Embodying Empathy: Engaging High School Students in Social Awareness Through the Choreographic Process

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EMBODYING EMPATHY: ENGAGING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN SOCIAL AWARENESS THROUGH THE CHOREOGRAPHIC PROCESS

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

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has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in College of Natural and Health Sciences in School of Theatre Arts and Dance, Program of Dance Education

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ABSTRACT


The goal of this study was to gauge growth of student empathy and social awareness as they collaborated through the choreographic process. There were eighteen participants in this study. Through learning about one individual’s experience growing up during the Civil Rights Movement, students used movement and the creative process to unpack ideas and concepts they learned. Through this study, participants used collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and the choreographic process to create a full-length performance. Participants gained a greater understanding and sense of empathy for the experience of the subject and others during this experience.

Limitations of this study included potential bias on the part of the researcher as she was also the teacher in this study. In addition, it would be important to perform this research with a more diverse student population over the course of multiple semesters to measure student growth over a longer period of time. Finally, validation of the research instruments was also considered a limitation of this study.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Goal of Thesis

Student engagement in collaborative research and performance is an excellent way to encourage critical thinking when investigating social and political issues. Oftentimes, students find it difficult to connect to concepts and ideas foreign to them due to differences in socioeconomic status and cultural backgrounds. By engaging students in the research, production, and performance processes based on specific social and political issues, dance educators might be able to more effectively engage students in learning about these issues in a creative and meaningful way. It was this researcher’s hope that by focusing on collaborative research, creative work based on the research, and the resulting performance, students would be able to connect intellectually and emotionally to the experience of an individual who lived during the Civil Rights Movement.

When considering the growing emphasis on teaching students 21st century skills, more and more research is being done on how creativity supports and encourages student growth in this area. In her article, “Materiality, Memory and Imagination: Using Empathy to Research Creativity,” Cathy Treadaway sought to find evidence of the importance of the physical experience in creative cognition. While her study was more focused on visual and digital art, her findings could easily be translated to dance. Treadaway stated, “Physical experience provides a wealth of sensory data to be processed and filtered in the brain” (233). Thus, it was possible students could connect to concepts
and ideas intellectually, but also emotionally, when they were experienced in their physical body.

Dance has been used throughout the world to create empathy and understanding cross-culturally. Performance has been proven as a method by which the audience and performer can connect and understand social and emotional issues. For example, the choreography *Southland*, created by dance pioneer Katherine Dunham, is a two-act work based on lynching in America (Hardin 46). This work dramatizes the events preceding, during, and following the lynching of a young black field hand named Richard and brings the harsh reality and sociopolitical issue of lynching to the attention of the audience.

*Southland* thus became Dunham’s refusal to dismiss the perpetual destruction of black lives meted out through judicial and extrajudicial means. Despite the criticism it drew from the US Department of State, the ballet demonstrated her commitment to social justice, situating her in the company of numerous black artists and writers who privileged art as a powerful intervention into the fraught sociopolitical discourse surrounding lynching. (Hardin 46)

However, an insignificant amount of research exists on how the choreographic process specifically encourages student engagement and understanding of cultural issues. The aim of this research was to engage students in collaborative ethnographic performance research they were presented with, research one man’s experience during the Civil Rights Movement, and create and perform choreography based on his experiences. The goal was the creation of an evening length dance concert consisting of the students’ works that were created using choreographic processes taught in class and based on the above described content.
Personal, cultural, and educational implications of this form of research are crucial to mention when discussing the topic of this type of collaborative performance. Ethnographic research can provide an opportunity for researchers to fully immerse themselves in the culture of those under study (Sangasubana 567). Ethnography is the art and science used to describe a group or culture (Sangasubana 567); as such, the cultural and educational benefits of this type of research are evident. Students today need methods to help them understand the struggles of people unlike themselves, and connect those ideas and concepts to the past as well as to the current social and political climate they live in.

The researcher set out to answer the following research questions in this study:

Q1 To what extent does hearing about an individual’s experience during the Civil Rights Movement and studying that Movement increase student empathy and cultural awareness when the choreographic process is used to assimilate and understand the Civil Rights information?

Q2 What stages of the choreographic process make this type of ethnographic research and the resulting performance more effective?

Q3 In what ways do different students perceive the effectiveness of the process and the research findings based upon their own social, cultural, and economic backgrounds?

In the above questions, the choreographic process refers to researching the topic, creating and developing movement, rehearsing, revising work, and performing the dance product.

**Purpose of Thesis**

“Sensation is based on bodily perception and, when linked with thought, produces a different type of knowledge, the operative reason” (Markula 361). Researching the Civil Rights Movement and creating a dance as a group based on that information had the
potential to develop students’ critical thinking, teamwork, problem solving abilities, empathy, and cultural awareness. The results of this study could then be added to the already growing archive of research in favor of dance education and its benefits to students at the secondary level.

From an educational standpoint, the value of this type of collaborative research was clear. The purpose of this study was to hopefully demonstrate that when students are engaged in learning through the choreographic research process, they are more likely to understand and become aware of social issues that might not resonate with them through other learning methodologies. The purpose of using this method was to build student awareness and understanding to show students might learn more effectively through the use of kinesthetic teaching strategies.

By connecting concepts and ideas with movement, it is possible students might understand social issues logically and emotionally in a way they could not through reading a text or hearing a lecture. As stated in their book, Thinking with the Dancing Brain: Embodying Neuroscience, Rima Faber and Sandra Minton pointed out, “Bodily action produces neural growth and greater neural density” (16). Through performing a collaborative, research-based dance work, students were actively engaged from the beginning to the end of the project and empowered to take ownership of their learning and the project itself.

Further evidence of using collaborative choreographic ethnographic performance research as a teaching tool was found in the following article. After conducting a study with students in an International Baccalaureate (IB) dance program, which included an emphasis on world dance and historical content, the researchers found the students
responded in a particular way. “As some of the students said, by learning the dances of a cultural group, they more fully understood and appreciated other cultures” (Minton and Hofmeister 75).

Thus, student engagement in collaborative ethnographic performance research could be an excellent way to get students thinking about real-world, 21st century issues. When so many young people find it hard to connect to others on a personal level, this type of learning experience could transform the way students are educated. This type of research could also demonstrate to the audience, the collaborators, and the educational system that dance is not just a method for encouraging students to be creative and active but also a way for them to connect kinesthetically, logically, and emotionally to social and political issues.

Stephanie Morris provided a firsthand example of qualitative, ethnographic dance research in her dissertation, Engendering Meaning within the High School Experience: A Consideration of Movement and Dance. Based upon Morris’ research, it was evident dance played a significant role in the physical, emotional, and intellectual development of her students. Research like this is invaluable as dance advocates and educators continue to seek ways in which to legitimize dance education and its importance in the public education realm. Morris wrote,

Through dance education…high school students know more intimately global components of our community as dance is a common thread throughout all countries and cultures. My students have formed connections with students they never would have imagined through dance class, like the students in Brooklyn and many of the students I have had with special needs. My students have learned
how dance encodes emotion and other themes as well as how to dissect and analyze pieces of movement for these meanings as they work side by side to problem solve. (147)

Dance education research is becoming increasingly important as dance educators seek to legitimize their careers, programs, and professions within the educational world. Using collaborative ethnographic performance research to engage students in social and political conversations and create empathy could be an invaluable asset in dance education curricula and their development.

The lack of data from national surveys…creates significant voids in our ability to understand our field and address opportunities to [assess the value of dance] …[through] teacher preparation, professional development, [and] credentialing [programs]. As a result, we have little understanding of these important components in K–12 education and lack focused methodological, short- and long-term plans of action. This must change. (Bonbright 108)

**Significance of Study**

As part of this graduate thesis project, this research might also provide data that can shed light on the fact that a dance education prepares students for college and career readiness. By conducting research based on the Civil Rights Movement and creating a dance based on that content, the students had an opportunity to develop their cultural awareness, ability to work with others, and solve a problem in the form of the dance they created. The outcome of this study could be added to the already growing archive of research in favor of dance education and its benefits to students at the secondary level.
Taking into account ways in which content and skills, both in and beyond dance, are experienced by students throughout a school curriculum can provide valuable information informing educators and policymakers. Understanding ways in which dance students’ value their experiences can enable dance educators to consider their roles, responsibilities, and goals in teaching. Being open to possibilities of what it means to dance (the expectations, values, and experiences of student dancers) recognizes individuals as agents in the social engagement of dance education. (Frichtel 52)

In addition, the type of creative work, which was the objective of this study, had the possibility of teaching students 21st century skills and was also significant because it would be invaluable to dance educators and policy makers. Anna Rosefsky Saavedra and Darlene Opfer discussed the importance of teaching these skills in their article, “Learning 21st Century Skills Requires 21st Century Teaching.” The authors listed collaboration, leadership, adaptability, effective communication, curiosity, and imagination as vital skills students need to be successful in their futures (8). When working in a group to create a dance, students could lead at times, be adaptable, and communicate effectively with each other. Students also need to be curious about the content on which their dance is based and use their imagination to create movement. Collaborative performance research might very well encourage the development of these skills in the lives of the young people who work together to create a dance.

By using dance to connect students to concepts and ideas relevant to their lives, educators could potentially unleash an excitement and engagement for learning that is difficult to arouse when teaching other types of academic content.
To be effective, curriculum must be relevant to students’ lives. To make curriculum relevant, teachers must begin with generative topics or topics that have an important place in the disciplinary or interdisciplinary content at hand and that resonate with learners and teachers. (Saavedra and Opfer 9)

As educators, a teacher’s goal should be to encourage students to be leaders so they can now and in the future be agents of change in society. It is the responsibility of dance artists to use their work to bring to light social and cultural issues in a way that is accessible to the audience. Thus, it is also the responsibility of dance educators to combine these two goals so students are equipped with the tools they need to be successful, contributing members of society. In their research with regard to dance as democratic education, Theresa Catalano and Allison E. Leonard wrote:

Since the body remains our most accessible tool through which we experience the world, dance as the artistic and aesthetic means of bodily expression made these realizations for the participants possible in distinctly embodied and personal ways. Even though the data collected consisted of their spoken and written words, the lived experience that they referenced was an embodied and largely a transformative one, partially due to the new terrain of dance in their lives. Since dance accesses and expresses the most personal and most public aspects of ourselves, epistemologically and ontologically, it also becomes accessible to all. Anyone can participate in the dance. Therefore, dance holds tremendous potential as a tool to engage in democratic deliberation, moving people, and minds. (84)
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Empathy

To have empathy, or to be empathetic, was described in the dictionary as “the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present” (Merriam-Webster). In layman’s terms, to empathize is to put oneself in another’s shoes.

Empathy has been defined slightly differently when it serves the goals of a discipline. In her book, *Empathy as Dialogue in Theater and Performance*, Lindsay B. Cummings sought to define the meaning, importance, and purpose of empathy in the theater. Cummings defined theatrical empathy as a “ray of hope, leading some to claim that it is our empathetic capacities that make us human and upon which all social life and organization depend” (3). When looking at the definition of empathy across literature and the social sciences, neuroscientists Jean Decety and Phillip Jackson identified four key components of empathy:

(1) the capacity for an automatic or unconscious affective response to others that may include sharing others' emotional states; (2) a cognitive capacity to take the perspective of another; (3) the ability to regulate one's emotions; and (4) a level of self/other-awareness that allows some temporary identification between self and other, but also ultimately avoids confusion between self and other. (Gerdes et al., “Teaching Empathy” 112)
**What Is Empathy?**

It was evident from the research that empathy is a vast and multi-faceted concept, one that does not have one solid definition, but is flexible enough in its nature to affect many areas of study and human development.

Empathy, thus defined, is a multidimensional construct that includes both bottom-up and top-down components. The bottom-up part of empathy is the automatic or unconscious affective process that allows us to recognize another’s emotional state. The top-down part of empathy is the conscious cognitive process that enables us not only to explain and predict our own behaviors, but the behaviors of others as well. (Gerdes et al., “Teaching Empathy” 112)

Overall, a scarcity of research on empathy exists across all fields of study, which makes it difficult to define and cultivate among students. This lack of consistency in the definitions of empathy makes conceptualizing and measuring empathy quite difficult. Elizabeth Segal, a leading researcher on empathy and its relationship to cognitive and social development was at the forefront of this investigation and had much to offer for those seeking a further understanding of empathy.

As a result of this semantic fuzziness, conceptualizations and measurement techniques for empathy vary—so much so that it has been difficult to engage in meaningful comparisons or to reach significant conclusions about how we define and measure empathy and how to effectively cultivate it. (Gerdes et al., “Measuring Empathy” 84)

Throughout history, empathy has intrigued psychologists. Beginning in the early 20th century, psychologists became interested in empathy, noticing the tendency of
individuals to imitate others who were different than themselves. Ultimately, these observations led to attempts to measure both cognitive and emotional empathy in subjects. Leading into the 21st century, the development of social cognitive neuroscience has added more components to the description of empathy and brought its affective and cognitive elements to the forefront of discussions.

Using fMRI equipment, neuroscientists confirmed that when we see another person's actions, our bodies unconsciously and automatically respond as if we were the "actor" and not just an observer. This phenomenon is called mirroring, and the circuitry of the brain responsible for this is referred to as the mirror neuron system (MNS). (Gerdes et al., “Measuring Empathy” 84)

This concept of mirroring is what dancers do with their bodies on a regular basis and is at its root the basis of the choreographic process. Observing another’s actions, hearing another’s experience, and then physicalizing it make the feeling or concept more accessible to the audience.

When we hear people speak or watch their posture, gestures, and facial expressions, the neural networks in our brains are stimulated by a "shared representation." The result is an inner reflection or simulation of the experiences of those whom we are observing. (Gerdes et al., “Measuring Empathy” 84-85)

Empathy is not a social skill, but at its root a deeply human characteristic, engrained into our genetics, and amplified when exercised through action. The physiological basis of empathy was described in the following way:

Recent discoveries in cognitive neuroscience, meanwhile, position empathy not as a social skill but rather as a neurobiological fact. Mirror neurons, so-called
because they fire both when we perform an action and when we see another
perform the same action, have led many to claim that we have an innate
connection to the actions, intentions, and feelings of others. (Cummings 4)

Empathy is indeed a phenomenon that is experienced by humans on multiple
levels and can be separated into several different facets. The purpose of this study, in
particular, was to understand the effect of empathy as it related to the choreographic
process. To physicalize empathy is to take an observed reaction, feeling, or idea and
“mirror” it through movement.

Why Is Empathy Important for
Future Generations?

Empathy is crucial to the success of future generations as the United States
culture seeks to build bridges, make deeper connections, and better understand
differences that define the country. These changes in empathy and understanding require
substantial changes in a person’s brain and thought patterns, requiring a particular type of
stimulation. For students, activities that encourage thoughtful consideration and
embodiment of another individual’s social and cultural experiences are key to changing
their brains’ neural pathways.

[Interventions designed to cultivate or increase affective and cognitive empathy,
at minimum, require students to have intense cognitive, emotional, and behavioral
experiences to develop new “tracks” in their brains. Affect-based experiential
learning engages mirror neurons at the visual, auditory, and somatic levels,
helping us to relate to experiences we may never have had, thereby increasing
empathy. (Gerdes et al., “Teaching Empathy” 118-119)
This type of increased empathy results in closer connections amongst individuals, hopefully leading to more meaningful conversations and the ability to understand the other.

Creating Different Types of Empathy

The work of creating empathy should begin in the educational system by using content and curricula in creative ways to build social, emotional, and cultural knowledge within students. Role-playing, imitative play, and other such activities are ways in which empathy can be practiced and encouraged.

Role-playing is an empathy-enhancement intervention that focuses heavily on imitation and mimicking to exploit the natural tendency of mirror neurons to create shared subjective experience. Mirroring activities can be especially useful when emphasizing cultural and social empathy. (Gerdes et al., “Teaching Empathy” 120)

Reading biographies, histories, and fictional books based upon or rooted in social and cultural experiences that differ from that of students could be used in this type of work with young people. In the same way, music, dance, and other art forms could create a somatic stimulus that engages students in the act of empathy and understanding. Most individuals can recall a piece of art, a performance, or a literary item that evoked a certain feeling and created a deep emotional connection to a concept or idea.

Learning dance technique or choreography requires replicating demonstrated movements—an activity that relies on accurate empathy and precise operation of the mirror neuron system. Sensitivity to the emotional motivation for actions can help students refine their performance. Since dance is mainly learned through
replication of observed movement, a positive emotional environment is paramount. (Faber and Minton 72)

**Social Empathy**

Engaging students in social empathy is imperative to cultivating the growth of civically responsible individuals who base decisions not on bias and prejudice but on the thoughtful exploration of the experiences and backgrounds of society as a whole.

Empathy is a critical component of developing a deep understanding of people's life experiences and a necessary ingredient in becoming a civically engaged person. When individuals gain understanding of the conditions and needs of others, they are more apt to become socially involved. Empathy fosters people's involvement in social change and civic involvement. Empathy is a skill that deepens students' understanding of our society, can lead to greater tolerance of difference, and enhances civic involvement. (Gerdes et al., “Teaching Empathy” 123)

Elizabeth Segal defined social empathy as the ability to understand people by perceiving or experiencing their life situations and, as a result, gain insight into structural inequalities and disparities (266). The more a student increases his/her understanding of such inequalities, the more he/she will be able to create positive change in their communities.

Social empathy is directly related to social justice as the empathy of the individual combined with a deep understanding of historical, social, and cultural issues, creating the desire to initiate and facilitate change. Without these understandings, students and others are more inclined to rely on social norms, biases, and stereotypes.
To encourage a strong belief in social responsibility, to develop effective, fair, and just social policies, and to generate transformative social action, we need to provide a deep historical and contextual understanding of the life experiences of people who are not identified with the dominant culture. (Segal 269-270)

*Cultural Empathy*

Inclusive cultural empathy provides an opportunity for resistance against individualism and current diversity issues (Pederson and Pope 842). In the context of impacting students, this type of empathy could help create a better classroom environment and school culture, promoting more action toward unifying communities in which students reside.

Inclusive cultural empathy is an alternative to the conventional empathy concept applied to a culture-centered perspective…Inclusive cultural empathy describes a dynamic perspective that balances both similarities and differences at the same time. (Pederson and Pope 844)

It is part of human nature to see the world through one’s own eyes and to assume everyone sees it similarly. Cultural empathy combats that basic instinct in order to draw people to a deeper understanding of oneself and others by focusing on the differences and similarities across multiple cultures.

Inclusive cultural empathy recognizes that the same behaviors may have different meanings and that different behaviors may have the same meaning. By establishing the shared positive expectations between and among people the accurate interpretation of behaviors becomes possible. (Pederson and Pope 848)
Movement is one way to encourage students to recognize similar and different behaviors amongst themselves and those around them. The inclusive cultural empathy Pederson and Pope described could be easily integrated into classroom lessons by investigating the historical and social context in which a culture was built (848). With this connection between social and historical context in mind, the dance classroom could prove to be an even more effective venue. In dance class, especially while choreographing, students have the opportunity to embody their findings and connect to a deeper understanding of their ideas. As noted in the research of Segal and Waxman (Pederson and Pope 848), it was concluded embodiment of concepts was an effective way to teach empathy to students.

In addition, it was evident from other research that dance evoked feelings in the participants and observers, which resulted in a more meaningful connection to the ideas being explored. In the IB Dance study mentioned previously, one of the students made the following comment: “Because of dance, I’m able to know what kinds of emotions go along with certain words…. [and I] think that the written word hits the mind, but the dance word hits the heart” (Minton and Hofmeister 72).

**The Choreographic Process, Dance Education, and Empathy**

The choreographic process incorporates the stages of research, development, rehearsal, revision, and performance. When collaborating on choreography, one must work closely with their peers to successfully create a product. Although work on a dance is often done solo, collaborative choreography requires all parties working together and communicating effectively to make creative work. This process inherently requires
empathy as no two people have the exact same experiences or social and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, empathy must be incorporated on several levels in this type of research and the resulting creative work.

The creator/performer/audience connection produces a continuum. Empathy must be used between choreographers in a group to create the work. It must also be used by the performers to evoke a feeling or communicate an idea to the audience. This means the feelings communicated in a dance are felt empathetically by the audience for the performance to be considered successful.

What Is the Choreographic Process?

The choreographic process at its root is a methodology for making dances. It is an approach to creating work that is meaningful, thoughtful, and inspired. All successful choreographers have a process by which they create or a system they turn to when they have hit a wall or lost inspiration. For many, creating choreographic work is their life—blood and source of income. What does one do when the inspiration has run dry but you have a deadline to make? The solution is to return to methods that were time-tested systems and used previously to create.

What is the point of studying choreography? When you are overflowing with an impulse, you don’t need a method, you just do it. True, but the art of any artist who has produced a body of work is backed up by a method, and approach and a philosophy that were hammered out in study, apprenticeship with a master or in the lonely hours in the studio. (Nagrin 2)

The choreographic process consists of several stages: the research on the topic, development of movement, rehearsal process, revision of work, and performance of the
final product. Dr. Sandra Minton drew a parallel between the choreographic process and the creative process in her book, *Choreography: A Basic Approach Using Improvisation*. In the text, the creative process was defined as a five-stage process: content immersion, incubation, the “aha experience” when puzzle pieces fall into place, soul searching, and the elaboration of content (Minton 3). Working through this process with young dancers can at times be a daunting task for teachers and students alike. To teach this process in dance education is to teach students the value of creativity, revision, troubleshooting, problem-solving, and critical thinking. “Creating is not easy, but knowledge of creative-problem solving strategies will enable you to work through blocks that may arise” (Minton 2).

*Dance Education Is a Tool for Learning Empathy*

Daniel Nagrin stated in his book, *Choreography and the Specific Image*, that teaching choreography as an art form is in its infancy compared to the teaching of the creative process in other arts (4). To effectively teach students anything, they must experience it. To use the choreographic process to teach students empathy, it must be experienced. While the process is multi-faceted, consisting of layers of vision and revision, the only way to learn is through doing.

You do not learn to choreograph by reading about it, hearing about it, or by watching the major companies in concert. You learn by choreographing, by experimenting, by creating little bits and pieces and fragments of dances and dance phrases, by playing with the materials of craft over and over again until they become second nature. You learn by getting your ideas out and into
movement, onto a body (yours or someone else’s), giving your dance an independent existence. (Blom and Chaplin 3)

However, the brunt of the work in teaching choreography is not on the student but on the educator. The educator carries a great responsibility to create the proper environment, ask the appropriate questions, and incorporate the materials needed to guide students through the experience. The teacher must create a safe, non–condemning environment in which students can experiment with movement ideas and concepts. Class goals and agreements must be set in place to ensure the giving of appropriate and constructive feedback, and the expectations of the teacher must be communicated clearly and effectively.

Besides carefully considering what to teach (content) and how to teach it (method, approach), you need to be sure that the ideas, structures, and themes you use are specifically geared to the point you are trying to get across, that the examples you choose are truly illustrative, and that the experiences you provide are particularly capable of being effective and successful. (Blom and Chaplin 210)

Engaging in the choreographic process in a collaborative nature encourages empathy as students are immediately expected to get to know and understand the needs and desires of those with whom they are working. This student interaction and the importance of this type of work was noted by one of the students in the article, “The International Baccalaureate Dance Programme: Learning Skills for Life in the 21st Century”; “There’s differences in people. …You need to know how to respect every single one of your peers ‘cause you’re more than likely gonna have to work with them on something” (Minton and Hofmeister 71).
The collaborative choreographic process can teach students how to work together as a team. At the same time, it is a way for students to understand the meaning others attach to events that have taken place in their lives.

Collaborative choreographic processes model teamwork, equal contribution, and group decision-making, offering a way for choreographers and dancers to practice intersectionality and critical reflection. Such dance making becomes a means by which artists can practice political engagement and participate in social justice movements. (Stockton 3)

However, the possibility of evoking the above outcomes is dependent on the lesson content provided by the teacher and the way in which the class is structured from beginning to end.

Simultaneously, for the purpose of this research, students were also engaged in a way that encouraged them to experience empathy because they were asked to understand the experiences of the person whose life they were using as inspiration. The result of this type of work could result in increased empathy in students but also could initiate steps toward creating social and cultural change.

**Dance for Social Change**

In the current social and political climate of the country, there has been a “call to arms” amongst artists to create work that is a commentary on social and cultural issues of our time. Many believe it is the sole responsibility of an artist to bring issues to light in a way that is accessible and understandable to their audience.

In sum, the artist turns material into art that, by creating percepts and affects, allows sensations to take place. Through this process of individual, physical
perceptions and feelings, an artistic work makes what is currently imperceptible perceptible in the social world. It frames the individual sensations (or the endosensation) within a larger frame of a social context. Taking the individual expression to the more abstract level of sensation (or the exosensation) allows a formation of a plane of composition. This plane of composition is then the thought system through which art makes sense of the world, creates coherence to it, and aims to deterritorialize or take up territory from the dominant opinion to transform it. (Markula 357)

As Markula noted above, to create dance for social change is to make the imperceptible perceptible in the social world (357). To have students create work collaboratively based upon another’s life experiences is to provide the opportunity for young people to better understand situations and cultures different from their own. To experience a different social aspect in this way is to create change in the lives of young people. These altered perceptions could then result in those same young people creating change in the lives of those around them.

Regardless of the term (socially engaged arts), artists working in these arenas share a common desire to unite diverse communities in partnerships that foreground the concepts of interdisciplinary collaboration, democracy, and inclusion. They draw on a breadth of artistic traditions and community building strategies to create experiences that center on a range of themes, from complex sociopolitical issues to the celebration of personal expression. At the most fundamental level, socially engaged artists aim to promote empowerment and social transformation in the communities in which they live. (Fitzgerald 2)
Dance for Cultural Change

Using the choreographic process as ethnographic performance research does not only engage students in social advocacy but also involves them in cultural change. Allowing for conversations and creative moments with regard to their own experiences and making comparisons and connections between their experiences and those of others in their classroom, school, and community culture could begin to shift ideas and understanding.

When Courtney studied a cultural dance form she learned, “They use it [dance] as communication between tribes.” Emily added, “You research how people express themselves . . . you have more respect for their culture and the way they see the world.” Kaylee added, “I’ve found I’ve learned to understand people and their behaviors so much more just from their dance. . . . You can feel the emotions of the people. . . . Whereas . . . textbooks . . . just give you the straight analytical point of view that makes no sense to you.” (Minton and Hofmeister 73)

In an education system that so often denies individuals the opportunity to celebrate differences, using the choreographic process to encourage cultural change is a tool that could greatly impact the lives of students.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to research how unpacking information through the choreographic process would assist students with understanding and creating empathy for an experience they had never had themselves. The goal was to answer the following research questions:

Q1 To what extent does hearing about an individual’s experience during the Civil Rights Movement and studying that Movement increase student empathy and cultural awareness when the choreographic process is used to assimilate the Civil Rights information?

Q2 What stages of the choreographic process make this type of ethnographic research more effective?

Q3 In what ways do different student groups perceive the effectiveness of the process and the research findings based upon their own social, cultural, and economic backgrounds?

This chapter contains the methods used to set up the research for this study and assimilate data produced as a result of this study.

Preparation for Study

A description of the purpose for this study and the data collection and analysis procedures developed by the researcher were submitted and approval was obtained from the University of Northern Colorado’s Institutional Review Board (IRB, see Appendix A). The procedures used to handle the data and risks and benefits of the study were also included in the narrative application along with copies of the research instruments to be used and sample consent forms for the students, their parents, and the audience members.
who participated in the study. The researcher was required to and received permission from the school principal to conduct the study (see Appendix B).

**Research Participants**

This study was conducted at a high school dance program in Texas. The program serves approximately 140 students. More specifically, the participants in this study were members of a pre-professional dance company consisting of eighteen dancers ages fifteen through eighteen. The demographics of the company were 11% African American, 16% Hispanic, and 73% White. These students came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds with 44% of the school’s total population being economically disadvantaged.

Although participation was optional for this study, all students involved in the company chose to engage in the process and execution of this research. They also all signed and returned consent forms for this study (see Appendix C). All classes and rehearsals were held in the researcher’s classroom located in the high school attended by all the participants. Throughout the spring semester, the students met and worked daily during the forty-five minute class period and also for an hour and a half after school on Tuesday and Thursday. The culminating performance also took place in the dance studio toward the end of the spring semester. Along with creating the choreography, the students turned the dance studio into a black box theater space, created programs, and designed lighting and sound for the final performance.

**Research Design**

Research data were evaluated using both qualitative and quantitative analyses. Most of the data were analyzed qualitatively since the researcher wanted to identify
themes that emerged based on students’ responses. Quantitative research analysis was used when the information received was numeric in nature.

Instrumentation and Research Strategies

Multiple research instruments were used to collect data during this study. These instruments included student pretest and posttest surveys, student reflection journals, the researcher’s class observations, and a post-performance audience survey (see Appendix D). The researcher also facilitated two interviews with the subject whose experiences were used as an inspiration for the students’ choreography and the students themselves. Student surveys were conducted at the beginning and end of the choreographic process while the reflection journals and researcher’s observations were completed four times throughout the study. The interview sessions were conducted once at the beginning of the study before movement was created, but after class had begun, and again a few weeks before the final performance. These interviews were held in class as the students listened to the subject’s answers. The audience survey was conducted immediately following the student performance and was done voluntarily.

All students gathered the information for the choreographic inspiration together as a class; afterward, they divided themselves into groups based upon which topics in the subject’s interview interested them. The groups then used the information they received from the interview to create movement and a choreographic structure they felt accurately depicted the subject’s experience during the Civil Rights Movement. When their groups were not actively working on choreography, they contributed to the creative process in other ways by assisting with choreographic revisions or by designing lighting, costumes, and the program.
In conclusion, students had to work together over the course of multiple weeks to create a final product to be performed for their audience. They were instructed to use the information gleaned from the interviews and their observations from their reflection journals to create their final work. The students’ final performance was the culmination of their kinesthetic learning throughout this process.

**Pretest and Posttest Surveys**

At the beginning and end of the study, the students were given surveys to assess their prior knowledge and connection to the content on which their dances were based (see Appendix D). This was done so the researcher could understand how participating in the study impacted the students’ learning and degree of empathy. These surveys were conducted via Google drive and the data were later organized into themes by the researcher.

In the pretest survey, students were asked questions regarding their prior knowledge of and connections to the Civil Rights Movement, level of confidence when doing choreography, and knowledge of the choreographic process. In the pretest survey, the students were also asked about their expectations with regard to the creative process used in this study and if they had ever been treated differently due to their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In the posttest survey, the students were asked about connections they were able to make to the Civil Rights Movement after participating in the choreographic project, the value they placed on this kind of learning, and challenges they faced throughout the process. In the posttest survey, the students were also asked to describe their greatest learning outcomes (see Appendix D). These surveys were
completely confidential in order to ensure student comfort in answering the questions with honesty and transparency.

*Student Reflection Journals*

The researcher was also interested in students’ thought processes throughout the study. The student reflection journals were completed at four points during the study and the responses were based on specific prompts (see Appendix E). The first reflection journal was completed following the initial encounter with the subject whose experiences were used as inspiration for the choreography. In these journal entries, the students were asked to describe what stood out after they listened to the subject speak, how they felt about the presentation, and what they hoped to gain by participating in the researcher’s study and creating the dances.

The other three journal reflections were done at points specified by the researcher throughout the choreographic and research process. Thus, these journal entries were completed over the course of nine weeks. In order to complete these later entries, the students were expected to reflect on some new prompts but were also asked to respond to the same prompts as those posed in the first reflection exercise in order to gauge growth and development throughout the study, if any. In some of the new prompts, the researcher wanted to learn how creating movements helped the students unpack their feelings and thoughts about the Civil Rights Movement; whether they were struggling emotionally, physically, or creatively during the study; how they were feeling in a particular week about their creative work; and what was and was not working for them at particular points in the project.
Subject Interviews

The researcher was also interested in having students interact with the subject whose experiences provided the inspiration for their choreography. Therefore, the students were given an opportunity at the beginning and toward the end of the study to meet with and interact with the subject and glean information and inspiration for their choreography. This was an informal process so no prompts were assigned ahead of time and the researcher, who was also the teacher, served as the facilitator for the interviews and students’ questions, but only if needed.

In each instance, the subject of the students’ choreography was given two hours to share information with the students. This information was specifically about the subject’s time in high school during the Civil Rights Movement. The students were permitted to ask questions they deemed necessary and an open and honest dialogue was encouraged. However, in the first session, the students primarily listened to the subject’s stories because rapport had not been established yet among all parties.

During their second encounter with the subject, the students had much more to ask as they were further along in their creative process and had nearly completed the dances. During this session, the students also asked the subject for feedback on their work, particularly if he felt the information was being communicated clearly and depicted through their movements. A lengthy discussion ensued as to how movement alone was not sufficient to communicate an idea but the emotions infused in the movement and their connection with the audience were the key in this type of performance.
Researcher Observations

The researcher was also the dance instructor in this study. As the instructor, she served as a facilitator throughout the process and only offered advice and guidance as needed and when requested by the students. When students were working in class and rehearsal, she observed and took notes. The researcher also videotaped the choreography at several different points throughout the creative process, as well as taping the final performance. These videos were used as well to analyze student growth during the study.

Post-Performance Audience Survey

At the culminating performance, audience members were asked to complete a voluntary exit survey (see Appendix F). All students performed for an audience consisting of their family members, peers, and teachers. This survey was used so the researcher could assess if the audience thought the students’ work communicated empathy and cultural awareness. The audience survey was completely confidential in order to protect audience members’ identity and ensure transparency in answering the questions. Only those audience members who completed a consent form answered the questions on the survey. More specifically, the researcher wanted to learn from the audience survey whether the students appeared to be fully invested and engaged in their creative process, made connections between past and present experiences, and seemed to experience the choreographic content in a stimulating, yet challenging way.

Data Analysis and Procedures

Both quantitative and qualitative data analyses were used in this study. However, qualitative analysis was used to analyze the majority of the data gathered as most of the
information was based upon student reflections, surveys, and researcher observations.

The audience survey was analyzed using quantitative methods.

**Quantitative Data Analysis**

Answers provided by members of the audience on their survey were the only data the researcher could analyze using quantitative methods. Quantitative methods were used to count how many times an audience member selected a similar response to the researcher’s questions or statements. Possible responses to these statements were strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Results of this analysis are presented in the Discussion chapter.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis was used by the researcher to identify reoccurring themes in students’ responses on the surveys and in their journals. Similar qualitative methods were used to analyze the researcher’s observations. Research questions posed at the beginning of this chapter served as a guide to enable the researcher to find emerging themes amongst student responses. Further information on these findings is presented in the Discussion chapter of this thesis.

**Summary**

The researcher first obtained appropriate IRB approvals for conducting the study (see Appendices A and B). This study was conducted at a high school in Texas and included grades 10-12 of varying social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. The students participated in a pretest and posttest surveys (see Appendix C) and completed multiple journal entries throughout the semester. Interviews with the research subject were conducted on two occasions and an audience post-performance survey was also
completed (see Appendix F). The researcher used qualitative methods to analyze the majority of the data accumulated in this study. In the analysis, the researcher identified emerging themes in students’ responses on the surveys, in their journal reflections, and from her observations. Quantitative analysis was used only to analyze the data from the audience survey.
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to engage students in the choreographic process through ethnographic performance research. The hope was to observe whether students gained empathy throughout the process working with the research subject and their peers. This qualitative and quantitative study was designed to answer the following three research questions and determine if the choreographic and research process impacted students’ empathy toward another’s experiences.

Q1 To what extent does hearing about an individual’s experience during the Civil Rights Movement and studying that Movement increase student empathy and cultural awareness when the choreographic process is used to assimilate the Civil Rights information?

Q2 What stages of the choreographic process make this type of ethnographic research more effective?

Q3 In what ways do different student groups perceive the effectiveness of the process and the research findings based upon their own social, cultural, and economic backgrounds?

In this chapter, the researcher discusses her analysis of the data from the student pretest survey, student to subject interviews, student journal entries, researcher observations, student posttest survey, and the audience member survey.

**Student Pretest Survey—Qualitative Analysis**

The researcher used the qualitative research method to analyze data recorded from the student pretest surveys. The surveys were confidential to ensure student comfort.
in answering the questions openly and honestly. For the purpose of this analysis and when discussing the findings, the students were identified by the letters A through R.

The student pretest survey was given before interviews with the subject and prior to the beginning of the students’ choreographic process. The survey consisted of thirteen short questions students were tasked with answering. The researcher was interested in the student answers on the pretest survey in order to gauge their willingness to learn, preconceived ideas, and preexisting knowledge prior to the study. The hope was to take these findings and compare them with the posttest responses discussed later in this chapter. Question one of the survey was: “In what ways do you think learning about the past experiences of others can impact the way we live our lives?” The researcher found most students were able to find connections to how the past could inform and direct the choices one makes in his/her future.

Student R stated, “Learning about the past helps us not repeat it and improve it for the future.” Whereas Student I commented, “I believe learning about past experiences can impact the way we live today because if we inform ourselves of past mistakes then we can prevent those things from happening again and for future friends and generations.” Students also mentioned how learning about the past could make one more appreciative of the diversity around them. Student G indicated, “It changes the way we look at other people.” In addition, Student J noted, “I believe learning about past experiences can impact the way we live today because if we inform ourselves of past mistakes then we can prevent those things from happening again and for future friends and generations.”

The second question on the student pretest was: “Have you ever been treated differently because of the color of your skin? How did that make you feel?” Here, student
answers varied since they were from different cultural and social backgrounds. The researcher found the diversity of these answers intriguing and was very interested to see how the varied backgrounds would impact the ways in which students interacted with each other throughout the creative process. Student B answered, “To the best of my knowledge I have never been treated differently because of the color of my skin” while Student G stated, “YESSSSSSSSSSS. It made me feel worthless and made me feel like I wasn't important.”

The next two questions on the survey pertained to students’ prior knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement: “What information do you already know in regard to the Civil Rights Movement?” and “Going into this project, what are your feelings in regard to The Civil Rights Movement?” Based upon student answers, the researcher found all the participants in the study had prior knowledge about segregation, the fight for equal rights, and important figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. In response, Student Q mentioned, “The Civil Rights Movement was a very long process of trying to get African American [sic] equal rights that others already had their whole life.” Students were also certain the Movement took place during the 1950s and 1960s. The researcher did find it interesting that while students were able to regurgitate facts about the Civil Rights Movement such as general information and details about important figures, they lacked an in-depth and personal knowledge of the time period. Student C wrote,

I have many questions in regard to the Civil Rights Movement because I do not know a lot of details about it, I mainly know the gist of it and what happened. I am angry that it took a very long time for people of color to obtain the same rights
that white people had and I want to know more about the Civil Rights Movement and what life was like when it took place.

Questions 5 and 6 on the survey were: “Do you know anyone who grew up or lived during the time of the Civil Rights Movement? If so, who?” and “If you know someone who grew up during this time, what have they shared with you about their experience?” About half of the students in this study had a family member who grew up during the time period, while the other half did not. It was most interesting that even the students who did have family from that time period did not or had not at the time of the study ever spoken about their experiences. This attitude was apparent in answers such as “They don’t like to talk about it,” “They haven't shared their experiences,” and “My great grandmother was alive during this time. She has not told me much of her experience.” Such answers made by Students R, B, and J, respectively, were surprising and concerning to the researcher.

Questions seven, eight, and nine on the student pretest survey all pertained to the choreographic process and student’s feelings and experience with regard to creating dances. When asked, “What do you think you already know about how to make or choreograph a dance?” students’ answers differed because they had varying experiences with dance making coming into this project. Student B, who felt confident about her creative abilities, commented, “I know that you start with an idea and go from there. It’s a process of trial and error.” While Student M said, “To use spacing, timing and movement to resemble a story. You can do this by having gestures throughout the dance.” Less confident students responded differently. Student J indicated, “I don't know how I
want to do this choreography because this dance feels like it should be seen differently to [sic] the audience.”

The students were also asked, “What do you know about the craft of choreography, and, what is your previous experience choreographing with other individuals, if any?” In response to these questions, it was apparent by the answers that students had a clear understanding of the difficulties, skills, and responsibility it took to create work and collaborate with peers. Student H noted, “I know that it is very difficult for me, and that it is a skill but also a position of power. You have the audience’s attention for ‘x’ number of minutes and you can use movement and music to influence what they think and their views of the world through art.”

Answers to question ten: “How does creating choreography aid in your learning of core content?” revealed many students were unclear about the meaning of core content and its connection to public education. However, Student K, who did understand the question, answered:

Creating choreography aids in learning core content by switching the ways we usually learn things and applying new knowledge in a physical way. In school, we mainly learn by listening to/writing down what teachers say. When we create choreography, we learn through movement.

Following the above question, students were asked, “In what ways do you feel like dance impacts your school culture and community?” The researcher found the answers to this question were the most important when engaging students in the appreciation of dance as a mode of social and cultural change. In response, students commented on the opportunity they had in the class to express themselves through dance
and work with a diverse student population. Student Q wrote, “Dance helps students to show their emotions and love through dance, and also brings a big group of people at school that are all diverse together.” Another participant, Student F, commented, “Dance can bring people together because if you look a certain way you can always dance with other people that do not look like you.”

Students also mentioned the impact dance has had on understanding content from other subject areas. Student G believed,

Dance has helped me improve in other school subjects. Especially anatomy. Knowing the dancer's body parts came in handy when going over the human body. Dance has always helped me in history. I have learned where certain dance moves have come from.

The final two questions in the survey were used to gauge students’ overall feelings and attitudes going into this project. Students were asked, “What do you feel your biggest challenge will be during this project?” The major theme that arose from these responses was the concern students had about being able to communicate clearly through movement and connect with content since it was an experience they had not had previously. Thus, Student I wrote, “I feel like my biggest challenge during this project will be really connecting with the subject.”

When asked “What are you most looking forward to about this project?” the researcher observed that although students were concerned about communicating an idea through movement, they had an overwhelming openness to the process and willingness to learn. Student Q was most looking forward to “getting to work with my peers and creating a moving dance with such a great group of people.” Another class member,
Student C, said, “I am looking forward to learning more about the civil rights movement and creating something out of it. I am very excited to work with my classmates and making [sic] something meaningful and creative.” The following comment made by Student N was the most prominent one with regard to this particular theme.

I am most looking forward to hearing about his experiences ‘cause we are so used to hearing the vague sugar coated versions told by people we do not know, but this is coming from a raw real true story from the person himself. I want to be able to do him justice by making his story known to the world in such a strong insightful way.

It was the opinion of the researcher that this last statement clearly articulated the desire students had to learn the truth and to use that truth to create work that was meaningful and world–changing.

**Student-to-Subject Interviews—Qualitative Analysis**

Following the student pretest survey, students were given the opportunity to speak directly with the subject with regard to his experience growing up during the Civil Rights Movement. The first occasion was immediately before the creative process of dance making began and the second one was a week before the performance. This second meeting gave the students an opportunity to receive feedback on their dances. The researcher, who was also the instructor of the class, served as a facilitator during the interviews but only as needed. Otherwise, the researcher observed and took notes on the interactions between the students and the subject as well as on the content and questions that came up throughout the conversations.
**First Meeting with the Subject**

During the first meeting, the subject shared his experiences about growing up as an African American youth in Germany on an Army base before moving back to the United States. He discussed the transition between attending an integrated school on base versus a segregated school upon returning to this country. There was an in-depth conversation about the change in educational quality, the difficulties he faced being ahead of his U.S. classmates, and his response that he felt held back due to segregation. In particular, the subject discussed the huge discrepancy he noticed in the quality of education he was receiving at an all-black high school versus the level of instruction received by students who attended all white or integrated schools.

This first meeting lasted two hours and over its course, the students were greatly impacted by the violence and blatant racism the subject experienced. Most importantly, the students realized the incidents the subject experienced took place when he was their age. Once the students realized this, it was easier for them to connect with the subject and his experiences. The researcher recognized this was a turning point for students with regard to their connection to the material and ultimately, as presented later in this chapter, a huge inspiration for the movement and choreography they were able to create together.

A large portion of the first meeting was also spent discussing what the students thought empathy meant. However, the researcher found it interesting that students had difficulty defining empathy. This issue provided another crucial interaction between the subject and students before they moved into the creative process since they were able to break down the meaning of empathy and discuss it together. During this discussion, the subject asked the students if they thought a person could truly be empathetic to another
individual’s experience. This caused all the students to pause and think; it was a question the researcher noticed many students were still trying to answer for themselves at the end of this study.

At the end of the meeting, the students met with the researcher to determine how they planned to move forward with the creative process. As a result, they decided to separate their creative work into four sections: realizing differences, violence experienced, the reality of the situation, and finding peace. Students then chose which sections spoke to them most clearly and picked those specific sections as the inspiration for their dances. It was also decided that when students were not in a section being rehearsed on a particular day, they would contribute in the design of the playbill, sound, or lighting for the final performance.

Second Meeting with the Subject

The second meeting took place a week before the final dance was performed for an audience. At this point, students had completed their work and were in the process of refining and editing the choreography as they saw fit. When the students met with the subject for their final interaction, they first performed the work for him to receive his feedback. It was important to note the subject was not a dance-artist and therefore was able to give feedback as an audience member with little knowledge of dance terminology, pedagogy, or choreographic practices. Thus, the feedback was based on performance quality and ability to engage the audience.

The discussion that followed again returned to empathy and how empathy, at its root, is an emotion or feeling. It was important for the students to have this conversation with the subject so they realized when they were not clearly articulating their feelings
through their performance. The researcher noticed this discussion ultimately impacted the performance quality and connection the students had with their audience.

Student Journal Entries

Throughout the study, there were four instances in which students were asked to submit journal reflections with regard to their creative process and the overall impact this work was having on their social and emotional learning. The journal reflections were entered on-line. The researcher analyzed the student responses to identify themes among the entries.

Overall, the researcher noticed the students’ journal entries were open, honest, and thoughtful. A full list of the prompts used to inspire journal entries can be found in Appendix E. Students were again assigned letters A through R for the purpose of confidentiality when discussing their journal entries.

First Journal Entry

The students wrote the initial journal entry following their first interview with the subject. Students were asked to reflect in their on-line journals so the researcher could observe and record the impact of their meeting with the subject as well as their feelings as they moved into the creative part of the study.

The first journal prompt was “What stood out to you the most this week after listening to the subject speak on his experience during the Civil Rights Movement?” Based upon these reflections, the researcher found the students were surprised and impacted by the peace the subject found despite the discrimination he faced as well as the reality of what growing up during the Civil Rights Movement was really like. Student D recorded the following,
He has found his peace and I don't think after an experience that traumatic I could. What also stood out to me a lot was that this was how life really was back then. You hear stories about how bad the times were, but it becomes more tangible when you are hearing it from the source himself. He led me to create images that he has seen in the real world.

Students were also immediately challenged to think and answer difficult questions they had not thought about or been challenged by previously. Student L observed, “Throughout telling us about growing up during the Civil Rights Movement, he worked in little life lessons here and there and asked us some really hard questions that got us thinking.” This initial conversation between the students and the subject was clearly an excellent way to get students to think critically and begin to formulate ideas about the dance they wanted to create.

Students were also asked, “What are you most excited/nervous/curious to learn about during this project?” The researcher asked this question because she was curious about student morale at the beginning of the project and wanted to learn about how it changed or did not change over time. A common theme in the student responses was the excitement they had about working together and also about what they would learn. As expressed by Student J, “I am most excited about working together with the other girls in this choreography project.”

In addition, there was an overall sense of nervousness as many of these students had never embarked on a creative journey like this as part of their dance education. There was also some self-doubt about the ability to effectively create and communicate an idea to the audience. Student L noted,
I am nervous about the process of coming up with the dance and to show to [sic] the audience about the feeling [I have] toward the Civil Rights movement. Before this I didn’t know much about all they went through and I just hope for the future to know more about it and his personal experiences.

When asked what they hoped to gain throughout the process, students commented that they were looking forward to gaining more understanding, knowledge, and a better education on what truly happened during the Civil Rights Movement. Students were also concerned with becoming more self-aware. Student F wrote, “I hope that through this project I will gain more self-awareness of my thoughts and opinions, [those which are] both conscious and subconscious.”

The fourth initial journal prompt was: “How confident do you feel about creating choreography on this subject?” Overall, the students lacked confidence because they did not have experience with nor knowledge of the subject from which they were supposed to draw inspiration. Student I suggested, “I am a little worried that I might not accurately portray the emotions that we are choreographing to and then the audience might not have this intense connection to it that I was hoping for.” Such statements made it clear that while the students had a great desire to do well, they doubted their skills and ability at the beginning of the creative process.

The final initial journal prompt was: “When you hear the word empathy, what comes to mind?” This was an important prompt because it was the basis for the entire research project. While students seemed unclear on the meaning of empathy before their conversation with the subject, their journal entries indicated this conversation assisted in deepening their understanding of this concept. Student G indicated,
When I hear the word empathy many things come to mind. One thing that comes to mind is the simple definition which is being able to put yourself in someone else’s shoes. Another thing that comes to mind when I hear the word is trying to find compassion and not a pity feeling like sympathy is.

Second Journal Entry

After two weeks of working together, students were given their second journal prompts. These prompts were designed to measure student progress and their emotional, physical, and creative feelings about the project. These prompts were also designed to encourage students to think critically about dance education advocacy as it applied to their creative work.

Students were first asked to reflect using the following two prompts: “In what ways has creating movements helped you unpack your feelings and thoughts about The Civil Rights Movement” and “At this point in the project, what are you struggling with most emotionally, physically, and creatively?”

One theme that emerged in the second journal entries was students seemed to connect with the material in a more visceral way. Student C was able to find a deeper connection to the material as evidenced when she wrote,

Once I started creating movements, I felt more connected to the subject and I feel like I am able to understand it more. There were so many emotions during the Civil Rights Movement, and I know I am not able to express them all in the short amount I have, but I do think it is very important to choose a few of the emotions and feelings and express them fully. Creating movement has made me think even more about the Civil Rights Movement and I have begun to take it even more
seriously because I want to make sure I can express emotions accurately and clearly to an audience.

In the responses to the second prompt, it seemed, at this point in their process, the students were struggling with creating movement to accurately represent their feelings and emotions as well as representing the experiences of the subject. They were also experiencing difficulties collaborating with others to create choreography. Student B made the following entry, “It also can be hard sometimes to work with a partner because there can be times when we disagree on movements and patterns.”

The students were also asked, “If you were to explain this project and process to a non–dance student, teacher, or family member, how would you describe it to them?”

From these responses, it seemed the students did have a clear understanding of the goals of this research and understood their movements needed to communicate an idea and evoke emotion from the audience. Student I noted, “If I had to describe this performance to a non-dancer, I would describe it as a project to channel the struggles and persistence that African Americans had to face every day during the Civil Rights Movement through the art of dance.”

With regard to discussing this project with a non-dancer, students were also asked to respond to the following prompt: “What would you say to them about the value of this kind of work?” Based upon their responses, all participants found the work valuable and wanted to articulate the importance to those unfamiliar with dance. Student K stated, “I would say that the value of [this] work is very important to some people and hard work to me because I don’t [sic] experience what others did.” Student F agreed, “The value of
this work is not just about developing our artistic skills and abilities to choreograph but it is also about how dance can change the way we see people and the world around us.”

The final prompt for this second reflection was: “How are you feeling about the project this week? What is working for you and what isn’t?” This prompt initiated what seemed to be honest and open responses from the student participants. The researcher found that, overall, students were excited about the creative process and looking forward to collaborating with their peers. This sentiment was stated best by Student O who entered the following comment in her journal.

I am truly excited about the project at this point because it gives us the opportunity to work together as student [sic] to create a piece instead of one person’s idea. Something that is working for me is incorporating everyone’s ideas because they are all meaningful and will add so much to a piece.

Third Journal Entry

Student participants were again given the opportunity to work on their dances for two weeks before completing their third journal reflection. Journal writing was scheduled in this way to give participants sufficient time to work together and process thoughts and ideas before reflecting on them.

Students were again presented with the same two prompts they had used to create the previous journal entries: “In what ways has creating movements helped you unpack your feelings and thoughts about The Civil Rights Movement?” and “At this point in the project, what are you struggling with most emotionally, physically, and creatively?” In response to the first prompt, the researcher found students continued to be able to use movement to connect with and understand the content they were given as an inspiration.
Based upon their responses, it seemed that engaging in creating movement continued to assist students to connect emotionally to the subject’s stories. Student I remarked,

Creating movement for this project has helped me unpack my feelings about how exactly any African American felt during this time. I was working on the anger portion of the dance and it really opened my eyes to just exactly what they would have felt or gone through.

The researcher also found the students were beginning to formulate a plan for how to communicate their thoughts and ideas by using the creative process. Student J recorded the following comment in her journal: “I want it to read to the audience and make them feel something. Although we didn’t live through it we have someone who did and he gives us the backstory when he lived through it and we get to incorporate that through dance.”

In addition to the above statements, students were also presented with the following prompts the third time they wrote in their journals: “What do you hope the audience will gain from watching your choreography and performance?” and “What are you most looking forward to about the performance?” In these responses, the participants voiced a desire for the audience to understand the weight of what they were trying to communicate as well as a desire to create and motivate real change within audience members. The students also expressed the hope their ideas were clear and easily understood. Student B wrote, “I want the audience to feel something when they watch our performance. I want the four different sections to be obvious to them and I want the four sections to be very different and clear. Student F added,
I hope that the audience will come away from this performance and become more aware of the way their actions affect others. I believe that this is something that people really tend to look over [ignore] in their everyday lives. I also hope that it causes the audience to think. Society is not always right and it is important to not follow others blindly.

In addition, participants expressed excitement over sharing their work with their peers and family members. There was a clear sense of pride in the work they had been able to do and accomplish together. The researcher found it encouraging to see students take pride in their work as well as ownership over what they had been able to create. The following was a comment made by Student C: “I am most looking forward to having my parents or one of my friends see that I am working really hard in a dance that I know means lot to someone. I am excited to have someone watch what my peers and I have contributed to.”

*Fourth Journal Entry*

The last journal reflection was written by the students three weeks before the final performance. At this point, the dances were nearly completed and the students were about to embark on the revision phase of the creative process. As mentioned previously, the students were presented with the same prompts as those they used to write their second and third journal entries.

In response to the prompt: “In what ways has creating movements helped you unpack your feelings and thoughts about The Civil Rights Movement?” the student responses continued to demonstrate the use of movement was assisting them in thoughtfully considering and evaluating the information they were given. At this point in
the study, students were not only able to engage in deeper understanding of the information, they were beginning to apply it to their own lives. Student D observed, “I realize that I am so lucky to be able to live in a society where everyone is integrated. It also makes me feel so oblivious to what society looked like back then.” Student F added, As we are creating these pieces in groups with the other girls in the company, I have realized more and more how privileged we are to get to interact and develop friendships across racial and cultural divides. Getting to hear others’ thoughts and opinions and interpretations of what we are creating and how to create it has been really enlightening because it has showed me how much being and thinking differently is a gift.

While the students were beginning to connect with course content on a deeper level by using movement, they were also beginning to truly experience the complexities of working in a collaborative setting. At this point in the project, Student A replied to the prompt “What are you struggling with most emotionally, physically, and creatively?” by writing, “Some concerns I have is [sic] having to listen to all the ideas that all the girls have at one time, [sic] it is very hard to because there's so many words just going around and we can't really listen to all of them at the same time.”

The following two prompts were presented to students with the purpose of assessing their current feelings with regard to the project in comparison to their initial thoughts when they began the creative process: “How are you feeling about the project this week?” and “What is working for you and what isn’t, and, what are you most concerned about in regards to the performance?” Based upon participant answers, the researcher found students had a sense of accomplishment in the work they did as a group.
as well as the ability to consider the more minute details of the performance such as costuming. For example, Student C revealed, “This week I have found that creating our own choreography and teaching each other has helped me feel more accomplished and…feel more confident in what I’m giving towards the dance.” The researcher found the students’ concern over costuming was an indicator of how participants were thinking beyond the choreography itself as a way to impact the audience with the creative work as a whole. Student L thought,

I am most concerned with the little details about how it’s all going to go. We’re currently trying to figure out if it’s ok to leave after each piece to go change costumes, or if this will ruin the fluidity. It’s just a bit conflicting because we want each dance to have a different costume because the moods of all the pieces are completely different, so we think it is a must to have different costumes.

In the final journal prompt, the students were asked to reflect on the following prompt: “How have I helped you most through this project? If we were to do this again, what could I do in the future to help you succeed?” The researcher felt this prompt was important because over-involvement on her part had been of great concern. To uphold the integrity of the study, the researcher wanted to ensure that students were not overly influenced by her input because she was also the class instructor. Student feedback to this prompt was encouraging and the researcher was pleased the boundaries between teacher and students were maintained throughout this process. In fact, Student B believed,

You have helped us in this project by making sure we are all on the same page and making sure everyone knows what they are supposed to be doing. It can
be a little hectic with 18 people trying to put on a full performance, so it is always helpful to have you in the room and making sure everyone understands what is going on. It is also helpful that you do not overstep because that can sometimes make people not think for themselves. I know this is supposed to be student choreography, so I like that you are not always in the room while we choreograph, because then we tend to look at you for approval and we second guess what we are doing.

**Researcher Observations**

Throughout the study, the researcher made observations on the interactions amongst the students and their peers and also among the students and class content. However, it was important to the researcher to create a certain amount of separation between herself and the students while they were working to promote autonomy and to maintain the authenticity of the study.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the researcher served as the facilitator as needed when the students met with the subject to discuss his experience growing up during the Civil Rights Movement. The researcher used this time as an opportunity to observe and describe student reactions, make note of themes in the subject’s story, and provide assistance to students as needed if the conversation lagged.

During the creative process, the researcher maintained a certain degree of separation from the students while they were working so she would not influence their work in any way. However, the researcher did provide feedback and help as needed. For example, if students were having difficulty with transitions in the dances or needed assistance counting music, the researcher would step in to assist. Sometimes, the
researcher would ask probing questions to encourage students to think through the process rather than just providing them with a way to solve a problem. There were also many moments in which the researcher first would say, “I have a suggestion if you would like to hear it,” thereby giving students the opportunity to accept or reject assistance as they saw fit.

Throughout the creative process, the researcher observed students as they worked together to create movement, sound, lighting, and a program for their performance. What was most noticeable was the students’ willingness to work together and their dedication to the creative process. The researcher typically reminded the students at the beginning of class about their goals for that day but beyond that, not much instruction was needed.

**Student Posttest Survey—Qualitative Analysis**

The participants completed the student posttest survey after the final performance. This survey consisted of twelve questions meant to gauge student growth and understanding from the beginning to the end of the process. To ensure student transparency, participants’ names were kept confidential. Students were assigned letters A through R to identify them for the purposes of this study. The posttest survey questions can be found in Appendix D.

Students were first asked, “What information do you now know about the Civil Rights Movement that you did not know before, and, what connections do you see between The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s–1960s and the Civil Rights issues happening today?” The researcher found the students had gained more information about the violence and brutality of the Civil Rights Movement as well as an understanding that many of those standing up for their rights were high school students. Student L
commented, “I know more about the actual brutality of it all. I also know that it was more than just older people and that it was actually people our age.” When asked about the connections that they had made from the past to present, the students recognized that while huge strides had been made in terms of civil rights, there was still work to be done. Student F eloquently stated,

I think that because we are not that far removed from the Civil Rights movement we are still as a society suffering from the implications of the decades and decades of segregation. The prejudices against African Americans are so deep in our society that simply just removing the segregation in the 60's was not enough and yet the people in power did not want to do much more because they wanted to maintain their power and social standing/money. I think that the effect of this has caused an underlying "separation,” [and that] theoretically everyone is supposed to have equal opportunity but in reality there are massive disparities that have perpetuated themselves.

The third question on the student posttest survey was “Were you able to connect your work in this class to work in your other classes? If so, how?” This question was posed by the researcher in hopes of having responses that would assist in the advocacy of more dance programs in her school district. What the researcher found was some students were able to connect class content to their other classes but others could not. About half of the students were able to make connections between the dance class and their other classes.

It was the belief of the researcher that connecting this information to other classes was completely dependent on the other courses in which students were enrolled during
the time period of the study. For example, Student K was able to connect this research to work in her English class. She alleged, “I was able to connect it [the dance class] to my English class because we were learning about civil rights activist writers such as Langston Hughes who inspired people with his writings.” In the same vein, Student Q wrote,

After learning everything we did through this process, I was able to better understand some topics that we discussed in AP Literature this year. We have read works like "Othello," and "Cry, The Beloved, Country," which have to do with discrimination based on skin color, so thinking back on some of the things that were in those books after this project helped me make connections and become a little more aware.

The following three questions were asked to determine whether the students seemed to grow emotionally and intellectually during the creative process. When asked “What was your biggest challenge during this project?” students expressed the belief that their greatest difficulty was creating movement and a narrative that clearly communicated their ideas to the audience. Student R thought,

My biggest challenge was trying to get the point across to the audience. I was constantly afraid of certain moments or movements being completely misunderstood or misinterpreted by the viewer because it’s hard to convey a powerful message through choreography.

Students were also asked, “What was your greatest learning outcome through this project?” and “What have you learned about yourself as a result of this project?” Participant answers revealed the students had certainly learned more about the Civil
Rights Movement through this project as well as how to collaborate with their peers. Students also learned they had more creative ability than they had originally anticipated. Students were able to find their creative voice and realized they did, in fact, have strong feelings when it came to choreography and the creative process. As Student D stated, “I have learned that my creative ability was greater than I had originally thought. I had ideas about how to convey feelings in movement and I think I did a really good job at showing feelings through dance.”

The next two questions served as a means to identify ways in which students felt choreography could impact their community and what they had learned about the act of dance making: “In what ways do you feel choreography like this can impact your school culture and community?” and “What have you learned about dance making and choreography as a result of this project?” In the answers to these questions, it appeared the students were able to recognize choreography could be used as a means of communication. Student P stated,

Choreography like this can impact my school culture and community by providing knowledge and giving our perspective about the civil rights movement. It can have a big impact because many people know nothing about the civil rights movement because it isn't talked about.

The researcher then continued to have students consider choreography and the creative process when she asked: “What have you learned about the craft of choreography?” As evidenced by their responses, it seemed the students had begun to understand the craft of choreography and that it included far more than just putting steps
I learned that the craft of choreography requires so much more thought about the whole story, rather than the movements and steps. It is easy to create a dance, but it is so much harder to create a dance that has meaning behind every movement.

Finally, in reference to the choreographic process, students were asked, “What value do you see in using choreography to learn about the human experience?” Based on the answers to this question, it appeared the students were able to draw from their experience and make a connection among movement, emotion, and empathy. As Student Q wrote,

It [dance making] helps me realize things that I don't think I would learn otherwise. Creating movement and trying to convey a certain message just has a way of teaching me about some different aspects and pieces of knowledge about life, and it's really cool.

To gain an understanding of students’ cultural and social awareness, participants were asked, “In what ways has learning about another individual’s experience and investigating it through choreography impacted the way you view the world?” Responses to this question led the researcher to conclude the students seemed more respectful of the experiences of others and had a more open worldview after participating in this project. It also seemed from their responses that the students were able to connect with the content on an emotional level. In response to this question, Student R noted,

Learning about another individual's experience and investigating it through choreography has made me more emotional and understanding because I learned
about some really hard things that…[the subject] went through, and it just made me feel so deeply for him and others who experienced what he did.

The researcher posed the final question in this survey entirely for the purpose of discovering answers that could be used to advocate for dance education: “What do you think the outcome would be if more dance programs in [your school district] did projects similar to this one?” In their responses, the students appeared to support such projects and were vocal about their beliefs that more dance programs in their school district should participate in projects such as this one. Student Q wrote,

I think that bigger change would happen faster if more [school district] dance programs did projects like this. Not enough is done on this topic nowadays, and if more projects similar to this one were done more often, more people would be informed and we could all work towards more change.

Audience Survey—Quantitative Analysis

The results of the quantitative analysis of the responses from the audience survey are represented in figures 1-7. Twenty-seven individuals completed the survey after the final performance of the student choreography. The audience member survey was distributed to performance attendees electronically following the final dance performance. The survey consisted of seven questions to which audience members could respond if they strongly disagreed, disagreed, were neutral, agreed, or strongly agreed with the content of a question. Those who responded to the audience survey had signed a consent form and were identified only by a code to maintain their confidentiality. While the majority of the data for this study were analyzed qualitatively, the responses to this survey were analyzed using quantitative methods.
Figure 1 represents how audience members responded to the following statement: “Based on the dances performed today, the students involved in this project appear to be fully invested and engaged in the work.” As evidenced by the sections in the pie chart, the majority of the audience strongly agreed the students involved in the performance seemed to be fully invested and engaged in the work while only a small portion agreed and strongly disagreed, indicating they did not connect with the dancers’ performance or the material. It is the belief of the researcher that those who did not connect with the dancers’ work would have had more of a connection had the process been more thoroughly explained and outlined prior to the performance.

![Pie Chart](image)

Fig. 1. Responses from audience member survey to question one.

The researcher was also interested in knowing if the audience could perceive whether the students seemed to clearly understand the connection to the content they were portraying through movement. Figure 2 displays the audience response to the
following statement: “Based on the dances performed, the students involved in this study appear to have a clear understanding of the content on which their dances are based and are able to make connections to real world, 21st century concepts and ideas.” In response, three quarters of the audience strongly agreed the students appeared to have a clear understanding of the content on which their dances were based. This information led the researcher to believe the audience was in fact able to discern in most cases the students understood the content with which they were working. Based upon the observations of the researcher before, during, and after the performance, and the conversations she had post performance, the majority of audience members were impressed with the students’ ability to connect past experiences to present issues.

Fig. 2. Responses from audience member survey to question two.
Figure 3 represents the audience response to the following statement: “This type of creative work is important to student growth and development in the…[school district].” In response, nearly three quarters of the audience strongly agreed this type of creative work was a key factor in student growth and development. A very small percentage of the audience chose to agree with this statement. The researcher found it interesting that almost a quarter of the audience strongly disagreed. The researcher felt this response could provide content for further discussion and research. This possibility is discussed in the conclusion chapter.

Fig. 3. Responses from audience member survey to question three.

Figure 4 provides audience responses to the following statement: “It is clear from this study and the dances performed today that the dance making and choreographic process allows for students to experience concepts and ideas in a stimulating, yet still
challenging, learning environment.” This statement was met with the majority of the audience strongly agreeing with the statement while less than a quarter strongly disagreed. The remaining members of the audience either disagreed or remained neutral. These responses led the researcher to consider the idea that perhaps more of the creative process should have been shared with the audience before the performance in addition to simply having them view the dances. The fact that the audience did not witness the students’ work as it progressed throughout the entire process could have affected how they answered this question.

Fig. 4. Responses from audience member survey to question four.

When asked to comment on the statement, “I would like to see more projects like this in the dance programs in the…[school district],” the results were again overwhelmingly positive. As figure 5 indicates, audience members appeared open to the
idea of having more projects like this one included in school district curricula as over half strongly agreed, a much smaller amount agreed, and just over a quarter strongly disagreed. Again, these responses led the researcher to question whether the survey participants would have answered differently if they had been able to observe more of the students’ creative processes.

From an arts advocacy standpoint, the researcher was interested in knowing if the audience saw value in this type of work as it relates to dance education. It was important for the researcher to know if the outcome of this type of work as part of a dance education curriculum was capable of having an impact on students. In response to the statement, “After seeing this performance, I have a deeper respect and understanding for the importance of arts education, particularly dance education,” figure 6 shows over half
of the audience strongly agreed and just below a quarter of the audience strongly disagreed.

![Pie chart showing survey responses](chart.png)

**Fig. 6.** Responses from audience member survey to question six.

The final statement in the survey was “In today’s performance, I was able to see students connecting past experiences to present issues.” The researcher included this statement in the audience survey because she was curious to know just how well the student performers were able to communicate their choreographic intent to the audience by using movement. While just over a quarter strongly disagreed with this statement, over half strongly agreed and the remaining audience members agreeing or remaining neutral (see figure 7). The researcher found the response to this statement encouraging since more than half of the audience seemed to realize the students connected the content or inspiration to movement in a way many of them might not have witnessed in the past.
Summary

The intent of this study was to investigate if student empathy and social awareness could increase when students were engaged in the choreographic process. Based upon the themes that emerged during this research, it was evident students experienced growth in empathy and social awareness during their time working on this project. In addition, students had an increase in confidence and more experience with the collaborative choreographic process.

Student responses from the pretest and posttest surveys indicated students gained a deeper understanding and appreciation of the subject’s story as they embarked throughout the creative process. Students were able to articulate how movement allowed them to process and unpack experiences they had not encountered themselves. Survey
answers also demonstrated students’ appreciation for dance as a form of social change and the desire to use dance to create change in their community.

Based upon the responses from participants’ first journal entries to their fourth entries, student growth and development in empathy was evident throughout their responses. At the beginning of this process, students expressed excitement but also concern with regard to their ability to effectively execute the project. However, final journal entries showed students had an increased sense of accomplishment and a boost in confidence as a result of the project. Students also expressed concern throughout their journal entries on their ability to connect with the subject’s experiences. However, by the final journal entry, students were able to have a deeper appreciation for the subject and what he encountered during the Civil Rights Movement. As evidenced by their responses, students had an increased sense of empathy in comparison to their responses at the beginning of the project and a greater desire to continue to use movement to engage in social awareness and change.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate if students could experience an increase in empathy and social awareness after learning of an individual’s experience during the Civil Rights Movement and processing it through the choreographic process. The study involved eighteen students, the teacher who was also the researcher, and the interview subject. The study consisted of qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data. Pretest and posttest surveys, student-to-subject interviews, journal entries, and an audience survey were used to collect data.

The study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

Q1 To what extent does hearing about an individual’s experience during the Civil Rights Movement and studying that Movement increase student empathy and cultural awareness when the choreographic process is used to assimilate and understand the Civil Rights information?

Q2 What stages of the choreographic process make this type of ethnographic research and the resulting performance more effective?

Q3 In what ways do different students perceive the effectiveness of the process and the research findings based upon their own social, cultural, and economic backgrounds?

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the implications, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research. This research has shown that by learning about another individual’s personal experience and expressing it through the creative and choreographic process that students are able to engage in deeper empathy and social awareness. The researcher found that while participants were able to express empathy on
some level on paper, the best way to gauge student empathy was through observing their engagement with each other and the subject throughout the creative process.

**Implications of the Study**

Based on the outcomes of the study, it was evident movement and the choreographic process did influence student empathy and social awareness. The responses in the student surveys and journal entries indicated that listening to the subject’s story and processing it through movement and the collaborative choreographic process allowed students to experience empathy on some level. However, the researcher would like to repeat this study to collect more data.

During the study, students were able to work together with no conflict observed by the researcher, implying students were able to engage in empathy with one another throughout this process to reach a common goal. Although students came from various social and economic backgrounds, it was the belief of the researcher that their desire to succeed and accurately tell the story of another allowed them to collaborate effectively. The students desired to tell the story of the subject with accuracy and by creating an emotional connection to the audience also led the researcher to believe the students were able to engage in empathy more deeply through movement investigation.

As evidenced by students’ posttest surveys, the researcher was able to assess that students enjoyed the process, particularly the performance of the material they created. The students also gained an increase in their collaborative and choreographic abilities and were able to connect with the content on a deeper level due to their movement investigations. However, it was difficult to assess how students’ social and economic backgrounds contributed to their increase in empathy. However, it did seem those
students whose background differed from that of the subject became more empathetic toward the subject’s experiences during the Civil Rights Movement.

**Limitations of the Study**

Despite the fact that students appeared to learn empathy during the study, it was crucial to discuss some limitations of the study. The primary limitation was potential bias on the part of the researcher as she was also the teacher in this study. If this study were to be done again, it would be best if the researcher was not also the teacher to eliminate potential bias. In addition, it would be important to perform this research with a more diverse student population over the course of multiple semesters to measure student growth over a longer period of time. Finally, lack of validation of the research instruments was also a limitation of this study, which would need to be addressed in further research.

To repeat this study with other student groups and populations in the same school district over a longer period of time could provide a more accurate outcome. With eighteen students from one campus alone, it was difficult to say if this small sample of students provided an accurate representation of the effect of the study on dance students as a whole. In future studies, it might be beneficial to increase the number of participants from several different campuses. For the purpose of this study, the researcher also used students who were part of an elite group of dancers within the program. Using students from various dance programs as well as from more varied social and economic backgrounds could also impact the outcome of the study.

The research instruments used in this study were not validated as the researcher also created and executed the pretest and posttest surveys, student journal prompts, and
the audience survey. All data were gathered and compiled by the researcher. In future studies, it would be beneficial for another individual to help collect data on the same study to verify the outcome.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the results of this study, it was clear the students gained deeper empathy and a sense of social awareness throughout the creative and choreographic process. If the researcher repeated this study, she would document student work during the choreographic process through video and photography to help demonstrate student growth throughout the process. This would be done to help the audience more fully understand the students’ creative process. Much of the data collected for this study were done through student journals; however, if the study was repeated in the future, the researcher might consider doing video interviews in order to have a more visual picture of student development during the process.

Another recommendation would be to have more than just a final showing of student work. This would allow audience participants the opportunity to see student growth in the work throughout the process. This, however, would require the researcher to have the same audience members in attendance each time, which could be a logistical and scheduling issue. The researcher would also like to investigate the possibility of having her students perform the final choreography for their peers at other schools. The researcher could then conduct audience surveys to see if the performance of the dancers had an effect on the empathy and social awareness of younger audience members.
Conclusion

Based upon this study, it was clear students gained more empathy and social awareness through the choreographic process. There was the potential for much more research based upon this topic to determine the extent to which the collaborative choreographic process impacted empathy and social awareness in students.
WORKS CITED


APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
DATE: December 12, 2018

TO: Rachel Wade
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1336069-2] Embodied Empathy: Engaging High School Students in Social Awareness through the Choreographic Process

SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: December 12, 2018

EXPIRATION DATE: December 12, 2019

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of December 12, 2019.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Morse at 970-351-1910 or nicole.morse@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Ms. Wade -
Thank you for your patience with the UNC IRB process. Dr. Clukey, the first reviewer, has recommended approval following your submission of requested revisions/modifications of the consent and assent forms. Subsequently, I reviewed your original and revised/modified materials and am also recommending approval. Please be sure to use all of the consent and assent forms amended and submitted in this second package in your participant recruitment and data collection.

Best wishes with your interesting research project and don’t hesitate to contact me with any IRB-related questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Dr. Megan Stellino, UNC IRB Co-Chair

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB’s records.
APPENDIX B

PRINCIPAL APPROVAL LETTER
To Whom It May Concern,

This letter will serve as authorization of Rachel Wade to conduct research entitled, *Embodying Empathy: Engaging High School Students in Social Awareness through the Choreographic Process*. All surveys, observations, and presentations are approved and will be supervised by our campus administration. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,
APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORMS
CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIENCE PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Embodying Empathy: Engaging High School Students in Social Awareness through the Choreographic Process
Researcher: Rachel Wade
Phone: 940 390 1270  E-mail: Sandra.minton@unco.edu
Research Advisor: Dr. Sandra Minton  E-Mail: Sandra.minton@unco.edu

Purpose and Description: The primary purpose of this study is to determine if engaging in the choreographic process causes students to have greater empathy and cultural awareness. Over the course of the spring semester, students participated in conversations with an individual who lived during The Civil Rights Movement and used what they have learned to create movement and choreography. In addition to this, the students participated in two surveys and some journaling in order to gauge their growth throughout the study.

There were three phases to this research, however your participation is only required during the third phase as an audience member after you have viewed the student performance. After the student performance of their work, you will be asked to fill out a survey to measure your thoughts on the project and the impact you believe it had on the students and the audience.

At the end of the project, I would be happy to share data from this study with you at your request. I will take every precaution in order to protect your confidentiality. I will assign a subject number to you. Only I will know the name connected with a subject number and when we report data, your name will not be used. The surveys that you are taking will remain confidential. The completed consent forms will be kept for three years in a locked cabinet in Crabbe Hall, room 308, in the office of Dance Education MA co – coordinator Christy O’Connell Black.

There are no risks involved in participating in this research. Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Office of Research, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

__________________________  ________________________
Subject’s Signature              Date

__________________________  ________________________
Researcher’s Signature            Date
CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS OF PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Embodying Empathy: Engaging High School Students in Social Awareness through the Choreographic Process.
Researcher: Rachel Wade,
Phone Number: (940) 390-1270 E-mail:
Research Advisor: Dr. Sandra Minton E-Mail: Sandra.minton@unco.edu

With the help of your dancer, I am researching how learning about an individual’s experience during The Civil Rights Movement and investigating it through the choreographic process affects student empathy and cultural awareness. If your child indicates a willingness to participate, we will be working through this process during 8th period and after school rehearsals with the Repertory Dance Company at . This research will take place throughout the majority of the spring semester and will culminate in a performance toward the end of the semester. There will be three phases to this research. First, students will engage in multiple conversations with a person who grew up during The Civil Rights Movement. During the second phase, students will use the information that they have learned to begin to create a choreographic work. Throughout the first and second phase, students will be asked to take a pre-test based on their knowledge of choreography and the Civil Rights Movement. They will also journal bi-weekly as a way to reflect on their learning. Finally, students will perform their work for an audience and complete a post-test based on the same content as the pre-test.

I foresee no risks to subjects beyond those that are normally encountered dancing in the classroom and onstage. Your child’s participation will not be solicited during any time outside of the already scheduled class and rehearsal times. This study is designed to engage your students in learning that requires them to collaborate, empathize, and use creative and critical thinking skills.

I will take every precaution throughout the project in order to protect your child’s identity by assigning numbers or codes for identifying all participants. Only I will know the name connected with a subject number and when I report data your child’s name will not be used. The tests your child is taking and his or her journal entries will remain confidential. The completed consent forms will be kept for three years in a locked cabinet in Crabbe Hall, room 308, in the office of Dance Education MA co-coordinator Christy O’Connell-Black.

Please feel free to phone me if you have any questions or concerns about this research and please retain one copy of this letter for your records.

Thank you for assisting me with my research.

Sincerely,

Rachel Wade
Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to have your child participate in this study and if your child begins participation they may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to your child to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Office of Research, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

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ASSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Embodied Empathy: Engaging High School Students in Social Awareness through the Choreographic Process.
Researcher: Rachel Wade,
Phone Number: (940) 390-1270 E-mail:
Research Advisor: Dr. Sandra Minton E-Mail: Sandra.minton@unco.edu

With your help, I will be researching how learning about an individual’s experience during the Civil Rights Movement and investigating it through the choreographic process effects your empathy and cultural awareness. If you are willing to participate, we will be working through this process during the 8th period and after school rehearsals with the Repertory Dance Company at . This research will take place throughout the majority of the spring semester and will culminate in a performance toward the end of the semester. There will be three phases to this research. First, you will participate in multiple conversations with a person who grew up during the Civil Rights Movement. During the second phase, you will use the information that you have learned to begin to create a choreographic work. Throughout the first and second phase, you will be asked to take a pre-test based on you knowledge of choreography and the Civil Rights Movement. You will also journal bi-weekly as a way to reflect on your learning. Finally, you will perform your work for an audience and complete a posttest based on the same content as the pre-test.

I foresee no risks to you beyond those that are normally encountered dancing in the classroom and onstage. Your participation will not be solicited during any time outside of the already scheduled class and rehearsal times. This study is designed to engage you in learning that requires you to collaborate, empathize, and use creative and critical thinking skills.

I will take every precaution throughout the project in order to protect your identity by assigning numbers or codes for identifying all participants who have taken the pre-test and posttest. Only I will know the name connected with a subject number and when I report data your name will not be used. The tests you are taking and your journal entries will remain confidential. However, your identity will not remain confidential during the performance and the audience members will know who you are. The completed consent forms will be kept for three years in a locked cabinet in Crabbe Hall, room 308, in the office of Dance Education MA co-coordinator Christy O’Connell-Black.

Please feel free to phone me if you have any questions or concerns about this research and please retain one copy of this letter for your records.

Thank you for assisting me with my research.

Sincerely,

Rachel Wade
Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Office of Research, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

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CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENT PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Embodying Empathy: Engaging High School Students in Social Awareness through the Choreographic Process
Researcher: Rachel Wade
Phone: 940 390 1270
E-mail: 
Research Advisor: Dr. Sandra Minton E-Mail: Sandra.minton@unco.edu

Purpose and Description: The primary purpose of this study is to determine if engaging in the choreographic process causes students to have greater empathy and cultural awareness. Over the course of the spring semester, you will participate in conversations with an individual who lived during The Civil Rights Movement and use what you have learned from these conversations to create movement and choreography. In addition to this, you will participate in two surveys and bi-weekly journaling in order to gauge your growth in understanding throughout the study.

During the first phase of the study, you will engage in conversations with and learn about his experience growing up during The Civil Rights Movement. You will have the opportunity to ask questions and gain insight into his experience so that you can use the information to inspire your choreography. In addition to these conversations, you will also learn important historical information regarding The Civil Rights Movement. The second phase of the study is designed to give you creative freedom and autonomy as you work through the choreographic process with your peers. You will be placed in groups, and from there you will be tasked with creating choreography based on the information and inspiration you have received in phase one. You will have many opportunities to revise, manipulate, and restructure your choreography. Don’t worry, I will be there to help you if you get stuck or need assistance. The ultimate goal will be for you to have a final piece of choreography that can be performed for an audience.

The third and final phase of this project will be the production and performance of an evening of dance. This will take place toward the end of the spring semester and will consist completely of you and your peer’s choreography. This is an opportunity for you to share all of your hard work and dedication with those who are important to you, and for you to demonstrate how dance can impact your community.

At the end of the project, I would be happy to share the resulting data with you at your request. I will take every precaution throughout this project in order to protect your confidentiality by assigning numbers or codes for identifying all participants. Only I will know the name connected with a subject number and when I report data, your name will not be used. The pre-tests and posttests that you are taking and journal entries will remain confidential. The completed consent forms will be kept for three years in a locked cabinet in Crabbe Hall, room 306, in the office of Dance Education MA co – coordinator Christy O’Connell Black.

Potential risks in this project are minimal. As with any exercise, risks include fatigue, localized muscle soreness, and the potential for strains and sprains of joints of the lower extremities. To counter this risk, I will always make sure that you are properly warmed up before you begin moving, and I will be present to make sure you are executing movements safely and correctly.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions,
please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Office of Research, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

Subject’s Signature  Date

Researcher’s Signature  Date
APPENDIX D

PRETEST AND POSTTEST SURVEYS
Pre - Test of Student Participants

Please fill out the survey below.

* Required

1. In what ways do you think learning about the past experiences of others can impact the way we live our lives? *

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. Have you ever been treated differently because of the color of your skin? How did that make you feel? *

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. What information do you already know in regard to the Civil Rights Movement? *

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. Going into this project, what are your feelings in regard to The Civil Rights Movement? *

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
5. Do you know anyone who grew up or lived during the time of the Civil Rights Movement? If so, who? *

6. If you know someone who grew up during this time, what have they shared with you about their experience? *

7. What do you think you already know about how to make or choreograph a dance? *

8. What do you know about the craft of choreography? *

9. What is your previous experience choreographing with other individuals, if any?
10. In what ways does creating choreography aid in your learning of core content? *

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

11. In what ways do you feel like dance impacts your school culture and community? *

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

12. What do you feel your biggest challenge will be during this project? *

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

13. What are you most looking forward to about this project? *

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Post Test of Student Participants

Please complete the survey below.

1. What information do you now know about the Civil Rights Movement that you did not know before?

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

2. What connections do you see between The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's - 1960's and the Civil Rights issues happening today?

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

3. Were you able to connect your work in this class to work in your other classes? If so, how?

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

4. What was your biggest challenge during this project?

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________
5. What was your greatest learning outcome through this project?

6. What have you learned about yourself as a result of this project?

7. In what ways do you feel choreography like this can impact your school culture and community?

8. What have you learned about dance making and choreography as a result of this project?

9. What have you learned about the craft of choreography?
10. What value do you see in using choreography to learn about the human experience?


11. In what ways has learning about another individual’s experience and investigating it through choreography impacted the way you view the world?


12. What do you think the outcome would be if more dance programs in Fort Worth ISD did projects similar to this one?
APPENDIX E

JOURNAL ENTRY PROMPTS
Journal Entry Prompts

1. What stood out to you the most this week after listening to the subject speak on his experience during the Civil Rights Movement? (This prompt will be repeated following the subjects’ other presentations.)

2. What are you most excited/nervous/curious to learn about during this project?

3. What do you hope to gain through your experience of being a part of this project?

4. How confident do you feel about creating choreography on this subject?

5. When you hear the word empathy, what comes to mind?

6. In what ways has creating movements helped you unpack your feelings and thoughts about The Civil Rights Movement? (This prompt will be repeated as the students create their dances.)

7. At this point in the project, what are you struggling with most emotionally, physically, and creatively? (This prompt will be repeated throughout the project.)

8. If you were to explain this project and process to a non–dance student, teacher, or family member, how would you describe it to them?

9. What would you say to them about the value of this kind of work?

10. How are you feeling about the project this week? What is working for you and what isn’t? (This prompt will be repeated throughout the project.)

11. What do you hope the audience will gain from watching your choreography and performance?

12. What are you most looking forward to about the performance?

13. What are you most concerned about?
14. How have I helped you most through this project? If we were to do this again, what could I do in the future to help you succeed?
APPENDIX F

POST-PERFORMANCE AUDIENCE SURVEY
Audience Member Survey

Please complete the survey below.

1. Based on the dances performed today, the students involved in this project appear to be fully invested and engaged in the work.
   *Mark only one oval.*
   - [ ] Strongly Agree
   - [ ] Agree
   - [ ] Neutral
   - [ ] Disagree
   - [ ] Strongly Disagree

2. Based on the dances performed today, the students involved in this study appear to have a clear understanding of the content on which their dances are based and are able to make connections to real world, 21st century concepts and ideas.
   *Mark only one oval.*
   - [ ] Strongly Agree
   - [ ] Agree
   - [ ] Neutral
   - [ ] Disagree
   - [ ] Strongly Disagree

3. This type of creative work is important to student growth and development in the Fort Worth Independent School District.
   *Mark only one oval.*
   - [ ] Strongly disagree
   - [ ] Disagree
   - [ ] Neutral
   - [ ] Agree
   - [ ] Strongly agree

4. It is clear from this study and the dances performed today that the dance making and choreographic process allows for students to experience concepts and ideas in a stimulating, yet still challenging, learning environment.
   *Mark only one oval.*
   - [ ] Strongly disagree
   - [ ] Disagree
   - [ ] Neutral
   - [ ] Agree
   - [ ] Strongly agree