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Brittany M. Johnson

Winthrop University, johnsonb28@winthrop.edu

Stephanie L. Milling

Winthrop University, millings@winthrop.edu

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# **Integrating Principles for Choreographic Evaluation into Education: One Proposed Model for Dropout Prevention**

Brittany M. Johnson  
Stephanie L. Milling, Ph.D. (Mentor)

## **ABSTRACT**

This research proposes a model that represents a synthesis of various choreographic evaluation principles and education reform curricula. Considering key concepts within education reform and arts education, this model attempts to provide insight on how choreographic pedagogy could possibly enhance student motivation, the needs of students at risk of dropping out, the curricular goals of reformation, and how choreographic pedagogy meets these goals. Through qualitative research, points of connection have been made between curricula specifically designed for efforts of reformation and the choreographic evaluation process used in the dance classroom. Together, reformation practices such as the Nine Principles of Coalition Schools, Constructivism, and various modes of choreographic evaluation have been combined to create this synthesis. When analyzing the principles emphasized in each of these concepts, one can see the overlap of ideas in the delivery of content, instructional methods, and teacher and student roles. The delivery of content and student and teacher roles described in authentic and relevant assignments are the central ideas of the model, combining ideas from critical evaluation in the dance classroom and a dropout prevention curriculum. The potential use of this model is two-fold: education reformers may implement this into the curriculum as means to reach students at-risk of dropping out, and dance advocates may find it to be of use when promoting the benefits that dance education can offer students.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Since arts education inherently aligns with the constructivist approach to education, it can be argued that dance pedagogy would be a key component in helping educators involved in reformation to restructure the school curriculum in a way that reaches children at risk of dropping out. Constructivism is a 20<sup>th</sup> century theory that adopts ideals from psychologist Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget's studies on children learning through play and experiences, which means that learning occurs through experiencing our world (Saraniero). According to Patti Saraniero, author of "Constructivism: Actively Building Arts Education," the arts and constructivism naturally overlap one another. Like the arts, constructivist classrooms are student-centered, promote collaborative and authentic experiences, and emphasize higher-order thinking and reflection.

"Constructivism: A Holistic and Approach to Teaching and Learning" is a culmination of several works written on the Constructivist Learning Theory. The coordinator of this work, Janet Giesen, provides readers with the basic philosophy, classroom approach, pedagogical practices, learning methods, and student and teachers roles described in this theory. Giesen defines constructivism as a learning approach that enables people to construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences.

Donn Weinholtz, former educator involved in reformation, is the author of "Restructuring an Urban High School," which addresses the reality of the school systems in urban communities plagued by severe social and economic situations. Weinholtz introduces readers to the Coalition of Essential Schools nine common principles that significantly changed the conditions of Cedar Rapids Metro High School. The principles offered in this book provided a strong foundation from which I initially based my theory on comparing dance constructivism and a basic reformation model. The principles are as follows: 1) The central goal of schooling is intellectual development, 2) students should study a few essential areas

deeply, 3) high expectations should be held for everyone, 4) learning environments should be personalized, 5) students should be constructing meaning rather than being filled up with information, 6) teachers should act as coaches and guides, 7) the key outcome is not test scores, but what students can actually do, 8) families should be central to the school life, 9) schools with these goals cost more or need to omit some of the wide-ranging functions performed by modern high schools (Weinholtz). In “Rethinking High School: Best Practice in Teaching, Learning, and Leadership” by Harvey Daniels, Steve Zemelman, and Marilyn Bizar, the Coalition principles are also introduced as one of the most successful education reform methods. This resource serves as a shared consensus of successful secondary education reform methods that has been put into practice over the last few decades (Daniels xi).

On the topic of dance education and constructivism, in the article entitled “Constructivism: Actively Building Arts Education” by Patti Saraniero, the author highlights the interconnected relationship between the Constructivist Learning Theory and the general arts education curriculum approach. The author emphasizes the major themes that are accentuated in the Constructivist Learning Theory such as the problem-posing pedagogical approach, the use of collaboration, a more student-centered atmosphere, and authentic assignments that are relevant to students’ lives.

While on the subject of choreography in the dance classroom, Larry Lavender, author of “Dancers Talking Dance: Critical Evaluation in the Choreography Class,” helps dance educators to teach students how to observe, describe, analyze, write, and talk about their dances more effectively. Practices such as Lavender’s critical process gives students a multidisciplinary approach, allowing them to understand, master, and explore concepts through different means: observing, describing, analyzing, writing, and verbalizing.

Last, the Americans for the Arts report “Arts Education Navigator: Facts and Figures,” written by Kristin Engebretsen and Elizabeth Van Fleet, provided statistical data supporting my theory in light of the correlation between dropout rates and arts integration. Student’s involvement in the arts can improve their attendance rate, academic achievement, test scores, and academic leadership.

After reading about several reform educators’ unique processes, experiences, and most importantly curriculum approaches, I came to the conclusion that there was something familiar about their perspectives on restructuring curriculum. Each of these reformers have redesigned a curriculum that naturally aligns with the arts-constructivist curriculum. From the perspective of a rising dance educator, I have comprehensively created a parallel between what I would like to call the dance-constructivist curriculum and these reformed curricula found in my research. Consequently, the purpose of this research is to provide a supposition addressing how education reformers can use a dance-constructivist curriculum approach to reach students at risk of dropping out.

## METHODS

### *Stage I*

Penny Hanstein and Sondra Fraleigh’s “Researching Dance: Evolving Modes of Inquiry” book helped to define a philosophical inquiry research design for this investigation. Stage one of the philosophical inquiry research design is called “reviewing the literature” (Hanstein 37). During this stage, there is the process of viewing and reviewing materials related to the research purpose (Hanstein 37) to create a model that demonstrates how the principles of choreographic pedagogy and constructivist learning theory can be combined and used as a tool to help education reformers restructure secondary curriculum to reach students at risk of dropping out. After defining the purpose and problem statement, I conducted a systematic analysis approach adopted from Penelope Hanstein to begin creating a cross-comparative analysis between these two bodies of literature. (1) First, I defined the purpose and problem of the study to help narrow my search, (2) made a list of the key words related to the topic (i.e. high school dropouts, arts education), (3) “reviewed” and “selected” appropriate and related materials, (4) “read critically and “determined” the relatedness of the source” by “writing” down the key ideas and

“noting” how they are related to the research purpose”, (5) “recorded” source and page number for all quotes”, and (6) “recorded” all bibliographic information accurately”.

### *Stage II*

The second stage of the philosophical inquiry design was forming a theory, the final result of the philosophical inquiry research design process. Rather than using a linear systematic approach to produce results, Penelope Hanstein’s “theory building” (66) process was used to create new knowledge. “The elements of the process or the theoretical building blocks are: concepts, definitions, statements (propositions), and the line of argument or the ordering or hierarchy of the statements” (Hanstein 66). The *concepts* are the foundation blocks of a theory that the researcher chooses to use to represent her or his ideas (Hanstein 66). Hanstein also defines *concept* as the building blocks of the theory. *Definitions* provide an explanation of the researcher’s meaning of the concept in relation to their research topic (Hanstein 67). In this case, a familiar concept is contextualized or applied in a different way according to the researcher’s theory (Hanstein 67). Statements, or propositions, are the researcher’s logical lines of argument that support or make up the theory (Hanstein 67). “Statements are declarations about concepts and the most important idea to remember here is that these claims are supported by data” (Hanstein 67), which comes from “a variety of sources such as observations, interviews, literature reviews, surveys, journals, artifacts, and documents” (Hanstein 67). The information below documents my procedural steps in creating a cross-comparative list of concepts from various pieces of literature reviewed. This reflects the processes described in stages one and two of Hanstein’s approach to qualitative methodology.

***Concepts* – The foundation blocks of a theory the researcher chooses to use to represent her or his ideas** (Hanstein 66)

Constructivism

Lavender’s ORDER approach to critical evaluation in choreographic pedagogy

Secondary education reform

Students at- risk of dropping out

***Definitions***- “articulates how a concept will be used within the theory” (Hanstein 66)

**Constructivism**- a learning theory that says that people construct knowledge through experience, which complements Lavender’s critical process, creating a tentative solution for reformers’ goals for student’s learning outcomes through their restructured curriculum

**ORDER approach**- an approach to the critical evaluation that takes place in the choreography classroom that requires learners to observe, describe, analyze, write, and verbalize in relation to dance works

**Secondary education reform**- a movement or cause that seeks to change the way high schools are structured in climate, curriculum, and teacher development for the betterment of student achievement and overall motivation to stay in school

Students at-risk of dropping out- students who have a high chance of discontinuing their high school education, but continue because of motivation from the arts

***Statements***- expresses the ideas that support and make up the theory (Hanstein 67)

**Constructivism and Reformation**

Constructivism: In “Constructivism: Actively Building Arts Education” by Patti Saraneiro, the author highlights the interconnected relationship between the Constructivist Learning Theory and the general arts education curriculum approach. The author highlights the major themes enlisted in the Constructivist Learning Theory, such as the **problem-posing** pedagogical approach, the use of **collaboration**, a more student-centered atmosphere, and **authentic** assignments that are **relevant to**

**students' lives**....“a constructivist dance teacher turns the task of choreography, as well as the ability to explain it with examples, over to students. With a well-planned structure set in place by the teacher, students gain understanding of choreography because they capture the real-world job” (Saraniero). The restructured curriculum approaches from “Rethinking High School” and “New Schools for a New Century” both impose **collaborative, challenging, and authentic** curriculum as well.

“Rethinking High School” authors and secondary reformers conglomerated their studies from the national curriculum standards; twenty subject- area organizations; national research centers; mainstream educational consensus findings on best practices, conditions, and structures; observations on high-performing institutions around the country; and even research reports funded by the U.S. Department of Education and professional organizations to devise a list of eleven key ingredients to good high schools. Number five was “Curriculum- with their teachers, young people engage in **challenging inquiry into topics that matter**” (Daniels, Zemelman, and Bizar).

### Constructivism and Choreographic Pedagogy

(<http://faculty.mwsu.edu/west/maryann.coe/coe/inquire/inquiry.htm>)

Constructivist Learning Cycle/ 5 E's	L. Lavender's ORDER
<b>Engagement</b> - object, event, or question used to engage students	<b>Observation</b> - viewing the work with a keen mental alertness
<b>Exploration</b> - “objects and phenomena are explored” (Coe, D. Ed)	<b>Reflection</b> - viewers take the visible properties of the work from their critical reflection and write about the way these properties interacted with one another, such as the relationship among qualities
<b>Explanation</b> - “students explain their understanding of concepts or processes” (Coe, D. Ed.)	<b>Discussion</b> - students share their notes on their description of the dance and their analysis of the relationships between the properties used in the work
<b>Evaluate</b> - “Students assess their knowledge, skills and abilities. Activities permit evaluation of student development and lesson effectiveness” (Coe, D. Ed.).	<b>Evaluate</b> - Judgment; where viewers provide their perceived description of a work's merit or flaws.
<b>Elaboration</b> - “activities allow students to apply concepts in contexts, and build on and extend understanding of a skill” (Coe, D. Ed.)	<b>Recommendations for Revision</b> - viewers recommend choreographic suggestions for the work under review. After all the viewers have interpreted and explored evaluative claims, the choreographer has learned which parts of his or her work were successful and/or what needs attention according to viewers.

### Students At-Risk of Dropping Out and Arts Motivation

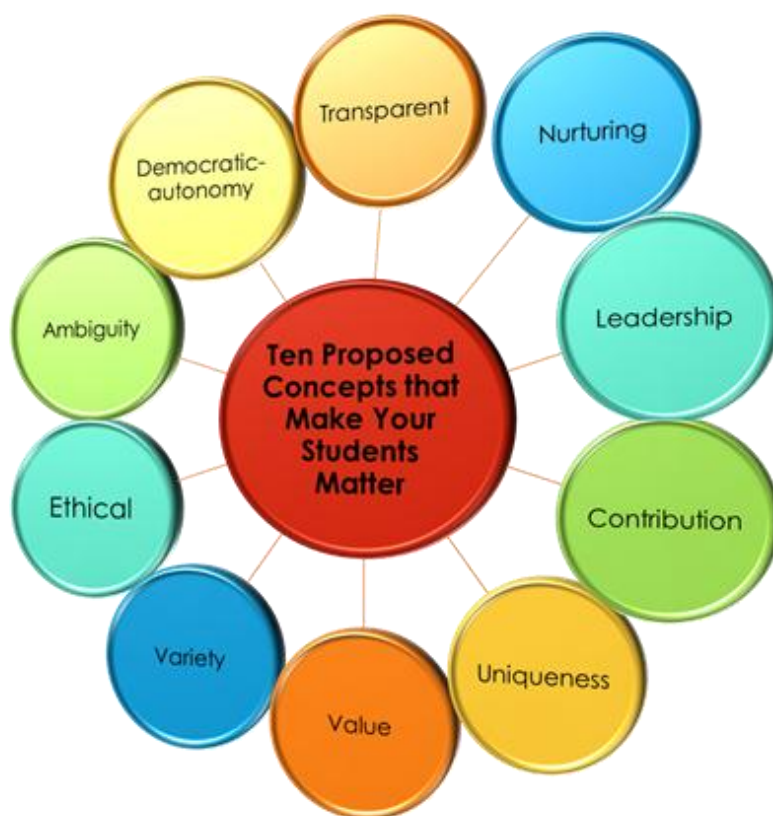
Many students who are dropped out of high school in “Why Our School Need the Arts” by Jessica Hoffman Davis, voiced reasons for leaving school such as, “the teacher just stood in front of the room and just talked and didn't really like involve you,” or they described school as “boring.” Engebretsen and Van Fleet's extensive research shows that low socioeconomic students who were at risk of dropping out would have otherwise “slipped through the cracks” if it were not for the relevance to students' lives and excitement that the arts provides, unlike those who reportedly did dropout from

Davis' case studies. "These positive effects of arts education helped students stay excited about school—keeping them hooked through graduation" (Engebretsen and Van Fleet 6).

"Low socioeconomic status (SES) students with a high participation in the arts have a dropout rate of 4 percent, but their peers with a low participation in the arts have a dropout rate of 22 percent" (Engebretsen and Van Fleet 5). In addition, "low-income students who are highly engaged in the arts are to graduate college as their peers with no arts education more than twice as likely" (Engebretsen and Van Fleet 4). Because of high engagement in the arts, only 7% of low socioeconomic students dropped out of school in 2008, which is five times less than other SES students with a dropout percentage of twenty-two.

According to the Facts and Figures report, historically, students with arts education have higher grade point averages and have scored higher on SAT, regardless of socioeconomic background, which closes the achievement gap of students' performance in school. "Students who take four years of arts and music classes average almost 100 points better on their SAT scores than students who take only one-half year or less" (Engebretsen and Van Fleet 9). Gainful employment, college completion, and volunteer work within the community are also other aspects that are correlated to low-income students' involvement in the arts.

## RESULTS



## DISCUSSION

A final piece of literature entitled "The Process of Engagement: Developing Civic Literacy via School- University Partnerships" by Michael Slavkin, Hilary Braysmith, and Norma Faust, helped me to finalize the model I hoped to create as a tool for dance advocacy, linking the essential components between education reform curricula and dance- constructivism curricula. This article was a review of a

partnership between a teacher education department and a dropout prevention program (Slavkin, Braysmith, and Faust 65). The product of this partnership was the CREATE project, (Cultural Reflection about Evansville- Art Transforms and Engages), an interdisciplinary experience supporting a strong-service-learning environment, which reconnected youth in the dropout prevention program back to their community through cultural and civic exploration (Slavkin, Braysmith, and Faust 65). Faculty, student, and community partners collaboratively devised a way for students to contribute to revitalizing the Evansville downtown area through coursework, creating an authentic learning experience and opportunity for students to make a difference within their community. Relating this to my background information, the authentic experience is emphasized and practiced in both the education reform and dance- constructivist environment. Being able to affect the community in a positive way is what ultimately changed student's attitudes towards their education. Their coursework was connected to the success of the community project, making the course material relevant and impactful. When students are able to witness the power of knowledge, they can walk away believing that knowledge is power. Suddenly staying in school to receive an education isn't so meaningless to students after all.

The power of authentic learning and civic engagement are the concepts that mostly impacted my research. Through means of authentic assignments, students understand the relevance of their education, and it does not leave them asking, "Why do we need to know this?" CREATE allowed students to see why knowledge is essential through means of civic engagement, leaving them to believe that they could make a difference. Therefore, the driving theme of my model is ten proposed concepts that make your students matter. The ten concepts are principles that have been borrowed from the article or formulated by myself based on methods that were used to create a successful authentic experience. They are as follows: leadership, contribution, uniqueness, value, variety, ethical, ambiguity, democratic- autonomy, nurturing, and transparency. I defined each of these principles through the perspective of education reform, critical evaluation, and dance- constructivism.

**Leadership-** every child needs to demonstrate leadership, taking charge of what they do best and leading others by example

**Contribution-** feeling included in making a difference; a student's contribution should be visible or self-evident

**Uniqueness-** assignments allow for diverse kinds of learners, ethnicities, strengths, and abilities

**Value-** students should feel valued by others, and that their unique skills are valued by others

**Variety-** assignments that allow multiple means of representation and expression and provide a democratic environment for students to be receptive to various interpretations, characteristics, thought processes, and working processes

**Ethical-** respecting the intellectual property and opinions of others, demonstrating personal and cultural tolerance, and behaving ethically, which promotes professionalism among students

**Ambiguity-** promoting assignments that involve ambiguity, deep inquiry, and reflective, critical thinking to solve a problem or accomplish a task, rather than "depositing" factual information, which is limited to right and wrong answers

**Democratic- autonomy-** not depending on authority figures and taking control of learning together as a team; the teacher becomes the facilitator

**Nurturing-** provide an opportunity for the teacher to nurture student growth through reinforcing student strengths and areas of improvement, and through providing thought- provoking questions and multiple stimuli that caters to students' personal intelligence and ideas

**Transparent-** assignments should demonstrate how coursework or contextual knowledge is clearly related to authentic assignments, so that the relevance of the content will become self-evident to students

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