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DANCE/MOVEMENT THERAPY AND COMPETITIVE DANCE:  
AN IN DEPTH SELF EVALUATION

Veronica A. Chapp-Miller

Thesis submitted to the faculty of Columbia College Chicago  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
Master of Arts  
in  
Dance/Movement Therapy & Counseling  
Department of Creative Arts Therapies

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## **Abstract**

I used artistic inquiry self-study methodology to extend my knowledge, awareness, and understanding of how dance/movement therapy (DMT) and counseling concepts can positively alter and enhance my personal dance aesthetic, style, and pedagogy. Reflection is a personal process that can deepen the sense of self and can lead to significant discoveries or insights, while self-assessment is a process that involves establishing strengths, improvements, and insights based on predetermined performance criteria. Using artistic inquiry gave me the opportunity to study, analyze, and document where and how the DMT process and concepts have developed within my natural teaching approach. Engaging in this study presented me with a clearer understanding of the specific DMT concepts that enhanced my natural approach to working with competitive dance students. The research detailed how the combination of these concepts have improved my pedagogic style and are utilized in a field of work not as yet broadly addressed by dance/movement therapists.

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I would like to dedicate my work to my loving husband Doug Miller, to my children Alex Lee Miller and Vianne Rose Miller and to my devoted parents Mr. Ronald J. Chapp and Mrs. Sandra J. Chapp. Without your continued emotional, physical and spiritual support I would not have been able to finish this important chapter of my life. I am forever blessed to have the most supportive, inspiring, motivating, and loving family on this earth.

Lastly, I dedicate this work in memory of my loving grandfather Mr. Anthony Chapp, you were my very own Fred Astaire, and you were the first to teach me how to dance. Your passion for dance and movement has always inspired me and the image of us dancing together is endlessly instilled in my mind, heart and soul. I miss you always and forever.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

My motivation for this research was both professional and personal. The motivation and overall goal in this study was to provide a better understanding of how I have assimilated dance/movement therapy (DMT) concepts into my dance pedagogy and how they have altered my approach to teaching, choreographing, and connecting with my students. As a result of my DMT training, I discovered a number of therapeutic concepts that were directly related to many facets of my experience with dance studio functions and operations. These operations included but were not limited to: teaching of dance, supporting social-emotional student issues, and managing the studio. I was already aware of two specific concepts utilized in DMT that I embraced in my dance teaching style – humor and improvisation. I have valued these two concepts as a person, an educator, and as a DMT intern. Moreover, relationships, fostering health, personal improvement (emotional and physical), and human development are very important to me, and I believe that focusing my work in these areas would help me to produce my best work as a dance teacher and choreographer. This in, in turn, would allow me to help my students produce their best work.

After my coursework in dance/movement therapy and counseling was completed, my thesis project took form after I was recruited by the owner of a Midwest dance studio in the fall of 2013. I became the creative director of the competitive dance team. My position included creating new choreography, refining existing choreography, coaching, and improving dance technique. The dance team consisted of 37 female members ranging in age from 8 to 17 (grades three through 12). The physical and emotional maturity of the students varied so no one specific method of instruction applied to all of the students. This required an approach that could be adapted to fit each student's individual needs.

I was prepared to identify the various pedagogical approaches that would be necessary for effective dance education for this group of students; however, upon my arrival, it was clear to me that this dance studio community was in crisis and that my role would need to go beyond that of solely teaching dance and choreography. The studio had just experienced the loss of their teacher, the founder and co-owner of the studio, in a traumatic event. It was clear that the lack of leadership in the studio had fostered an atmosphere that was lacking in confidence both among the staff and among the students.

Change is an inevitable part of life; however, the traumatic nature of the change that occurred combined with the response from the studio's staff and students created a delicate situation. The emotional health and training needs of the students could be seriously affected if the problems were not handled correctly. I recognized an ideal opportunity to incorporate concepts from my DMT training in order to be able to thoughtfully and compassionately foster a healthier studio environment that could support both social emotional growth and dance training. Through observation, instruction, non-verbal communication, and verbal communication with the studio community over the course of the first two weeks, I was able to quickly identify the 17 dancers between the ages of 14 to 17 that had been most negatively affected.

I identified three problems that posed the most serious obstacles to the dance team's success as individuals and as a team in competitive dance: low frustration tolerance, lack of confidence, and challenges with teamwork. I helped the students discover that individual success was a function of team success. I conveyed my belief that there is a direct link between personal growth and team growth. I observed many behaviors from the students that had a negative effect or contributed to stunted growth. There was a lack of encouragement and support of one another. Learning from other's mistakes is something I considered to be a classroom



norm; however, as I offered corrections or feedback during class or rehearsal, my students did not appear to use my feedback as a learning opportunity. The students made attempts to redirect my focus to other's weaknesses in order to elevate their own status. There was minimal awareness of teammate's spatial positioning as compared to an individual's own body. A lack of empathy for the other members on the team was apparent through words, body language, and the lack of acts of kindness. The students expressed frustration with their teachers and their peers. Many were short tempered and inconsistent with their dance performance. Several of the dancers expressed an already existing feeling of defeat and were not invested in delivering their best efforts.

The three problems identified were obvious obstacles to class performance and would challenge my teaching abilities. It should also be noted that, as traumatic as the event that had occurred had been, it alone did not create the negative atmosphere in the class. Through years of substandard/poor teaching methods/direction and perhaps a lack of parental guidance, many students had formed attitudes that were destructive to the studio and dance team performance. The addition of the traumatic event further exacerbated those troublesome abilities. My work was cut out for me and my therapeutic skills would be challenged.

During the course of my DMT studies, I became aware of various concepts of. However, at the same time, I did not understand the impact these concepts had on the students, me, or the interactive impact on each other. I realized that control and awareness of each and every part of the body and its respective movements needed detailed attention. Understanding the mind-body relationship became critical to me as I would build relationships with my students. I would need to become more cognizant that change is a process rather than a onetime occurrence. I expected there to be some level of growth in my ability to be patient. Through feedback received from

instructing the students to be mindful and more aware in the classroom with directives and each other, I planned to sharpen and improve my own mindfulness and awareness skills. Mindfulness is, first and foremost, a deeply personal experience. For the purpose of this study, mindfulness is the practice of being with our experience, moment to moment, without reflexivity changing or rejecting it (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Before my DMT training, I believed the use of an open, accepting, positive, but disciplined method of working with each student would assist the student in reaching or exceeding his or her anticipated potential. I insisted that all team members were respectful to each other and help each other in a positive manner whenever possible. I worked on adapting my teaching methods to work for each group. In this way, I could recognize the best of the group and then develop new talents and techniques individually for each student. This both addressed areas where the student was lacking in development and also allowed those students who improved in technique to be positively reinforced. I tried to mentor students to recognize their own areas for growth while learning certain dance forms or steps. I helped them measure their own personal growth.

I have come to recognize that competitive dance teachers, for the most part, do not work on cognitive development, moral character development, emotional aspects of dance, interaction with team members, and/or the physical integration of these concepts. My DMT training set me on a path of searching out new methods and reviewing basics in the development of being our best selves. I planned to put certain moral values from each student in place as well as the commitment to hard work. Laughing at or promoting negativity towards any teammate would not be tolerated, and I would set the boundaries verbally. I reviewed my current teaching methods, and I planned for those methods to be positive and demanding but always achievable

based on human development models and dance proficiency level. I desired for the word team to have real meaning for my students. My teaching mission became an established core requirement for each class. Each class focused on the concept of teammate cooperation and mutual support. I explained in detail that accepting personal mistakes and the mistakes of others would assist in growth and correcting problems. Physical dance achievement, diligence, respect for self and for others, not abusing your body or soul, and connecting with teammates would become the central focus to the program. My goal was to reach my own full potential as a teacher and to effectively teach dance technique, choreography, and teamwork while fostering resilience, healthy body-mind connection, and self-worth within the studio community. In doing so, I would be successful in assisting my students to reach their own potential.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research provided a better understanding of how utilizing DMT concepts in my traditional dance pedagogy altered my approach as a teacher/choreographer and how I connected with my students. Had applying the identified DMT concepts with my unique dance pedagogy improved my teaching methodology? How did my evolving teaching style influence/change my students' ability to comprehend a specific concept as presented and then use that knowledge to strive for even greater levels of excellence?

Several theoretical models from my DMT training were particularly useful in conceptualizing how and where studio improvements were needed. While I understood that I was not going to be conducting therapy in the studio, the fundamental concepts were available to keep myself attuned to the everyday events that were taking place. DMT is an integrative field that utilizes the teaching concepts and choreography of early practitioners in the field of dance

(Levy, 1988a). These practitioners concentrated their efforts on eliciting more than technical growth from themselves and their dancers (Levy, 1988a).

My theoretical framework combines a humanistic person-centered approach along with a Chacian and Schoop DMT approach. Humanistic theory places emphasis on the development of the whole person. The person-centered approach requires the therapist to have empathy and unconditional positive regard for the client. To be empathic, one has to remove one's own views and values to see the world from another's perspective (Levy, 2005; Sandel, Chaiklin, & Lohan, 1993). Marian Chace's belief that every person has the desire to communicate complements person-centered therapy's unconditional positive regard. I chose the Chacian approach because of her ability to improvise in the moment both verbally and nonverbally to reach her clients. (Levy, 2005). My students desired structure and consistency within the classroom. The Chacian approach used methods and improvisation within structure that is ideal for the group of students that I worked with. I respected Chace's approach because of her intuition, skill, and genius to invent several forms of verbal and nonverbal communication to reach clients (Levy, 2005).

Trudi Schoop has been a great source of inspiration in the development of my therapeutic methods. Many of her interventions used in therapeutic sessions are similar to exercises I use to teach both choreography and the application of that choreography into a group/class session. The use of mirroring, humor, and miming are all tools I have used in my classes. The humor used in teaching needed to be implemented wisely, and the student's movement autonomy required boundaries. With this age group, I needed to use caution so as not to throw obstacles in the way of open communication. Schoop believed that there is so much to laugh about in life, especially ourselves (Levy, 1988a). The person's body-design should indicate a free, adaptable body that is capable of choice and decision, a body with a point of view. A capable body design portrays a

confident attitude that allows one to act or react to any situation it may be confronted with. Body design dictates how one carries oneself and identifies with others. It reflects one's strength of character and level of personal achievement in life (Schoop & Mitchell, 1974).

Furthermore, Levy (1988a) noted that Schoop was able to transform clashes and individual struggles into laughter and self-acceptance (Levy, 1988a). I have not only used these methods for myself, but I have also used them in the past to develop teaming skills and to shift the mood/atmosphere in the classroom. Like Schoop, Chace also used the process of mirroring or reflecting, by listening to the patients' nonverbal and symbolic communications, Chace genuinely validated her patient's immediate experience of him/herself while creating empathy and emotional acceptance (Levy, 1988a).

I observed the group of students involved in this study to have a noticeable lack of patience, empathy, and teamwork. Using mirroring could give the students the opportunity to assimilate other teammate's movements, breathing techniques, and expressions. Mirroring could give the students a deeper connection to both themselves and the others on the team. These tools could also provide me with the chance to connect with my students and expand their movement repertoire, using the language of DMT, or learn new ways of moving, from the dance educator perspective. Hackney (2002) stated, "We breathe automatically, but breath can be influenced by and is reflective of changes in our consciousness, feelings, and thoughts. We can attend to our breathing and become attuned to changes in our inner attitude as we go through our day." Bringing awareness of the use of breath within me and to my students will help change my personal as well as my student's own feelings. Newly developed thoughts and movement patterns lead me and the students in a positive direction both mentally and physically.

## **Summary**

The overall goal of my thesis was to analyze and critique my dance pedagogy and determine how the use of identified DMT concepts have altered my approach to teaching, choreographing and connecting with students while working in the competitive dance field. “Creating motivation within students is not only crucial, but challenging” (Criss, 2011 p. 65). Through this research, I identified, documented, and analyzed my improvisational DMT concepts embedded in my dance pedagogy. The conclusions drawn from this study detailed how these enhancements to my approach when working with students have positively resulted in more confident, motivated students who strive for excellence in the classroom and beyond.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Support**

Minimal literature was available that combined DMT with competitive dance. To understand competitive dance and its relationship to DMT, a step by step document search was made to thoroughly understand the current knowledge base available. This analysis identified the past and current studies, discussions, and therapy concepts that have been completed and were crucial to the completion of this study. With this information, it was possible to determine core DMT methodologies and theories while at the same time identifying where gaps in literature exist. I reviewed literature in the fields of competitive dance according to this study; the relationships between competitive dance, dance education, and therapy; the application of improvisation and humor in DMT and dance education; and the social-emotional needs of adolescents.

### **Competitive Dance**

A literature search has shown that there has not been a significant amount of literature connecting DMT to competitive dance. Research on youth in competition has been primarily a concern of sports psychologists. Sobash (2012) reported:

Dance competitions have grown over the years with over two hundred competition companies currently in business at the local, regional, and national level. Each competition provides opportunities for performance with set rules and judging criteria. News and TV reality shows such as *Dance Moms* have shed some light on the general public as to the physical and psychological demands on children who compete. (para.2)

I have personally worked with the Dance Moms cast, and have seen firsthand the demands on the young people competing. In this particular show/studio, I additionally witnessed a lack of personal and genuine attention shown to the minors participating on the show. This was very

discouraging. In the aforementioned study by Sobash (2012), she stated that competitive dance affects social behaviors and showed how competitive dance is handled differently by each individual. The results were inconclusive as to how social behaviors of individuals who have competitively danced may differ from those who have not. The data was gathered in a 64 question survey. This survey was given to 58 (47 Female; 6 Male; 5 Unspecified) undergraduate dance students recruited from Chapman University in Orange, CA. Students ranged in age from 18-22. The results of the study identified dancers' attitudes towards their social development. Several of the participants confirmed it was difficult to make friends or be involved in other activities outside of dance. However, 45.3% concluded that even though they missed out on social events such as school dances for competitions or weren't as actively involved at school, they don't regret their time demanding decision to be highly involved in their dance training (Sobash, 2012).

The following sections of the literature review speak to the lack of literature connecting DMT to competitive dance. I review chronological development of DMT that also details my approach to introducing my DMT concepts into the everyday dance studio teaching routine. With a lack of information regarding competitive dance and DMT, I transitioned the search into researching the fundamental basics of dance ranging from dance education, through DMT training, followed by the application of the DMT skills in therapy situations. This forms a more complete DMT analysis for competitive dance.

### **Dance Education and Therapy**

Dance education offers many hypotheses as to the ways in which DMT may benefit students, clients, and patients; some treatment examples being: movement, somatic, social aids, non-verbal therapy, and verbal therapy. For example, Irmgard Bartenieff (1958) demonstrated



how the dancer understands and experiences the body in motion and can be used in therapeutic intervention. She stated that each posture a dancer takes is related to an emotion or feeling.

Bartenieff also noted that dance fundamentals must develop in the context of both dance and everyday movement if dance science is to be applied in such a way that subsequent generations of dance teachers can utilize dance research and dance fundamentals in therapeutic settings.

A need for correlation of dance and certain areas of science cannot be denied. Through the 1950s, psychology started to strongly impact dance education. Gladys Andrews, a professor of physical education and a leader in the field of movement education, integrated body, mind, and emotions. All three interrelated in her pedagogy. Andrews also created a children's bill of rights in her Creative Rhythmic Movement (Reedy, 2009).

Developing a somatic understanding of dance movement is a key learning component of dance education. Dance/movement therapist, Trudi Schoop, developed a therapy plan that included self-assessment of the student technique in the physical aspects of class, peer feedback/partnering, and student observations and personal verbal critique (Schoop, 2010).

Dance/movement therapist Sherry Goodill (2011) stated: "One of the benefits of dancing is an increased sense of vitality---an awakening and renewal of one's life energy. Studies have shown that dance interventions by trained professionals can decrease depression, improve mood, and strengthen positive feelings about one's self" (para.3).

### **DMT and Exploration of Self**

DMT has been used to instill a greater sense of mind, body, and spirit; awareness; a broadened range of flexibility; and healthier understanding of the self and of personal relationships (Gladding, 1998). Spindell (1996) stated that DMT is a very different process than just teaching or learning how to dance. Techniques must be employed by the therapist whereby

the student guides the teacher. The student learns to trust him/herself. DMT is a standard exercise or movement program/s in that it is designed to inspire creativity and a sense of completeness in the clients; thus, DMT is a well-being phenomenon (Spindell, 1996).

DMT techniques have demonstrated having an effect on female patients. Krantz (1999) conducted research with eating disorder patients. Positive assertions were documented regarding self-assertion, self-directions, and self-respect. Also through documented weekly meetings, Krantz reported experiences of positive self-assertion, self-respect, and self-directions. The foregoing research was completed for female patients as opposed to competitive dance students, so application is marginal but applicable.

### **Improvisation**

During this study, it was vital to understand where my students were emotionally and physically during each class session. Through the use of movement improvisation and improvising in the moment with my standard teaching techniques/interventions, I gained the knowledge on how to reach their full attention. I found that physical movement (i.e., shaking, spinning, and jumping), and some non-traditional teaching methods was most effective in getting them to respond. Perhaps the most effective tool was general silliness, impulsive reactions to some stimuli emanating from the students. Through the responses from the students to these body movements, I was able to create new and creative choreography that simultaneously motivated the students. This process as outlined defines improvisation as applied in this research.

The following section discusses improvisation both in movement and in relation to being in the present moment, the process of therapy and improvisation, and improvisation in dance pedagogy (specifically competitive dance and commercial dance). There is minimal literature

available regarding improvisation as related to my research study. I found that the current research related to improvisation is more explicitly centered on performance.

**Improvisation and DMT.** Individual counseling, group therapy, support groups, and psycho-educational training all use improvisation within sessions. Therapists use improvisation frequently to meet their clients' needs by creating therapeutic interventions—on the spot—during a session. Nachmanovitch (1990) discussed improvisation and how it is employed in therapy and situations requiring creative thinking. Nachmanovitch believed that improvisation is a self-creative process. He described the process as the road we travel on a lifelong adventure. The adventure is about the self. As one traverses the road, one's own originality is fully appreciated (Nachmanovitch, 1990). Nachmanovitch explained how finding the “how” in improvisation is different for everyone because everyone's process and mind are different. He also explores structure within improvisation and how we find it individually. The Nachmanovitch techniques will serve as critical reference data throughout this study.

Yalom (2005), a pioneer in the area of existential psychotherapy, notes that the here and now has no therapeutic power without processing feelings derived from behaviors in the here and now. The work I completed in the studio required me to continuously work in the moment. Similarly, therapeutic movement relationships require the therapist to be in a movement relationship or interaction with a patient in the present moment, a concept that encourages acceptance, improvisation, and communication. The importance of the here and now is very significant in the progress clients make during a dance class and or therapy session (Yalom, 2005). Gestalt therapy also places emphasis on gaining awareness of the present moment and the present context.

Through therapy, people learn to discover feelings that may have been suppressed or masked by other feelings and to accept and trust their emotions. Needs and emotions that were previously suppressed or unacknowledged are likely to surface as well. Through this process, a person gains a new sense of self as overall awareness increases.

The focus on the here and now does not negate or reduce past events or future possibilities; in fact, the past is intricately linked to one's present experience. The idea is to avoid dwelling on the past or anxiously anticipating the future. Experiences of the past may be addressed in therapy sessions, but the therapist and client will focus on exploring what factors made a particular memory come up in this moment, or how the present moment is impacted by experiences of the past. (Gestalt Therapy, 2015, para. 4)

Chace would meet clients where they are emotionally, genuinely accepting them.

Through her movements she would verbalize to her clients that she hear, understood, and accepted them (Levy, 1988a). Dance/movement therapist Blanch Evan's approach moved from an educational emphasis to a psychotherapeutic emphasis (Evan, 1980). One major component of Evan's approach was working with in-depth and/or major complex improvisation. She would implement this component when she noticed her clients struggling. Evan would call out sentences that needed to be completed and the participants would finish the statements as they moved; for example, "I feel \_\_\_\_", or even "I know I can \_\_\_\_" (Groninger, 1980). This exercise is designed to focus on awareness on how the body feels physically, emotionally, and or mentally. What is useful here is that awareness of these various feelings often leads to awareness of emotional content that underlies them (Vega, 1992). Fortunately, movement and art provide many ways of working with feelings that are less threatening than words alone, and the forms used can help to provide a container for the long-repressed feeling and create change (Vega,

1992). Through working with a client, the therapist can allow the client to become freer and freer in comfortably exposing body and feelings and not through one dramatic body change event (Evans, 1982). Authentic movement is a particular method used in DMT that utilizes improvisation in the here and now for the purpose of gaining insight into inner experience. Whitehouse described authentic movement as movements that have an emotional charge. This occurs when a person is able to move freely, give up control, and acknowledge what is happening in their body (Levy, 1988b).

Trudi Schoop was another DMT pioneer who used improvisation in the moment to create change with her patients though she used it differently than other dance/movement therapists of her time. Through the use of improvisation, Schoop turned spontaneous actions into a routine movement. The goal of planned movement formulation is to have participants master the unconscious stimuli of the spontaneous improvised movement (Schoop & Mitchell, 1974). The integration of DMT and improvisation gives clients a method to achieve deeper self-awareness and a new insight into how to listen to one's own body. In addition, from this new found awareness clients can potentially learn to listen better to their bodies' needs, become pain free, move more easily, do life work more efficiently, and perform with greater vitality and expressiveness.

**Improvisation and competitive dance.** To be a good improviser, you have to do a lot of listening and paying attention to others. Some dancers believe improvising means simply doing whatever you want, but that is incorrect. It's tremendously difficult yet very stimulating (Sagolla, 2009). Similarly to the use of improvisation in DMT, improvisation in competitive dance is used to inspire the creative process by allowing the movement to come through in its most original and immediate response to the direction given by the choreography and the music. Dancers

audition for jobs on a daily basis and are usually competing against hundreds of other, equally trained men and women.

In today's competitive dance world, improvisation is a huge component of many different audition processes. Almost every audition a dancer can attend, whether it be for a Broadway show or a music video for MTV, will include a free style portion. Judges want to see what your strong qualities are and how creative you can be to any song they may play for you. The good part of this is that you are able to really impress your judges by showing off what you can do, even without planning. The drawback to this is that dancers can often feel unprepared and nervous about performing something that they themselves have never done before. (Maher, 2013. Para.4)

During the improvisation portion of an audition, dancers will be judged on their creativity, use of stage, and how they execute their technique throughout their movements.

Those auditioning will also be judged on their partnering and improvisation connection (Kile, 2017). However, in all cases, improvisation is created under firm guiding principles: established beginning and end points, structural boundaries, predetermined limitations, and unqualified acceptance of whatever is proffered (Sagolla, 2009).

When improvising in the commercial setting, the infinite possibilities can feel paralyzing. You may have spent hours in classes following cues to initiate movement from your lowermost left rib, to pretend like you're painting the air, to dance like a cucumber. In an audition, nerves don't always permit the kind of creativity needed to come up with interesting movement on the spot. You're exposed, and vulnerable, and in front of people who are deciding whether to hire you. Not exactly an ideal setting for artistic inspiration (Stahl, 2012). Every audition has different expectations. Your best audition preparation will follow the Annoyance Theatre mantra

of “take care of yourself first” (Bowman, 2010). Bowman suggests giving you a focus. Your partner might be awful. Your partner may freeze and have no clue what they are doing. He or she might grab you without your permission. You should be prepared for anything. The use of improvisation in the competitive dance field is extremely different from the use of improvisation in therapy and in DMT.

**Improvisation and general dance education.** A study from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology found that the experience of embodied transformational learning through improvisation enables students and teachers to experience new sensations and understandings of themselves as individuals and as members of the community. They can gain insight into the capabilities of others and understand the possibilities for different and unique students to become dancers and choreographers (Ostern, 2015). It is not uncommon to in the midst of an improvisation to feel suddenly and inconsolably stuck, to find one wishing to be anywhere but where you are in that particular moment. Dancers who are able to stay present at these moments and resist the urge to flee find themselves at the threshold of what separates the known from the unknown self (Benjamin, 2002).

When meeting someone through movement, we understand the value of dis-orientation, authentic dialogues, risk-taking, and equality in decision making. The dialogue is authentic in that, when you are in the improvisational moment you do not know where the movement will take you (Bakhtin, 1991). A report written by Ferrufina (2010) on improvisations in contemporary dance and its applications in education and health suggests that, in the use of a personal constrained exploration through movement/dance improvisation, we develop motor, cognitive, and socio-emotional resources and/or flexibility with potential applications for education and health. A significant contribution to improvisation and dance education was

developed from modern dance pioneer Doris Humphrey. Her development of group interplay opened up diverse and variable modes of interaction between members of a group, with respect to space, time, and respective roles and to act or react. The choices made within this framework of possibilities carry aesthetic, educational, and social implications (Mindlin, 1988). From an educational and social point of view, the interactive group realizes a network in which every individual has the opportunity to build relationships with others (Mindlin, 1998).

A fundamental concept created by Emile Jaques-Dalcroze called The Dalcroze Method focused on three main concepts to define his method. First, Dalcroze developed Eurhythmics, which is defined as the development of musical expression and a way of developing musical skills through structure, i.e., expressing what you hear through movement such as clapping and stomping. Secondly, he also developed and implemented the Solfege method as a means to train the physical senses to hear movement and sight-singing skills. Lastly, Dalcroze combined Improvisation with the use of instruments, movement and voice (Estrella, n.d.). The Dalcroze Method helped the evaluation of dance pedagogy by fostering improvements to the imagination, creative expression, coordination, flexibility, concentration, inner hearing, musical appreciation and understanding musical concepts (Dalcroze, n.d.).

Melo Tomsich technique dancers were encouraged to explore the different aspects of movement, concentrating on the processes by which they emerge rather than on particular shapes (Tomsich, 1978). This technique is not focused on performance or the end result, and this makes it especially applicable not only to artistic dance projects, but in education and in therapy (Ferrufino-Vargas, 2010).

### **The Importance of Humor**

By bringing humor into the here and now, Trudy Schoop was able to create a sense of



cohesion in a group that allowed emotions like happiness and enjoyment to reenter the awareness of clients (Batko, 2012). Results of existing studies suggest that humor and laughter can reduce anxiety, create a positive learning environment, and increase student motivation and enjoyment of the topic being taught (Garner, 2006). Garner (2006) found that the use of appropriate humor can facilitate a more relaxed atmosphere and provide a cognitive break that allows the students to assimilate the information. Humor is an invitation to think differently, from another perspective, while at the same time inhabiting one's own perspective; in other words, humor encourages one to learn (Nilsen, 1994). Just as playfulness can be consistent with reason and intelligence, so can humor be compatible with an attitude of seriousness and rigorous learning. The role of laughter as a means of interactive emotional regulation has been investigated in the article "Studies of the Brain, Face and Emotion." This study found that laughter plays an important role for the regulation of negative affect (Godfrey, 2010). Godfrey stated that humor can be a strong medicine, and laughter can be contagious.

It is reassuring in these days of deadly epidemics and sometimes dreadful costly medical treatments, that laughter is inexpensive and priceless; and the only side effects are pleasurable. In contrast to joyful activities, the painful drudgery exercise (activity on a go-no-where treadmill) or the passive watching of television can provide limited health benefits. Addictive activities, however, such as laughing and exercise can enhance the health and well-being of many unhappy, depressed, and unhealthy people (Humor Therapy, 2011).

Dance /movement therapist Tortora (2006) stated that the use of multiple partnering formations in dances enable children to experience interaction and physical closeness to others in appropriate ways. They stimulate laughter, conversations, and expressions of joy. All of these aspects of dance encourage communication and a sense of belonging (Tortora, 2006).

Godfrey (2004) found that laughter can reduce stress hormones and boost the immune system. Laughter can reduce blood pressure by increasing vascular blood flow, and it can provide an aerobic workout (Godfrey, 2004). Laughter interventions in the work place have been shown to increase self-efficacy in self-regulation, positive emotion, optimism, and social identification (Beckman, Regier, & Young, 2007).

### **Social-Emotional Learning**

The social-emotional aspect provides a person with the sense of who they are in the world, how they learn, and helps them establish quality relationships with others. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (SEL Defined, 2015).

Rena Kornblum, a dance/movement therapist, has developed a highly respected curriculum intended to decrease bullying and violence by promoting pro-social skills using DMT based concepts and activities.(Hancock Center for DMT, n.d.). Kornblum's approach is solution and problem focused (Hancock Center for DMT, n.d.). Specifically in adolescents, there is great importance placed on feeling as a part of a group. The sense of belonging seems to be a requirement for positive self-esteem and well- being. For example social and peer groups reflect on adolescents desires to feel accepted (Payne, 2001). As Broderick and Frank (2014) believed that empirically supported SEL programs and enhance children's health and wellness. However, they noted that this also requires support and buy-in from teachers, parents, and the community in order to make the most impact on students' lives.

### **Conclusion**

The topic of this study centers around competitive dance and dance/movement concepts/pedagogy. Although lacking in quantity, the literature available has shown competitive dance to be a growing field, a field in which the improvisational and the social-emotional skills/attitudes of the individuals come into play. These trained/inherent skills not only teach the student but also let the student guide the teacher. DMT literature is explicit in detailing body in motion therapy and speaks to the greater sense of mind, body, spirit and awareness of the client/patient/student. DMT data further details how improvisation and humor can help the therapist to create spontaneous improvised movement. In comparing/linking the competitive dance and DMT literature, similarities become apparent that demonstrate the benefits reaped through the use of DMT concepts. The literature review has identified several DMT concepts. The identification of concepts was the source for developing my initial research question: How has the application of my identified DMT concepts with my unique pedagogy improved my teaching methods and how has these DMT concepts been assimilated into my DMT? Other literature resources highlight such concepts as interactive group participation, the creation of change in the here and now, mirroring, listening techniques, and group choreography. With the combining of the identified DMT concepts with these additional resource data points, the second research question is posed: How did my evolving teaching style influence/change my students' ability to comprehend a specific concept?

### **Chapter Three: Methods**

Working in the competitive dance business world over several years, I observed that competitive dance teachers lacked empathy and did not relate to their students. They were more interested in self-gratification and monetary reward. This was a problem begging for a solution. The purpose of this study would be to determine that solution. This study would determine how DMT concepts have been assimilated into my dance pedagogy and how the identified DMT concepts have altered my approach to teaching, choreographing, and connecting with my students, thus eliminating this lack of empathy and establishing trust with my students.

#### **Methodology**

“Art is a way of knowing,” stated Allen (1995). Art is perhaps our most ancient mode of pondering and coming to terms with the problems, contradictions, and powers of human experience. Artistic inquiry, in the form of a self-study, was used for self-analysis and individual development. One form of artistic inquiry uses different dance-making concepts to collect and analyze data and present the findings in order to draw conclusions based on the research completed (Hervey, 2004). Movement has always been a form of emotional expression and has been therapeutic for me. My own movement has been a more reliable indicator for knowing and understanding rather than outside sources. I chose this methodology in order to have a better understanding of myself and to research my proposed topic as it is a familiar method to my unique style of learning. Just as the arts must be allowed to speak for themselves in their own areas of expertise (Hervey, 2000), my own movement defines my DMT capabilities. Artistic inquiry allowed me to use my body as a platform to gather, analyze, and present embodied data.

The only participant in this study was me. I was 38 years old at the time of the study and I am a Caucasian female. I conducted my research in the Midwest at a dance studio where I held

the position of Creative Director of the competitive dance team. I integrated techniques derived from DMT theory and practice with standard teaching methods and my own dance pedagogy into the new teaching concepts used while analyzing the reactions of 17 female students ages 14 through 17 (grades 9-12). The data collected only reflected my reactions from each class because over the years I have developed my own style of documenting, recording and analyzing data collected during a dance class and/or competition.

### **Procedure**

I collected data through the use of journaling and through reflective movement sessions that mirrored my actions/reactions from teaching each class. My reflective movement sessions were captured through the use of videotape. Having established a new pedagogy that integrated my unique teaching style with DMT techniques, the focus was to assess my teaching interventions and document student improvements/changes made during class sessions. Immediately following each session, I completed a journal entry, focusing around the events/processes that occurred during the class. I chose to also journal notes to record any changes in my body movements, thoughts and the images that came to mind from watching my video log. The use of both forms of data collection gave me a better understanding and deeper insight to the outcome of my research. I reviewed my notes and looked at them in terms of Bartenieff Fundamentals and The Kestenberg Movement profiles. All data gathered was analyzed at the completion of my research. I combined the data recorded from my journal responses observing students along with assessments of my movements made during the class session to create a choreographed dance that symbolized the results from the study.

The study was conducted in a large, well lit room in the dance studio. As noted, I was the only subject of this study. The subject test group of 17 females provided me the opportunity to

analyze my techniques and gauge the effectiveness of those techniques. The study procedure was as follows:

1. For a period of three weeks, the dance class met twice a week, each class lasting 45 minutes. The class integrated DMT concepts with an emphasis on mindfulness combined with both standard teaching methods and my own approach to teaching dance.
2. Journal notes would document my processes and create a more concrete way of interpreting the effects of all changes/shifts in my body and identify any developing thoughts made during the class. Journal entries were made immediately following class to ensure my response to class was accurately captured. I used the methods of free writing, free association, and creative dialogue to collect data for my journal entries.
3. In addition to my journal notes following each instruction, I video recorded a personal movement session for 15 minutes. These video sessions specifically were for me to reflect upon each class through the use of movement. Written notes do not always convey the correct message given by physical movements. The video would verify journal data.
4. After all research data was summarized, analyzed, and conclusions drawn, I choreographed and performed a movement piece. The performance physically symbolized the results of the study and highlighted these specific actions that were unique to DMT and led to the new and innovative teaching techniques used in this analysis.

Being that all of my data collection was subjective, I was methodical in my journal entries. With each entry, I identified which concepts I borrowed from DMT and what components of my own dance pedagogy were incorporated for that particular session. I journaled my thoughts and feelings in anticipation of the class, during the class, and after my interventions were applied. My journal entries required consistency and structure to allow for accurate data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was divided into three topic areas: a review of the data recorded in my journal entries following each class, a review of the journal entries made after I viewed each video recorded session of my movement, and a review of the journal entries made after conversations were held with parents, students, and studio owners.

1. Reviews of the six journal entries immediately following classes were analyzed. I looked for trends in my feelings and responses after teaching each class. I specifically measured my reactions towards the students in relationship to frustration, confidence, and team cohesiveness—the three problems I had identified prior to my research. I identified which coping skill(s) I incorporated in that class session such as: distress tolerance, emotional regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness. I also made note of the effects of my personal/unique teaching methods for each class/session, e.g., humor or mirroring. I measured if my body movement reflected the thoughts and feelings of my mind. I also analyzed if during the times I was using mindfulness, did my own body portray those skills to my students. The following question could be posed, “Could I see

measurable growth in my teaching abilities from the first session recorded in the journal to the last session that was recorded?”

2. Analysis of journal entries collected was made after the video viewing. In each entry, I focused on thoughts that I possessed during the recording of my movements and I commented on my movements made in the presence or absence of self-regulation. If I journaled that my movement appeared rigid or stressed, I compared it to the journal entry immediately after teaching class. I investigated the collected video data for a correlation to the data collected in the class corresponding to movement.
3. Lastly, I reviewed the analysis of both data sets to find consistencies and correlations. When I detected correlations, I reviewed the pedagogy of that class to identify the specific DMT concepts borrowed and the specific concepts taken from my teaching style. In particular, I concentrated on classes that revealed maximum effectiveness and growth.



## **Chapter Four: Results**

The goal of this study was to explore how DMT concepts came into my approach to teaching dance. This chapter consists of the following structure: I explain the video and journal analysis from each of the three phases of the study. I will first describe my movement in the two videos related to each phase and then elaborate on the data that I journaled in each phase. The data will be placed in the context of what was happening in the studio at the time of journaling. Lastly, I will describe the final choreography I created and performed as a culmination of all the movement and journal data collected and analyzed in this study.

### **Video and Journal Movement Analysis**

**Phase one: Videos one and two.** In the first two videos, I started by lying on the floor with my eyes closed. My shoulders seemed tense as did my face. My jaw appeared to be locked, rigid and clenched. My jaw, shoulders and upper body appeared constricted with increasing pressure and bound flow. I laid on the floor for lengthy amount of time. I gradually moved to a standing position with my eyes open, my expression was blank. In that moment, I journaled about feeling helpless and lost. My movement was unpredictable. It was fast moving and did not take up a lot of space. I was mostly moving in my upper body. I noticed a slight variation of a reach and pull pattern, my arms would slash outward and then pulling in closely next to my sides, which implied I was reaching for something (with frustration) and brought it back into myself. At one point in this video I seem to lose control completely, my movement was extremely fast moving in a circle and punching in the air. By the end, I slowed back down and moved back on to the floor in a small ball with my forehead on the floor with a passive weight. I remember saying to myself “this too shall pass.” My experience as a DMT intern prior to this research taught me that my growing edge in the DMT field would be to find patience with others

and more importantly with myself. I believe this phase of the research was a good first test of my growing edge. How far had my patience come with myself and with others?

**Phase one journal analysis: “The Beginning” (videos one and two analysis).** After watching each video entry I would journal thoughts and ideas about how I was feeling and possible new ideas to improve the classes with the implementation of DMT tools. In the first phase I was challenged with a high level of resistance from the students. Their lack of focus and unwillingness to be open minded to new ideas and new ways of moving was evident by their body language. For example, lying on the floor and not moving when given the directive to start class or rolling their eyes as I spoke about their need to be more connected to the current movement that I was demonstrating, followed by the unlimited questions surrounding what time it was and if they could use the bathroom. This phase challenged my own frustration tolerance, confidence, and patience. I found through my check-in process with them that I was getting little to no effort. Their answers were short and hurried, and dance movements were also sharp and quick which could be seen as almost sarcastic in nature. How can we explain these resistant reactions? The concepts that I taught in the dance class were not new to me but they were new to the students. Developmentally, young ladies at this age in their lives have the tendency to be resistant to authority figures and change. These were young ladies whom had set opinions and learning habits. They believed the old methods from their past instructor to be correct. To modify their thinking/attitudes would take some effort and creative planning. The combination of a new teacher/director, learning new dance techniques and the challenge to let go of old habits proved to be a hurdle too high at this early training phase. At this point in the study, a bar was set for achievement. The goal was to break through the resistance and slowly build trust between the students and myself. Gaining this trust would prove to be the key element to positive change

within the classroom and in the students' attitudes. From my experience as a DMT intern, re-patterning the witnessed body movement within the students would be gradual. I would need to work on decreasing pressure, decelerating time, and working on moving with a more direct use of space. Decreasing pressure would be equivalent to lifting a weight off one's shoulders. It gives a sense of freedom and responding to instruction is given in a relaxed atmosphere, making the understanding of DMT concepts much easier. This learning atmosphere would help the students have a better connection to the teacher, themselves, and their fellow team members. Deceleration in time would provide both me and the students with greater patience. With more patience I would be able to teach in a manner easier for the student to understand, be more concise in presentation, and present the material without hesitation. Additionally, the process of slowing down would help me to have an open dialogue with my students whereby comments, both explicit and implicit, could be discussed for the better understanding of each student. Schoop has been a great influence throughout my DMT course of study and based on Schoop's works, I used mirroring and breathing as a way to introduce change. I started with a warm-up that expressed just the opposite of what the students were showing me in their dance movements and also what they were communicating verbally and non-verbally. This warm up used slow floating movements combined with breathing techniques. Ultimately this resulted in a slow gradual change in the student's movement and in their speech. The use of DMT tools combined with my own style of reinforcing what was expected of each student and my ability to educate the student started to create positive change within the first two classes of my research. In the beginning phase, this was more of a forced transition. However, at the conclusion of the first two classes, resistance was noticeably reduced.

**Phase two: Videos three and four.** Although, my movement in videos three and four was similar to that of videos one and two, at times it also appeared to be very different. At points, my movement was very direct and focused, moving forward and in a direct path. There were clear moments of my body weight shifting from one part of my body to another, one foot onto the other as my arms moved from side to side. There were a number of points of interest to me in these videos. As I moved, my focus did not always seem to coincide with the direction of my body, as though I was looking away from the direction I was moving. I believe this movement was a reflection of questioning myself during these classes and trying to hide any feelings of self-doubt. I tried to lead by example. “Fake it till you make it” was a constant mantra I played in my head while teaching phase two. The other points of interest for me were my negative use of space and my noticeable lack of breath. Typically, I am a mover that takes up space, and my affinity is to produce choreography that travels and lengthens through the body. In these videos, I did not travel and I did not reach out from my body to any great extent. My arms moved side to side, staying close to the body. I traveled backwards and forwards without any actual movement. I basically remained in one spot. I noticed the lack of breath in my movement through the redness in my face and the lack of flow throughout the movement. When analyzing videos one and two compared to three and four, there were distinct positive changes made in my movement. For example, the fact that I was standing utilizing the vertical plane and moving with an alert expression on my face was a positive change. I had more facial expression and I seemed to have less restricted (bound flow) body movement. The movement had turned more into a swaying motion. From these observations I can only believe that positive changes had started to develop during phase two.

**Phase two journal analysis: “The Middle” (videos three and four analysis).** As stated above, following the initial two classes, the resistance had started to diminish. During phase two, “The Middle,” the students had started to come into the class room on time, were less lethargic and were not lying on the floor. The one thing that I still noticed at the beginning of the middle stage was the individualistic behavior of the students. Within the group, there was an evident disconnect between the students. This disconnect was displayed by the placement the students chose when spacing themselves in the room. The witnessed disconnect also appeared when it came time for the students to move across the floor and during the choreography portion of the class. Having identified issues, I worked on choreography that was directed to address these areas of weakness while using the combination of DMT concepts and breathing techniques to decrease frustration tolerance and increase balance. The most essential awareness of self comes from breathing (Siegel, 1984). Deep breathing exercises can be very beneficial for adolescents regardless of the individual’s problems. Deep breathing has several goals associated with it. It allows the client to relax, refocus, and concentrate on their feelings (Gladding, 1998). Simple directives that highlight students breathing were provided to the students. The directives I gave detailed how important it was for each student to note that, while performing singular movements or in movements with a partner, how their breathing was affected. When the students became aware of their breathing, they were able to relax more within the movement. In time, there was an ease as to how the students were learning and moving to the choreography. There were elements of free flow and less restricted movement. They moved more confidently in the vertical dimension and were more indirect rather than direct, although this showed evidence of trust being gained within the group. There remained definite trust issues and feelings of abandonment that would still need to be further addressed. Working on more direct movement,

decrease in time, and reaching out into the horizontal space, I felt would be beneficial to each student individually and as a team.

**Phase three: Videos five and six.** When viewing video entries five and six, an image of the ocean with its rolling wave (swaying body movement) and calming influence comes to my mind. In this phase I started to let go and be patient with myself. I started standing with my eyes closed. My body seemed grounded and I was taking time to breathe prior to moving. As I proceeded to breathe I began to feel that my range of influence and trust was expanding to levels not yet attained. There was a sense of openness and acceptance. I started to move slowly and gradually, my body movement carried more influence on the floor and in a way appeared to encompass more space. In this video I did travel in space and I had a more clear focus. There were moments of rocking myself back and forward, and side to side. I believe there were still moments of self-doubt and the rocking was a reflection of those particular moments where I needed to use self-care. Lastly, the most apparent change from prior videos was that I had more free flow in my body movement. DMT identifies free flow movement to be a positive tool. It provides a sense of openness and an ability to explore and be aware of our surroundings.

**Phase three journal analysis: “A New Beginning” (videos five and six analysis).** In the final stage, “A New Beginning,” it was apparent through the students’ behavior towards one another that the sense of separation between students had decreased from the moment they walked in the room. There were more warm expressions given through hugs and laughter. Moreover, there were conversations and social media pictures happening throughout their time with me, reinforcing the skills being taught by peer comments being made from outside the dance studio. During the last few class sessions before this study was completed, I still sensed a lack of confidence. This was exhibited in the student’s body movement and at times their facial

expressions. For example, there was still a defeatist attitude after constructive criticism was given for not performing a certain movement properly with the correct technique. The students' shoulders would drop, their attitude would change, and many times this was followed by negative comments about themselves. I observed that negative responses were longer in duration than positive responses. The duration of a negative atmosphere, however, did lessen with each class. Their ability to rebound was greatly improved as compared to the first phase. There was also a clear change in where the focus was within the room; the students were more focused on themselves rather than others. This was significant because "focusing enables one to pause, to focus in on the river of experience and to capture the felt sense of a particular experience" (Rappaport, 2009, p. 29).

Students that are willing to display empathy or sentimentality are putting themselves in a position of vulnerability. They need to feel safe in order to expose this inner sensitivity. If they feel respected, valued and in control they will be motivated. They need to feel as they are not alone. Teachers are more likely to successfully motivate students if they form a personal relationship with them and become a supportive leader (Criss, 2011). During the final two classes, the students left the room in much the same manner that they came in. They were motivated and had caring expressions towards one another and me. This attitude also conveyed a higher level of team cohesion, a stronger group dynamic, and a more connected relationship between teacher and students. From my experience, repetition within the dance class is crucial, this promotes consistency and eliminates the feeling of the unknown. I have always believed that when the class has solid work habits and becomes more predictable with expectations, rules, and structure students are able to feel safer emotionally and physically. Consequently, for similar

purposes both Marian Chace and Trudi Schoop used a clear structure in their therapy sessions. “Creativity is a habit, and the best creativity is the result of good work habits.” – Twyla Tharp

### **Final Choreography and Performance**

The choreographed video was a dance piece and performance that reflected the culmination of my research throughout the writing and movement portion of my thesis. This performance was an opportunity for me to integrate my findings and moreover provide me feedback from a small pool of friends, family, and colleagues who have been on this journey with me. The choreography represents the three distinct phases during my study labeled as: “The Beginning,” “The Middle,” and “A New Beginning”. The choreography was also a reflection of my journey while writing this thesis.

While choreographing this piece, I wanted to focus on the themes that arose during my previous videos and journal entries. The choreography is about inner struggle with self, self-doubt, transitions, and patience. Additionally, I started choreographing from the thoughts, feeling and emotions that I could recall from each individual phase. Consequently, the process of choreographing this piece for myself was very similar to the journey of this thesis. Initially, I became very irritated and frustrated with the lack of movement that I could observe. This was my area of expertise and, in this moment, I had nothing. This is where my research questions truly came into play; how has the application of identified DMT concepts with my unique dance pedagogy improved my teaching methodology and how did my evolving teaching style influence/change my student’s ability to comprehend a specific concept as presented? In the moment that I felt frustrated and blank I was able to use self-analysis and tell myself to take a step back, breathe, and remind-myself once again to have patience. I believe finding patience within me will be a constant work in progress throughout my career.



I decided to turn off the choreographer in me and let my knowledge gained from DMT training guide me. I chose to improvise to music that felt authentic to each phase. In the first phase I used music that had no lyrics and sounded dark and heavy with a slow tempo, the second piece of music that was used for phase two, also had no lyrics. This piece of music had a slightly faster tempo with a more free flow sound. Lastly, the last piece of music I used had words, I believe the words gave me motivation to move, the tempo was faster and I believed the music to feel light and freeing in my body movement. Next, I used movement from these improvised moments to choreograph the piece. I decided to make the choreography in three separate pieces as a reflection of the three identified phases. The last selection of choreography also included movement that reflected a conclusion to the study.

Movement has always been an outlet for me. Through this artistic inquiry, I was reminded of how far I had come in my journey with integrating my two worlds of DMT and dance education and how much more I have to experience and explore. Embodying the thoughts, feelings, and emotions from this study gave me a stronger awareness of what transcended internally for me through this experience and a deeper connection to myself that will always be remembered and be a part of me.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

The overall goal of this study was to have a better understanding of how DMT concepts have been assimilated into my dance pedagogy. The study explored the following question: How has the application of identified DMT concepts with my unique dance pedagogy improved my teaching methodology?

### **Identified DMT Concepts within My Pedagogy**

Through analyzing the data in my research journal, it was determined that in addition to the DMT concepts I had already surmised were present in my pedagogy, my pedagogic dance concepts contained several additional concepts that were documented in the literature from the DMT and therapeutic communities. Improvisation and humor were integral concepts upon which my pedagogy is based, and their use in my pedagogy was verified by this research. Findings also identified that the following DMT concepts were evident within my dance pedagogy: the value of social-emotional needs of dancers; the value of non-verbal dialogue; and the use of reflexivity, self-awareness, and mindfulness. As of today, the competitive dance world has not had these tools available; thus, my own adaptation of these concepts into my work with competitive dancers has had positive results.

### **Improvisation within Structure**

Improvisation was a key DMT concept and dance education approach that was stressed throughout the study. From the first day of teaching at this studio, I felt like I was walking on thin ice and any new stressor that occurred would act as an added weight to drive me through the ice and jeopardize this research effort. Starting from that first day of class with this target group of students, it was imperative that I be mentally sharp and able to anticipate whatever changes/nuances that could occur within the class structure in order to improvise a solution. The

use of improvisation was built into the structure of each dance class from the warm-up to across the floor exercises and the combination at the end of class. I shifted my approach accordingly to the reactions and actions of my students. I used music to elevate their mood in the moment in order to provide a possible safe place to express deep emotion through their body movement. Similarly, I could sense that I needed to find movement and music that would be in direct opposition to their actions/reactions so as to quickly shift the mood from being more negative to positive. Helping the students find confidence within themselves was an initial struggle. I found methods and exercises that would move the students across the floor with confidence while exuding outward beauty. This was demonstrated by their non-verbal body language and movement. For example, I found a selection of specific music that spoke to them and that they could identify with. I was able to attune to the students through music, for example choosing the artist Beyonce noticeably changed their body movement. The ladies would walk with a more upright posture, a more confident look on their face and appeared more motivated. Listening to their non-verbal responses through different music choices was helpful in changing classroom behavior. This provided them with the confidence that would stimulate inner growth.

I was the facilitator for all improvisation activities. I made it a point to never walk into a class with a plan or choreography that was already set. Most choreography was developed and implemented in the moment. Challenging me to come to class with no plan or preconceived notions certainly provided growth within my own dance pedagogy but also provided me with a new inner confidence and strength. Marianne Adams, a dance professor at Appalachian State University, practiced “crossing artistic modalities so that students respond aesthetically to dances rather than written critiques” (Adams, 2005, p. 11). She continued, “The act of making a creative

response has encouraged and validated the students' own aesthetic choice in improvisation and in dancing expressively in fully embodied way" (Adams, 2005, p. 11).

## **Humor**

In this study, my style of facilitation of a dance class could be considered similar to my style as a facilitator of a therapy session. I employed several forms of humor to get the attention of the students. Amanda Gordon (2010) suggested that humor and laughter can help teachers and students form better relationships and come to see each other as human beings who are jointly responsible for the success of the learning process. To implement humor in dance classes, I used my body as a way to exaggerate a certain movement that was happening within the room and to provide a gentler way of giving constructive criticisms during class. For example, I walked around the room quacking like a duck while demonstrating a duck –like back posture to enforce change within my student's use of their body core and placement. This duck movement not only made the students laugh, but after a few attempts, the duck motion had a positive effect on their body movement, body placement and dancing skills. I utilized humor as a way to connect and as a way to break down the walls of competitive/negative energy in the dance classroom. I used humor to shift the focus, while also teaching technique.

The students slowly became aware of their new skills and this awareness brought on positive change, or one might say, therapy through humor. Moreover, I found some students to be very rigid in their posture which made it very difficult to perform ballet (flow, slow time) type movements that exhibited grace. In this case, I acted out being a swan trying to demonstrate grace and beauty. I modeled the swan movement (floating, light, decreasing pressure) to be similar to a ballerina's movement style. This use of humor was not only useful in demonstrating

correct technique, but it also served to break down barriers and resistance between the students and me.

This study involved my work with emotionally stressed students and methods to respond to them in ways that addressed not only the needs of their dance education, but also their social-emotional needs. The humor was critical to breaking down the tense, emotional attitudes permeating the class. When used correctly, humor can be an important intervention in both therapeutic and dance education settings. For example, Devereaux (2008) cited the study of a family who experienced domestic violence and noted an increase in laughing due to positive actions that were affecting family members over time through DMT. The humor used in DMT interventions helped with the healing process from the traumatic violence experience. Laughter taught them how to handle the domestic violence and to be able to learn from the experience and make sure did not reoccur under similar conditions (Devereaux, 2008).

Sarcasm is another method of humor that I often used in class. I applied sarcasm in the classes by making fun of myself to show the students that it is okay to not take oneself too seriously. By laughing at my own efforts to be exciting and original, I found the students to be more open to constructive self-criticism, to take risks in their movement, and to be more creative in their own choreography while improvising. That said, I have learned through my 20 years of teaching dance that it is important to be careful where I use my sarcasm in class because it can often come off demeaning if not used appropriately. With this particular group, I was extremely aware of the sensitive place that these students were in and used sarcasm carefully.

### **Social-Emotional Needs**

Throughout the research, the discussion has centered on the negative social-emotional effects of a traumatic event on a group of competitive dance students. It is important to mention

that during my research I was reminded of the importance of authenticity. Being authentic in one's actions is to be genuine and trustworthy beyond reproach. Authentic movement occurs when a person is able to move freely, give up control, and acknowledge what is happening to their body (Levy, 1988). Empathy, laughter, and humor are traits that exhibit authenticity. These traits are core tenets of my pedagogy and I believe they are central to my ability to reach out to my students and stir their souls and gain their trust. Achieving trust is half of any battle, and I found being authentic increased a deeper connection to my students through the use of improvisation and humor. When I was able to be authentic with myself I was better able to help my students within their own authenticity. Authenticity was a key element to the positive outcome of my study.

The traumatic event was the trigger to a series of events that contributed to the erosion of these social-emotional relationships between the students. I planned to treat these fragile student relationships by the identifying DMT concepts integrated in my pedagogy with other concepts that I had already integrated but not yet identified. Having recognized the issue, I chose an approach to address these students' emotional and personal needs while also attending to the frayed relationships within the group. The ability to focus on social-emotional needs in addition to dance technique and choreography was an important element to address effects of the traumatic event of losing their dance teacher.

These findings are supported by the literature, wherein Jones, Bailey, and Jacob (2014) found that the positive development of social-emotional skills is the basis for achieving students' positive behavior in school. Key social-emotional skills listed in their study included the ability to focus, listen attentively, follow directions, manage emotions, deal with conflicts and work in co-operation with their peers (Jones, Bailey & Jacob, 2014). These skills were centered themes

throughout my research. My findings demonstrated how my interventions positively impacted students' social-emotional behaviors. Furthermore, when social-emotional concepts are implemented, children experience predictability, which promotes understanding and the use of appropriate behavior. The use of social-emotional concepts can assist new as well as established teachers to enhance their capacity for positive interactions with students. These concepts can also help teachers establish reasonable age-appropriate expectations. According to Yale University psychology professor Mark Brackett, the implementation of school-wide social-emotional learning programs improved student's attitudes, health, social relationships, and academic performance (Batson, 2009). These findings are arguably able to be translated into a dance education setting as well.

Dacher Keltner, founder of the University of California Berkley's Greater Good Science Center, outlined the central role of compassion in our lives (Batson, 2009). Teaching kids how to read and respond to facial cues, touch, and vocalizations in order to empathize with one another and experience compassion helps them relate to one another. Given the importance of communication and collaboration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, understanding others is a foundational skill.

Throughout this study, I noted that focus and the ability to listen attentively were a major problem during a typical dance class. To be in a learning environment, a person must be able to focus and be attentive to the instructor. The students that constituted the dance team and were the participants in this research were not focused, lacked attention, did not follow directions, and could not manage emotions or deal with conflict. These social-emotional concepts were used in each training class. I journaled each session in written form and completed six videos, demonstrating how I was personally affected through the development of the students' social-emotional skills.

These issues of focus and attention were treated incrementally. For example, during the combination portion of the class, I would teach the routine and have them perform the choreography with the music. I would then divide them up into groups to watch each other and vocally encourage the students to positively support each other. At the end of class, I would have the students each describe something positive that they observed during the combination to one of their peers; each student would give a positive affirmation to at least one other member in the class/team. This increases inner confidence within each individual and team cohesion began to shift positively. Another example was my encouragement to listen and pay attention to all constructive criticism that I gave throughout the class. I stressed the importance of learning from one another. I placed emphasis on the importance of being inspired by one another rather than holding in feelings of jealousy and/or feeling less than other in the room. Jealous situations are especially threatening to individuals with low self-esteem. It is very likely that adolescents with chronically low self-esteem struggle to form trusting relationships with their peers (Parker, 2005). Lastly, I lead by example in naming my own strengths and weaknesses as a dancer and how all of them individually inspired me to be a better teacher.

Because of the special situation that these particular students had been through, I believed their social-emotional needs were of high importance. They vocally shared their thoughts regarding feeling abandoned, having low self-esteem, and feeling alone. Sharing my own experiences and direct support of them personally was extremely important to them. I explained how I felt growth is a never-ending process, that giving up is not an option, and how important it is to stay motivated and focused in any facet of our lives. As a result of these conversations and the movement exercises in class, I observed that incremental improvements in focus and attentiveness through an empathic leadership style. An empathic leadership style signals that the



therapist understands and supports the client. Displaying empathy has been shown to be an important component of leadership (Sadri, Weber, & Gentry, 2011). It was through my empathic leadership style that the students were able to have their social-emotional needs met.

### **Non-Verbal Communication**

The dance team that served as participants in this research consisted of 17 young ladies/students. These students were individuals with 17 unique thinking processes and personalities that were not only being trained to a specific set of techniques, but also had to deal with the loss of their teacher. They would have to continue their studies with a new teacher who would use completely new and different teaching methods. From the students' point of reference, acceptance of those methods would be affected by nonverbal communications such as seeing (as related to the teacher), mirroring, observations (the teacher's body language), and personal (other team members') reactions. Observation is a key means by which we learn about ourselves in relationship to others and our surroundings (Tortora, 2010). Thus, observation was the primary method by which they would learn about me, their new teacher, and each other. Dance/movement therapist Marian Chace stated that nonverbal observation, attunement, and mirroring are core communicative tools that dance/movement therapists consciously use. The information thus obtained is utilized to create dance/movement and play-based therapeutic explorations to support deeper expression and understanding (Tortora, 2010).

In the United Kingdom and Belgium, groups such as Boas and Life Dance are coaching leaders on projects for companies. These projects include working with movement analysis, observation, and non-verbal language. Companies like Walt Disney Company, General Motors, IBM, and many others have reaped the benefits of programs that incorporate the body and conscious experience as a tool for efficient and motivational transformation in the competitive

environments (Boas, 2009). During the classes, I used several forms of non-verbal communication through gestures, signals, and movements. One clear example of this is in the simplicity of having the students clap in support of each other's movements; this alone shifted the energy in the class and in the students' performance. In this study, the students did learn that their interactions with other team members did have meaning and consequences. Their positive or negative attitudes and non-verbal movements on the dance floor were mirrored in team members' positive or negative participation and by their facial and body expressions. The positive attitudes displayed by the students at the conclusion of the research validated that the application of non-verbal concepts within a structured class had been a success.

### **Reflexivity, Self-Awareness, and Mindfulness**

DMT is the use of dance and movement that allows the body to exhibit inner emotional well-being, which in turn can lead to changes in the psyche, thus promoting personal health and growth (Levy, 1988). Similarly, Cohen and Walco's (1999) research results confirm that DMT helped children adapt to demands of their situations as well as learn how to moderate and control emotions of their related behaviors by recognizing the extremes.

DMT has been used to instill heightened awareness; a greater sense of mind, body, and spirit; an extended range of flexibility; and healthier understanding of the self and of personal relationships (Gladding, 1998). In relation to this study, reflexivity, self-awareness, and mindfulness were an element of each class. This was achieved through constructive criticism not only from me but also from the students' interactions. I would use leading questions such as: What do you feel went wrong in a specific movement? When transitioning from one designated area of the floor to another, what would be the most direct pathway? How can you let someone know you are sorry for running into them? Are you using your breath during this particular

exercise? Holding a question and answer session with the students and listening to their concerns/answers proved to be a great tool for opening meaningful lines of communication. Through providing their own reflective thoughts and answers, they were able to become more self-aware and mindful not only of themselves but of others. Working in this way personalized new knowledge and gave the students the expertise and confidence they needed in order to be responsible for their own dancing.

Furthermore, self-assessment is essential to successful dance learning. Moreover, articulating their personal experiences in achieving a shared learning objective, students build community in the classroom (Schoop, 2010). Erick Erickson emphasizes the importance of self-evaluation during adolescence. During this adolescent time, youth establish their ego identity. During this critical time in their lives they are primarily concerned with who and what they are in the eyes of their peers (Buehler, Weigert, & Thomas, 1977).

Evaluating myself after each class with questions and through journaling about my movements, I found that I was becoming more self-aware and mindful with not only my students but with myself, as well. According to Anthony Giddens (1991), reflexivity means to pay close attention to your own experience. This implies both a personal awareness and a search for the critical connections between sensory experiences and their cultural ramifications. Giddens (1991) emphasized how reflexivity of the self extends to the body:

The reflexivity of the self extends to the body, where the body is part of an action system rather than merely a passive object. Awareness of the body is basic to “grasping the fullness of the moment,” and entails the conscious monitoring of the sensory input from the environment, as well as the major bodily organs and body dispositions as a whole.  
(p. 77)

Reflexivity can be considered a form of critical reflection associated with research and means paying attention to the interrelationship between self and knowledge creation. Keeping the research journal was a critical reflective practice.

To be reflective is to sit and think about what took place after it is completed, reflecting on one's role in the experience, others' reactions, and one's responses to these reactions. This can be done through thinking, writing, or speaking with another person. One goal of engaging in reflection is to learn from one's experiences with the intention of improving the quality of one's interactions with others in future encounters.

I found that as the students were laughing, I was laughing right along with them. My responding to them in turn was a good indicator of how my patience was steadily improving. In retrospect, I believe these self-evaluations made my dance pedagogy stronger and more responsive to the dance environment. Anatomical awareness and alignment is central to my positioning and spatial awareness concepts that I strive to improve in my own development as well as in my approach to students in class. This reflexivity and development of self-awareness was critical because "an awareness of one's leadership style and its effect on different populations can increase the level of sophistication of the dance therapist's group interventions" (Johnson, Sandel, & Eicher, 1983, p. 17).

### **Limitations**

This study was limited in that it was a self-evaluation. Self-evaluation is in itself the definition of setting limits although it is a modified self-evaluation in that I could be influenced by the comments provided by participating students (aged 14-17), parents, and other studio owners. Also after spending extended periods of time with individuals, one might tend to take on some of that person's traits thus masking one's own ideas—a limitation that I was keenly

aware of. For example, each student's capacity to learn and assimilate change can vary drastically. A high performance/achievement class would push the envelope as to results achieved whereas a low achievement class might produce limited results and a true value to the new pedagogy might be more difficult to achieve. Other possible sources of limitations could extend to personal objectivity, and time or physical constraint.

### **Future Research, Implications for DMT, and Implications for Dance Education**

The first question this study brought to mind was, how do we help more dance teachers to strengthen their connection with their students and to themselves? The use of DMT concepts such as improvisation and humor could help educators to form stronger relationships with their students. Continuing education could refine educators' teaching styles, interventions, and approaches to improve the importance of considering students' social-emotional learning. Training could be provided through a workshop, a seminar, or even an online course. This proposed continuing education could be given by a dance/movement therapist who specializes in these specific areas. This course could provide a specialized certification to educators in specific DMT concepts and open the door for further continuing education credits without having to complete the full requirements of a college degree. A second question is: How can a dance/movement therapist be more aware and productive in the competitive dance arena and how could the use of this study translate into other populations? This is an important question because dance/movement therapists do not always come from a dance background. Once again, the availability of a workshop/seminar/online course around the concepts and expectations of competitive dance could be an asset to the dance/movement therapist. The course could provide insight to dance education, competitive dance, structure of studio classes, and how DMT could be utilized within this specific population. Moreover, the idea of certifying dance educators in

the knowledge of specific DMT concepts is not limited to only working with dance education. This concept could work with almost any educator/health care provider working in varied fields. For example: In the field of dentistry, the dentist could be certified in specific DMT concepts that could provide a better relationship between them and their patients and staff. The DMT knowledge could also provide the skills to deal with patient's fears and anxieties of going to the dentist. The dental receptionist could also receive certification in DMT concepts that could also assist him or her in providing counseling techniques for those whom are nervous and anxious in the waiting room. The possibilities are endless. A multi-segmented curriculum is another possibility to answer both of the above questions. A curriculum where both dance educators and dance/movement therapist could learn from one another and trained together about the benefits of integrating dance education and DMT concepts.

This idea leads me to the following future research question: how can we motivate more educators to implement further self-analysis to improve their own methods/program/pedagogy? Unfortunately, I do not believe there to be a clear answer to this question. This question opens all educators to becoming vulnerable and take a getting a clear perspective of their own strengths and weaknesses. Starting this process of promoting self-evaluation and self-exploration with our teachers/educators offers the best opportunity for success. These are the individuals who in the beginning and through the education process could teach that making positive change within oneself by way of self-evaluation and self-discovery is extremely important to becoming a success both in their personal lives and in their career.

To be the best we can be, continued self-analysis is an invaluable tool for continued growth in our lives. What this research has shown is that by thinking out of the box through use of DMT concepts dance educators like me can positively alter their approach to teaching,

choreography, and connecting with their students. It has also shown how valuable self-evaluation can be for all of those who seek improvement and positive change and stride for a healthier lifestyle.

Assessment is an integral part of instruction, as it determines whether or not the goals of education are being met. Changes in the student's skills base and increased depth of knowledge require new learning goals; these new learning goals change the relationship between assessment and instruction. Teachers need to take an active role in making decisions about the purpose of assessment and the content that is being assessed (Edutopia, 2008). Becoming a more effective teacher does not mean that a teacher passes more students or that a teacher raises their class average by so many points. To be more effective simply suggests that a teacher challenges and enlightens students each and every day (L., 2012).

It is important for teachers to model self-assessment. Teachers need to show their students that it is important for everybody to self-evaluate by doing their own self-evaluations. One thing teachers can do is to ask their students for feedback on how the class is going and what the teacher is doing well and not so well. In this way the teacher is showing that they want to make improvements where needed (Why Is Assessment Important?, 2008). Educators who are most interested in doing their best are the ones who tend to take self-evaluation most seriously and may share their critiques and seek advice from colleagues on how to improve the effectiveness of their teaching (Schwartz, 1962).

## **Conclusion**

I was motivated to critically scrutinize my own dance pedagogy by my new position as an artistic director of a competitive dance team that struggled with frustration tolerance, team cohesion, and lack of confidence. Based on the synthesis of the supportive research with my

knowledge of DMT concepts and my own dance pedagogy, I was able to confirm that the application of DMT concepts when merged with my personal dance pedagogy provided a more resilient approach to my teaching methods as noted in my many examples throughout the results and discussion chapters and by my own experiences of growth and shifting to meet the needs of my students' dance education, as well as to healing a broken studio.

Martha Eddy (2006) discussed a six-phase class structure which included several concepts contained in my unique DMT approach and that were similar but yet different in many ways. Eddy mentioned warm-up, floor exercises including partner work, movement across the floor, and a cool down period much the same manner that I structure my class. The content of each phase was very much different, with each phase building on the preceding effort to attain the desired outcome. Eddy's work reinforced my structured class content as being relevant to current dance methodologies/concepts.

My personal dance experience and training were built on concepts developed through inner awareness. My background spans skills learned in the classroom, taught in both academic and business environments, and acted out in stage performances. The combination of these capabilities have honed my teaching skills and developed unique concepts that provide me the ability to integrate a student's inner awareness into their developmental experience. By combining the approaches of a phased class structure, body-mind concepts, heuristic self-search, and unique artistic concepts, I started to define how I structure my personal life and then move those artistic/structured concepts into the classroom. Being artistic as well as structured appears to be contradictory, but it is the synthesis of the two that drives my unique dance pedagogy.

The literature referred to the concepts integrated into my teaching pedagogy. From this study, I recognized student feelings/movement, creative abilities, and natural sense of rhythm as



being vital to the development of a pedagogical approach that will benefit the student. The pedagogy that I have developed specifically for the dance studio benefit, to my knowledge, has not been applied in a similar fashion in the competitive dance industry. Being possibly one of the first teachers to successfully integrate these concepts has opened a door for application to the DMT community.

In this study, I implemented a thorough self-evaluation to better understand how DMT concepts have been assimilated into my dance pedagogy and how these DMT concepts have altered my approach to teaching, choreographing, and connecting with my students. This study showed clear evidence that the application of DMT concepts was productive and moreover necessary to the growth of my dance pedagogy.

Data analysis from this study verified that a marked improvement occurred in my teaching effectiveness. The identifiable problems of frustration tolerance, confidence, and team cohesiveness began to improve after the second class of implementation. The results are represented in the three part choreography piece that I orchestrated after analyzing the data from my journals and video entries. There were three distinct phases within the time of the research. I labeled them as: “The Beginning”, “The Middle”, and “A New Beginning”. I had observed that the application of DMT principles started to create a noticeable positive difference in the level of performance of my students versus those in other similar dance studios. Continuing growth would require patience and diligence, both for myself and my students.

In conclusion, based on the fusion of the supporting research with my personal experiences both as a DMT intern and competitive dance instructor, I confirmed that when applying DMT concepts to my own natural teaching approach, I generated a positive change in my students. In performing a self-analysis, I found my movement to be a reflection of the

atmosphere in the class. If I modeled emotional regulation, distress tolerance, and interpersonal effectiveness, my movements were purposeful and meaningful. The teaching core of my dance pedagogy was centered on teaching movement within an organized structure and tending to social-emotional needs of my students. This study allowed me to connect to my body and have a stronger sense of myself. Plus, I have become more patient, which has helped me to think clearer when improvising in new situations. The analysis of my journal entries combined with my video footage made it clear to me that utilizing DMT concepts in my teaching approach has left me with a more capable dance pedagogy and more importantly has given me a deeper sense of self. Lastly, utilizing DMT concepts showed me how to be a more effective, compassionate wife, mother, daughter, friend and teacher.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Definition of Terms**

#### **Artistic Inquiry**

A focused, systematic inquiry with the following characteristics: artistic methods of collecting, analyzing, and/or presenting data; utilizes a creative research process; and is motivated and determined by the aesthetics of the researcher or researchers (Hervey, 2004).

#### **Motivation**

The desire to be involved through the enjoyment of playing (Garvey, 1977) and expressing yourself in DMT (Winnicott, 1985). The enjoyment of DMT in team interaction and self-fulfillment (Payne, 2008).

#### **Dance Movement Therapy**

Dance/movement therapy (DMT) is defined by the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) as the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive, and physical integration of the individual, for the purpose of improving health and well-being (Welling, 2014).

#### **Pedagogy**

A form of knowledge production for coming to know about human movement. A set of techniques and concepts taught to a class that encompasses not only physical activity but also informs the student about one's body and health through movement and team interactions (Shapiro, 2005).

#### **Improvisation**

The integration of body and mind which is central to the practice of creating new dance techniques (Benjamin, 2002).

## **Choreography**

The creative process of dance making and the application of artistic manipulation to expressive instruments; the dancers (Ashley, 2014).

## **Competitive Dance**

Competitive dance is a popular activity in which competitors perform dances in any of several permitted dance styles—such as acro, ballet, jazz, hip-hop, and modern. (Competitive Dance, 2016)

## **Exploration of Self**

The understanding and acceptance of who one is, what they do, realize their level of self-esteem, communications skill, and personal relationships (Tartakovsky, 2011).

## **Social-Emotional Learning**

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (SEL Defined, 2015).

## **Non-Verbal Dialogue**

The primary means of developing communication and relationship between teacher and student. The ability of the teacher to distinguish subtle shifts in nonverbal expression including facial expressivity, vocal changes, and qualitative shifts in body movement (Chaiklin & Wengrower, 2009).

## **Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is a term with rather different meanings in different contexts: in general, it means 'reflecting' and specifically, as part of the social research, reflexivity is the process by which the researcher reflects upon the data collection and interpretation process (Harvey, 2012).

### **Self-Awareness**

Self-awareness is an understanding of oneself including one's own knowledge, attitudes, and opinions

### **Mindfulness**

Nonjudgmental, moment to moment awareness; the regulation of attention in order to maintain focus within the present moment and adopting an acceptance and open-based approach to personal experiences (Bishop et al., 2004).