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# The Value of Choice: An Exploratory Case Study on the Intrinsic Motivation of Dance Students Within the Creative Process

Jenna M. Gonsalves

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

THE VALUE OF CHOICE: AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY ON THE  
INTRINSIC MOTIVATION OF DANCE STUDENTS  
WITHIN THE CREATIVE PROCESS

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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College of Visual and Performing Arts  
School of Theater Arts and Dance  
Dance Education

December 2017

This Thesis by: Jenna M. Gonsalves

Entitled: *The Value of Choice: An Exploratory Case Study on the Intrinsic Motivation of Middle School Dance Students within the Creative Process*

has been approved as meeting the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the College of Performing and Visual Arts, School of Theatre Arts and Dance, Program of Dance Education

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## ABSTRACT

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This exploratory case study was designed to analyze the impact choice making has on the intrinsic motivation of middle school dance students including self-determination theory's basic needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Data were collected using multiple sources including observation rubrics and semi-structured pre- and post- group interviews. Two groups of students ages 11-14 created dances for performance. One group participated in a collaborative approach to the creative process and had the opportunity to make choices. The other group participated in a teacher-led creative process and did not have the opportunity to make choices. A thematic content analysis of pre- and post- study interviews revealed three distinct themes that were unique to choice-group students: individuality, community, and new ways of thinking. This differed from non-choice group students who revealed themes of feeling important and improved ability. Graphs derived from ratings scales on observational rubrics revealed that students who had the opportunity to make choices had higher ratings of autonomy and relatedness over the duration of the study. The findings from this study suggest that implementing student choice in the classroom may have a positive effect on intrinsic motivation and the basic needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Goal of Thesis**

As described by Richard M. Ryan and Edward L Deci in *Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation: Classic Definitions and New Directions*, simply means, “to be moved to do something” (54). In dance, this is a literal definition since movement itself motivates dancers. The feel of the movement across the body, the rhythm of the music, and the aesthetic nature of the dance are just some of the intrinsic motivators that move the dancer to dance. Performance is often a strong motivator for many dancers. On stage the dancer feels the heat of stage lights, imagines audience perception, hears the music, touches the contours of their costume, and listens to the applause. Performance as a motivator even goes beyond the “on stage” experiences as it is built into the very structure of many dance classrooms. Students are performing for the teacher as they cue and give corrections, performing for their peers as they practice skills and routines, and performing for themselves as they continuously watch themselves in the mirror. Elizabeth M. Lazaroff writes that her observations of a dance classroom “illuminate the bond between performance and motivation in dance-in-education including the physicality of dancing, a performative pedagogy, the roll of practice and imitation in learning, and the experience of performing” (28). Performance is a valuable factor when it comes to motivation for dance students, but the question that must be addressed is whether this

extrinsic source of motivation is enough to keep students interested and engaged in a student-centered manner. It is suggested that it is not only the fact that students are motivated, but also the orientation of the motivation that matters (Ryan and Deci, *Classical Definitions* 54). Extrinsic rewards such as deadlines, competition, and classroom climates can actually forestall intrinsic motivation. On the other hand, tangible extrinsic rewards such as constructive positive feedback can actually enhance intrinsic motivation (Milyavskaya and Koestner 4). This is important because “Intrinsic motivation results in high quality learning and creativity, extrinsic is good when it is with an attitude of willingness that reflects an inner acceptance of the value of the task” (Ryan and Deci, *Classical Definitions* 55). Extrinsic and intrinsic motivations both have their place in the classroom. External motivators like performance often fuel dance education; it is therefore essential that dance educators go beyond external motivators and work to develop the intrinsic motivation of their students.

The focus of this research will be on the period of time prior to the dance performance hereby known as the creative process. In *Creative Process Mentoring*, Larry Lavender describes this process as “creatively developing, revising, and setting a dance work” (6). Typically, in preparation for performance, a dance teacher will go through the creative process on their own in order to develop and teach choreography to a group of students. The teacher makes choices; the students are expected to follow in a structured and precise manner leaving little room for their creative involvement. The way choreography is taught; teachers often encourage dance students to give more personality to the movement and to make it their own. If the student is young, new to dance, or not naturally inclined to individualization, they do not have the knowledge or skill base to

understand how to add personality or make it “their own,” or what those two terms even mean. Children need to be taught through experience like improvisation, watching and responding to dance, understanding concepts, and making choices, to gain the understanding and confidence to add personal self-expression to given choreography.

This study analyzed whether including student choice in the creative process impacted students’ intrinsic motivation. The essential question addressed in this study was:

- Q1 What is the impact of involving student choice in the creative process, including intrinsic motivation and the basic needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy?

The study analyzed this question using an exploratory case study design. Two groups participated in the case study, the choice-group, and the non-choice group. The non-choice group went through a normal process where the teacher choreographed their dance, placed them in spots, set the piece, and oversaw rehearsal to get ready for the performance. The choice-group had opportunities to make creative choices throughout the process as they collaborated together through writing, art, and dance to get ready for the performance. The researcher gathered data through interviewing both groups both pre- and post-study. The researcher also filled out observation rubrics for every student after each class.

### **Purpose of Study**

Motivation is a vital subject to educators. According to the Self-Determination Theory, in order to be motivated the basic human needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy must be met (Ryan and Deci, *Classical Definitions 57*). This study analyzes specifically how utilizing choice can impact intrinsic motivation through looking at the

three basic needs. In dance, many opportunities present themselves in which students can make choices. They can make choices that have an impact on whole group, e.g. selecting a stretch to do in a circle, choosing the quality in which improvised movements will be done, or in demonstrating self-expression in the gestures they choose when the teacher allows for such freedom. The teacher should play the role of facilitator by supporting their student's choices and giving them effective feedback while teaching them to reflect on their own work (Anderson 10). Unfortunately dance teachers are often playing the role of coach, rarely allowing for much personal choice. "Teachers need to step back from being in 'complete' control and wholeheartedly accept the role of facilitator and mentor" (Gilbert 13).

How dance is taught varies by location, but in an extra-curricular setting it generally holds to a "demonstrate and do" pedagogy (Purvis 35). Teaching and learning within this design requires the student to learn by seeing and then putting what they saw physically into their body. Motivation within this design comes immediately through "praise and criticism, followed by corrective instruction and more practice" (Lazaroff 23). Teachers choose music that matches the movement as children learn the ins and outs of dance technique. When it comes time to prepare for performance, the teacher works intently on their own to choreograph something meaningful that the students will both enjoy and learn from. Students follow instruction and receive feedback from their teacher to build up their ability. Within this demonstrate and do format, performance itself becomes a significant external motivator. "Performance is the main motivator of dance students because it is built into the structure. The learning experience consists of the performance as the apex, while the prior and subsequent parts are aspects of the total

performance experience” (Lazaroff 24). When set up in a healthy way, this can be beneficial for school age children. Young people generally love to perform, but performance should be used as a goal and a way to show their creative work. But this researcher believes that performance should not, as Lazaroff suggests, be the main motivator. This could cause students to develop an ego-centric attitude that measures success on comparison, out-performing others, and high ability being more important than effort (Treasure and Roberts 478). In a student-centered model Performance is not the only aspect of dance education. The Colorado Dance Standards state that, “the essence of dance is to feel, create, compose, interpret, perform, and respond. Dance is the physical expression of an idea developed through a process of research, inquiry, and movement discovery” (Colorado Department of Education 8). By giving students a choice in the creative process, including creating, responding, inquiry, and discovery enhances the teaching of performance. Students must be involved hands-on. Without such involvement, they are missing out on the problem solving, revising, brainstorming, learning leadership skills, making mistakes, and other learning opportunities that come with the creative process.

### **Significance of the Study**

External motivators surround middle school aged dancers. Popular culture dance has come into the limelight with shows like “Dance Moms” and “So You Think You Can Dance,” and dance videos are on their phones, computers, and televisions more than ever. The comparison game begins as this strong external motivator drives students, possibly negatively, to achieve the results they think are optimal. The results-driven mindset can bring students to be focused on one thing, the performance, but not necessarily in a

healthy way. Students must be given a voice because a teacher cannot read their minds. Hearing a student's thoughts and ideas can make a lesson more meaningful and support positive a teacher-student relationship (Sebire et al. 108). In addition, middle school students are particularly vulnerable due to their transition from middle school to high school. At the same time their bodies are changing, their friendships are shifting, their opinions are stronger, and they are faced with more structure and rules than they had in primary grades. Because of this, young people become less active during the transition from childhood to adolescence (Sebire et al. 100) causing middle school students to be more intrinsically motivated to push through this difficult time.

Being surrounded by extrinsic motivators, it is of great import that educators use the healthy external motivators, like performance, as a goal to facilitate the growth in their student's intrinsic motivation. This case study used the three basic needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence as defined in the self-determination theory to analyze and observe motivation. "Addressing these issues among middle school populations may be especially revealing because the transition to middle school is associated with more rigid rule structures and less support for student autonomy" (Hayenga and Corpus 371). To support the need of relatedness students had the opportunity to work with their classmates through a collaborative approach. Working closely with peers builds a strong social structure and provides support for the need of relatedness (Sebire et al. 108). The need for competence was addressed as students learned through movement inquiry and discovery. The need of Autonomy was addressed by providing a supportive environment and allowing students the opportunity to make choices. The qualitative data were able to compare how choice effects the other basic

needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy as well as intrinsic motivation overall. Although there is a large amount of research on motivation in education, there is very little research done on motivation and the field of dance education specifically. In addition to broadening the field of dance research, this new research improves upon what we know about motivation by comparing how the motivation of students in the creative process who have the opportunity to make choices differs from those in a choice free, demonstrate and do environment. As education continues to shift toward a student-centered model, dance education needs to follow suit.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Achievement Goal Theory**

Motivation is a hot topic in educational reform. The spectrum of theories and research is vast and the perspectives and opinions are too numerous to mention. There is very little research regarding motivation specifically related to dance education. But no matter the field, theory, or opinion of student motivation the overarching question for all teachers is the same: How are students motivated? Research in physical education has often focused on achievement goal theory as a way to understand motivation. The two goal orientations in achievement goal theory are task-oriented and ego-oriented. In a study by Charlene S. Shannon on why girls are motivated to stay enrolled in after school studio dance classes, she found that “Task goals tend to be associated with sport adherence while ego goals are associated with drop out” (287).

An individual who is task-oriented utilizes an undifferentiated concept of ability, focusing on demonstrating new skills, learning new skills, and demonstrating mastery of the task. . . . In contrast, an individual who is ego-oriented utilizes a differentiated conception of ability, focusing on demonstrating ability by being successful with minimum effort and outperforming others. (Treasure and Roberts 476)

Understanding these two orientations is important because task-oriented individuals are driven primarily by intrinsic motivation. Teachers want to build a motivational climate that supports task-oriented learning in order to help develop intrinsic motivation in their students.

Based on Achievement Goal Theory the motivational climate is the psychological environment created within a particular situation, and it can be task- and/or ego-involving. Task –involving climates are characterized by positive reinforcement of individual progress, cooperation, and every individual being valued. By contrast, ego-involving climates involve rivalry, negative reinforcement for mistakes, extrinsic rewards, and perceptions that high ability rather than effort leads to success. (Norfield and Nordin-Bates 259)

Ego-involving climates can be harmful to a student’s psychological well-being. In De Bruin, Bakker, and Oudejan’s study on achievement goal theory and disordered eating in female gymnasts and dancers, they found that there was a strong correlation between ego-oriented climates and disordered eating (76). This revelation further proves the importance of fostering a healthy task-involving climate for learning. The authoritarian traditions of some dance studios are prone to promote ego-involving climates. “Ego-involving climates with emphasis on objective performance are linked to maladaptive dispositions and response patterns characterized by high cognitive trait anxiety, neurotic perfectionism, low self-esteem, low relatedness to others, and negative affect” (Stark and Newton 357). It is important to acknowledge, though, that even with a well-designed task-oriented environment, students may be at different developmental levels. That is why it is extremely important for teachers to engage with students and understand their individual background including but not limited to home life, social life, culture, and emotional needs. All of these circumstances factor into a student’s social-cognitive development and cause them to respond to situations differently from another student their same age.

A student with an egocentric outlook on the dance experience requires special consideration. Egocentric individuals tend to lack empathy, practice unhealthy comparison, and value natural talent over effort. Brenda Pugh McCutchen explains that

egocentric thinking is normal in the preoperational stage of development, but by pre-adolescence that stage should start to diminish (84). If that does not occur, teachers should identify the stage the student is in, in order to help them develop empathetic orientation and internalize healthy values (McCutchen 88). Middle school students require special considerations, as some students tend to be task-oriented while others tend to be more ego-oriented. Based on these findings, teachers must build a classroom environment that supports task-oriented behavior and sets students up for success. The environment for learning needs to be carefully constructed so that students feel safe and capable. Students should know they have the ability to learn through their effort and have the desire to succeed. By doing these things a teacher can better support students who are at an egocentric stage.

In this case study, achievement goal theory's motivational climate and student orientation (task-centric and ego-centric) are important factors for discussion. The motivational climate for this research was built over the duration of the school year before this project started. The students understood the expectations they had as a part of the group with a foundation of a respect for themselves, the process, and each other. Unfortunately, some of the students held an egocentric attitude, and this was an unforeseen variable to the study.

### **Self-Determination Theory**

Intrinsic motivation refers to doing an activity for the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself. Intrinsic motivation happens in an environment that supports the three needs as outlined by Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory. This theory suggests that factors of environment, like the task-involving motivational climate mentioned,

influence the basic needs satisfaction. Meeting these basic needs (competence, relatedness, autonomy) then influences intrinsic motivation (Norfield and Nordin-Bates 258). In other words, a healthy classroom environment influences the basic needs, and the basic needs influence enjoyment. In the experimental study, *How Community Dance Leads to Positive Outcomes*, conducted by Jennie Norfield and Sanna Nordin-Bates found that “relatedness emerged as the most consistent predictor of the motivation-related variables in this study” (268). This contrasts with Ryan and Deci’s findings on intrinsic motivation being primarily affected by the “satisfaction of competence and autonomy with relatedness playing a less vital role” (Norfield and Nordin-Bates 261). The three needs are dependent on each other. It is nearly impossible to isolated one without impacting the others.

The needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are thought to be universal across people and cultures and applicable throughout all aspects of a person’s life. Autonomy refers to the experience of choice and volition in one’s behavior and to the personal authentic endorsement of one’s activities and actions. Competence involves the ability to bring about desired outcome and feelings of effectiveness and master over one’s environment. Finally, relatedness reflects feelings of closeness and connection on ones’ everyday interactions. (Milyavskaya and Koestner 387)

#### *The Basic Needs: Competence*

Students feel competent when they perceive that they have the ability to perform a challenging task (Sebire et al. 100). “The need for competence relates to whether an individual perceives themselves to be capable of achieving their goals and function effectively within the environment” (Norfield and Nordin-Bates 260). One way in which teachers can support competence is through feedback. Positive feedback has generally been found to increase intrinsic motivation because it enhances perceived competence (Ryan and Deci, *Self-Determination* 70). Student feedback should also be meaningful in

order to support students' need to feel competent. Ann Green Gilbert lists meaningful feedback as one of the ten main principles for brain-compatible dance education.

The brain needs feedback to learn from experience. Students cannot learn, grow, and develop without it. Meaningful feedback is positive, timely, frequent, learner-controlled and descriptive—not simply general. It must be multi-modal to reach all learning styles. For example, feedback might be expressed through positive words from a teacher or peer, from drawings, diagrams or photographs; from smiles and direct eye contact; from appropriate touch by self, teacher or peers as well as from manipulation from models and props. The intrinsic reward of achievement, as well as teacher and classmate appreciation, are far more meaningful than external prizes of treats and trophies. (12)

Another important factor of competence is a well-organized lesson with thoughtful planning and meaningful content. Structure supports competence (Sebire et al. 108). Well organized and conceptually structured lessons bring about an atmosphere in which students perceive they are competent because the instructions and lesson are clear and build upon prior knowledge. “When class content connects to a student’s life, both the brain and the body gain and retain knowledge” (Gilbert 11). Teachers need to make every lesson meaningful. If lessons are not meaningful, students will most likely not retain knowledge, understand concepts, or find the task intrinsically motivating.

Competence is viewed as the most likely of the three needs to produce motivation. On its own, competence is not enough to spark intrinsic motivation. Students can be competent and receive validation from external factors like grades without showing any kind of intrinsic motivation. It is therefore crucial that we look at more than just competence to measure motivation. In this research, the researcher discussed prior knowledge in pre-interviews and competence was supported through a series of well-structured experiences that provided support for choice-making and collaboration throughout the process. The researcher continually checked for understanding and

provided clear examples of meaningful feedback. Peers and teachers delivered feedback in multi-modal ways by through verbal response, note cards, single descriptive words, and simple drawings.

### *The Basic Needs: Relatedness*

Relatedness—the need for support, social interaction, and inter-personal understanding—in general is often seen as the least important need in the Self-Determination Theory. This is not consistent in physical activity settings. Physical activity settings naturally foster relatedness through involvement (Stark and Newton 357). In the case study “Exploring Factors Influencing Girls’ Continued Participation in Competitive Dance” by Charlene S Shannon, ideas identifying with relatedness (everyone competes, friendship, supportive environment) accounted for three of the six main reasons why students were involved in dance (292). This is likely due to the idea that intrinsically motivated behaviors are more likely to occur and thrive in contexts that support a sense of connectedness and belonging. “Social contexts that satisfies these needs [competence, relatedness, autonomy] will enhance intrinsic motivation” (Patall, Cooper, and Wynn 897).

Providing a caring climate supports the need for relatedness. “In a youth sports context, a caring climate helps to develop youths’ ability to monitor, manage, and control positive affect. . . . Caring is related to higher levels of enjoyment and commitment” (Stark and Newton 357). Creatively, students feel comfortable sharing their ideas if they feel safe and cared for (Gilbert 26). This sense of care and belonging come when teachers approach students with an expression of authentic interest in them as an individual. “Such interactions including using a caring, respectful and warm manner in which they express

empathy, avoid blame, act in a non-judgmental way, and via showing concern and care when others are faced with challenges” (Standage and Emm 253). A caring environment can reduce student anxiety and help them be creative. Teachers who work to relate to students help them feel recognized, valued, and nurtured in an increasingly impersonal world (McCutchen 327).

The need for relatedness can also be met through social structure. The use of partner work and small groups with solid organization, structure, and form help bring about emotive connections and social skills important to social development. Collaborating in small groups not only supports relatedness but also allows students to perceive more control, provide feedback for peers, support each other’s successes, and experience better psychological health (Standage and Emm 254). Collaboration is better for learning than competition. Providing opportunities for collaboration creates a healthy task-involving motivational climate by decreasing competition and breaking down boundaries between classmates. “Using a variety of groupings through the class, such as pairs, trios and small and large groups, creates a multi-dimensional, student centered learning environment” (Gilbert 12). In addition, problem solving together brings about more ideas and choices. Middle schoolers are generally excited to work in groups but feel self-conscious about standing out and speaking up. By providing group activities that naturally bring about creative expression students can build up confidence through group experiences that facilitate relatedness.

The students in this new case study had support for the need of relatedness through working collaboratively with each other. They worked in pairs, small groups, and large groups as the dance was created. They also worked outside of the dance medium

and took on other art forms such as poetry and visual art in both small and large groups. The researcher worked to establish a caring environment and supportive atmosphere that was non-judgmental and safe for creative expression.

### *The Basic Needs: Autonomy*

Autonomy is the least studied of the basic needs when it comes to dance education and self-determination theory but is said by Deci to be a significant element of student engagement (Irving 4). Research conducted in physical education settings has found that students who perceive their teachers to be autonomy supportive positively predict the satisfaction of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Standage and Emm 244). Similarly, a study done by Eleanor Quested and John L. Duda on dance burnout among elite dancers found that “when dance teachers reduce pressures and encourage self-initiated and self-controlled actions, the dancers are more likely to feel efficacious” (161). This can apply to all dancers across the board, specifically when fostering a healthy motivational climate. Dance teachers need to be willing to give the classroom back to which it belongs: the students.

Autonomy is not something that a traditional dance classroom is used to supporting. Dance styles, like Ballet, come from a long-practiced tradition of authority and strict social constructs. The autonomy in a traditional dance form such as ballet must come deep from within the artist itself; the artistry is kept alive through individuals who commit to the craft. Sandra and Phillip Hammond talk about how a dancer’s strong technical background is the basis for autonomy. “The greater the technical base, the more likely will an artistic endeavor develop autonomously, that is, evolve independently of surrounding social forces and independently of the personalities of its practitioners” (16).

While this is true for trained dancers, for children who are just learning the art form, this cannot apply. It takes years to develop technique strong enough to be able to add in the flourish and flair independent of a choreographer because the “controlling environments reduce a sense of personal autonomy and intrinsic motivation” found in dance technique classes (Flowerday and Schraw 2007). That is one of the most important reasons why teachers need to build caring environments for autonomy supported classroom structure, and motivational climate.

Students need to be able to take responsibility for their learning. “Students who construct and re-create their own learning experience are more engaged; they retain information longer than students who are ‘fed’ information. . . . Allow students to take charge of their own learning through choices, peer coaching, and problem solving” (Gilbert 14). Teachers who are working to provide autonomy support need to be aware of how they interact with students, and the expectations they establish.

When teachers provide autonomy support they give meaningful rationales (especially for tasks which are important but not as enjoyable as others), offer choice which pupils value, seek and acknowledge pupils’ perspectives or ideas, and nurture pupils internal interest and enjoyment. In contrast controlling teachers aim to motivate by inducing internal pressures such as guilt on external pressures such as a deadline and feedback giving, and language used to manipulate rather than be informative. (Sebire et al. 101)

This new case study provided autonomy support by acknowledging students’ ideas and value to the project. The researcher placed value on teacher student relationships and vocalized trust in each student’s ability to contribute to the project. Space was given for creative inquiry and risk taking as well as problem solving. Improvisational exercises prepared students for the kind of choices they would be making

in the collaborative project through giving them the tools to coach each other and analyze their work.

### **Providing Choice**

Providing choice may be the most obvious way to support a student's autonomy (Patall, Cooper, and Wynn 897). William Glasser's Choice Theory suggests five basic needs that all people seek to satisfy, including: survival, freedom, power, belonging, and fun (Glasser 25). Choice theory and self-determination theory are very similar. Glasser's freedom need is reflect in SDT's Autonomy. Belonging is very similar to relatedness, and power essentially identical to competence. Autonomy is identified as a major factor in intrinsic motivation (Irvine 4). The main difference between the two theories is that choice theory suggests "all of our behavior is our constant attempt to satisfy one or more of the basic needs written into our genetic structure. None of what we do is caused by a situation or person outside of ourselves" (18). Self-determination theory suggest that we can be motivated by both external and internal sources, but internal results in higher quality learning and creativity. This new research will focus on the basics of Self-Determination Theory as the foundation of discussion and acknowledge that extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation are a factor in education.

Self-determination theory says that choice should result in positive motivational outcomes. That is, "people will be more intrinsically motivated to persist at a task to the extent that the activity is their personal choice and/or provides opportunities to make choices" (Patall, Cooper, and Wynn 897). In order for the choice to persist in positive motivational outcomes it needs to be meaningful; for the choice to be meaningful it must

satisfy the three needs. It is therefore important to set up choices that fit into the positive motivational climate of the classroom.

There are studies in which choice has had no effect, or even a negative one, on motivation in the classroom. In a study conducted by Flowerday and Schraw, students given a choice between working on a crossword puzzle or an essay showed a negative effect on effort. In the same study, students who were given a choice of how long to study did poorly on the exam. (207). These results were likely due to the fact that the choice was not meaningful to the students and did not satisfy their needs.

Choice should focus on actions rather than options, differentiate between picking and choosing, avoid decision overload, match an individual's potential (i.e., the choice should be neither too easy or too hard), and not compete with an individual's cultural situation and social position. (King and Howard 60)

One study was found in which physical activity effort was measured in girls who were in dance as a part of a physical education class and were given opportunities to make option choices.

Dance instructors qualitatively reported providing choice (of music, dance styles, warm-up activities, and choreography) was perceived by instructors and girls to make lessons more engaging and enjoyable. However, this provision largely reflected option choice, and did not appear to provide action choice, such as having control over task progression which is a central element of autonomy support. (Sebire et al. 107)

These students did not have much autonomy support in their choices, so when they were encouraged to work on their own they had low effort and participation. This further highlights the importance of giving action choices to encourage self-determination. In dance this can be done in a variety of ways including making their own schedule for choreography and choosing how much time they need to spend on an activity, establishing ways in which to take critique and decide how to revise their own

work, and brainstorming with a group ideas about the intent of a piece of choreography.

This qualitative research study gave one group many opportunities for both action choice and option choices in the creative process as they prepared a dance for their final performance. The other group, the non-choice group, did not have choices as they created their piece. Because this is not a study about the specific kind of choices (action or option) being made, many different types of choice making opportunities were provided.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate how adding choice to the creative process impacts intrinsic motivation of middle school students. The methodology section identifies the details that tools that were necessary to answering the research questions: What motivates students when learning choreography for a dance concert? How does a collaborative approach to the creative process effect the group as a whole? In what ways does involving student choice in the creative process affect the student's perceived autonomy, competence, and relatedness? And, does involving student choice in the creative process have an impact on a student's intrinsic motivation?

#### **The Research Design**

The study was an exploratory case study that consisted of qualitative and quantitative research. Data were collected using pre-study interviews, post-study interviews, and observational rubrics. The researcher, who was also the teacher, used a research journal to summarize the events of each class.

In order to best answer the research questions, the researcher broke the students up into two groups. One group, the choice-group, was a part of a collaborative creative process where they had the opportunity to make choices. The other group, the non-choice group, was a part of a traditional teacher-directed creative process. Both groups performed in a dance concert at the end of the project.

It was required that all participants have a consent form filled out by a parent/guardian. Participants also completed an assent form for themselves. The research lasted for 12 weeks.

### **The Research Setting**

The research location was in Hawaii in a rural area. This rural setting makes the bulk of its income through tourism with some local families operating small businesses. Chain restaurants like Applebee's and Red Robin are non-existent; instead local people eat at small family owned establishments such as the one next door to the research location. Students often walk to the surrounding businesses. It is a safe environment for children to be outside alone, playing, walking to convenience stores, and catching the bus to the nearest beach.

The specific location for this study is a small town, inland of the ocean, on the side of a hill. The breeze blows through the hills providing a welcome relief from the hot sun. In addition to the non-profit organization where the research took place, there is an elementary school, a gas station, a dentist, two restaurants, a surf shop, a chiropractor, and a pie shop. There is a stoplight, one of two on the side of the island. The community center across the street is often alive with fundraisers, martial arts classes, hula dancing, taiko drums, and tai chi. The local butcher, the grandfather of one of the students, sells meat from his ranch that runs down the hill. This small town is off the beaten tracks of tourism mostly because it is inland from the beach. The nearest tourist attraction is the coffee tasting room at the edge of the coffee fields down the road.

The population is made up of diverse groups of people. Local people (Kama'aina), have varying cultural backgrounds that stem from the plantation days.

Portuguese, Filipino, Japanese, Puerto Rican, and Hawaiian traditions have bled together to create the local culture of Hawaii. Hawaiian Pidgin, the dialect of English spoken by local people in Hawaii, is a spectrum of words from those cultures mixed with modified English words generally shortened and simplified in order to make communicating easier during plantation days. There is also a large number of people who move to this area to experience the “island life.” Many of these people move to this tiny hillside town into a multi-million-dollar private housing community. This influx of people greatly impacts the way in which things operate, the result of which is a lack of available home rentals and real estate prices that are driven through the roof. It is hard to make money on the island; the median annual household income is just over \$50,000. With it being difficult to make ends meet, many locals cannot afford a home, making room for transplants to buy expensive property.

Hawaii Community Arts Initiative (HCAI) is a not-for-profit organization that provides classes in dance and art to the children of Hawaii. Hawaii Community Arts Initiative is a pseudonym to preserve confidentiality. Their philosophy is “planting seeds of creativity.” The founder of HCIA said that her hope is to give children the opportunity to put their energy in something positive to help keep them out of the unhealthy life cycle on the island. When the researcher asked the founder about this “life cycle” she mentioned that many people get into drugs and alcohol at a young age after watching their parents do the same thing. When she was growing up on the island there was nowhere like HCIA where children could have a creative outlet; that is what lead her start teaching hip-hop and breaking ten years ago when she first got started. This attitude of creating a safe space for children sets up a great motivational climate. Most children

come into the building with big smiles on their faces. They crowd the teachers and linger on the dance floor even after class is finished. There are only three other places to take dance classes on the island and HCIA is the farthest west. As a non-profit organization HCIA does not discriminate by socio-economic status. The enrollment cost is \$100 for an 8-week class session; any additional class is 50% off. If a student cannot afford classes there are scholarships and sponsorships available.

The dance room at HCIA is a large space with hard linoleum floors, and mirrors on the front wall. The sound system delivers loud and clear music. DJ equipment is up against the wall, and graffiti style art surrounds the space with the sayings “nobesked,” (Hawaiian Pidgin for don’t be scared, or go for it!), “Drama Free Zone,” and “Let’s Dance.” Twinkly lights hang from the ceiling providing a fun change in atmosphere when desired. On the other side of a dividing wall is a messy and colorful art studio. Abstract paintings of patterns found in nature, larger than life jellyfish, and simple splashes of color mixed together hang on the wall. There are huge shelves filled with art supplies and books. The space immediately invites people in with its charisma.

### **The Participants**

Sixteen middle schoolers participated in the study. All sixteen children completed the pre-interview and full duration of the study. Two students no longer attended class after the performance and did not complete the post interview. All the participants were female and ranged in age from eleven to fourteen. Twelve of the participants attended public school, representing two different middle schools, one on the east side of the island and one on the west side. Three participants attended private school, and one participant was homeschooled. Four students commute from the east side of the island;

the rest live within ten miles of the studio. Most participants are picked up and dropped off by their parents, two of the participants walk from the school bus, and the participants from the east side carpool.

The participants were a part of the HCIA Academy program. The Academy program is a yearlong commitment for students. Students in this program had shown commitment through participation in classes the previous year, performing at HCIA events, and being role models for the HCIA community. Students attend an “audition” that aids in their group placement. The Academy student’s placement for the year depends on who the teachers think will work together well, but all students who audition get placed. There were two academy classes selected by the researcher to participate in the study. Each group was of the same age range and ability, all took three to five classes a week, and all had no experience with choreography. These classes provided a natural selection for the choice and non-choice groups. The students had already been working together for a whole semester when the study began, and they had a great community. They often came early to sit together, talk, and eat snacks. Classes were often filled with laughter.

### **Organizing the Lessons**

The choice-group met for rehearsal one hour once a week for twelve weeks on Wednesdays from 6:45pm to 7:45pm. They all took a one-hour ballet class that preceded their rehearsal time. Students in the choice-group took part in a collaborative creative process that encouraged student agency though providing choice making opportunities.

Table 1. Choice-group Schedule

Week	Activities	Choices
1	Pre-Study Interviews	None
2	Brain Dance I am Poem Sharing poems Picking 5 key lines from poem Creating a symbol of the poem Audio recording poem	Lines Colors Share
3	Laban's Efforts led improve Recording of statements and symbols Individual Choreography Map Share with partner Chance dance in groups of two	Improvisation Activity Duration Revise Recordings
4	Brain Dance Time to review movement phrases Partner Collaboration Choreography Map Showing collaborations with various music Pair Share: Intent Research music at home	Concepts Activity Duration Intent Statements Music
5	Brain Dance Share music Shapes and transitions improvisation Setting the beginning of the piece	Improvisation Stage Placement Activity Duration
6	Brain Dance Mirroring, shadowing, reacting improvisation Reviewing and reworking Vary the phrase using direction, quality, and level Pair Share: Climax	Partner Rehearsal Time Duration Improvisations Revise Activity Duration
7	Brain Dance Levels improvisation: one up one down Review and revise Pair-Share: Resolution	Improvisation Revise

Table 1 (cont.)

Week	Activities	Choices
8	Brain Dance Improvisation: follow the leader Review and revise Work on resolution Adding in resolution Modify as needed Taking turns critiquing Costuming	Improvisation Costuming Revise Critique
9	Brain Dance Review / Revise Rehearsal with critiquing	Critique
10	Brain Dance Review / Revise Rehearsal with critiquing	Critique
11	Brain Dance Review / Revise Rehearsal With a mock audience Teacher Verbal Feedback	Critique
12	Performance Post-Study Interviews	None

The schedule, although clearly planned, needed to be flexible. Schedule adjustments occurred due to attendance irregularity, student needs, and unplanned student life circumstances. The schedule in Table 1 served as a timeline in an effort to keep the activities on track. All activities took place in the order listed in Table 1, with small changes occurring when students needed more time. Choice-group students had the option to decide on the duration of certain projects. There were times when some groups would finish projects faster than others or student absences put them behind. In these cases, the teacher would step into the collaboration help accelerate the process. When

students were absent, they would miss out on the activities of the week before and join in on the current activity. There were also some technical difficulties with some of the students' recorded audio statements. Three students had to re-record their poem later on in the process. During week 6 the study had to pause in order to deal with unfortunate social situations coming from an individual in the other group. This circumstance resulted in both the choice-group and the non-choice taking a half hour off from the lessons and discussing the problem. The graphs in chapter four show the significant effect this had on observed competence, relatedness, and autonomy. The researcher had to adjust the schedule of week 6 and shorten the duration of the activities.

The researcher was aware of giving meaningful choice-making opportunities as a part of the lesson. For a choice to be meaningful students need to be given support. The teacher provided support for choices through feedback, answering questions, handouts, and conversation prompts written on the white boards. Table 2 shows a variety of choice supports from the study. Choreography maps provided steps that a student could follow to create a dance phrase. These maps served as guidelines or inspiration for choreography but could be manipulated as the students desired. Pair share activities provided talking points to discuss with a partner on various topics. Pairs would share their ideas with each other, complete any movement tasks from the instructions, and then share their partners' ideas with the whole group to facilitate group discussion.

Table 2. Choice-group Supports

Choice Support	Prompts
I am Poem	Fill in the blank hand out Audio Recording playback
Individual Choreography Map	A movement shape or gesture for I am statement A different line spoken out loud in stillness A pathway from your symbol that takes you through space A movement shape of gesture from a different line in your poem I am statement repeated including spoken text
Partner Collaboration Choreographic Map	I am statements Pathway from symbols Stasis Taught statement I am repeated Resolution
Pair Share: Intent	Conversation prompts: Given the I Am... poem, what should this dance attempt to communicate to the audience? What are some dance elements that could help us communicate the intent? Which kind of music choices do you think would communicate that when layered with voices?
Pair Share: Climax	Conversation prompts: Given our original intent, what is the message that should be communicated in the climax? What movement elements can help communicate that? Movement Exploration: Come up with a movement phrase, shape, or gesture that communicates that.

Table 2 (cont.)

Choice Support	Prompts
Pair-Share: Resolution	Conversation prompts: Given the intent of piece, what should be communicated during the resolution? What are some movement elements in regard to space and time that can help communicate that? Movement Exploration: Create a group shape in shared space, a transition, and a shape alone in general space that shows resolution.

The non-choice group met for rehearsal for 45 minutes once a week on Tuesdays from 4:45pm to 5:30pm. They all took a one-hour ballet class that preceded their rehearsal time. Students in the non-choice group took part in a traditional teacher directed creative process.

Table 3. Non-choice Group Schedule

Week	Activities
1	Pre-study interviews
2	Technical warm-up Teaching the thematic movement phrases
3	Technical warm-up Reviewing the thematic movement phrases Introduce the intent
4	Technical warm-up Reviewing thematic movement phrases Modifying the movement phrases
5	Technical warm-up Setting the beginning Setting formations

Table 3 (cont.)

Week	Activities
6	Technical warm-up Review and revise Manipulate the thematic phrases
7	Technical warm-up Adding a conclusion
8	Technical warm-up Check for understanding through group discussion on the intent Performance quality discussion
9	Technical warm-up Rehearsing the dance to other pieces of music Try on costumes
10	Technical warm-up Rehearsing the piece in small groups Peer feedback with a partner
11	Technical warm-up Rehearsing the piece with a mock audience Verbal feedback
12	Performance Post-study interviews

### **Instrumentation**

Three instruments were used to collect data, pre-study interviews, post-study interviews, and observational rubrics.

#### *Pre-Study Interview*

As a result of this study's examining intrinsic motivation, it was important that the researcher hear the students' perspective. The interview was a semi-structured group interview. Students in groups of three or four sat with the researcher around a table and discussed the questions. The interview questions were designed as a starting point to open

up discussion. The researcher guided the interviewees to discuss the ideas by keying into what they were saying and continuing the conversation, allowing for more in-depth responses. The interview began with questions about demographics and dance experience, and moved into more complex questions throughout the interview session. Questions were designed to understand the students' experience of autonomy, relatedness, and competence, as well as their experience in dance, goals, interests, and enjoyment. There were six main questions in the interview: Why do you study dance? What is your opinion of your dance ability? Do you consider yourself creative? Do you imagine yourself dancing in ten years? Do you like working with groups? Do you feel interested in this project? and Would you like to be able to make choices when learning your dance? In addition to the six main questions, the researcher asked probing questions to assist the participants in communicating their opinions. The probing questions provided the researcher with possible talking points to keep the conversation going. This was helpful for this age group, as some students would answer exactly like the person before them. The teacher would ask a student directly for their opinions to be sure all students were given the chance to talk. The duration of the interview was ten to fifteen minutes.

Interviews were audio recorded on Garage Band software and then exported to an audio file that was stored on a password protected external hard drive. A copy of the Pre-study Interview Guide can be found in appendix A.

#### *Post-study Interviews*

Post-study interviews were also semi-structured group interviews. Students discussed the same main six questions with the addition of questions about their

experience: Was creating this dance something you enjoyed? What was it like working with your classmates? and, What was it like working with your teacher? There were also questions specifically about the creative process: What did you find difficult? Did you find it fun and interesting? Did you learn anything new? and, Is there anything about this dance you are particularly proud of? Probe questions aided the students in communicating their opinions and dig into the three basic needs. One final question added in the moment about the students' opinion of where their motivation came from. This question helped the researcher understand the students' opinions and compare them to the research analysis.

The interviews were audio recorded on Garage Band software and exported as audio files to a password protected external hard drive. Appendix B contains a copy of the post-study interview.

### **Observational Rubrics**

The researcher, who was also the teacher, completed an observational rubric based on the observed behavior of each student. She used a ratings scale of one to three in order to aid in mapping the observed behavior. The ratings scale provided subjective quantitative data. Every week the researcher calculated the mean number for each behavior and logged it into the excel document. She kept a research journal as a way to avoid confirmation bias.

Table 4. Observational Rubric Ratings Scale

Observed Behavior	1	2	3
Participation	The participant passively participated and seemed uncomfortable with activity.	The participant actively participated but seemed unenthusiastic.	The participant actively participated and was enthusiastic and responsive.
Competence	The participant showed lack of understanding.	The participant showed average understanding.	The participant showed full understanding.
Collaboration	The participant did not share any ideas and was not receptive of other's ideas.	The participant did not share ideas but was receptive of others' ideas. Or The participant shared ideas but was not receptive of ideas.	The participant both shared ideas and was receptive of others' ideas.
Autonomy	Students allow themselves little creativity and interpretation.	Students allowed themselves some freedom of interpretation.	Student allowed themselves full freedom of interpretation.

### Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher transcribed the pre-interviews and post interviews, and analyzed them using Thematic Content Analysis. The researcher repeatedly listened to the interviews, read the full transcriptions, read each line in detail, coded the transcriptions, and looked for common themes. The student perspective was important to gaining additional understanding of intrinsic motivation in students. The thematic analysis will be discussed in chapter four.

For the quantitative analysis, the ratings scales on the observational rubrics were added up and calculated to find a mean number for each basic need. Both the choice-group and the non-choice were observed every week. The numbers went into Excel documents to aid in analyzing the observed basic needs in the choice vs. non-choice groups. Line graphs generated by the Excel documents spanned through the twelve-week case study. The graphs compared the three needs against each other within their individual groups as well as compared autonomy, relatedness, and competence between the two groups. The graphs were valuable in looking at overall student experience. Graphs and a discussion of the quantitative analysis will follow in chapter four.

All methodologies were important to the research question. The details of the location and participants gave the researcher a clear understanding of the demographics of the participants. The organization of the lessons and tools used for learning give clear ideas about what happened in the classroom. Lastly the methods of data collection lay out the ways in which new information was collected and organized.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION

As stated in chapter one, this exploratory study examines how adding choice to the creative process impacts a student's intrinsic motivation. The two types of data collected in this study organize the chapter. First, an unforeseen variable will be discussed. Next, the quantitative data gathered from the observational rubrics shows the similarities and differences between the two groups' basic needs satisfaction over the duration of the project. After, the thematic analysis of the student interviews shows what emerged as common themes across the two groups as well as the differences. Lastly, the research questions are discussed using the analyzed data. In the discussion chapter, all names are pseudonyms for confidentiality.

#### **An Unforeseen Variable**

The two goal orientations, task-centric and egocentric, previously discussed in the literature review became important factors in this study. Task-centric students value the mastery of tasks, understand that skill comes from hard work, and practice empathy in their relationships. Egocentric individuals tend to lack empathy, practice unhealthy comparison, and value natural talent over effort. Although the motivational climate was task-oriented overall, it is impossible to control all factors of a student's experience.

During week six students brought to the teacher's attention that some harsh words were left on a voice message for a choice-group student from a non-choice group

member. The message spoke hateful words about the choice-group student's ability and skill level. By the time the teacher learned of the incident, all of the students in both groups were aware, and the teacher had to put the research on hold in order to handle the situation. After hearing the message and talking to the victim and her parents it was decided that the best course of action was to have a discussion with both groups about what happened and give the students a safe situation to express their concerns. This unforeseen variable had a significant effect on the basic needs ratings particularly during week six.

### **Observed Basic Needs Satisfaction**

As discussed in the literature review, self-determination theory states that in order for intrinsic motivation to occur, the basic needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy must be met. Figures 1, 2, and 3 were constructed using the ratings scales on the observational rubrics. A full breakdown of the criteria that determined the ratings can be seen in Table 4 in the methodology chapter. According to the ratings calculated, the choice and non-choice group all experienced the three basic needs. There were however major differences in the observed amount across the timeline of the project.

#### *Competence*

Competence—the need to feel capable of meeting goals and finishing tasks—was observed through a ratings scale of one to three. Students who received a score of one showed a lack of understanding in the lessons, passive participation, and discomfort with the activity. Students who received a two showed average understanding and actively participated, but seemed unenthusiastic. Students who received a number three showed full understanding, actively participated, and were enthusiastic and responsive. Figure 1

shows a line graph of the average competence rating calculated for the choice and non-choice groups.

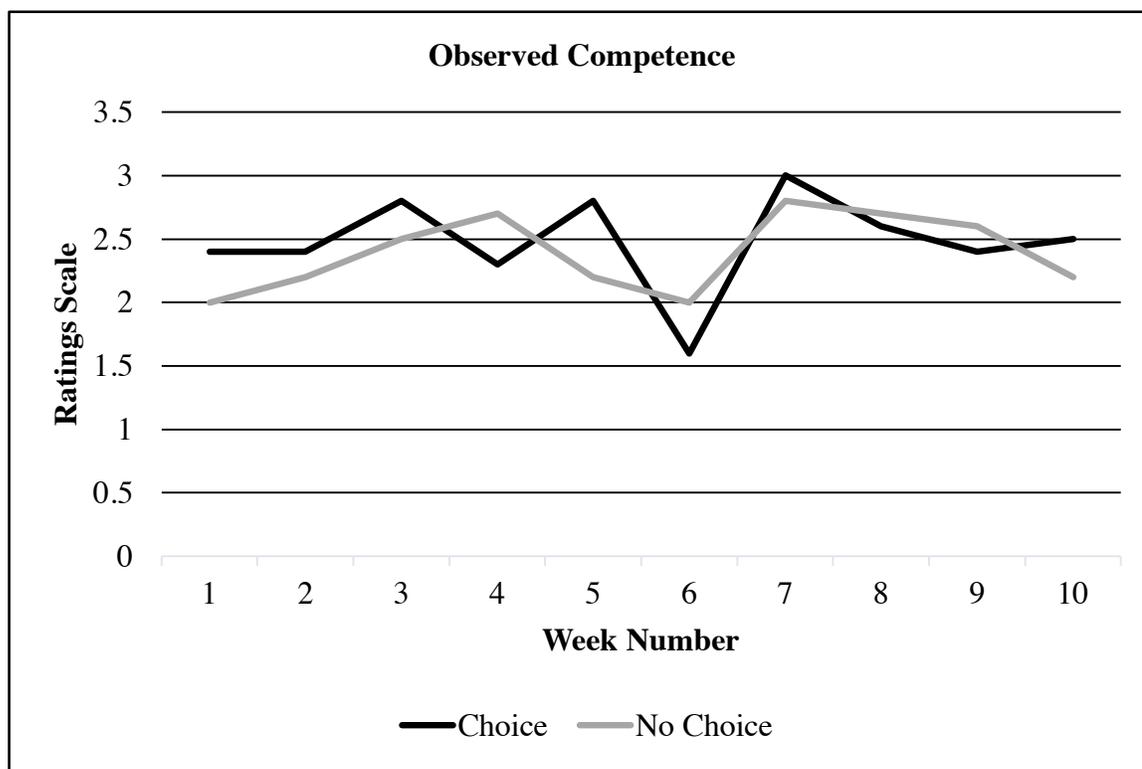


Figure 1. Observed Competence of Choice and Non-choice Groups

Observed competence was consistently on a high level for both groups. Week six though shows a significant decrease in observed competence for the choice-group and the non-choice group.

#### *Relatedness*

Relatedness—the need for support, social interaction, and inter-personal understanding—was observed on a ratings scale of one to three. Students who received a one did not share any ideas and were not receptive of others' ideas. Students received a two if they did not share ideas but were receptive of others' ideas, or, conversely, if they shared their ideas but were not receptive of others' ideas. Students received a three if they both shared their ideas and were receptive of others' ideas.

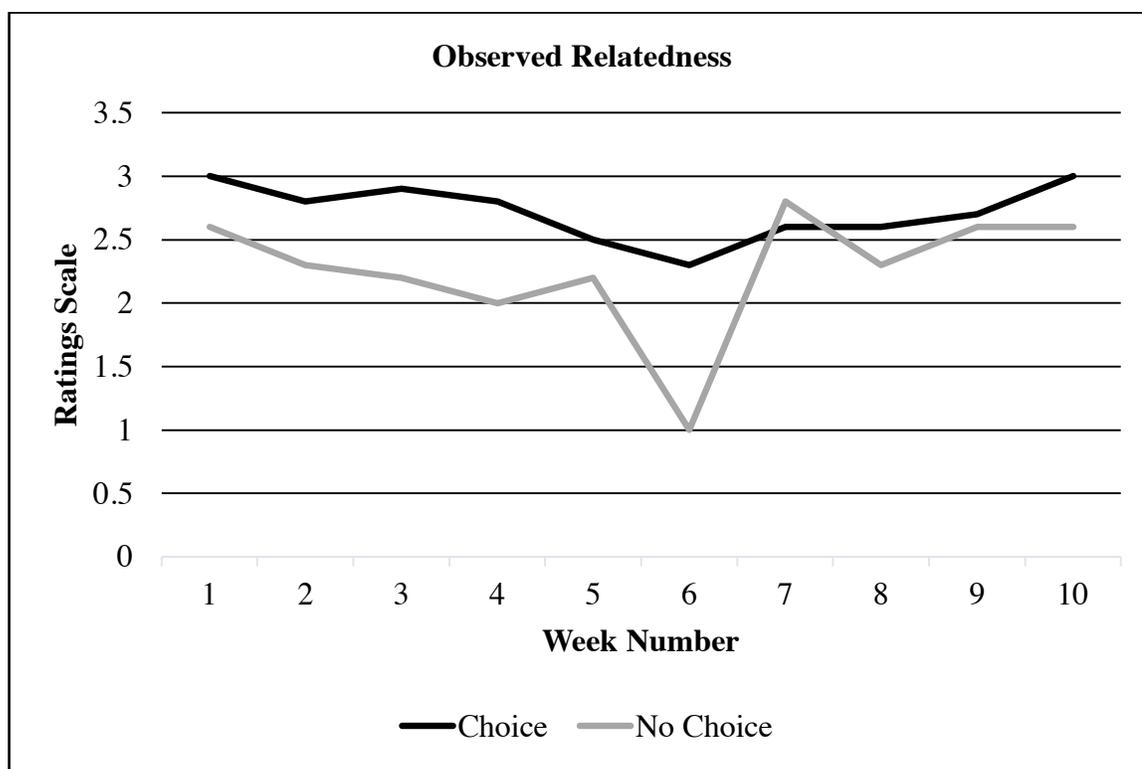


Figure 2. Observed Relatedness of Choice and Non-choice Groups

The choice-group, who had a collaborative approach, had an overall higher relatedness rating than the non-choice group, who used a traditional teacher led approach. Similar to the Figure 1 on competence, there is a dip during week six for the non-choice group. The decrease, though, is more drastic for the non-choice group. Students in the choice-group that had the student who was victimized by the voicemail spoke words of encouragement and unity after the incident. The students who were most affected were the classmates of the student who left the voicemail whose ratings were much lower than average. They spoke words of empathy for the other group and seemed to be more distrustful of each other the rest of the day. The classroom was quiet in the non-choice group as rehearsal continued on week six.

### *Autonomy*

Autonomy was observed on a ratings scale of one to three. Students who received a one allowed themselves little creativity and interpretation. Students who received a two allowed themselves some freedom and interpretation. Students who received a three allowed themselves full freedom of interpretation.

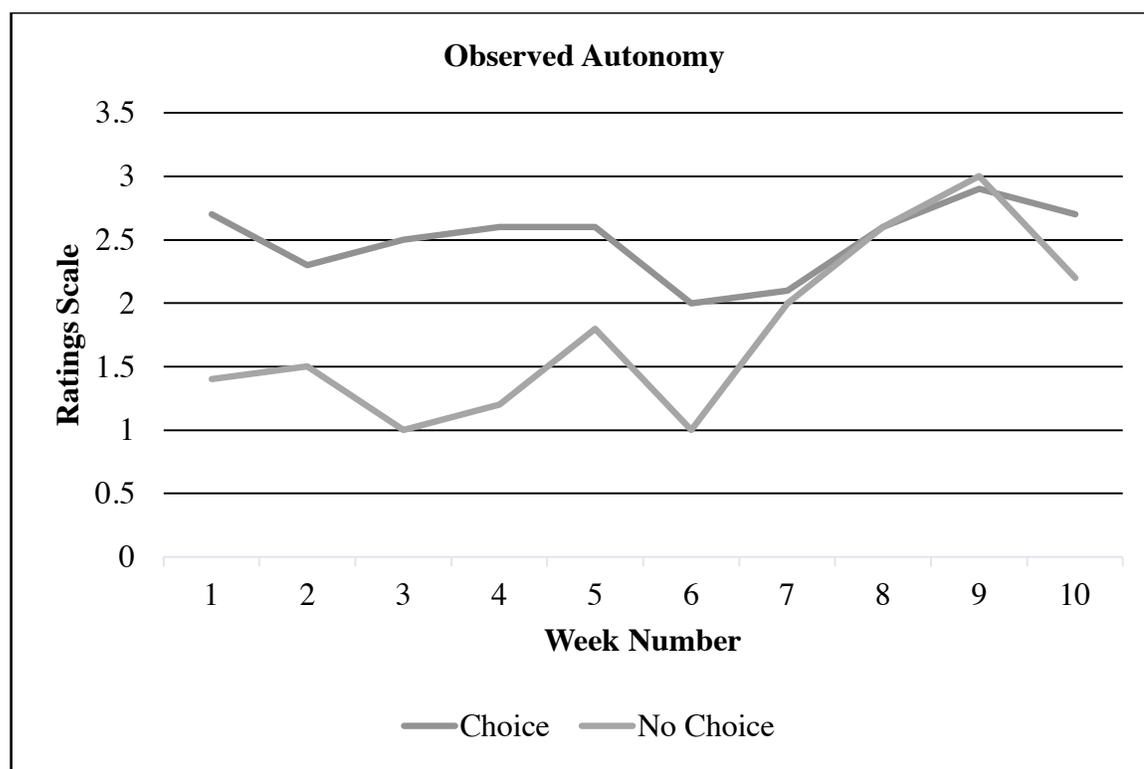


Figure 3. Observed Autonomy of Choice and Non-Choice Groups

The choice-group consistently had a high rating in autonomy throughout the duration of the study. The non-choice group started out with a low rating in autonomy but steadily increased as the end of the study approached. After the non-choice group students had learned the choreography and set their piece, the teacher checked for understanding of the intent and discussed the meaning behind the piece. The students were encouraged to present the intent with the quality of their movements and emotion

from their piece. Because the students were confident in their choreography they started to explore their performance qualities. This finding is consistent with the Hammonds' point of view discussed in chapter two that for autonomy to be present, dancers must have a strong technical base. Figure 3 shows that while the group that was given a choice experienced high ratings of autonomy throughout the project, the non-choice group students who understood the choreography and were given encouragement to understand the purpose of the choreography had high autonomy ratings near the end of the session.

### **Pre-Interview Thematic Analysis**

The purpose of the pre-interview was to see the similarity between the two groups before the project began, as well as to be a jumping off point to engage students in the experiment. This gave the researcher a better understanding of the post-interview data's validity. Both the choice-group and non-choice group had few things to say about each question. The students seemed nervous, and some groups gave short answers, if any, to the questions. Despite the lack of quality answers, similar themes emerged in both the choice-group and non-choice group pre-interviews.

#### *Enjoyment*

Both non-choice group and choice-group students made many remarks about dancing for enjoyment. Words like happy, fun, freedom, joy, and stress relief emerged from choice-group participants when asked why they study dance. Erin, a choice-group student, said "I feel happy, if I feel sad or angry I'm always happy at the end of the day because I have dance." Another choice-group student, Bethany, mentioned that "describing why you dance is a hard question, I don't know I just think I enjoy myself." The non-choice group has similar answers with four of the students using the phrase "it's

fun” to answer the question. A non-choice student, Gini, said that she dances because it is fun and it is her passion. Some students mentioned themes of dance letting them just be themselves. Nina said, “At home, there’s just a lot of people so I’m by myself a lot. At school, I don’t feel like I can express myself because people would judge me, but at dance I can just be myself.” This statement of individuality emerged as one of the most common themes in the post-interview. One choice-group student mentioned dancing because it is a good workout, but also spoke about enjoying it. No student mentioned not enjoying dance. Students also mentioned a high level of interest in performing in the dance concert.

### *Ability*

The second most common theme between the two groups was ability. Students were asked about their perception of their dance ability. All students said they were either good or somewhere in the middle, and that they had the ability to improve. Students in both groups mentioned that through hard work and practice they could get better. One student in the non-choice group mentioned, “I feel like it takes more than practice, maybe trying harder.” It is important that students feel they are capable of improvement and learning as it relates to their ability and to the basic need of competence. Students already showed a high level of competence pre-study. All statements in both groups were specifically about ability and not creativity. Students mentioned dancing in the future during their interview, including having goals of dancing in college, for a future job, or dancing for fun.

Even though the pre-interview had little substantial information, it provided a clear base for the researcher to work from. All student participants enjoyed dancing and

wanted to be a part of the project. All students felt that they either have a high ability or the ability to improve.

### **Post-Interview Thematic Analysis**

The purpose of the post interview was to gather data to discuss the research question: What is the impact of involving student choice in the creative process, including intrinsic motivation and the basic needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy? The students had higher quality responses in the post-interviews than in the pre-interviews. The second the microphone turned on they were singing, laughing, and making jokes. They seemed much more comfortable with each other, the researcher, and with the interview process. The following analysis will break down the themes of the choice-group and compare the themes with those of the non-choice group.

### **The Choice-Group**

New themes emerged in the post-interviews that differed between the groups. The themes from the choice-group are: judgement-free environment, individuality, community, and new ways of thinking.

#### *Judgement-Free Environment*

The most common theme that emerged among the choice-group students was about not feeling “judged.” When asked, “how do you feel when you are dancing,” most students mentioned feeling free from judgment and getting to express emotions. Some phrases that were mentioned were, “we could move freely and not be judged,” and “no one’s going to judge you because there is no right way to move,” This theme was present in many parts of the interview. Students spoke about not feeling judged in the dance room and that is why they like it. They spoke about overcoming their fear of judgment when

working with their peers, and they spoke about feeling comfortable showing their ideas in the class because they would not be ridiculed. These responses showed great enthusiasm for the creative process including the feedback portion of the lesson. Students in the choice-group routinely received feedback from the teacher and each other. Because they did not feel “judged” they were able to receive feedback and continue to revise and rework their choreography without feeling that they did something wrong.

### *Individuality*

Middle school students are beginning to form their identity. As these students approach adolescence, they seek out autonomy, and so the choice-group often spoke about individuality. Nina was ecstatic to have some input in the dance design. She said, “I loved being a part of this so I could put some things that I want and things I know I’m good at in the dance.” Similarly, Anna spoke about how she “modifies things to make it her own in this class, when we dance in groups I kind of add my own things and don’t do exactly what the teacher tells me to and try and just be myself.” Other students spoke about dance as a way to express emotions and feelings. One example came from Autumn who said, “dance is a good outlet for me from school and stuff. I like being able to express myself and not think about the troubles of school and stuff.” A few of the students brought up sections of the choreography that they personally contributed to as a piece of pride. Anna was very proud of a piece she came up with that was used as a motif. Her classmates said, “it is the first thing I think about when I think about this dance, it was so beautiful!” This comment brought a big smile to Anna’s face.

### *Community*

Another reoccurring theme of the post-interviews was the idea of community. One student in the choice-group did not agree and felt that working with a group was hard because other people in the group did not use an idea she came up with. She said, “I liked working with the group, but the group choreography part was difficult. I had an idea, and people kept changing it and it was frustrating because I knew how I saw it!” This example was not surprising from this student. The researcher observed her getting easily frustrated and having a hard time with collaboration. She did not receive other ideas and would be unwilling to budge on her own. Her small group had a difficult time with their collaboration and mentioned struggling with this as well. Anna mentioned, “In the groups part it was kind of hard to express your feelings because maybe other people would not like that.” Nina, the third member of this group looked back on their experience as something that brought them together. “This project brought us closer together, especially because there were some parts where we all struggled but we all got through it which I think brought us closer.”

Besides that instance, comments about community were entirely positive. Phrases such as: “because we love each other,” “we just totally get along,” and “we have a great relationship,” were common. Maya said, “This project helped me notice things about myself and others I would have never guessed.” One student, Bethany, even pointed out that she feels their close-knit experience is unique, mentioning how she would not feel as comfortable in another studio. She called the class, “a family creating something together.” These community-focused ideas communicate a high perceived level of relatedness among the choice-group students.

### *New Ways of Thinking*

One last theme that emerged in the choice-group post-interviews was their mentions of learning new ways of thinking. The students talked about terms and ideas that they did not mention at all in the pre-interview. Autumn discussed communicating the intent stating that “Just trying to figure out what we wanted to get across to the audience was hard, but once we figured that out it we knew we could pull this off.” A common thought among the students was using new tools to solve problems. Nina mentioned it was difficult to come up with movement until they had the tools from drawings and poetry. She later mentioned, “I really like how we worked through our thoughts using our bodies.” When asked if the project made her feel more creative Anna said, “I think it showed me how many different things you can put in a dance. It opened me up to a bunch of new ways of moving.” The fact that students mention the new ways of thinking implies they perceive a high amount of competence.

### **Non-Choice**

The themes that emerged in the non-choice group differed from those of the choice-group. The non-choice group post-interview themes are improved ability and feelings of importance.

### *Feelings of Importance*

The non-choice group’s experience of autonomy was different from the choice-group’s. The choice-group mentioned many instances of individuality and a desire to express emotions and be themselves. When the researcher asked, “How does dancing make you feel,” the students had two types of answers. About half of the students used words that described dancing making them feel happy or joyful. The other half used more

ego-centric words like “dancing makes me feel special,” and “I feel like a star.” Skyla described how she wants to be in the front row and have people whisper, “who’s that girl!” While this is normal feeling for many performers, it was interesting to the researcher that no students from the choice-group had that kind of response.

### *Improved Ability*

Another common theme from the non-choice group was the students’ being focused on their ability. Statements were often made about the difficulty of the piece, how they finally understood how to execute a particular movement, and how they personally improved in their technique. When asked what they were proud of, students spoke of how they noticed the group’s finally dancing all together. The students specifically spoke about their improvement with timing, specific dance “moves,” and performing for the audience. Lucy was excited, saying she realized she could go beyond her ability. Statements like this show that the students had a high experience of competence as they learned their dance.

A few times comments about the whole group’s ability were mentioned. Hayden said, “It was hard at first, but we powered through.” Later when asked if there was anything she was proud of she said, “We all did it! People have come up to me and told me how much they liked it. We really came together. I got a lot of compliments.” Most comments about the group had to do with ability. When asked about what it was like working with their classmates, the students responded with thoughts of “It was good, I think we did a really good job,” and “They were really funny.” One student mentioned they thought learning the dance was good team building.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to examine the relationship between student choice and motivation in the creative process. The final chapter of the thesis restates the research question, summarizes the results, and discusses the implications.

#### **The Research Question and Methods**

The original research question explored in this study was: What is the impact of involving student choice in the creative process, including intrinsic motivation and the basic needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. To seek answers for this question the researcher used an exploratory case study with two groups of students: a choice-group and non-choice group. The choice-group took part in a collaborative approach that gave them many opportunities to make choices while preparing a dance piece for a dance concert. The non-choice group used a traditional teacher led approach to learning choreography for a dance concert. Data collection methods included observational rubrics that used a ratings scale for the basic competence, relatedness, and autonomy for each student every week, and pre- and post-study semi structured group interviews.

#### **Interpretation of the Findings**

As stated in the literature review, self-determination theory states that in order for people to be intrinsically motivated the basic needs of competence, relatedness, and

autonomy must be met. The following interpretation of the results looks at the three basic needs and their relationship to choice making in this study.

### *The Basic Needs and Choice Making*

Autonomy, the need for personal control or self-reliance, is the least studied of the basic needs as it relates to dance education. By adding choice to the creative process the researcher was automatically giving the students a sense of agency. The differences between the two groups' post-interview responses were subtle. One idea the researcher found relevant was the difference between the choice-groups theme of individuality vs the non-choice groups theme of feelings of importance. Both of these ideas relate to the basic need of autonomy. Individuality was the main theme in the choice-group post-interviews. They spoke of dance as a way to seek independence and to find freedom in self-expression. This was different from the students in the non-choice group who desired being seen as important. In Figure 3 the observed autonomy of the choice group was higher throughout the duration of the study. The non-choice group's observed autonomy peaked in the last three weeks of the study, after the choreography was learned. The researcher wonders if these two pieces of data relate, based off of having the opportunity to make choices in their learning. Choice-group students had more improvisation, hands on learning, and constructive feedback than the non-choice group students. Non-choice group students, although encouraged to be expressive and find uniqueness in the given choreography, did not do so until week 8 when they were comfortable with the given material.

The desire to feel important also relates to the need of relatedness. Most people are naturally attuned to seek out relationships and be seen as important to people who are

of value to them. For these students, this desire could occur for many reasons. The students could be seeking affirmation from their parents or peers when it comes to their dance ability or they could be seeking affirmation from their teachers. The choice-group students never mentioned this desire to feel important. Dance and learning specialist Anne Green Gilbert talks about how effective dance teachers should praise and validate their students by name every class. The choice-making approach had more feedback and validation of choices built into the lessons. These validations could have caused the students to find an intrinsic sense of importance. It could also be that the dance piece they collaborated on was more important to them as they had more ownership of the piece. Further research could be done on this idea of importance and validation in dance education. Research could also be done on the kinds of feedback and cues used by the teacher and the socio-cognitive effect that has on the students.

Another difference in the experiences of the choice and non-choice groups was the basic need of competence. According to the thematic analysis of the group interviews, each group experienced competence in different ways. The non-choice group regularly mentioned in their post-study interviews their abilities as a dancer and performer. They spoke about the physical improvements they experienced because of their dance performance and how they feel they were pushed as dancers and overcame barriers. The choice-group spoke more about cognitive abilities like how they learned to think in different ways and use movement as a way to solve problems. In addition, they talked about how their experience opened them up to new ways of moving and creating new movement. Both the cognitive and physical statements from both groups showed high levels of competence.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research.**

On the basis of the study results alone it is impossible to know whether adding choice to the creative process increases intrinsic motivation. Because of the themes of enjoyment presented from the choice-group and non-choice group in the pre-interview, it can be deduced that both groups had some intrinsic motivation to start with. But the themes presented in the post-interview analysis from the choice group—new ways of thinking, individuality, community—are more intrinsic by nature than those of the non-choice group—feelings of importance, increased ability. Studying intrinsic motivation is very difficult and easily influenced by outside variable

The researcher, who was also the teacher, had also worked with these student participants for the past year. They already had a relationship and experience with doing improvisation and giving feedback to their peers. Although they had never been a part of collaborative choreography before, they were comfortable with the exercises and lessons. The results would be different for a group that had never had improvisation or exploratory learning in their classroom before. In order for choice making to be effective the atmosphere for learning needs to be nurtured over time. Because the researcher/teacher had a personal relationship with the students, there is the possibility of bias in the researcher observations. The researcher kept a research journal to protect the study from the confirmation bias that could potentially occur. The students may have also been influenced by this relationship in the interviews. Although instructed to answer all questions honestly, it would be beneficial to have an outside party conduct the interviews if this project were to be completed again.

Further research would more conclusively discover whether student choice in the creative process increases intrinsic motivation. This study was done in a non-profit community dance setting. The results may be different in a school, studio, or professional setting. A larger group of participants that looks at case studies across a wide variety of settings would give greater insight into the implications of choice in the creative process.

In conclusion, the researcher believes that adding choice to the creative process gives students a richer learning experience and higher intrinsic motivation. Dance students deserve the opportunity to be a part of their learning experiences. The results from the teacher observations showed that students who were given choices had higher amounts of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Research shows that having these basic needs met impacts intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, the results from the interviews showed that teachers who facilitate growth and understanding by including choices in their classroom can help create artists who appreciate their worth, seek individuality, develop new ways of thinking, and value their community. These findings show that utilizing choice in the classroom, as seen in this study is a beneficial way to enhance learning in the creative process.

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APPENDIX A  
PRE-STUDY INTERVIEW GUIDE

## PRE-STUDY INTERVIEW GUIDE

Participants \_\_\_\_\_

**Can you please state your name, your age, and your grade?**

**Who normally brings you to rehearsal?**

**Do you do any other activities besides dance?**

**Could you explain to me why you study dance?**

*Probe: How you feel when you dance?*

*Probe: Does how you feel while dance change based off of who is watching?*

**How many dance classes do you take a week?**

**Have you ever taken a choreography class before?**

**Have you ever performed in a dance concert before?**

**What is your opinion of your dance ability?**

*Probe: Do you think you can improve?*

*Probe: What does it take to improve?*

**Do you think you are creative?**

*Probe: how are you creative?*

*Probe: do you feel you get the opportunity to express that?*

**Do you imagine yourself dancing in 10 years?**

*Probe: Can you explain to me what you imagine that would look like?*

*Probe: If you do not imagine yourself dancing, do you think being a part of this class will be beneficial in any way?*

**Do you work well with groups?**

*Probe: Do you feel comfortable sharing your ideas with the group?*

*Probe: What about group work makes you uncomfortable?*

**Do you feel interested in this project?**

*Probe: Are you excited to start your work?*

*Probe: Can you elaborate on any challenges you might face?*

**Would you like to be able to choose how your dance will look?**

*Probe: What aspect of the dance would you like to choose?*

*Probe: Do you think you would feel proud of that choice?*

*Probe: Can you explain to me the steps you would take in order to make that choice?*

APPENDIX B  
POST-STUDY INTERVIEW GUIDE

## POST-STUDY INTERVIEW GUIDE

Participants \_\_\_\_\_

**Can you explain to me why you study dance?**

*Probe: How do you feel when you dance?*

*Probe: Does your feeling while you dance change based off of who is watching?*

**What is your opinion of your dance ability?**

*Probe: Do you think you can improve?*

*Probe: What does it take to improve?*

**Do you think you are creative?**

*Probe: Did this project make you feel more creative?*

*Probe: Did the choices you make give you the opportunity to be more creative?*

**Was creating this dance something you enjoyed?**

*Probe: Do you imagine yourself making dances in the future?*

**What was it like to work with your classmates?**

*Probe: did you feel comfortable sharing your ideas?*

*Probe: did you get more comfortable over time?*

*Probe: did you feel listened to?*

**Think about the process of making this dance**

- a. *What did you find difficult?*
- b. *Why do you think you made the choices that you did?*
- c. *Was it something you found fun and interesting?*
- d. *Did you learn anything new?*
- e. *Did you ever catch yourself thinking about what the audience would enjoy when making your choices?*
- f. *Are there any choices you made during the process you are personally proud of?*

*Would you like more personal choices to be built into the creative process in the future?*

*Probe: Do you have any ideas about how that could happen?*

*What would you recommend that I change if I were to do this project again?*

APPENDIX C  
STUDENT OBSERVATION RUBRIC

## STUDENT OBSERVATION RUBRIC

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Group \_\_\_\_\_ Week Number \_\_\_\_\_

	1	2	3
Participation	The participant passively participated and seemed uncomfortable with activity.	The participant actively participated but seemed unenthusiastic.	The participant actively participated and was enthusiastic and responsive.
Competence	The participant showed lack of understanding.	The participant showed average understanding.	The participant showed full understanding.
Relatedness	The participant did not share any ideas and was not receptive of other's ideas.	The participant did not share ideas but were receptive of others' ideas.  Or The participant shared ideas but was not receptive of ideas.	The participant both shared ideas and were receptive of others' ideas.
Autonomy	Students allow themselves little creativity and interpretation.	Students allowed themselves some freedom of interpretation.	Student allowed themselves full freedom of interpretation.