to come out of your shell” and dance is the only class “that you not afraid to try new things” (Dance Participant, Risa, 2016). Many of the participants stated that taking dance was a good way to relieve stress, and make friends, and build community. One participant said, “I developed a family when I joined dance” (Dance participant, Liz, 2015). Peter, (2015) shared that dance has given him “an outlet to channel my

energy into something beneficial, I could compare it to martial arts in a sense. It teaches you to humble yourself by learning that everyone starts somewhere and its very delicate and vulnerable in the world of dance” (Dance Participant, 2015).

Artistry

The arts nourish our souls and as Janesick (2011) states, “The researcher is the research instrument in qualitative research” (p. 1). The body is the dancers pen, for you write and create with your dancing pen. Merriam (2009) notes that, “Qualitative research is interested in how meaning is constructed, how people make sense of their lives and their worlds. The primary goal of qualitative research is to uncover and interpret these meanings” (p. 29). As a dance teacher, I am always reflecting on the process or outcome of a movement phrase. What nuances must be added to make the movement phrase or dance complete? With experience, I discover, that the movement or dance phrase is never complete. I might be satisfied with how the movement evolves, but the movement is never complete. Dance students in my class create dance phrases for their assignments. These dance phrases eventually evolve into student choreography.

Choreographic Process

The word play is movement, or just move, and let the movement speak to you as part of the dance improvisation process. The human body is the instrument through which improvisation is created (Curtis, 2000). To improvise in dance is to create movement. What kind of movement is created? These movements originate from the idea of the dancer; the dancer conceptually and organically creates the dance signature. The creating of movement phrases may begin with a gesture, flick of the hand, or the roll of the head. These gestures may lead to strings of phrases compiled, juxtaposed, and arranged in the movement identity of the dancer. All the sensory

attributes are available to the dancer when improvising. Dance improvisation embodies spontaneous and free movement, which abandons structure so that the movement can flow. The choreographer takes this free movement and organizes it into structured phrases. These movement phrases are embellished and utilize the movement elements of space, shape, weight, and time. Dance improvisation breaks away from traditional format when creating movement. This is opposite to when the choreographer sets structured movements on the dancers, such as in ballet.

Dance participant, Asha, (2016) danced at the high school dance program for four years; she had no earlier choreographic training and she explained that her inspiration to choreograph her first dance in high school was something she dreamed up and came from her own experience. Dance is a nonverbal art form and communicating without using “any voices” was a new experience. As she enjoyed the choreographic process, she utilized all the movement elements: space, shape, time, and weight. Although the choreographic process for Liz at first was filled with anxiety because she had to reveal her “vulnerability,” Liz explained that:

Once I had to make my own piece, I was terrified because I did not know what to do. We were told to include space, shape, weight, and time, and that was all on me. I did not know how to incorporate all those elements because I was still used to being told what to do, not doing it myself (Dance participant, Liz, 2015).

As the choreographic process became easier for Liz, she would go on to the dance floor, play music, and record herself improvising movement. “I just did what my body wanted to do.”

Dance participant Peter shared that he favored the movement elements shape and weight because “it is interesting to see what type of shapes people create when they dance.”

Choreography was challenging for Peter; all through high school he struggled with creating his

own dance pieces. He preferred performing in dance pieces. However, he explained that:

When you see a dancer in action, for example a jump, for a split second you see what shape they make in the air, but the combination of movement needed to get to that midpoint to see that shape in space is what I love about dance. (Dance participant, Peter, 2015)

For many of the dance participants of this research study, improvising and playing with movement was the initiating process to creating movement phrases. One of the participants explained, “I really like to experiment with time and weight, because it is so fun to play with, and it is fun to see how one movement can go from being slow, adagio, to fast, quick, sharp and the opposite (Dance participant, Risa, 2016). Improvisation and exploring the movement elements helps dance participant, Kai (2016) to find her own movement. Sometimes “I just start by trying things and I work my way through it organically. I just let myself go and then something comes out of it. Hopefully it's good. If it's not, then I try again” (Dance participant, Kai, 2016).

When my students are working on movement phrases during dance class I observe that some tend to favor certain movement elements. Dance participant Rye, (2015)-would start with the movement element weight, because that is what he favors. He explains that weight impacts what your dance looks like. Some dance students have no problems with choreography but for others it is daunting and overwhelming. Dance participant Kai, (2016) described that, “creating my own choreography is really hard for me, but it is also my time to create my own work, my own art of dance.”

When advanced dance students are working on their choreographic assignments, they tend to take more risks because they are comfortable with their bodies and have a larger movement

vocabulary. In contrast, the choreographic process for novice dance students is filled with trepidation and sometimes angst. Creating a safe and comfortable environment to explore movement phrases is optimal. Risa expressed that optimal position:

It's always nice to see one type of movement accentuated over others during certain parts of a phrase because it makes it more interesting, and using the different elements and experimenting with them while you're choreographing is very fun and it helps you to know that you can experiment with different types of movements (Dance participant, Risa, 2015).

Dance Experience When Performing or Creating Choreography

Kai (2016) describes her performing experience as “exciting and scary” because stepping onto a stage in front of people and “sharing your art is always going to be scary, because you don't know how people are going to react but it is exciting every time I step onto stage and dance”. Dance participant, Lee, describes the feeling of dancing in front of an audience as “an adrenaline rush” and “I had to put myself in a different mindset like this is my role, this is who I'm portraying.” Lee enjoyed the role playing and expressed that, “you get to play different characters and experiment with different types of dance” (2016).

Many of the participants find that showcasing of their own choreography as “nerve-wrecking” because they fear “judgements.” Reflection, critique, and feedback is part of the choreographic process and for the novice choreographer critique and feedback is filled with anxious trepidation. Peter stated that you should take the “critique and turn it into a positive and then learn from it.” Dance participants expressed that there was nothing as invigorating as performing in front of an audience, for you are sharing your thoughts, feelings, and artistry through the articulation of movement.

Dance participant, Emma, (2016) struggled with choreography and shared that, “I was really bad at creating my own choreography. All I wanted to do was to dance what she gave me. I don’t want to have to make my own.” She described that the movement element, “time was something I definitely worked on more as I grew in my choreography.” Emma came to discover that less is more and by that she explained was taking the time in her choreography to create a shape was better than “just popping up into it. I think by the end of it, time was my favorite one” (Dance participant, Emma, 2016).

Dance community

Rye (2015) danced with his dancing partner for two years and developed a trusting relationship with her. He shared that “you put so much trust into one person” especially if you are lifting them. He describes his relationship with his partner and peers as a “community,” because you make so “many friends with dance you develop trust.” I recall choreographing a modern dance duet for Rye and his partner. This dance piece was filled with quick transitions and intricate body lifts, all required strong dance technical skills and are only possible due to trust. Rye shared that “dancing with a partner is probably the best feeling you can have because you feel a connection.” He continued to express that “when you dance solo, you express what you’re feeling, but when dancing with a partner you express both of your feelings” (Dance participant, Rye, 2015).

Participants of this study shared that taking a dance class, participating in dance rehearsals, performance, and choreography makes “you feel like you have another family” and is “a good way to have fun” because “you just do your passion and learn” and this is the way “you build a community.” You get to meet people when you take a dance class. “You get close to them, it is a family, a small community” (Dance participant, Liz, 2015). Emma felt a sense of

community and family with the people that she danced with in high school. She shared that if it wasn't for dance, she would have never been friends with a big football player, a skater, and surfer dudes. She felt that there was no way they would have been friends "with a little white girl like me who was nerdy" (Dance participant, Emma, 2016).

Personal Growth

No experience is needed to take a dance class in high school. In my dance class, it is about your personal journey and growth. My students are all on their own dance journey in class. What I am discussing is more than just physical accomplishment, more than just executing double pirouettes and working on leg extension. As a teacher, I observe my students' techniques improve with practice; this improvement is possible due to their kinesthetic increase in range of motion. This mechanism aids in the execution of intricate movement phrasing and are examples of physical growth.

Dance participant, Rye, (2015) expressed that his personal growth in the dance class was "mostly confidence and weight loss." He shared that he was a big kid growing up with big legs and doing the splits was impossible for him, but taking dance classes helped him with his range of motion. He explained that in the beginning "it was really hard for me to do the splits, but then you just keep doing it every day and eventually you reach it."

Another component of growth is when dance students perform choreography with syncopated nuances and completely immerse themselves into the movement. They accept that the movement exploration may be transformational as this may guide them or lead them closer to their dance identity.

One participant explained that with dance she "feels active" for she does not consider herself as being athletic. Another participant recalled that she, and her dancer classmates, were

interested in each other's "growth" for they "learned to work as a team and they took pride in each other's accomplishments." Most of the participants in my research study shared that they took pride in each other's progress. "You took joy when someone else did something good. You could see that they are improving; it was always lifted up in class." Asha, who is in college describes her high school dance experience as positive because "I feel a lot more confident in myself, not only physically but also emotionally, just being able to connect with people a lot more." Asha was shy in high school and taking a dance class helped her. She describes her experience:

I didn't like talking to people as much, but after being able to perform and meet new people and take this amazing dance class, I felt more confident in myself and started to believe in myself a lot more with this experience. It made me realize that I could do so much more (Dance, participant, Asha, 2016).

Dance participant, Risa, (2016) expressed that dance has "empowered" her because "dance makes me feel happy" and "dance allows me to be creative and express myself." This empowerment came from creating her own choreography and having the freedom to create her own movement instead of having to mold into someone else's choreography. Risa shared that dance gave her confidence, made her a better person intellectually, and helped her to think through complex problems. Learning movement phrases and challenging choreography has helped her schoolwork because "helps me to think from all different angles, literally and intellectually." Risa went on to express that "dance helps her with her logical brain." (Dance participant, Risa, 2015).

Peter (2015) expressed that when he started dance in high school, it was just another "fun physical activity" but it turned more than that for him. He shared that, "It gave me a place where

I could express and grow as a teenager. It gave me a second family that I knew I could learn and grow together with” (Dance Participant, Peter, 2015).

Dance participant, Kai, (2016) shared that dance helped her to get “in touch with emotions that I didn’t know I had.” The ballet classes in the beginning were unfamiliar, while singing and acting came naturally. At first, she struggled in ballet class. “It made me uncomfortable at first because I wasn’t the best at it.” Kai expressed that it “humbled” her and made her more “resilient” because she kept on working “hard” until she felt comfortable. Taking ballet and modern dance classes at first may have been an “uphill battle against my clumsiness and un-coordination” but training gave her so much confidence in her body and herself that she could walk into a musical theater audition with confidence (Dance participant, Kai, 2016).

Qualitative Research Questions: Analysis

What can we learn from graduates of a high school dance program about dance as a journey of authentic self-expression and creativity?

The graduates in this study shared their passion for dance. The participants danced in high school and they all performed with the after-school repertory dance company. We learn that graduates from a high school dance program developed in three critical areas. They gained confidence, felt safe and learn trust which helped to build their self-esteem. Participants felt safe in the dance class. This safety was because of the trust in the classroom, a trust between dance students and teacher. In my observation, trust develops once there is mutual respect.

All participants shared that dance helped them to explore their dance identity. Most expressed that dance identity meant feelings of safety, discipline, communication, expressing yourself, and never giving up. They said that their dance identity evolved as they became confident within themselves as dancers. Some of the participants defined dance identity as rooted

in their cultural values which shaped and influenced how they interpreted movement. Finding yourself and expressing yourself through movement made some of the participants vulnerable, but feeling safe in the dance space eased this emotion and opened the door for movement exploration and discovery.

Participants described how dance helped them to express their feelings and how it helped them to communicate in non-verbal ways. At first, one of the participants expressed that she was nervous because she was new to ballet and modern dance. But this, over time, went away once she understood her body and became familiar with the movement vocabulary. Dance is non-verbal art-form because you communicate with your body. I often tell my students that your body is your pen, and you are writing with your pen, so with every stroke you inform and learn. Dance participants discussed the physicality of the movement, the demanding rehearsal schedules of the dance company needed sheer stamina as the dancers rehearsed and performed. For some participants, this gave them “discipline,” for the dance pieces in the performances were well rehearsed and this gave them a sense of satisfaction. The dance training kept them in shape and many of the former dance graduates shared that they are continuing their body conditioning exercises. One of the dance participants who is in college explained that because of her dance training in high school she is still aware of her body and posture. Understanding their bodies, working on range of motion, and knowing your limitations are what most of the participants felt helped them to improve their kinesthetic skills. Working with their own limitations particularly helped them to design and grow in other areas of the movement arena.

Three of the male dancers in the study showed that their experience in the dance program was positive. They never felt out of place in the dance class. Dance was a way for the them to release their stress; dance was an emotional outlet. Dance participant, Cole, 2016 shared that

now he can proudly share with his colleagues at work that he danced ballet in high school. Dance participant, Peter, 2015 said that from a male's point of view of ballet, "I absolutely love how it mixes power with grace."

Participants felt that they were part of a family a dance community that looked out for each other. A family that shared in the progress and growth of the dancers. As their teacher, I observed this sharing and community. Students in the dance company and in the dance program shared their progress and advanced students took it upon themselves to help the novice dancers. All the dance rehearsals were after school, four times a week for at least two hours a day. The dance family extended beyond the dance studio to the neighboring community, who donated their time and services to photograph our students and offer lighting equipment for our performances.

What is the dance experience when exploring movement phrases, learning choreography, and creating and performing work?

We learn that the benefits of studying dance in high school helps students be aware of their own bodies. It helps students explore their own movement potential. Once dance students fully explore the range of possibilities, they can explore their personal space, which is the space around them. Moving the movement beyond your personal space is when you willing to take risks. This is when you challenge yourself as a dancer, an artist. Many times, for the novice dancer, this exploration takes time, and the participants of this study shared that exploring and improvising was key to finding their own movement signatures.

Students in the beginning modern dance class create dance phrases, reflect upon these phrases, accept positive feedback, improve upon them, and perform the improved phrases. These phrases are created out of exploring movement and improvisation. Some students can

choreograph and perform their own work, while others perform in classmate's choreography. At first one of the participants expressed that she was nervous to perform her own work because she feared judgement. One of the participants expressed that creating her own work was scary but once she went through the choreographic process she began her own personal dance journey.

Each student in the dance class is on their own personal dance journey. Dance students have diverse needs: some have previous dance training, others are athletes who dance, and there are those with no experience or dance training. One of the participants described performing in front of an audience as an "adrenaline rush because it is exciting, and thrilling especially when your heart is pumping" (Dance participants, Liz, 2015).

Many of the participants described their experience performing choreography or showcasing their own work as satisfying. They expressed the sheer gratification they got from knowing that they created a piece of choreography from nothing, and that the process evolved out of improvisation, which opened new ways of moving. Some of the participants shared that it was a challenge to move organically, which meant they had to develop their own movement. Creating choreography is not for everyone. One participant described this as an on-going challenge, and that her preference is to dance in other people's choreography. (Dance participant, 2016).

Dancing with a partner can be beautiful; it is artfully described as a symbiotic relationship. It is all about trust and dependability. Trust that your partner will be there to catch you after a dance lift; trust in your partner as you give your body weight to him/her. This is a careful, yet free flowing delicate balance in modern dance and ballet. One participant shared that when you dance with a partner you learn a lot about yourself, other people, and the dance community.

Dance participants described that you develop a trusting relationship with your dance peers

because the movement needs you to work together. In my observation, performing a movement phrase or creating an intricate shape is possible when you have the trust of your peers because the complexity and design of the choreography lends itself to that mutual trust.

In a radio interview, dance participant Liz was asked what she got out of studying dance aside from learning to dance. Her response was:

Trust. I learned to trust people and trust my own body. With that, I feel like I have more confidence in myself. I'm able to do things that I've never really thought that I could do.

Once I put my mind to it, dance has really helped me prove to myself that I can do it, trust in other people and trust in myself (Dance participant, Liz, 2013).

Reflecting Upon the Dance Journey

In all my dance classes I ask my students to reflect upon their dance journey. The reflections can be about the choreographic process, the dance class or about their performance. The following reflections are from participants in this study during their time in the high school dance program.

Dance participant, Lee, (2012) described: “My personal dance journey through choreography has been quite a difficult one, and to come up with my own dance moves to my life was challenging.” She expressed that she would “...move the way her body feels and the way it flows.” She expresses that she is always organizing her movement phrase “...so that it makes sense to a point. Because of my personality I constantly cut, paste, delete, and edit my choreography, only to change it back to the original. I rehearse and rehearse the piece until I am content with my dance piece (Dance participant, Lee, (2012).

Dance participant, Peter, (2013) reflected that “...dancing was difficult at first, learning to know my own body and reaching beyond my personal space and just letting go, took time.” and

Peter, (2013) expressed that once his technique improved he was not “...embarrassed to dance in front of people.”

Dance participant, Emma, (2014) reflected in a podcast her challenges with choreography.

Emma states:

Choreography is hard. I thought it would be simple, I can just make up any moves I wanted. No, I had just ten days where I just like had a block I had nothing to do. I think listening to music helps and that is what I did. Just take inspiration from what you are thinking of and make movement. I have a lot of space, that element and I have been trying to work on time and shapes and I think different combinations of that is really going to help me. (Dance participant, Emma, 2014)

The dance company has a rigorous rehearsal schedule, three times in the week and most Saturday mornings. At rehearsal, dance participants Peter and Rye reflected upon the following questions. When asked what do they get out of the dance program. Peter, (2013) responded that “knowing his body and understanding how his body works, communicating through movement with other people, with your partner, and being in sync with everybody is important.”

Another question posed was what were the challenges they faced with dance. Rye, (2013) response was:

Just being younger than everyone else. I think fitting in is very hard for me. Also, just building trust with the other people, they are two years older than me, it is hard to build trust with people two years older than me. I grew up being the oldest in my family, the top dog of everything. This time it is not like that, I am the young one. I just love the love around here. It is special. (Dance participant, Rye, 2013)

The final question posed was what makes the dance students work so hard on Saturday

morning, when they could be hanging out at the beach. Peter (2013) responded that “For the love of dance, to get better, first it is humbug then it is refreshing to exercise with the dance company because it is your family. It is you bonding and taking time to connect with each other” (Dance participant, Peter, 2013).

Reflecting voices. Dance participant Liz, a junior at the time shared that: Reflection in dance is critical and the choreographic process can be scary and exhilarating, especially for novice dancers. Liz reflected upon her time within the dance program:

I always thought of myself as mediocre until I discovered dance. I was in the 7th grade and watched art come to life with dancers performing in the high school spring dance concert. The dancers were amazing and their performances flawless and professional. Each artist had a unique style of dance. They filled the stage with ballet and modern dance, blending their spirits with skill technique, spiritual passion when they mesmerized their audiences with their various dance pieces, capturing our heart with their artistic dance stories. The first time I stepped into the dance program I did not know what to expect because I never danced before, it was a game changer for me. To be honest I thought it would be an interesting elective for me. To my surprise, I was taken on an unexpected journey, pushing myself from mediocre to excellence. (Dance participant Liz, 2014)

Dance participant, Liz presented a narrative conveying her personal dance journey, which was transformational. I was so proud that she found her voice. During movement improvisation students are prompted to explore movement elements such as space, shape time and weight. By the end of the semester they perform a dance that they created using the movement elements as guides. It is important that students observe their

peers dance. Sometimes students observe a performance by the dance company and this is a reflection from Emma:

What I most enjoyed and thought was most interesting about the movement was the syncopation and the shapes the dancers created. Now, I understand how much syncopation can make choreography more interesting to watch. I also love how shape can be used to tell a story. (Dance participant. Emma, 2014)

Dance blogs. I created a website for the dance program of which I am the administrator. Students who feel comfortable may post their reflections on the dance blog site. Students have the choice to write out their reflections or they may post their reflections on the dance blog. The following are reflections from dance participants Rye, Liz, and Emma in 2013. Emma was in her second year with the dance company and in the second year of taking dance classes at the dance program. She reflects that “It is by far the greatest thing at our school. I have learned so much about my body and it has changed my life. I have started eating healthier because I care about what goes into my body” (Dance participant, Emma, 2013). Liz states that:

The after-school rehearsals prepare the company members for the winter concert, and during school hours we work on our technique, and choreography. I'm extremely grateful to have this experience. My teacher has helped me grow as a person and everyone in this program is thankful for their journey. (Dance participant, Liz, 2013)

Dance Participant Rye, (2013) a junior at the time shared that “So dancing got me to lose 37 pounds, that's right 37 pounds, just by dancing for Mrs. Cremer her workouts are better than any other work out machines or workout program.”

The Last Dance of Data Analysis

For an improvisation dance assignment, the students explore and create their phrases to share with the class. The dance participants shared their stories and dance journey for this study. We learned that the dance journey for graduates of a high school dance program is about showing trust. With the trust, the students felt safe, and being safe allowed them to explore and find their voice through the movement. The dance participants expressed that although dance classes were challenging it helped them to understand their bodies and gain flexibility. The physicality of the movement dance was a constant factor that the participants expressed as the mind and body connection that gave them a sense of balance and accomplishment.

Participants defined dance identity as freedom to express and communicate, feeling safe to explore, developing discipline, and never giving up.

The dance experience when exploring movement phrases, learning choreography, and creating and performing work were multifaceted. Students shared their different comfort and skills levels with improvisation and choreography. Creating their own choreography was described as ‘empowering’ and ‘nerve-wrecking’ and performing was described as an ‘adrenaline rush.’ Participants described that through movement they learned to find themselves and described performing choreography as satisfying. Dance gave them the confidence and the opportunity to create and innovate and to never give up. All the participants shared that by taking part in a high school dance program they found friends and a dance community that is a family.

Chapter Five

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

This chapter discusses the findings, implications, and recommendations for further policy, curriculum development and research. I frame this chapter with these three questions: (a) How can findings from this study inform and support sustaining dance programs, and drive future dance programs in the state of Hawaii? (b) How can we move towards finding the organic dance voices of our students? (c) Why should we value dance education?

Let's Look Back

The purpose of this arts based, auto-ethnographic inquiry was to explore the concept of dance identity and its influence on personal growth and artistry. I asked the participants of this study to define dance identity. Their responses were diverse. I asked the following research questions: What can we learn from graduates of a high school dance program about dance as a journey of authentic self-expression and creativity? What is the dance experience when exploring movement phrases, learning choreography, and creating and performing work?

Who did I Study?

I teach dance at Central High, a public school and the participants of this study are former graduates of the Central High dance program. I also chose to explore and define what dance identity meant to me. I went back to my childhood in South Africa and defined my dance identity and my identity growing up under apartheid.

During apartheid, I was unsure what story to tell with dance. Dance education under apartheid was prescribed and structured. Dance improvisation at that time seemed odd and awkward. I had no idea about my own movement form, where to begin, how to explore because dance that I learned was conditioned and uniformed. Creating movement at my dance studio in

Athlone, Cape Town was at first a struggle but I never gave up and I continued to explore and free myself of the chains of uniformity. This freedom is what I believe was the early origins of my dance methodology mechanism of *create, rehearse, perform, and reflect*.

I recall a dance memory when I was with the Silverleaf children, a youth performing arts group in Cape Town. I was leading the younger students in movement on the outside patio in Newlands, South Africa. The students were doing exactly what I was doing improvising movement at a real fast pace. I enjoyed this process tremendously and then I knew that this is what I wanted. I want to create movement and dance. I enjoy the process of choreography, a mechanism that is fulfilling and rewarding. I am fortunate to be able to write about what I practice every day; dance and choreography. This research study has allowed me to look at what I do as a dance practitioner. It is affirming to know that dance continually touches the lives of my former students. I am so grateful for their active participation and responsiveness to this research study. I am committed to providing a safe space for all my students to dance. The dance space is more than just a dance studio, it is a safe haven where moving bodies speak, physical feats are pushed to another level, and stories are told through the moving body. When students sign up for dance at Central high school they will have a personal dance experience

I conducted 2-3 semi-structured interviews with 10 former graduates of the dance program spanning from 2010 to 2015. All the participants studied ballet and modern dance with the dance program and danced with the after-school dance company. Some participants studied dance for most of their high school years and others just a year or more.

Choreography Dance Methodology

I created the methodology of *create, rehearse, perform, and reflect*, a process that I practice with my choreography students. This process works well with novice and advanced

choreography students. There is no rigid structure to the process. An advanced dance student may initiate the process with *create*, then move straight to *reflect* or may *perform*, and *reflect*. I encourage novice students to go through the process in order just because it is a guide, a dance map to the choreographic process.

Discussion

What surprised me about the data were the responses from my former students regarding the question on dance identity. All participants shared that dance helped them to explore their dance identity. Most expressed that dance identity meant feelings of safety, discipline, communication, self-expression, and never giving up. What resonated with me was the response that dance identity was defined as *never giving up*. This is impressive and admirable for young people who are dealing with the complexities of adolescence. This response became a powerful mirror to my experience of growing up under apartheid where *never giving up* was surviving. It is what I had to do for there was no other way. This thread continues to the place of Hawai‘i that weaves *never giving up* with my former student’s definition of dance identity. This *never giving up* is also about my role as a teacher in fighting for the survival of a dance program in the state of Hawai‘i. The dance program at the high school is an intervention, just as dance was my intervention to apartheid.

This study has provided evidence that students who participate in a dance program gain confidence, trust, and the freedom to communicate. The participants of this study stated that they felt safe in the dance studio. This statement made me pause. The dance studio which is a physical entity, with a black vinyl dance floor occupying most of the classroom space. However, the data revealed that this physical space had significant meaning for my students. In my dance classes, it

is so important that my students feel safe because if they feel safe they can create and explore and make mistakes.

As the teacher in this space I made the space my own, I became the caretaker. Together the students and I clean the space, nurture the space, and meticulously take care of the raised dance floor. Soon the students develop ownership and the dance space is their own. The dance space becomes a form of resistance. Organic movement is created in this space and the speaking voices of my dance students challenge the traditional paradigm of learning by sitting in a desk. You are actively engaged when you are choreographing for you are creating, rehearsing, performing and reflecting. As an artist educator, I witness the value and the benefits of the dance program in the lives of my students.

Yet with the benefits and positive impact dance has on our students, dance education is still marginalized. Ann Kipling Brown (2008) dance educator states “I have no doubt of the power of the arts and of the particular role that dance plays in comprehending events and finding fruitful and an energetic way of living in the world” (p. 150). I personally know what impact dance had on my life growing up under apartheid because dance was my escape, my refuge. Dance education provides our students with the possibilities to dream, explore, innovate and yes, make mistakes.

Access and Equity

As a Title I public school, Central High dance program is home to students who want to explore ballet, modern dance, and choreography. The dance students enrolled in the dance program range from 9th to 12th grade. At Central High dance is an elective, which means students are in class because they want to be there, they elect the class. All dance electives classes are taught during the regular day.

Many of my high school students cannot afford to take ballet or modern dance classes outside of school. Private dance studios prices are out of reach for them, which limits access to who dances. Students who sign up for dance classes at the school earn their fine arts credit, which is required for graduation. The aim is to offer students the opportunity and access to dance. This access includes formal dance training, access to explore movement, access to explore their movement voice, and access to choreography. A ballet and modern dance class is different from an English or social studies class. Students in these classes normally sit in a desk and need very little space to move around. In a ballet and modern dance class you move around, it is kinesthetic. Dancers jump, pirouette, perform phrases on the floor, and dance (on pointe) on their toes.

Keeping the Dance Program Alive

For as long as I have been at Central High school, the issue of class size is contentious because the dance studio is small. Large class sizes in the studio jeopardizes safety. The first seven years at Central High school I had a supportive administration that understood the premise that a dance class is significantly different than an English class. The dance program was given what it needed, which was adequate safe class sizes. With administration changes, so do expectations change about how many students I can take in my dance classes and/or cutting dance classes with small sizes. As the dance practitioner and professional, I am aware of how many dance students can safely perform in the dance studio.

Just recently we had another change in administration and I was told that I could only teach two modern dance classes; they were going to combine my ballet beginning and advanced classes. The administrator wanted me to provide evidence for a smaller ballet class. The dance program at my school has survived for eleven years, sustaining ballet and modern dance classes

in the regular school day. This was possible only because for the first seven years at Central High school we had a principal who supported the dance program. When the administration changed, the dismantling of the dance program almost happened. Now, with yet another change in administration the dance program is thriving. Keeping a dance program alive means that the dance teacher takes ownership over the program, does many more work hours outside of the regular job with no compensation, and volunteers time for dance rehearsals four times a week.

What is needed at my school is equity. The administrator at my school needed to find the data for justification for a small dance class. I am fighting for the survival of a ballet class. Keeping a dance program alive you have to be adaptive, you have to be fluid because the complexity of the situation unravels from administrator to administrator from pressuring mandates and squeezed finances. Maintaining and sustaining an existing high school dance program is challenging especially in an educational environment that sees dance as a co-curricular activity.

Survival of a Ballet Class, the Data is Among us

Under the current administration, I knew I had to find a way to justify the need for smaller ballet classes. I was instructed to “provide the data,” “stick to the data,” so that I could provide evidence of why the dance studio is too small for 24 ballet students. It was another battle for the survival of Central High dance program. I was beginning to go insane, trying to figure out how I could prove quantitatively to my new administrator that the dance studio is certainly too small to accommodate 24 students. I wanted to be a team player, so I took advice from other leaders on campus. My dear mathematician friend came over with her yardstick and measured the studio. I can still see her kneeling, prodding, and measuring the physical space of the studio to provide the quantitative data I needed to make an effective argument for my principal. I am grateful to her,

for her insightful consideration. However, I am the dance practitioner, the artist who teaches in the dance studio alongside my students who know every tiny dip or crack on the floor. Through every dance class and performance, we move through the space, silently manipulating movement phrases in the space, for we know that space is small, but we adjust, and juxtapose the movement. Because of the size of the space, I have to split the class. Students take turns performing the phrases. This is frustrating for me, because my students are here to dance and not to observe. I looked for the dance report that was written years ago about how many students can be in the space. This report could provide the evidence that my students need to have two ballet classes. I turned my house upside down looking for it. I could not sleep thinking about it. How about collecting qualitative data? Ask my students what it is like to perform in a small space with 24 students? Ask me, the teacher who choreographs and, teaches in the dance space? I am the professional dance practitioner and the data is among us. Just ask. I had enough. I began writing about it.

Dance Education and Growth

At Central High, all teachers must participate in data teams. Teachers collect data within their specific content areas and meet with their team to discuss the next steps to improve student learning. One of the challenges facing art educators is that when you meet with your data teams at your respective schools, you are asked to create a common formative assessment. In my case, the data team consists of music, visual arts, and dance. We found creating a common formative assessment challenging. Instead, each fine arts content looked at the theories of change within their own disciplines. Theories of change are specific planning, participation, and evaluation tools which identifies specific long term and short-term goals and backward maps the curriculum to attain its desired outcome.

How do you assess the academic value of dance? This is a question asked by administrators and data coaches. I assess my dance students on their participation and growth in the dance class. This means performing movement phrases in class, movement studies, execution of the ballet barre, center work, or movement across the floor. In addition to all the movement phrases for growth another important component is student reflection on the movement process for assessment, its strengths, and challenges. As a dance teacher and choreographer, I always tell my students that dance is a process, it is cyclical, for you *create, rehearse, perform, and reflect*.

The current educational environment of testing and data collection pushes dance education into these structured, linear mandates. Given the nature and form of movement it is qualitative data that is needed because you capture the nuances and essence of the movement. Movement is not static; it is always in a state of flux. Individually, the disciplines of the visual arts, music, drama, and dance can discuss their assessment within their content, but the disciplines are different in the form, elements, and skills. Eisner (2004) states, “When the public is concerned, about the educational productivity of its schools the tendency, and it is a strong one, is to tighten up, to mandate, to measure, and to manage” (p. 4). Educational federal mandates such as No Child Left Behind (2001) and Race to the Top (2009) with its focus on testing and measurement, I would argue has left arts education on the fringe of education.

At my school, mandatory testing classes meant that dance students enrolled in ballet or modern dances classes had to drop it to make space for the tested class. Dance, as a result of mandated reform and testing, is not a priority. Hopefully with ESSA (2015): Every Child Succeeds Act, a federal educational mandate is left to the states to develop its own educational plan. This plan focuses on educating the whole child and takes into consideration that knowledge is acquired in diverse ways. According to Gardner’s (1993) theory on multiple intelligences, one

of the components, bodily kinesthetic intelligence, places dance as a vital mechanism for how students learn. This component of educating the whole child is included in the blueprint of Hawai'i Department of Education Strategic Plan of 2017-2020 which states that learning be personalized and that learners have a well rounded educational experience. It also states that schools "create innovative learning options to earn a high school diploma." What does this mean? How the arts are positioned still needs to be defined. The dance program at my school is going into its twelfth year and is a creative learning option. Dance education is more than just learning the language of dance. It is about who we are as people, embracing differences and embodying our cultural values, responses, and different voices (Samson, 2008, p. 216).

The Value of Dance Education: A Somatic Response

Dance education is more than just learning steps or movement phrases. Dance education helps to understand the world through movement. We depict what we know, we share who we are, and we provide social commentary through the body. Samson (2008) states: "Dance education is not just about learning the elements and language that constitutes the dance process- it is about addressing who we are as people, embracing differences encountering numerous cultures, interacting, and collaborating with others and inviting response" (p. 215).

I see dance as part of the socio-political context which is embedded in our culture. One cannot remove the movement from the culture. Students come to the dance classroom with their cultural values, customs, and beliefs They come with knowledge and learn new knowledge. They are not empty vessels that information must be deposited into (Freire, 2000). Dance education is about dialogue, dialogue with the self and dialogue with your environment. Students are having the dialogue with their body. The dance piece "At the Bus Stop," that my students performed had to do with social commentary. It dealt with the characters that one encounters while waiting for

the bus. The students provided input for the characters and I choreographed the movement. It was a collaborative effort. It was a dance dialogue between teacher and students. I recall that dialogue as full of joy and humor.

In dance technique class, it is about learning the movement vocabulary and the skills to broaden the dancers' range of movement exploration. The participants in this research study enjoyed the physical challenges to the body. They talked about gaining flexibility and control over their bodies. Dance increased their range of motion and helped them to understand their bodies. This means practicing and practicing a jump or mastering a pirouette. Dance education provides dance mechanisms such as improvisational movement elements strategies to help the dance student to explore movement.

Many of them stated that the dance classes helped them with their personal growth. What does that mean? Adolescence is a challenging time for young dancers and understanding their own bodies is important for my students. Dance education helps the student to listen to their bodies and to each other. Participants in this research study stated that they shared in each other's personal dance growth. They took pride in each other's accomplishments, and worked together as a team

The value of dance education in our schools informs and transforms our young people to speak, critique, and ponder with their bodies. Dance as a personal journey is the intervention for disadvantaged marginalized students at Central High. In the classroom, I see the movement transformation in my students from their first dance class when they were awkward, shy, and never moved beyond their personal space to now where they are moving and owning their own body. Students develop a sense of calm power when they listen to and understand their bodies which is empowering because they are in control of their body and movement; an adolescent

movement awakening. This coincides with my transformation as a teacher and dance educator. In my teaching pedagogy, it is all about listening to your body, your story, your journey. Dance educator Shapiro (2008) states “that the body is the ultimate destination of cultural forming, both local and global” (p. 262).

The Mechanism of Dance as a Personal Journey

In most public schools in Hawai‘i, students have no prior dance experience. Dance education in my classroom means that students are taught that dance is a personal journey. I am interested in the dance students having an experience, a ballet experience, a modern experience, and choreographic experience. I am not interested in the authoritarian methods of dance, where the movement style of the teacher must be obeyed. Such control violates creative safety and produces dance clones. Dance as a personal journey allows students to make the movement their own by encouraging voice and honoring stories; for you dance your experience. Sansom (2008) discusses that “telling of one’s own stories draws on multiple layers of being and unearth the deeply embedded emotions that lie within, thereby exposing something about who we are and what we care about” (p. 209). This process or mechanism I developed and redefined over my years as a dance educator with my thinking of dance education also evolving and transforming

Dance education provides meaning in our lives. One of the participants of this study expressed that “dance took her on an unexpected journey, pushing herself from mediocre to excellence” (Dance participant Liz, 2105). Dance had a profound influence on my own personal life and dance journey. Dance education under apartheid was segregated, except, for a few grey areas where dance educators took risk and provided access to those of us who wanted to dance.

Dance education in schools faces many challenges and dance educators need to learn how to talk about dance education, and advocate for dance education without

isolating peers. Dance education programs are developmental and emerging. Dance education provides an alternative pathway to learning which is tangible, aesthetic, and transformative. Samson (2008) states “The stories and experiences that are etched onto our bodies remain one of the most valuable resources we could ever use in the ongoing struggle for social justice” (p. 223).

The findings of this study reveal that participating in Central High school dance program fostered students’ identity, developed their movement voice and artistry, and allowed them to explore their own personal dance journeys. What does this all mean? Possibly the qualitative data may help to sustain existing dance programs and drive future dance programs in Hawai‘i. Students come to the dance with their values, perspectives, aspirations, conflicts, and pain. Dance education helps students to make sense of the world and find their place in the world as agents of social transformation. Dance education provides an avenue for movement exploration, critique, and reflection. The value of dance education at Central High dance program according to the data is emerging and transforming.

Student Voice

In dance, student movement voice must be at the center of what we do. There are very few schools that teach students how to dance, how to find their own organic movement voice, and how to choreograph. Most students copy dances from YouTube and call it their own. The participants of this research study stated that dance helped them to understand their bodies, and that dance provided them with the ability to feel free in their self-expression. Participants expressed they were given the latitude to explore their own movement. This is unnerving for some teachers who may feel that letting their students

explore their own movements might mean they relegate control over the dance classroom. I have embraced the motivational and inspiring aspects of the way I was taught dance, and threw out the stifling aspects of it. I have evolved and grown as an artist educator and student movement voice is at the heart of how I teach dance.

Sustaining a Dance Program: Background of Central High School's Dance Program

In the following section, I discuss the complexities of sustaining a dance program: (a) What does a viable dance program look like? (b) How does one create and sustain a dance program?

Years ago, when I arrived at Central High, there was a creative dance class that took place in the cafeteria taught by a fine arts teacher. I took over the dance class and encountered talented passionate students. They wanted to dance and continue their dance education but could not afford the fees for dance classes outside of school. This was the impetus to pioneer a ballet and modern dance program at Central High.

As stated, I teach ballet and modern dance at my high school and direct the repertory dance company, a performing dance company that promotes the dance program. In my classes I have a diverse student body with an increased enrollment of athletes taking dance. Students in my ballet and modern dance classes, range from beginning to advanced students. Some students are taking dance classes for flexibility and to increase their range of motion, while others just want to try it for fun. The advanced students plan to study dance in college and go into dance related fields.

My theories of change for short-term success is when students can enroll in dance, and can explore dance as a personal journey, while the long- term success is when students can take ballet and modern dance classes for a fine art elective, and continue to create, rehearse, and

reflect in defining their dance identity. The dance program is successful when the following conditions are in place:

- When students can sign up for ballet and modern dance classes and can explore dance as a personal journey.
- A qualified caring teacher to own the program
- School administration financially supports and values dance as a fine arts elective. The electives are seen by the administration as the co-curricular and therefore not a serious subject.

See below Table three illustrates the components needed to sustain a dance program: (a) existing resources, (b) activities, (c) short-term outputs, and (d) long-term outputs. What threatens the dance program internally? Students not signing up for dance class and changes in administration. What threatens the dance program externally? New initiatives, budget cuts and cutting the dance program.

Elements for Sustaining a Dance Program

Table 3					
Dance education as a personal journey					
Inputs	Outputs			Outcomes -Impact	
	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Participation</i>		<i>Short</i>	<i>Long</i>
Resources Raised Marley floor 8 Ballet barres Bose sound system TV overhead Piano in the studio Changing rooms Accessible restrooms to the dance studio Water dispenser for dance students Dance studio converted into theater for performances Video camera Computer and music	Modern dance construct Mediation Body Conditioning Center work Across the Floor: Movement Phrases Improvisation Organic choreography: using the movement elements of space, shape, time, and weight Ballet Class Construct Ballet barre Center work Across the Floor Repertory Dance Company Students from the dance program who are committed to attending rehearsals 3 to 4 times week Guest Artists: workshops collaboration with visiting dance professors Professional development for teachers: Body Conditioning	Ballet Showcase at the end of all quarters Choreography Sharing of movement phrases Organic Student choreography in dance performances Choreography and Performing showcase of skills of students Performances Winter and Spring Dance Concerts Reflections Student reflections, dance blogs video reflections and critique		Students can participate in dance as a personal journey Ballet and Modern dance offered as a fine art elective for graduation Participation in movement phrases such as space, time shape and weight Dance in safe environment Dance is healing Dance develops artistry using movement elements Self -confidence and self esteem	Create, rehearse, perform, and reflect. Dance as a personal journey Use of movement elements in defining dance identity Developing student choreography Developing dance educators Presenting dance work and presentations in other classes Dance work presented to schools

Survival of a Dance Program: Community Support

I am fighting for the survival of Central High dance program because dance classes are threatened with changes in administration. The current administration is inherently focused on mandates and testing. Currently three of my dance classes have been cut. I offered to teach one advanced ballet class for free after school if my students can get credit for it. The dance program is an intervention that supports disadvantaged marginalized students in high school.

This year is the eleventh anniversary of the dance program. To promote and market the specialized training offered at this public school, a dance repertory company was formed to perform in the winter and spring productions. All students in the dance company are currently enrolled at the school. Advanced and novice students who participate in dance classes are given the opportunity to perform and, if skilled, choreograph. Some graduates return to the school to offer support in coaching younger dance students.

I stage two dance productions, one in winter, and one in the spring. Dance performances are free and attended by families and the community. At the end of each performance there is a question and answer section, which provides instant feedback to the local community. This dialogue between the students and the community is valuable aspect of the process. This community has reached out to support the dance program by helping with the stage lights, dance playbills, and photography. The dance program is emerging and evolving.

Inputs and Outputs-Mechanism of Dance as a Personal Journey

The data I collected is from former student reflections, video, radio interviews, programs from performances, and dance blogs. Some of the existing inputs are the following:

One activity is when dance students in the modern dance class create their own organic choreography by using the movement elements of space, shape, weight, and time. The

mechanism of *create, rehearse, reflect, and perform* is the process that is used to prepare students to present their choreography to the class and for performances.

I am the only dance teacher and capacity building at the school is important because it will expose students to different movement perspectives. Partnering with the university dance department generously allows some of the guest artists who are in residence at the university to offer dance workshops for our students. This past year one of the dance professors from the university dance department volunteered her time to choreograph for the students.

The key mechanism at my school is having access, coupled with a caring and passionate dance teacher. Another mechanism is the continual offering of ballet and modern dance as a fine art elective for graduation. Ballet and modern dance classes at private dance studios are expensive, but if you attend this public school your dance classes are free.

The dance program will continue to be viable with the physical use of the dance studio. Participation in dance at the high school builds students' self-confidence, promotes healthy living, and increases range of motion. Each student brings their self, values, and culture to the dance process, and thus, dance identity individually defined on this personal journey.

Recommendations

The new educational legislation of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015), declares the arts important to every child's education. Hawaii Department of Education came up with a strategic blueprint that focuses on education for the whole child. How do we advocate and innovate to provide dance education for all our learners in public school? The questions that I raise in this study are access and equity. What role does ESSA play in fostering equity and access in dance education? In bringing dance education to all learners, we need to cultivate and ensure qualified dance education certified teachers in the classroom.

Dance Education Teacher Certificate

In the state of Hawai‘i there are no dance education certificate programs whereby potential teachers could earn their dance licenses. There are licenses for music, drama, and visual art but not for dance. Recently the University of Hawaii Dance Department and the College of Education at the University of Hawai‘i both wrote letters to the Hawai‘i Standards Board to support a proposal to create a certificate in Dance, K- 12. I propose that teachers who are planning to teach dance in the public secondary schools have a dance degree and dance education certificate. I have a BFA in dance and a MA in dance education, and to teach in Hawaii public secondary schools, I had to get certified in social studies because there was no dance licensure.

What I propose are dance education certificate courses where potential dance teachers can earn their dance licensure. By implementing a dance education certificate, Hawai‘i joins other states in offering a dance certificate and assuring that children are taught dance by qualified professionals. Other states, such as North Carolina, Washington, Connecticut, and New York offer a Post-Baccalaureate Licensure in Dance Education.

The University of Hawai‘i graduates dance majors with masters and bachelor degrees in dance. With a dance education certificate in place, dance majors could instead enroll in a dance education certificate program whereby they could earn their licensure. I propose the dance certificate as a year program with 9 classes and a total of 27 credits. I suggest a potential collaboration between the College of Education and the University of Hawai‘i dance department to implement a dance certification program.

Why a Dance Education Teacher Certificate?

Dance education graduates learn about dance through their dance major. A dance

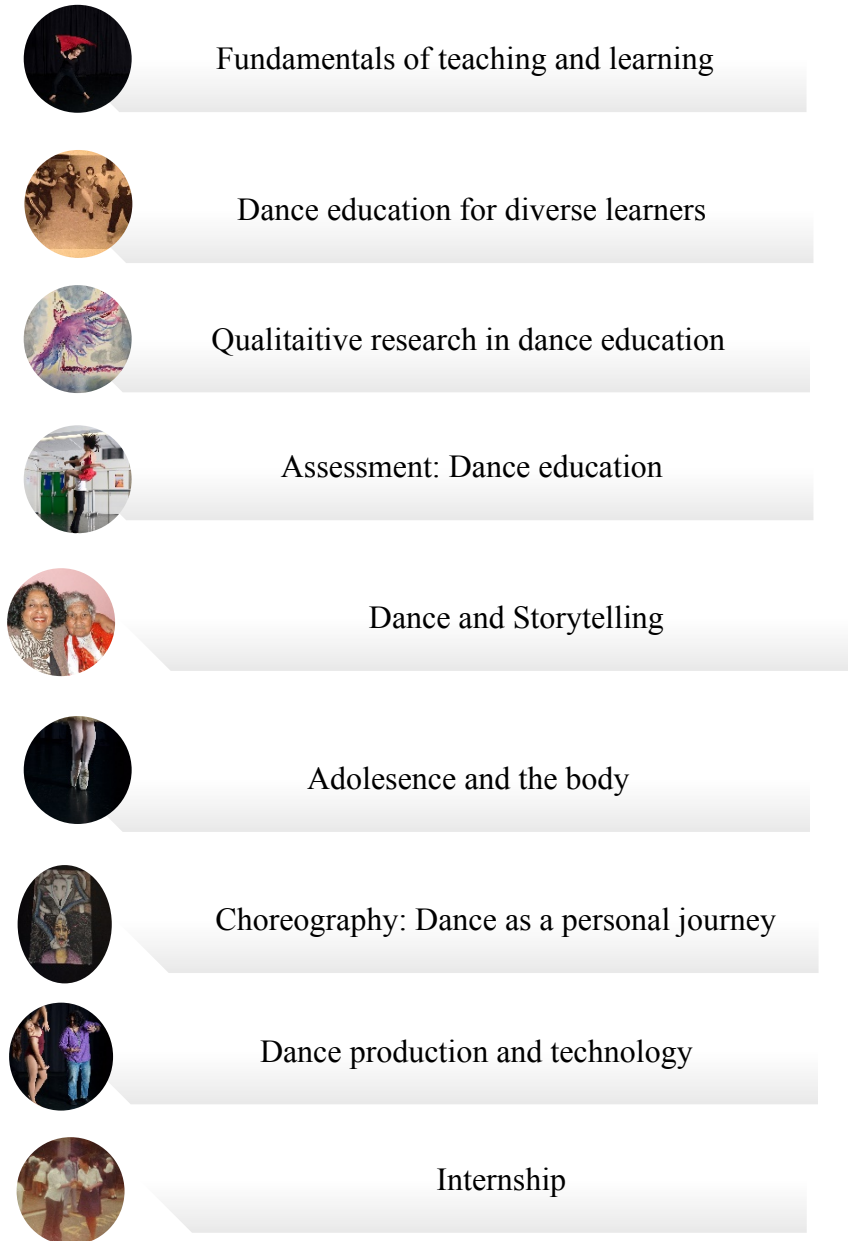
education certificate could prepare the dance majors for the complexities of teaching dance education in the public schools. The dance certificate should entail how to teach dance to all learners and the designing of courses such as dance and story-telling, choreography as a personal journey, and dance production.

The dance certificate program I recommend should be for dance majors or minors only. This will ensure that students have a dance teacher who is qualified and technically proficient in modern dance and ballet with the skills to guide students through improvisation and choreography to find their own movement voice. Dance in the school is considered a fine art. A dance education certificate program offers dance majors and minors teaching careers in the public schools.

The evidence from this research study reveals that dance students who experience dance in high school gain confidence, freedom to explore, and trust, as well as increase in their physical and emotional well-being. As one student in this research study expressed, “I become more confident in who I am as a person and more confident within the body that I have because of how accepting dance as an art form is” (Dance participant, Lee, 2015). It is important for dance teachers to have the expertise and experience to value and honor the different voices of their students.

Dance Education Certificate Course Work

Figure 4.



Photographs of family, former students, friend, and myself.

Conclusion

The former graduates of Central High dance program expressed that participating in a high school dance program provided meaning to their lives. The dance program provided an outlet for the participants to express themselves, and by participating in dance they became part of a community. Participants of this study described many benefits to taking a dance class. One benefit is that taking part in a dance class helped them to develop themselves as a dancer. They also find their artistic voice through the dance journey. Another benefit was students being able to express themselves in a way they never knew was possible. Many shared that the rigorous kinesthetic demands of the dance class coupled with the physical and mental stamina, toned their body, and increased their range of motion, and improved their flexibility.

The participants defined dance identity as freedom to express and communicate, feeling safe to explore, developing discipline, and never giving up. Participants described that through movement they learned to find themselves and it gave them the confidence to go about their school day. Another response was that learning movement phrases and challenging choreography helped with schoolwork. A moving response shared by one participant was that when you dance with a partner you learn about yourself, other people, and the dance community.

As the former dance teacher to the participants of this study it was affirming, surprising, and enlightening to hear how dance impacted their lives. The dance studio is a haven for my students and myself. It is a space where meaning is constructed through movement, ideas are embodied, and questions about the self, culture, and the world explored. Every student needs the space to create and innovate, the space to make beautiful mistakes. Albright (1997) discusses that dance is dependent upon the physical body for its representation. The body is at the center of creating a dance, for you dance what you know. And what you know is movement that comes

from within you. What lies within you gets its impetus from your own personal stories and cultural values.

The participants of this study described dance identity as *never giving up*. During apartheid, *never giving up* was my survival. I use that lesson to instruct students that when one falls off balance in the dance movement, or in one's life, *never give up*.

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Appendix A

Invitation to Participate in Research Study

Dear _____,

My name is Desiree Cremer; I am conducting this study as a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in the Doctor of Education (EdD) Professional Educational Practice program. I am conducting this research study as a requirement for earning my doctoral degree. The purpose of this study is to explore the concept of dance identity and its influence on personal growth, and artistry. I like to extend an invitation to you to participate in this research because you have and are studying dance.

Activities and Time Commitment: If you participate in this research study, I will conduct individual interviews with you at an agreed upon location and time. The interview may consist of 15 to 20 open-ended questions and may take an hour to an hour and a half. The interview will be audio-recorded then transcribed and analyzed.

Benefits and Risks: The benefits of this study may help performing arts educational programs in the community. I believe there is little risk to you in participating in this research study. Please note that you can also stop the interview or withdraw from this study at any time.

Privacy and Confidentiality: All data will be stored in a safe place. The only people authorized to have access to the research information will be myself, my University of Hawai'i at Mānoa advisers, and members of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Human Studies Program.

At the conclusion of the study, all data will be destroyed. When reporting the results of the research study, I will not use your name or any other personal identifying information that can identify you. I will use pseudonyms and report the findings in a way that protects your privacy and confidentiality to the extent allowed by law.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw your participation at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study there will be no penalty or loss to you. Your choice to participate or not participate will not affect your rights to services at University of Hawai'i. There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Your participation in this research study is greatly appreciated. It is the hope that the study's findings will provide rich feedback for the arts education community to continue its important work in providing arts education in Hawaii.

If you are willing to participate or you have any questions about this study, please call me at 808-226-8071 or email me at cremerd@hawaii.edu.

Sincerely

Desiree Cremer

Appendix B

Individual Consent Form

My name is Desiree Cremer. I am a researcher conducting this study as a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in the Doctor of Education (EdD) Professional Educational Practice program. I am conducting this research study as a requirement for earning my graduate degree. The purpose of this study is to explore the concept of dance identity and its influence on personal growth, and artistry. I am asking you to participate because you have and are studying dance.

Activities and Time Commitment: If you participate in this research study, I will conduct individual interviews with you at an agreed upon location and time. The interview may consist of 15 to 20 open-ended questions and may take an hour to an hour and a half. The interview will be audio-recorded then transcribed and analyzed.

Benefits and Risks: The benefits of this study may help performing arts educational programs in the community. I believe there is little risk to you in participating in this research study. Please note that you can also stop the interview or withdraw from this study at any time.

Privacy and Confidentiality: All data will be stored in a safe place. The only people authorized to have access to the research information will be myself, my University of Hawai'i at Mānoa advisers, and members of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Human Studies Program.

At the conclusion of the study, all data will be destroyed. When reporting the results of the research study, I will not use your name or any other personal identifying information that can identify you. I will use pseudonyms and report the findings in a way that protects your privacy and confidentiality to the extent allowed by law.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw your participation at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study there will be no penalty or loss to you. Your choice to participate or not participate will not affect your rights to services at University of Hawaii.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please call me at 226-8071 or email me at cremerd@hawaii.edu.

You may also contact my adviser, Dr. Sarah Twomey at twomey@hawaii.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the UH Human Studies Program at 808-956-5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu.

If you agree to participate in this project, please sign and date the signature page. Your participation in this research study is greatly appreciated. It is the hope of the researcher that the study's findings will provide rich feedback for the arts education community to continue its important work in providing arts education in Hawai'i.

Signature for Consent

I am agreeing to participate in the research study

Please initial next to either "Yes" or "No" to the following:

_____ Yes _____ No I consent to be audio-recorded for the interview or focus group portion of this research.

Name of Participant (Print):

Participant's Signature

Date: _____

Appendix C

Individual Interview Questions

Background

1. How did you come to take a dance class?
2. Describe your overall experience in ballet or modern dance class?
3. Describe what happens the first 30 minutes into a modern/ballet dance class?

Dance Identity

4. You bring yourself, values, and identity on a dance journey. Can you share what dance identity means to you?

Voice

5. How has dance impacted your everyday life?

Movement elements

6. Movement elements such as space, shape, time, and weight are crucial in creating choreography. Describe your process in creating your own dance? What, if any, of the movement elements do you favor?

Benefits

7. What, if any, are the benefits of taking a dance class?
8. To what extent has dance played a role in your overall well-being?

Personal growth

9. What, if any, has your participation in dance contributed to your personal growth?

Artistry

10. Describe the experience when performing choreography for a showcase or performance?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share

Appendix D: IRB Approval




UNIVERSITY
of HAWAII®
MĀNOA

Office of Research Compliance
Human Studies Program

March 9, 2016

TO: Desiree Cremer
Sarah Twomey, Ph.D.
Principal Investigators
Educational Foundations

FROM: Denise A. Lin-DeShetler, MPH, MA 
Director

SUBJECT: CHS #23802 - "Embodying Dance; Converging, Self-Values and Identity. A Journey from Apartheid to Hawaii"

This letter is your record of the Human Studies Program approval of this study as exempt.

On March 9, 2016, the University of Hawai'i (UH) Human Studies Program approved this study as exempt from federal regulations pertaining to the protection of human research participants. The authority for the exemption applicable to your study is documented in the Code of Federal Regulations at 45 CFR 46.101(b) (Category 2).

Exempt studies are subject to the ethical principles articulated in The Belmont Report, found at <http://www.hawaii.edu/irb/html/manual/appendices/A/belmont.html>

Exempt studies do not require regular continuing review by the Human Studies Program. However, if you propose to modify your study, you must receive approval from the Human Studies Program prior to implementing any changes. You can submit your proposed changes via email at uhirb@hawaii.edu. (The subject line should read: Exempt Study Modification.) The Human Studies Program may review the exempt status at that time and request an application for approval as non-exempt research.

In order to protect the confidentiality of research participants, we encourage you to destroy private information which can be linked to the identities of individuals as soon as it is reasonable to do so. Signed consent forms, as applicable to your study, should be maintained for at least the duration of your project.

This approval does not expire. However, please notify the Human Studies Program when your study is complete. Upon notification, we will close our files pertaining to your study.

If you have any questions relating to the protection of human research participants, please contact the Human Studies Program at 956-5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu. We wish you success in carrying out your research project.

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