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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

DIGNITY AND RESPECT IN THE SALSA DANCE CLASSROOM:  
FOSTERING HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM  
TO PROMOTE COMPASSION

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

Diana M. Sanchez

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

December 2020

This Thesis by: Diana M. Sanchez

Entitled: *Dignity and Respect in the Salsa Dance Classroom: Fostering Healthy Self-Esteem to Promote Compassion*

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

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## ABSTRACT

Sanchez, Diana M. *Dignity and Respect in the Salsa Dance Classroom: Fostering Healthy Self-Esteem to Promote Compassion*. Unpublished Master of Art thesis, University of Northern Colorado, 2020.

Many students that have attempted to take salsa dance classes often express their disillusionment in the way in which they are treated by salsa dance instructors. Salsa dance classes have the possibility to function to awaken in the student greater integration with the society in which people live, while stimulating actions, improving self-esteem, and self-confidence, improving vocabulary, awakening sensitivity, attenuating shyness, as well as increasing communicative and social skills. If the content of a course is well designed and delivered with an intentional student-centered approach, it can positively contribute to greater and more sincere learning. In this sense, the objective of this study was to analyze and reflect on the ideas of dignity and self-respect in the context of the learning environment created. With these ideas in mind, the purpose of this research was to investigate the outcome of treating students with dignity and respect, specifically in the salsa dance classroom. This study was designed to employ an environment that would foster a healthy self-esteem and would promote compassion with students. Two groups of ten participants in each group were compared in this study. The participant responses to these teaching strategies were tracked via pre and post surveys, and interview questions which provided insight regarding best practices and approaches for building students' strategies both in and out of the dance class.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Goal of Study**

Salsa dance is a body expression full of movements and rhythms that communicate the human emotions and feelings present in our daily lives. It develops the integration between groups of people, providing them with an effective and solidary experience. Although dance is not configured as a thematic axis worked in schools by Physical Education teachers, it clearly is a body manifestation practiced by many people, whether in a group or individually, and even as a form of leisure. Dance is present in different moments of our lives and in different spaces of society. One of these spaces is the school where the student spends most of his life. In this perspective, as a body manifestation, dance should be inserted in all school contexts to systematize knowledge for the formation of citizens. In these terms, the school would cease to be just a space in which the activities of reading, writing, and developing mathematical, logical reasoning are prioritized, it would also assume a role in the formation of expressive posture, common to the behavior of a civilized and educated man in the Social environment.

As content in physical education classes, dance undoubtedly provides the individual with a series of health benefits, and maintenance of quality of life, such as improvement in motor development, construction of a critical and conscious view of life, in addition to improving motor skills. All of this takes into account the limitations and capabilities of each student. In the school or dance studio context, the dance takes on different perspectives, such as those related to creativity, education, and expressiveness. It also functions to awaken in the students greater

integration with the society in which they live, stimulating their actions, improving self-esteem, self-confidence, and vocabulary, awakening sensitivity, attenuating shyness, making them more communicative, and sociable; if the content is well designed, it can positively contribute to better learning. In this sense, the objective of this study was to analyze and reflect on the ideas of dignity and self-respect in the context of the learning environment created and the treatment of dance content from the perspective and experiences of learners.

Several studies support the theory that dancing is good for the brain, improves academic achievement, and helps increase self-esteem. Anne Green Gilbert invented the BrainDance exercise in 2000, based on the primary developmental movement patterns that wire the central nervous system, which effectively integrates the mind and body in regard to academic achievement. The Arts Education Partnership published reports on studies in a collection called *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning* (Fiske 1-15). One of these study reports (Catterall and Waldorf) observed that standardized test scores were rising faster in Chicago schools participating in an arts-integrated program, which included dance, than in comparable schools that did not practice arts integrations. However, the research develops in light of discovering that many people have felt discouraged from taking dance classes due to having negative experiences with schoolteachers and private instructors based on how they were treated on a personal and professional level. This study aims at examining the teaching practices in salsa class with an emphasis on the dignity and respect for developing self-esteem and compassion among the learners.

### **Purpose of Study**

The goal of this study was to determine if treating students with dignity and respect in the salsa dance classroom, regardless of their talent, fosters healthy self-esteem and promotes

compassion. The information collected will hopefully lead to embracing new teaching techniques and practices that can be implemented in every salsa dance classroom in the future and will give instructors the opportunity to make a difference in their students' lives. Students' responses to teaching strategies were tracked via pre and post surveys and interview questions to help gain new insights. This research sought to answer the following question:

Q1 In what ways do intentional teaching practices with an emphasis on dignity and respect attribute to self-esteem and compassion in the salsa dance classroom?

### **Significance of Study**

Iuliano, Lutrick, Maez, Nacim, and Reinschmidt, a group of people that led a research on the role Social Latin Dance can play in health and in creating community connections, suggested that the variety of dances and cultural relevance makes the Latin Dance community worth exploration (1). If the dance practice is to be examined for the aspects of dignity and respect, it is important to study salsa dance class in particular considering the aspect of its cultural significance. This study is particularly important for the Latin Dance community, as it will bring to light an issue that has not been researched before. Reviewed literature showed that dignity and respect in dance classes was studied before but explicit focus on salsa was not found. Salsa dance is symbolic due to its traditional practice for the Latin community in terms of its cultural significance, and hence the element of respect comes with it. Through the findings of this study, the dance community can benefit as a whole and can put into practice better intentional teaching strategies as the study will bring various aspects in to light that could be helpful. Both instructors and students can learn more about the effects of treating people with dignity and their impact on learning capabilities. This can, in turn, have repercussions on how students treat others throughout life.

This study also meant to make advancements in the understanding that if all people treat each other with dignity and respect in a setting as simple as a salsa dance classroom, everyone involved can help spread this concept to others. In general, this study aimed to impact the ways in which people treat others, including friends, family, strangers, and people of other races and ethnicities. Students might begin to wonder if anyone ever treated them without respect and dignity in the past and how that made them feel or affected their self-worth and self-esteem. This study invited salsa dance instructors to take advantage of the opportunity of teaching others to help positively shape the personalities of students keeping various important aspects in mind.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **Teaching With Dignity and Respect**

One basic principle in educational theory is that all people deserve the right to be treated with dignity and respect. Teaching in classroom settings can be challenging as it is being a student in today's educational environment. In multi-diverse surroundings, it is highly important to create classroom environments that allow for exploration to freely and openly discuss questions about oneself and others' identities. Teachers are at the forefront of this movement and therefore have the first opportunity to be role models to students, and a salsa dance classroom is no exception. Allowing everyone to be themselves without judgement implies that they are respected for who they are and in return they are expected to do the same for others. In their article, "Re-editing Respect on Campus in an Age of Growing Disrespect," Robert Engvall and Jessica Skolnikoff discuss how this can affect the classroom environment stating,

Respect begins by providing a space in the classroom for all voices, even the ones that one finds problematic. It is about providing that space and then engaging with it rather than running away with being dismissive. It is impossible to expect others to respect you and your viewpoint when you dismiss them as lesser in any way. (47)

It is safe to say that the use of the golden rule, which promotes the principle of treating others as one wants to be treated, is a good rule of thumb; however, racial division, political differences, and a lack of empathy towards other people's viewpoints being displayed in society,

is leading to more tension and less unity in the world. People who experience failure tend to either overcome their hardship or strive for better, or they become discouraged at situations and tend to give up, with the majority choosing the latter (Fischer 9). The feeling of failure can be avoided early in a child's life by including one-on-one conversations in a student-centered, holistic classroom setting. Failure can lead individuals to negative interactions with society, often leading to a lack of empathy towards others and themselves. Richard Curwin, Allen Mendler, and Brian Mendler, authors of *Discipline with Dignity: How to Build Responsibility, Relationships, and Respect in Your Classroom*, state that

We must let students know that our goal is always to maintain their dignity. Doing so increases trust, builds relationships, and makes problems easier to solve. Treating students with dignity means we stay calm when things around us get crazy. It means we talk to students as privately as possible. It means that even when they are rude, nasty, defiant, and disruptive, we are empathetic, compassionate, and caring. Treating students with dignity means that students see their leader model the behaviors we want them to exhibit. (Curwin, et al. 6)

The words of these authors highlight the importance of maintaining dignity and respect while passing on knowledge to students from teachers. These norms described by the author are equally applicable to salsa dance class.

Teachers need to consistently ask themselves how they can engage with students in a meaningful way while still teaching all of the requirements simultaneously and treating all students with the dignity and respect they deserve. The teacher needs to practice empathy, which, by the simplest definition, means to have the capacity to place oneself in another individual's position. The outcome of how a teacher engages with students has an effect on future behavior

and the success of an individual throughout life. People can become unsympathetic, unreasonable, unaffectionate, and excuse these characteristics based on prior experiences. The characteristics that people develop and manifest can be traced back to prior personal experiences and this often begins in the classroom.

### *Importance of Dignity and Respect*

Recognizing the dignity of students in salsa dance classes is a great challenge for teachers. It is connected with promoting the rights of students and counteracting threats to their development. The most important components in the field of education are those that make up the modern system of development and protection of the dignity of people. It depends on the scope and degree of their implementation whether the contemporary dancing school makes the student the subject of its activities, and above all whether it is friendly to students, on the youthful, often bumpy path of their own development. The center of gravity is shifted to tasks, responsibilities, and requirements in this period. At the same time, however, there is a system of supporting students that creates favorable conditions for their development and self-fulfillment (Baines and Armstrong 21).

From an early age, students should be familiar with values such as human dignity, respect for oneself and for others, freedom, equality, tolerance, and solidarity. These are fundamental concepts in shaping civic attitudes, determining the approach to other people, society, and a democratic state. The inherent and inalienable dignity of a human being is the source of human and civil freedom and rights.

The concept of personality (personal dignity) recognizes dignity as a trait that is generally developed independently. It can be acquired, developed, or lost. It is an expression of internal predispositions that encourage people to live in self-esteem, in accordance with the principles

they recognize. In this context, the lack of dignity is expressed in resignation from one's own values, humiliation, mindless obedience, irresponsibility, opportunism, lying, and treating others objectively. It follows that a person is not automatically entitled to personal dignity because there are people who do not have it. In such an approach, dignity has quite a subjective dimension, combined with a good name, and respect. It cannot lay claim to a universal category serving as the basis of human rights and freedoms. It can only affect one's ability and determination for self-development. On the other hand, "personal dignity (human dignity) is recognized as an inherent value that belongs to all people without exception. It is non-gradable and inalienable, and therefore cannot be waived or lost" (Reyneke 11-22).

It is this personal dignity that constitutes the true essence of humanity in every human being; something that allows a person to distinguish own self from other living creatures, for example, reason, self-awareness, or the ability to take a free decision and free action and responsibility for one's own conduct. Human dignity is inherent, meaning that a person acquires dignity at the moment of becoming a human being that it belongs to everyone due to the very fact of being human. Everyone has dignity, without exception and without differences. The holder of dignity includes children and adults, punished and unpunished, alcoholics and abstainers, as well as citizens and foreigners. Dignity is "inalienable." This feature means that dignity is assigned to people throughout their life. Just as humanity cannot be relinquished, also dignity cannot be relinquished. Managing dignity is not in the capacity of both man and organs of power (Reyneke 17). Dignity is the source of freedom and human rights that should be a major part of teaching practices and teachers are expected to convey that the dignity of the human person does not follow from human freedoms and rights, but it is freedoms and rights that result from human dignity. Human dignity is unbreakable (Reyneke 16-18). This means that no



one can deprive anyone of their dignity, reduce it or temporarily suspend it no matter what the situation is.

### **Emotional and Physical Significance of Dance Classes**

The movement, rhythmic or not, regardless of whether it is related to the dance or the daily life of any person, brings with it a series of meanings that arise from mental processes, from the experiences and reflections of each individual. Externalized, this movement is expressed as a genuine language through the body, a way of speaking. When this language is understood, the body is also understood; analyzing what emanates from the body, one realizes what the individual has to say (communicate) to the surrounding people. In this context, dance emerges as an important exercise for the students' action-reflection, allowing them to understand at times their own story, at other times, to place themselves as the main actors in the intricate script of successive events and chronological stages which is called life (Dardeau and Klumb 12).

Dance constitutes a genuine object of study just like any other area of knowledge and, having seen its value and role in the formation of citizens, it needs special attention from the teacher in both the art and the physical aspects of the process. It appears that the dance classroom environment reproduces life in a society that is established beyond those walls. Often, they end up in the classroom (intentionally or not): issues that, a priori, should be restricted to the students' family circles. And teachers, whether they like it or not, need to address such demands so that they can, in short, take care of the comprehensive training that is so desired by teachers as well as the learners (Pennington and Nelson 23).

Giorgino and McCown also confirm that in recent times the relationship between knowledge of dance and other diverse areas, such as art, physical education, history, geography,

and biology, has become more intrinsic, and that one must think about dance as an art language that has a story to tell as a secular knowledge and that can be contextualized, appreciated, and done in the classroom environment. These authors also argue that the relationships between dance and health are almost automatic and immediate, and that dance classes can provide students with opportunities to identify problems, raise hypotheses, gather data, and reflect on making and thinking, and associating healthy living (17). On the artistic side, Giorgino and McCown clarified that students in dance classes could create and appreciate productions that address environmental issues, becoming more critical, responsible, and constructive while perceiving members, dependents, and transforming agents of the environment.

Dance education allows for teaching the full potential of expression of the human body in a fun way as it provides students with pleasant moments where well-being is evidenced and can contribute to teaching and learning. It is a complete activity that exercises the body, mind, and soul. But the teaching of dance is not restricted to the technical performance of teaching. It is not just about learning choreography. The senses encompassed by dance are much broader and more complex. As pleasant and beautiful as the mechanical repetitions of gestures with well-designed movement sequences, one should not ignore the fact that dance has added other benefits to it, such as motor, social, cognitive, cultural, and artistic (Gilbert 22).

Dance is a body movement, which allows, through the rhythm of the movements, a certain harmony, temporal organization, allowing students to be in charge their own movements. Following this idea, dance historian, theorist, dramaturg and curator Claire Croft mentions that dance benefits its practitioners with increased body resistance, aesthetics, posture, and flexibility (Croft 20). However, according to Lada-Richards, the level of motor development of students must be observed. Varying movements between necessary skills such as running, jumping,

crouching, or moving in different directions, including turns, can be on the axis or around an object. In addition, Fischer comments on the development of physical values through motor body movements (jumping, running, and others) and psychomotor values, which occurs when there is a need for coordination between arms, legs, head, and torso (17). Through these observations one can learn to appreciate the benefit of dance classes not only on the physical aspect but also on the emotional significance it can bring to each individual.

### **History of Salsa Dance**

Salsa is a dance style that originated in the 1900s in Cuba, where rhythms from the two main existing styles of music in the region (Cuban Son and Afro-Cuban rumba) were combined to create this new dance. This new rhythm was combined with American jazz and taken to New York by Cuban musicians (“Salsa [Dance]”). Salsa dance can be described as a happy and relaxed genre that people of all backgrounds enjoy; it is no surprise that it is very widespread in many countries. In the 60s, disco dances started with Touch Dances (dances in closed posture) and Solo Dances (individual disco dances), acquiring great popularity of music and disco events. In the 70s, with the advancement of discotheques, perhaps even sociologically related to women’s emancipation movements, ballroom dancing for two, but without physical contact, increasingly became adept, developing ways already observed in Twist and Beat. When Salsa appeared and started to become popular, it was characterized by the mixture of Caribbean music and had influences from Mambo, Cha-cha-cha, Cuban Rumba, Reggae and even Brazilian Samba.

The word Salsa is of Spanish origin and means seasoning or mixture, which defines what this rhythm means. First came the music in the 16th century, which was called “Cuban son,” and it gained popularity in the 19th century, but only after the dance came; it gained more and more

strength and became one of the main rhythms of ballroom dancing. The dance is very reminiscent of the mambo, but it differs due to its own characteristics. In addition, salsa makes use of many rotating movements (Bordas 35-41).

Usually, the dance is performed in pairs, but there are also steps for those who want to dance alone or for the choreography moments when couples dance separately, known as shining. The pace is quite fast, which involves a lot of technique, balance, and body awareness. Many say that dancing to this rhythm is not easy and that it is necessary to grow in the universe of salsa to reach a high level. The rhythm may not be easy, but it is possible, to achieve excellence in this dance style, even when the students start classes at a later age in life. There are countless benefits that salsa dancing provides. Ballroom dancing is considered by many to be a therapy. In addition to doing well for the health of the body, it is good for the soul. It induces compassion among the practitioners (Katoppo 1-5).

### **Using the Salsa Dance Classroom to Practice Compassion**

Salsa dance, and overall Latin-style dance, is becoming increasingly popular worldwide with more than 250 major events called Salsa congresses, festivals, and/or conventions, internationally every year. The scene spans over 50 countries and about 200 cities. Salsa, in particular, has grown a lot more in the past decade with the creation of competitions such as the World Latin Dance Cup, the World Salsa Summit, and the Ultimate Latin Dance Championship.

These competitions have inspired dancers from all different backgrounds and even non-dancers, to learn how to dance salsa in order to participate in such competitions. Studios in the Latin dance scene all over the world have increased their number of students in the past thirteen years, thanks to these competitions that have sparked the interest of thousands of people worldwide, since all of them are streamed for free online as they are happening.

It is in these competitions where talented people are discovered and become famous either by winning or by simply being talented dancers. They often have a large audience worldwide, opening opportunities to receiving invitations to teach at many of the salsa congresses that happen almost every week in any of the 200 cities in which they currently exist. These same dancers become popular in their city of origin and through their competition's success they gain new students who want to learn from them. This can be where using a salsa dance classroom to practice compassion comes in. These dancers who were already either professionals prior to winning a competition or became professionals in the process of doing so, now have a platform where they can pass on their knowledge and skills to other people.

Oftentimes dance instructors don't use this opportunity to teach with dignity and respect in the platforms that are being provided to them. Attendees of such conferences use social media to discuss how the instructors made them feel out of place, even saying that if they were beginner dancers they were in the wrong place, and that it was not what was said but how it was said. In other occasions, students made public they had purchased full passes to events to take dance workshops but had given up on them because of how instructors made them feel.

Not all instructors teach this way, but one can't help to notice how instructors that have favorable circumstances to practice compassion through their teaching style do not take advantage of this opportunity that may affect the students' dignity in a positive or negative way. This lack of consideration and compassion in teaching can occur for a variety of reasons: perhaps the individuals are egocentric and feel superior to others after becoming good at what they do, or they were simply taught the same way they now teach, meaning they learned how to dance salsa in an authoritarian environment. An environment that creates an atmosphere of obedience without questioning the teacher, fear of being called out and put on the spot, and even a twisted

sense of self-worth creates a negative culture and feeds the authoritarian teaching model that is often preserved in dance. These are signs of a classroom in which the teacher is the knowledge holder and the student is expected only to be quiet and learn.

Hanu Salmi, a researcher in Finland, investigated the effective use of open learning environments and the changes in the roles and responsibilities of both the teachers and students. The research uncovered that the classroom is the environment for formal education, as it systematizes concepts and assumptions, aiming at the social transformation of the citizen. It allows students to cultivate values, both in social life and among colleagues, teachers, and employees, in addition to the content covered in the classroom (47). It provides a diversity of information and behavior, where education is defined through the present ideology.

A salsa dance classroom provides a relevant opportunity to turn an authoritarian type teaching style to a more democratic classroom. In such a classroom, students are not afraid of the teacher, and they feel they have the power to voice their concerns and ask questions if they feel like doing so. This type of environment offers a place where they can learn without fear of being judged. Salsa teachers can demonstrate empathy towards their students by understanding first and foremost that they are there because they want to learn, whether they are good or not. That means that instructors must be patient, repeat the curriculum as needed, be open to questions, and most important of all they need to put themselves in the students' position; if it was the other way around, how would they like the learning environment to be if it was the instructor taking the class. When students feel this connection with their teachers, they realize that the instructor cares for their learning and for their success. This, in turn, will create a positive learning environment, in which students will most likely model the behavior they see in their teachers and will practice those characteristics within the classroom and in society. The ultimate goal for any

instructor should be to find ways to help prepare compassionate people for the world. This is of particular importance, given the current and fast changing circumstances, and any opportunity to cultivate compassion should be considered.

### **Benefits of Being Compassionate In This World**

What is compassion, why do we need to show compassion, and how does it relate to teaching Salsa dancing? The most common definition of compassion is to be able to put oneself in another person's shoes, or in their position in order to understand what they are going through and what feelings they are experiencing during a particular given situation. In fact, compassion goes a little bit deeper than just understanding someone else's emotional state; it also means to suffer together with that other person to ease the pain or struggles that they may be encountering.

With the tumultuous state of the world, people are being less and less compassionate, not only to themselves but also towards each other. It seems the new standard is to not expect others to have compassion for anyone. To many, there can be the feeling that they now live in a world filled with war, hatred, violence, and hopelessness. Violence and hatred are portrayed in many ways that can affect a person through instances of mass shootings, hate messages and hate speeches on social media.

Referring to hate speech Zachary Laub, senior copy editor and writer for the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) wrote and reported the following statistics:

Incidents have been reported on nearly every continent. Much of the world now communicates on social media, with nearly a third of the world's population active on Facebook alone. As more and more people have moved online, experts say, individuals inclined toward racism, misogyny, or homophobia have found niches that can reinforce

their views and goad them to violence. Social media platforms also offer violent actors the opportunity to publicize their acts. (Laub)

Based on this report it could be safely assumed that most of the people either engaging in hate speech and/or committing crimes are likely to lack compassion and were most likely not exposed to it in their lives. It could also be true that particular events from the past in which these individuals were not treated with compassion themselves triggered such behaviors. It is important to recognize that cultivating compassion in every given setting and opportunity provided can help spread this quality that might eventually lead to a kinder and more hopeful world, a world in which people care for one another and acknowledge that other people have feelings and emotions similar to their own. This can be of great contribution that does not cost anything to anyone, but rather just requires some effort. To add to the benefits of being compassionate in such a chaotic environment, mental-health experts say that practicing compassion can improve health, well-being, and relationships (Santamaría-García, et al. 1-4). When people relieve the sufferings of others, they feel happier, more optimistic, less lonely, and less inclined to think negative thoughts.

If humans can understand themselves, they could look for the needs hidden behind the actions they choose with genuine interest, if they can approach selected strategies with gentleness, even though they would prefer to choose something else in retrospect, there is a higher chance that they will look at other people with greater kindness. This is more significant and necessary, particularly for younger students, who above all, need kind support accompanying them on their way to maturity (Reis et al. 14-20).



### *Self-Compassion*

If people stop equating self-compassion with self-indulgence or justifying themselves, they will begin to see that in many situations they have given as much as three factors allowed. These three basic factors are the environment (in which people found themselves supporting or not), resources (which they had at their disposal, i.e. patience, forbearance, peace, etc.), and awareness. One can notice that it is even inhumane to set the bar even higher. It is easier to stop demanding more and more from surrounding people because the requirements do not translate into results. Kelly and others, examined whether a woman's level of self-compassion on a given day contributed to healthier approaches, adds, "By remaining calm and understanding when faced with rejection, failure or criticism, we develop composure, strength and emotional stability which in turn lead to a higher quality of life, increase our productivity and our effectiveness." Self-compassion creates inner peace, and the restored balance bears fruit in many spheres of human lives.

The ability to take care of oneself is also developed when there is compassion alive in humans. Especially in those moments when humans experience pain or failure, it is worth being protective of one's own self. Researchers emphasize that taking care of oneself does not mean that individuals stop working and give up success. This concern becomes the foundation for shaping inner strength. Gina Masullo, an associate professor in the School of Journalism at The University of Texas at Austin, led a research to find out what types of personal self-compassion are more common among people who disagree with others' societal viewpoints. The author argues that human beings can learn to see failures as opportunities for growth, not as painful signs of our ineptitude in life. By caring for resources, for emotional well-being, by looking for a balance between giving and taking, humans can become able to take care of loved ones with true

care and tenderness, not only out of a sense of duty but also when they are going through difficult moments (Masullo 27).

Mindfulness is another benefit associated with the compassion being carried, which is seeing things as they are without exaggerating or ignoring them. It helps to notice various thoughts and emotions, including difficult ones, without the need to panic, silencing them, or identifying with them too much. Humans can experience various emotions, and accept and receive them with the awareness of transience. This ability helps to accept various emotional states with balance (Zhang et al. 10-15).

A new research study, published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*, shows that compassionate skills can reduce depressive symptoms in people with chronic or recurrent depression. Scientists found that practicing compassion reduced the severity of depressive symptoms, and the benefits lasted for at least six months. Depression often manifests itself with self-criticism and low self-esteem, which can lead people into a downward spiral of negative thoughts. Self-criticism can go from attacking one's own body to inducing feelings of shame, guilt or comparison with others and feelings of inferiority (Kelly et al. 9-10). Masullo believes compassion is key to healthy self-esteem and resilience. There is a lot of discussion about narcissism and its consequences today, but we want people to have a dose of healthy narcissism within them. This ensures a stable sense of self-worth when life is not going well, whether it's a bad day or a job loss. If people lose self-esteem during these life challenges, it will be difficult for humans to regenerate (Reis et al. 9-12).

Showing compassion to oneself is no different from compassion for others. It requires understanding and kindness when one fails or make mistakes, rather than harsh judgement. This practice also has therapeutic effects, as demonstrated by recent research (Neff and Germer 6).

In dance, attributes such as respect for others, solidarity, and dignity are necessary but not often considered. Vieira emphasizes the importance of this moral stance when he states that dance ethics triggers a series of reflections that can be generated in the classroom, such as dance processes and social roles, and concludes that such questions experienced in the body in the form of danced movements can lead the students to express their opinions about dance without being aggressive, disrespectful and unfair. Dance comes as a facilitator in interpersonal relationships, as it is a playful and collective activity, in addition to being a practice that uses the sense of responsibility. According to Santos and others, a conscious and global motor education is prioritized by dance, but the action is not only pedagogical but also psychological, as it is always trying to improve the student's behavior (Lada-Richards 14).

#### *Mental Health and the Function of Compassion*

It is possible to remove other people's sufferings and practice compassion when teaching a salsa class. This type of setting can take advantage of the classroom and cultivate a harmonious and peaceful atmosphere where all students feel safe and cared for. Salsa teachers have the power to model compassion by teaching a class where they explain the material in a way that everyone feels included, and can understand, even if it means slowing it down and repeating for mastery. Instructors can answer questions students might have, even if those questions mean taking their time to re-teach the material they have already taught. It also means treating all students equally, regardless of the student's speed of acquisition. Using the proper tone of voice, appropriate attitude to address their needs, and even going out of their way to help each student reach the class goals are ways that they can model compassion. By doing so, instructors let students know they recognize that there may be limitations, but that no matter what, those limitations are there to help them be successful. It all ties back to treating people with

dignity and respect and learning to value their presence and input. When teachers treat their students with those principles in mind, they are likely to foster a classroom where students value themselves and develop a healthy self-esteem. Individuals with a healthy self-esteem are said to have effective communication skills and enjoy healthy relationships. Imagine a classroom where these qualities are present, one can only visualize a place where everyone is accepting of each other and shows compassion to all the people surrounding them. Rich Cavaness, author of the article titled “Nine Common Characteristics of People with High Self-Esteem” says the following:

With their good communication skills and their enthusiasm to succeed, people with high self-esteem generally enjoy healthy relationships and are able to accept constructive criticism, without letting it dent their confidence. Because of their confidence they are rarely competitive with others because they are comfortable with their own abilities and accept others where they are. They don't put others down to build themselves up and they tend to be forgiving towards others. (Cavaness 13)

If these types of individuals don't push others down to build themselves up, they can help transfer these same traits to others, and what a better way to use a salsa dance class to do so. Many dance teachers use negative and derogatory terms to address students; such treatment can highly impact self-esteem and lead to manifestations of negative behaviors in the future.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine if treating students with dignity and respect in the salsa dance classroom, regardless of their talent, fosters healthy self-esteem and promotes compassion. There were two groups included in this study, one that involved a more traditional teaching format and an experimental group, where extra considerations were made to create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment. These considerations involved a slower pace, giving student's time to have their questions addressed, and offering after class help when needed. A more compassionate and considerate tone was used for the experimental group to see the difference in their learned experiences. This research sought to answer the following question:

- Q1 In what ways do intentional teaching practices with an emphasis on dignity and respect attribute to self-esteem and compassion in the salsa dance classroom?

#### **Preparation for Conducting Study**

The researcher designed all components of the study as well as determined how the data would be collected and analyzed based on a need for research in this particular area of study. A research study narrative that described the purpose of the study, procedures for data collection, handling, analysis, possible risks and benefits, any costs or compensation, and sample consent forms to be distributed to participants was then submitted to the University of Northern Colorado's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval prior to conducting the study. Upon

approval from the IRB, the researcher began the study. The approval letter along with other documents submitted to the IRB for this research can be found in Appendix A.

### **Research Participants and Site**

An interest flyer was created to recruit voluntary participants within ages eighteen and up. This flyer was then shared on the researcher's social media accounts and asked to share with individuals that might be interested in being part of the study. The recruiting flyer offered a free four-week beginner salsa dance course to anyone interested in learning the basics of salsa dance. In order to place participants in two different groups, the control group and the experimental group, two-time slots for the classes were offered: 6:30-7:30 p.m. and 8:00-9:00 p.m., giving participants the opportunity to choose which group they would be in without bias. Interested individuals then contacted the researcher via email or text to provide their preferred time slot.

After reviewing and agreeing to the consent form, the participants were then randomly added to the control or experimental group. The recruiting period lasted four weeks before finalizing the participant list. There was a total of twenty-one participants in the study: ten participants in the control group (group one) and ten participants in the experimental group (group two). The researcher was also the instructor for the four-week beginner salsa course. The study took place at the researcher's dance studio in Aurora, CO and participants were notified of the class location when signing the consent form shared after they showed willingness. It was the recruiter's intention to only provide the specific location to those that decided to be part of the study, therefore the recruitment flyer did not include the study location. Although participation was completely voluntary and participants had the option of withdrawing from the study at any point if they felt uncomfortable or for any other reason, all that signed the

consent form completed the four-week beginner salsa course, took the pre and post surveys, and answered the interview questions two weeks after the course was over.

### **Research Design**

The research study took place over the course of four weeks, two weeks in March and two weeks in May of 2020. Due to the Covid19 pandemic and its effects on social distancing restrictions, two of the four scheduled weeks in May were conducted via zoom video conferences. Although it was a different delivery method due to the circumstances, the instruction was live and remained the same as originally planned. There were two groups, and each group received four hours of instruction, making a total of eight hours for the entire study.

A course syllabus was created and provided to the subjects after they confirmed participation and had signed the consent form. Each week had a specific learning target, with the final goal of learning basic salsa dance steps that could be utilized in any social dance setting.

The objectives of the course included learning freestyle salsa dance moves and partner dance moves. The first ten minutes of each class were used to lead student participants through warm-up stretches, followed by twenty minutes of direct instruction of freestyle movements that could be done without a partner. Halfway into each class session, the students chose partners; some of the females assumed the role of the lead in order for everyone to have a partner. Each lesson culminated with students dancing what they had just learned, with music and without the instructor leading the class.

### **Research Instruments**

Various research instruments were used to collect data in this study. These instruments included pre and post surveys, post-study interview questions, instructor observations, and video recordings. These instruments were created by the instructor/researcher based on the need to

collect the proper data that would contribute to the findings of this study. Copies of the research instruments can be found in Appendix C.

### *Pre- and Post-Surveys*

Students were given an electronic pre-survey before engaging in any instruction. At the end of the study, students were also provided a post-survey with similar questions from the pre-survey to aid in comparing their answers. The survey included questions about how they felt before and after taking the course in terms of excitement, nervousness, confidence, patience, self-esteem feelings in response to positive or negative interactions, and self-placement of learning style, or, in other words, whether they believed they were fast or slow learners.

### *Interview Questions*

The researcher interviewed the students separately via zoom about two weeks after the course with a series of seven questions to collect additional data. They were asked a total of seven questions including: What was your opinion of salsa dance prior to taking the class, and did any of that change as a result of taking it? What did you learn about the instructor and her teaching techniques? In terms of understanding how you best learn, what did you discover about yourself and your learning style after taking this course with this instructor? How did you feel on the way to each class? Was there anything specific that triggered certain emotions? Would you recommend others to take this class? Why or why not? Overall, how do you feel this instructor treated the students? And finally, please provide examples you may recall.

Key indicators evaluated in the interviews were the student's level of comfort during the four classes and their willingness to continue dancing after the course ended. The researcher also looked for changes in the participant's responses regarding positive or negative feelings about



themselves and others, as well as if these feelings would either make the students want to pursue more dance classes in the future, or if they would be hesitant to do so.

### *Instructor Observation*

As the instructor, the researcher directly interacted with all student participants. She also used the mirrors in the studio to monitor and observe as the students participated in all the salsa dance classes and looked for indicators of comfort level, ability to fully engage with everyone in the class as well as any positive or negative responses to the teaching method that was being implemented. Short excerpts of the classes were video recorded and were later observed by the instructor to look for more indicators that may have been missed during the live instruction. The researcher then typed notes based on each observation.

### **Data Analysis and Procedures**

The data collected in this study was analyzed in its majority using a qualitative method. The surveys and interview question responses were analyzed compared for changes and differences between the two groups. The researcher intended to identify if any changes had taken place over the duration of the class and examined how the answers to the questions differed or shared similarities between the experimental group and the control group. Seeking answers to questions such as: Did the experimental group feel more valued and appreciated, did they plan to continue taking salsa dance lessons? Did the control group feel less valued? Did they feel discouraged from continuing salsa dance lessons? Additional demographic data was collected from the pre and post-survey to analyze using a quantitative method, which can be found in the discussion chapter.

All the data collected for the study including pre and post surveys, interview questions, observation notes, and video recordings were stored at the home of the researcher in a password-

protected external drive. In addition, to protect the identity of the participants, the researcher assigned numbers to refer to each participant. The researcher conducted the entire study, including teaching the course. Therefore no one else had access to the information.

### **Summary**

At the culmination of the study, the researcher looked for indicators in students' pre and post survey responses that helped identify overall positive or negative feelings in response to a traditional teaching format as opposed to a format that placed additional emphasis on compassion and considerate teaching approaches.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if treating students with dignity and respect in the salsa dance classroom, regardless of their talent, fosters healthy self-esteem and promotes compassion. This research sought to gain insight in ways that intentional teaching practices with an emphasis on dignity and respect attribute to self-esteem and compassion in the salsa dance classroom. This qualitative and descriptive study concentrated on one main impact: student outcomes, based on the responses collected from the participants. The results of those responses are discussed in this chapter.

#### **Analysis of Students' Responses to Surveys**

There were two groups included in this research: a control group and an experimental group. Each group had ten participants making a total of twenty for the study. All twenty participants completed the consent form and all twenty participated throughout the entire study. The demographics of the participants were: eighty percent Hispanic, ten percent White, and ten percent Black. There was a total of seven male participants and thirteen female participants.

#### *Pre-Survey Responses*

The students' pre-surveys consisted of questions designed to gain insight on how the participants felt before taking the course, in regard to excitement, self-confidence, and how much salsa dance they were currently familiar with. The following individual figures will show answers from the top five questions pertaining to these indicators for both the control and the

experimental groups. Each figure will represent one question with the level of agreement to disagreement range.

It is apparent from the participants' responses to question one that they were all very excited to take this course. Fifteen of them strongly agreed to being excited, and five just excited overall. It was expected that a majority would feel excited as they had voluntarily chosen to participate in the experiment. However, confirming this information gave the researcher a preview of how they were feeling prior to starting, and she was interested in knowing how they would feel afterwards. Of course, how they felt afterwards would highly depend on how they felt during the four weeks in the learning environment.

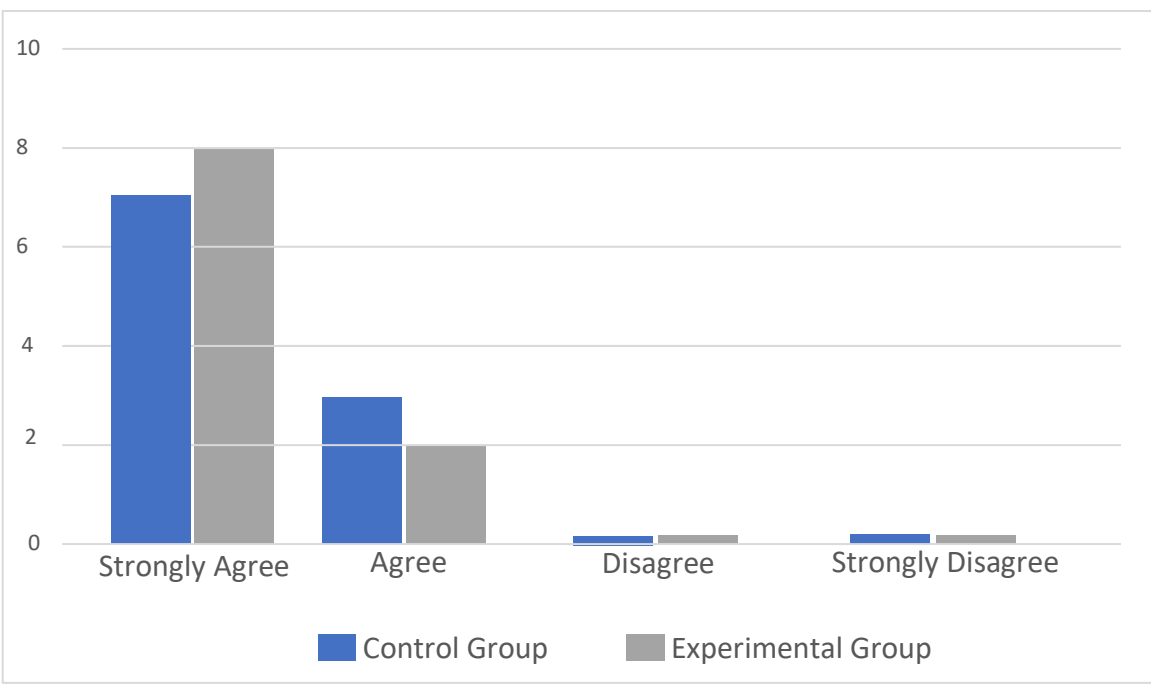


Fig 1. Pre-Survey – Responses to Question One: Are you excited to take this course?

The second question in the survey asked the participants if they anticipated learning fast. The results of this question provided information pertaining to the learning confidence level and self-placement of the participants. Responses to this question can be seen the figure 2 below.

In response to their self-identified confidence in ability to learn fast only three participants seemed to believe that they would learn the material fast. Eight participants strongly disagreed they would learn fast, and nine just disagreed making a total of thirteen responses indicating that they did not believe they would learn fast, or, in other words, they identified themselves as slow learners. The information gained from this question was useful for the researcher to better anticipate reactions of frustration during the study, particularly from those in the control group who would receive a traditional teaching format. It was also interesting to notice that out of the twenty participants not one of them felt strongly about their ability to learn fast, there were three that only agreed to that question.

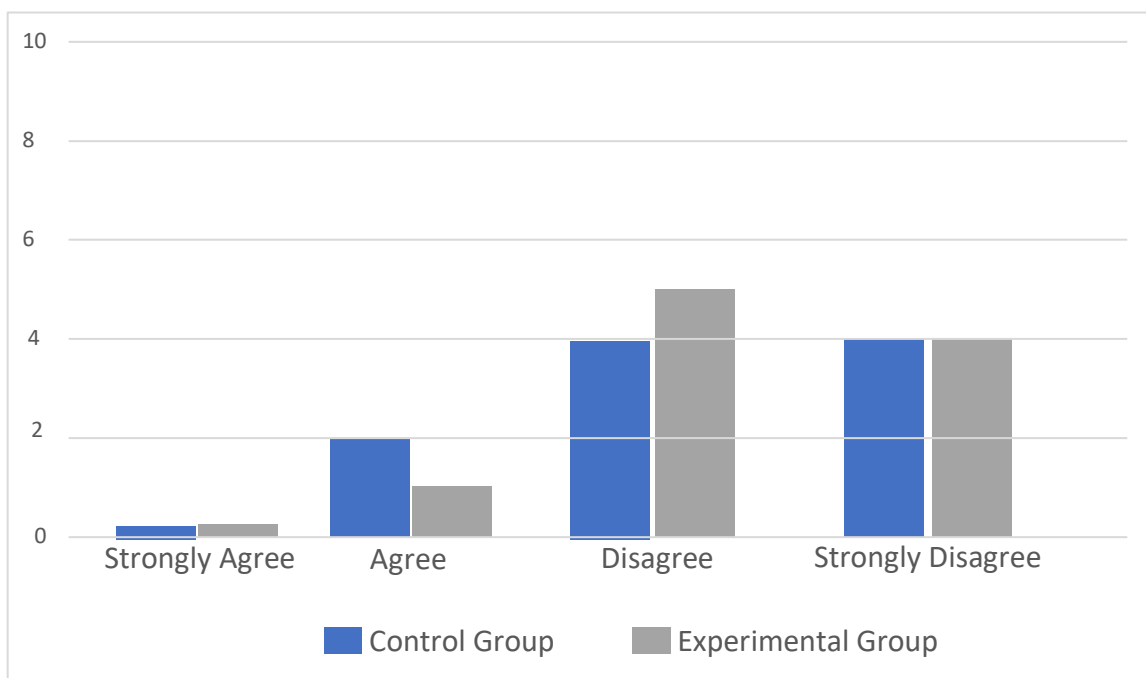


Fig. 2. Pre-Survey – Responses to Question Two: Do you expect to learn fast?

The third question that the researcher considered prior to starting was if the participants thought they would feel nervous taking the course. It is important to keep in mind that the study invited individuals learning the very basics of salsa dance, therefore the majority were beginners and had never taken a salsa class before.

In response to question three, which asked: Will dancing make you nervous? The majority of the participants either believed, by just agreeing, or were convinced by strongly agreeing, that dancing would make them nervous. This was another important consideration for the researcher to keep in mind about those students that would most likely get frustrated during the learning process. Seventeen out of the twenty students anticipated dancing would make them nervous; however, there were three that disagreed with this question.

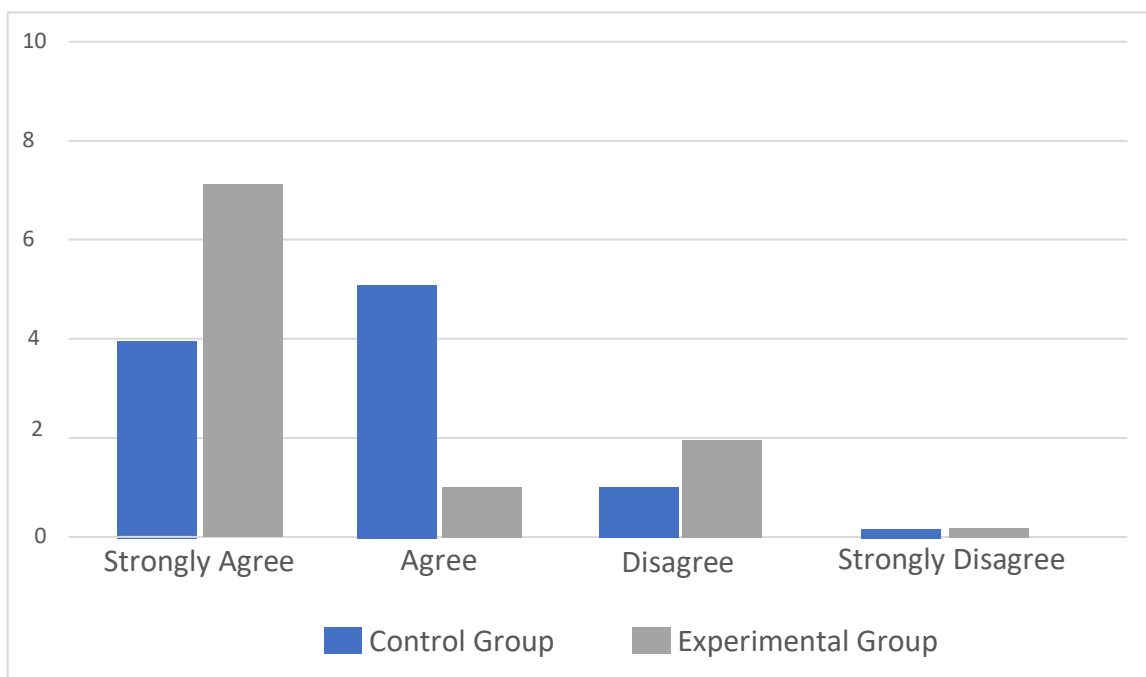


Fig. 3. Pre-Survey – Responses to Question Three: Will dancing make you nervous?

The researcher also wanted to track student progress, therefore she wanted to know the students' current knowledge of salsa dance moves. The fourth question asked if they knew enough moves to dance a full salsa song. Figure 4 shows the response to this question. Based on all responses, not one of the twenty participants knew even a few, or enough, moves to dance a full salsa dance song at a social gathering. This was a good starting point because the researcher would be able to find out through the post survey later on if they felt they had learned at least some steps or enough to dance a full salsa dance song which typically ranges anywhere from four to six minutes. From the control group, seven students strongly disagreed, and three agreed, whereas all ten students from the experimental group strongly disagreed to knowing enough salsa moves to dance a full salsa song.

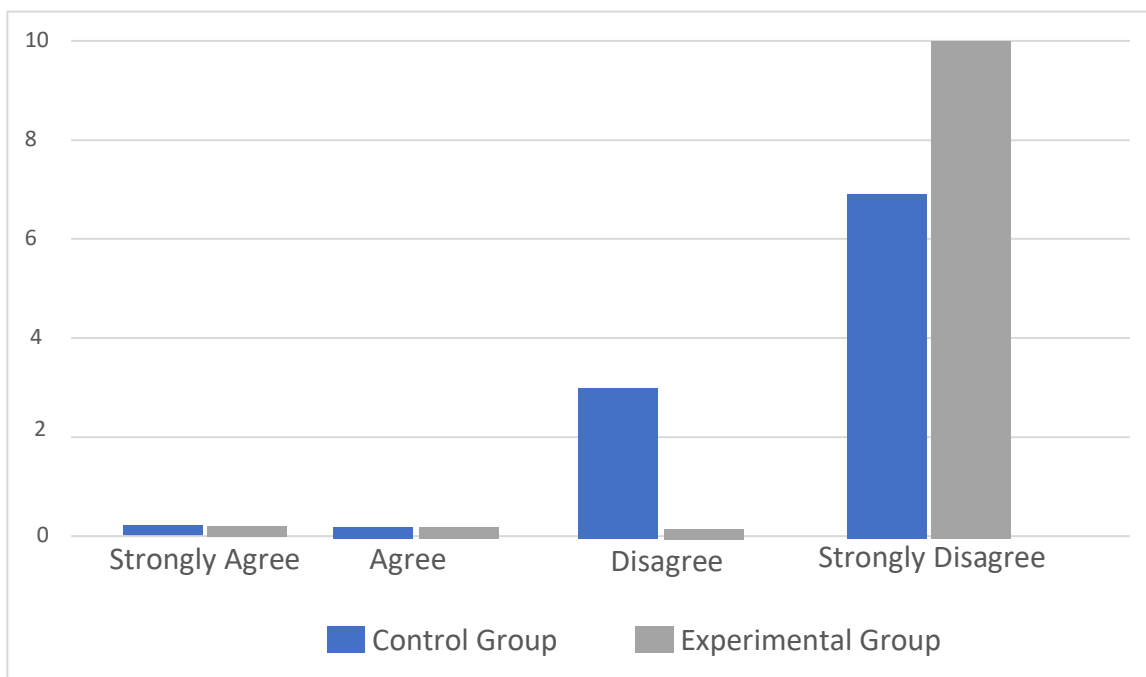


Fig. 4. Pre-Survey – Responses to Question Four: Do you know enough moves to dance a full salsa song?

The last pre-survey question asked: Do you feel confident dancing when other people are watching? The response to this question is shown in figure 5. Seventeen of the participants said they did not feel confident dancing when other people were watching them. This may be a result of being shy, not feeling that they knew what they were doing when dancing, or simply feeling embarrassed by the fact of being observed. The other three stated that dancing in front of others was not a problem, as two from the control group and one from the experimental group agreed to feeling confident about dancing when other people watched them. This concludes the analysis of the top five questions the researcher considered were of most value to this study.

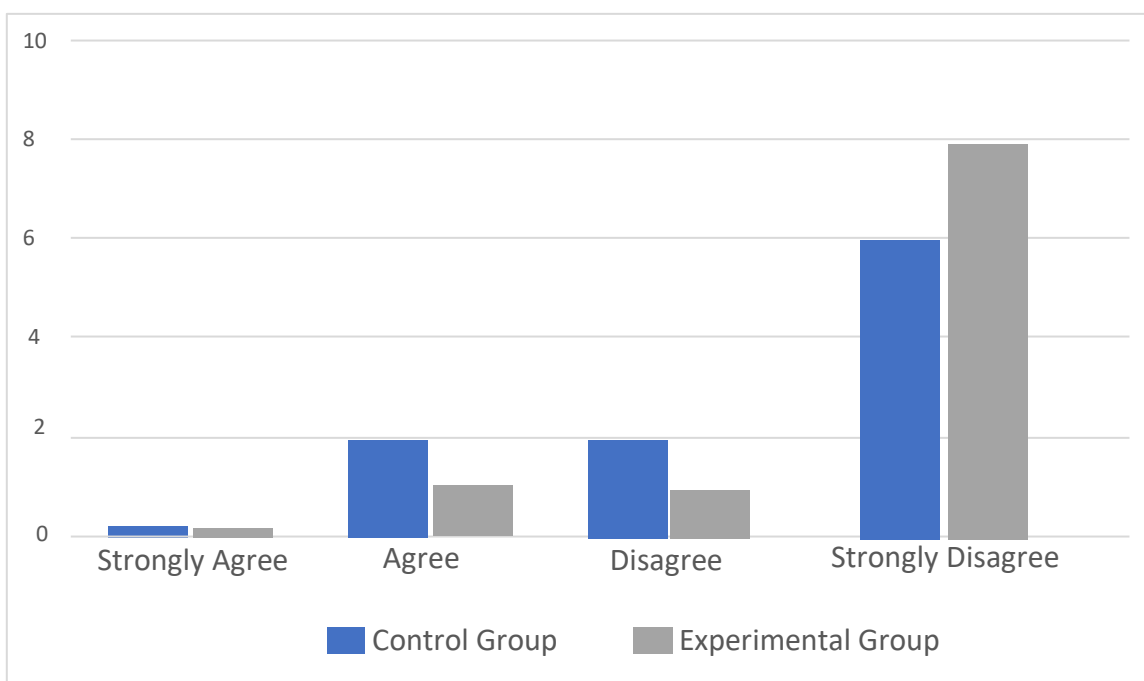


Fig. 5. Pre-Survey – Responses to Question Five: Do you feel confident dancing when other people are watching you?

### *Post-Survey Responses*

The students' post-surveys consisted of the same questions asked in the pre-survey but asked in the past tense. These questions now aimed to gain insight on how the participants felt after taking the course, regarding excitement, self-confidence, and how much salsa dance they



felt they had learned. Fifteen participants said they felt excited after the course ended, and five said they did not feel excited. Compared to the pre-survey where all twenty felt excited, now, after the course, the excitement changed for five of them. Also, it is important to note that all ten students from the experimental group felt excited after the course ended, and the five that did not feel excited were from the control group.

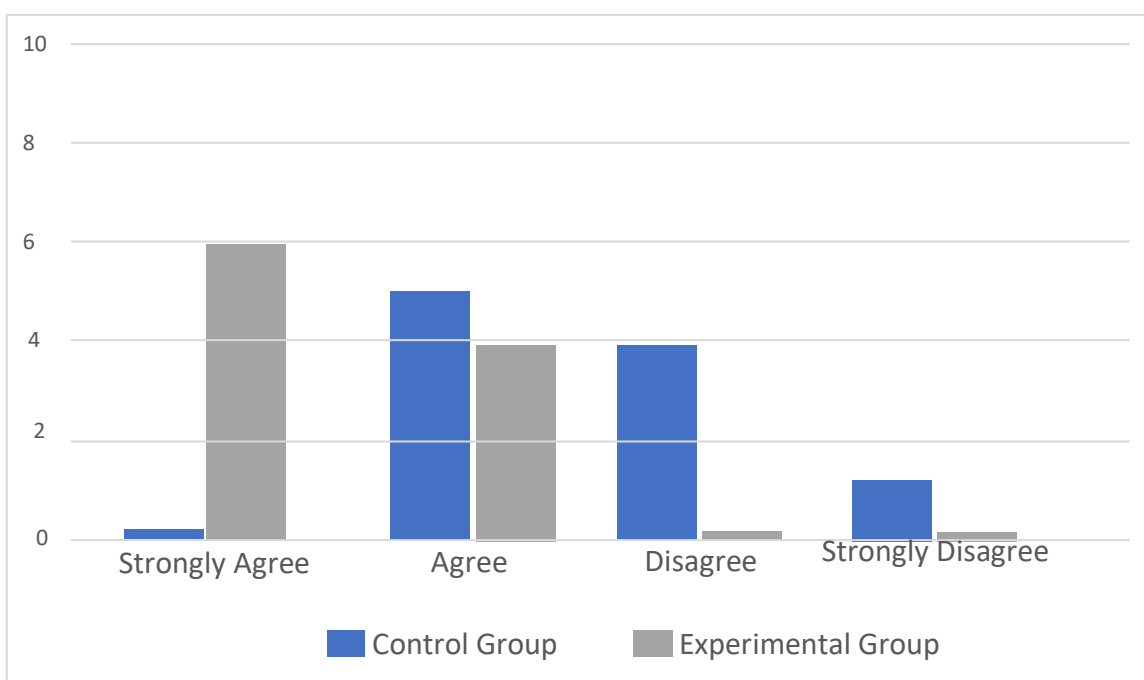


Fig. 6. Post-Survey – Responses to Question One: How excited did you feel after taking the course?

The second question in the post-survey was, did you learn as fast as you expected? The response is shown in Figure 7. Eleven students felt that they learned fast, and nine felt that they did not learn fast. Comparing these results to the pre-survey, only three students thought they would learn fast. It is noteworthy that only one person from the experimental group felt they would learn fast, and after the course ended eight felt they had learned fast. The opposite result

occurred in the control group, eight of the participants felt that they did not learn fast during the course of the study.

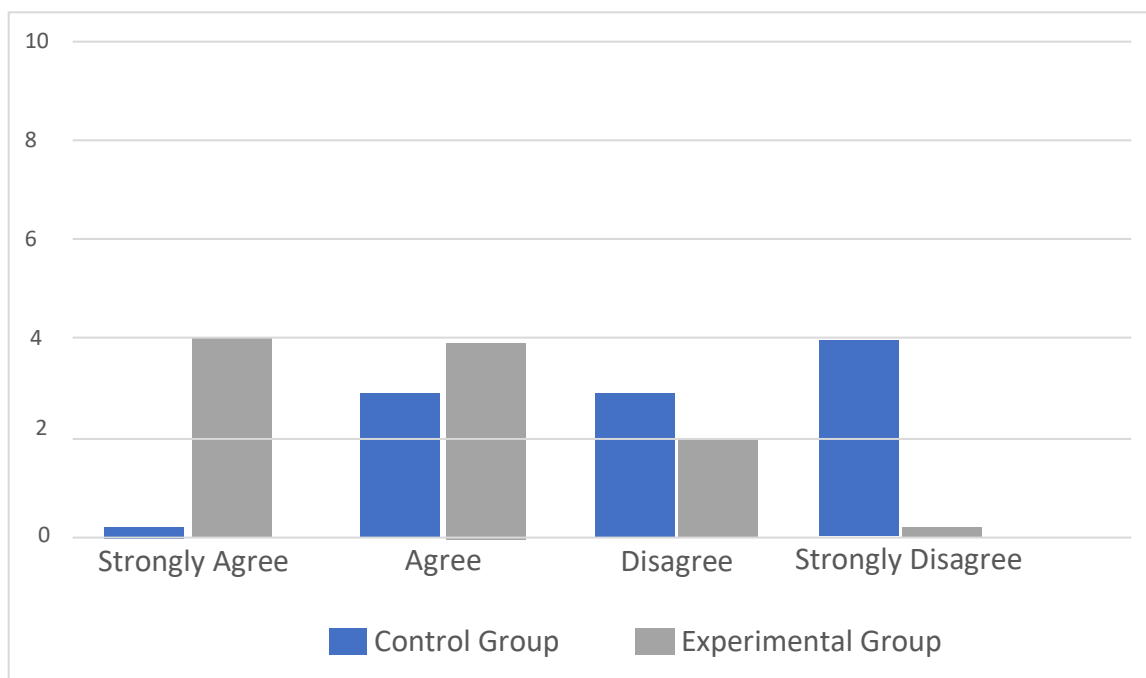


Fig. 7. Post-Survey – Responses to Question Two: Did you learn as fast as you expected?

The third question asked the participants if they had actually felt nervous during the classes. Following, in Figure 8, is their response. Seventeen participants had expressed in the pre-survey that they thought dancing would make them nervous, and three did not think so. The results to this post question show that once in the class most of them did not feel nervous; sixteen disagreed to feeling nervous as they engaged in the classes. Once again, a pattern can be observed here with the experimental group, in which eight had anticipated getting nervous, but in the post-survey, nine of the same group said they did not feel nervous during the process. The control group had nine participants state that they did not anticipate getting nervous during class, but seven participants admitted to feeling nervous in class.

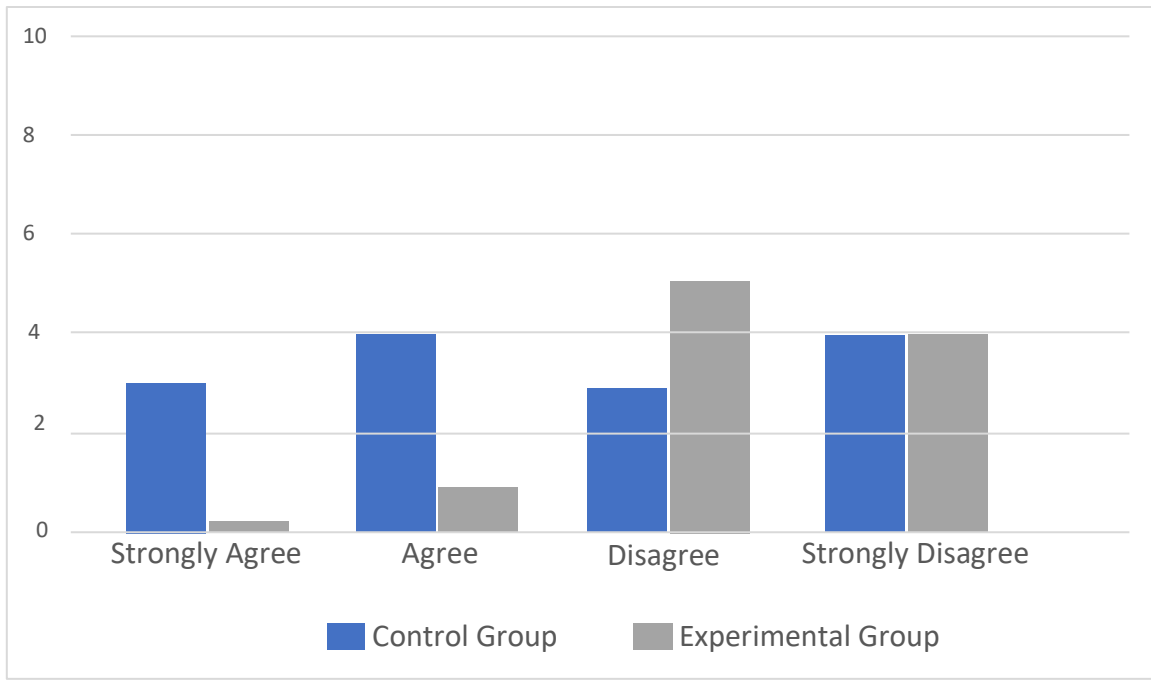


Fig. 8. Post-Survey – Responses to Question Three: Did dancing make you nervous?

The fourth question in the post-survey asked, do you feel you learned enough moves to dance a full salsa song? The response to this question would help the researcher track the progress that students thought they had made over the course of the four weeks. Figure 9 shows the response to this question.

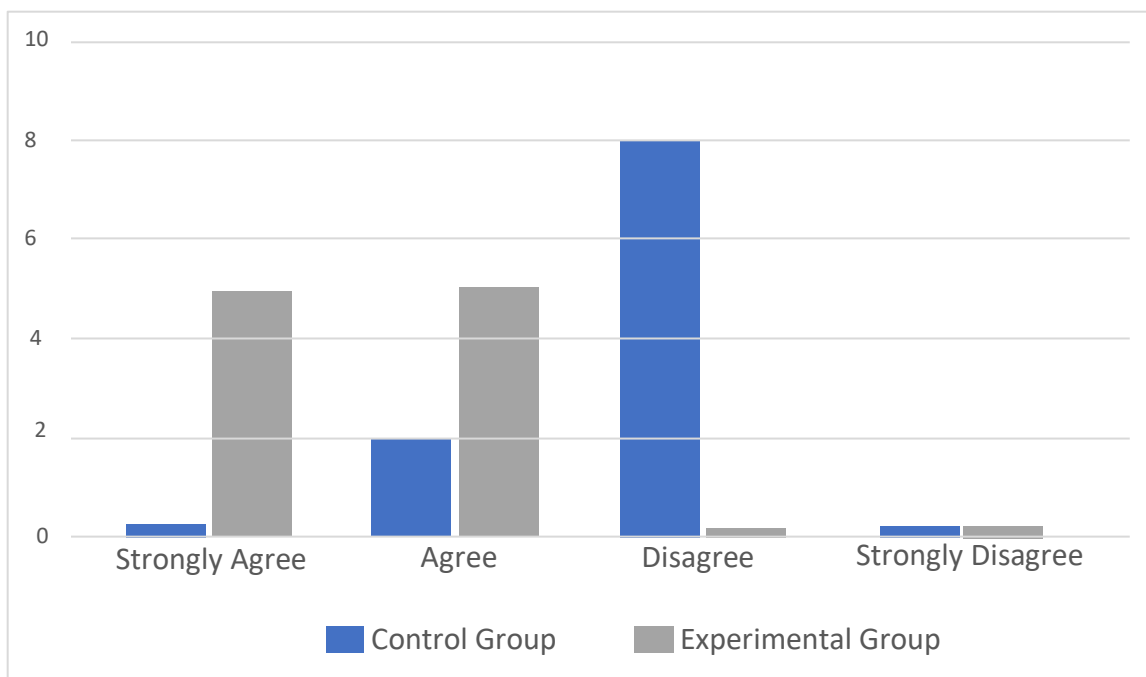


Fig. 9. Post-Survey – Responses to Question Four: Did you learn enough moves to dance to a full salsa song?

The last question in the post-survey asked, do you feel confident enough to dance in front of people to show them what you learned in this class? Figure 10 displays the results to this question. The pre-survey data showed that all twenty students started the course not knowing enough moves to dance to a full salsa dance song. This was expected because all participants had never danced before or had experience in other genres but never danced salsa, which made everyone in the study truly a beginner salsa dancer.

The data in this post-survey question now showed that all ten participants from the experimental group felt that they had learned enough moves to dance a full salsa song, whereas

only two from the control group felt the same way and the remaining eight said they did not learn as much as the participants from the experimental group.

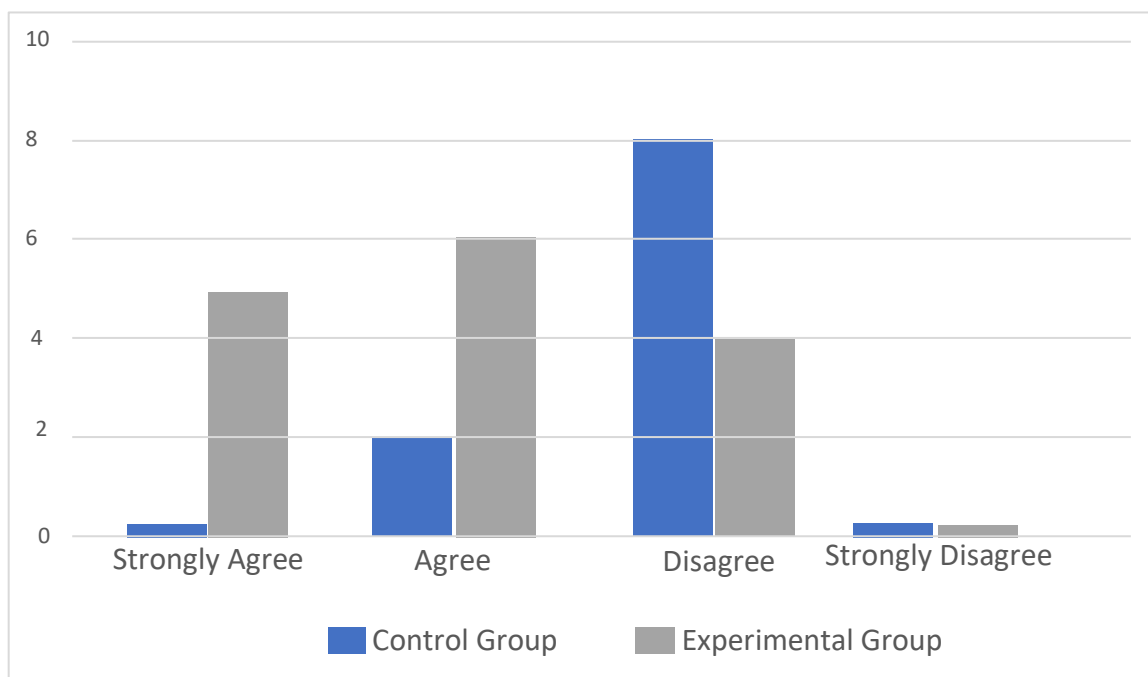


Fig. 10. Post-Survey – Responses to Question Five: Do you feel confident enough to dance in front of people to show them what you learned in this class?

In the pre-survey, seventeen of the participants had expressed that they did not feel confident enough dancing in front of others or if other people were intentionally watching them perform dance moves. The post-survey data shows an extreme improvement in this area for the experimental group as all ten responded favorably admitting that they would feel confident dancing in front others to show them what they had learned in the dance class. That means that the nine that previously did not have that confidence had gained enough confidence to perform this task. Eight students from the control group continued to feel the same way before and after the course meaning they had not gained enough confidence to dance in front of others.

Comparing the pre and post survey responses of both groups revealed the differences in how the participants felt about the delivery of the dance course. For instance, a majority of

students in the control group, who were taught using a more traditional teaching model, did not seem to make improvement in terms of feeling they had learned enough and gained confidence dancing in front of other people. Based on both survey responses from the control group, it was also revealed that they did not seem as excited after the course as they were prior to beginning the four-week salsa course. For example, all ten participants in the control group felt excited prior to beginning the course, but this feeling changed to not being excited for half of those participants. This data gives insight into the ways in which the lesson delivery and treatment of participants impacted their learning outcome.

The opposite can be said about the experimental group, according to the pre and post survey responses, it was observed that the majority of this group not only made progress in the process but also changed some of the perspectives about themselves by the end of the course. The experimental group was taught with extra considerations, which involved a slower pace when teaching, giving them time to have their questions addressed, and offering after class help when needed. In addition, a more compassionate and considerate tone was used with this group as opposed to the control group, which was more a direct, fast-paced learning environment.

### **Analysis of Students' Interview Responses**

All participants of this study were also interviewed separately via zoom call approximately two weeks after the course ended. This allowed for time between the interview and the four-week class to give participants a chance to reflect on their experience. Just as in the pre and post survey questions, the interview questions were designed to gain a more personal response from the participants after having time to think about how they would summarize their experience in this study. The researcher looked for specific key indicators in the interviews, such as the student's level of comfort during the course, willingness to continue taking dance lessons

in the future, and any potential changes over time based on the participant's perception of this dance experience.

There was a total of seven interview questions, some of which were repeated and/or similar from the pre and post surveys. Conducting interviews allowed the researcher to collect more personalized answers and give the participants the opportunity to express themselves verbally.

The first question asked was what their opinion about dance was prior to taking the class, and if that opinion had changed as a result of taking the class. For the most part, in both groups, students had felt that dance was fun but too hard to learn; they said it consumed too much time, and they thought it was mainly for those that already had some type of rhythm. After taking the class most students from the control group said they had become convinced dance was hard and others said it was frustrating. Participant number three said in his response, "before taking this class I thought dance was easy and fun to do, after taking this class I still think is fun but I don't think is as easy as I thought." Participant number one said, "I believe I need to invest a lot more time to get better results." The experimental group responded with positive feelings after the course. Participant number fourteen who had said that she thought dance was better suited for younger people explained, "I was wrong, I learned that anyone at any age can learn if they have a good teacher." Participant number seventeen, who shared that his wife always told him he had no rhythm, and therefore he would really struggle a lot, said, "After taking this class I found out that it is not about having rhythm or not, it is about how much interest your teacher has in your learning."

The second question asked them to share what they thought about the instructor's teaching techniques. One common denominator that most responses from the control group had

was that the instructor moved too fast and that perhaps she was better suited to teach advanced level students and not beginners. Participant number eight shared the following, “she needs to slow down and consider some people who have never set foot in a dance studio,” and participant number ten said, “she is amazing, but again I am not a gifted person in the area of dance so even if she kept trying I would keep failing.” Most students from this group, nine to be more specific, also shared very similar sentiments. The resounding responses from the experimental group were that the instructor had a genuine interest in their learning. Participant number sixteen enthusiastically said,

She is very strategic about how she introduces the basics, which to me was the most important factor in coming back. She dedicated a specific period of time in the first class to drill the first basic step to make sure we had it perfect. I would say the group pretty much perfected that step in the very first class. She then explained that knowing this basic would make it so much easier to keep adding more, and of course I wanted to learn more so I went back to all the classes.

Participant number nineteen also shared a positive outcome by saying, “the teacher was recommended by a friend, and she was pretty good at explaining the class and made everyone feel included and welcomed.”

The third question was more personal and asked the students what they had discovered about themselves and their learning style after taking this course with this specific instructor. As expected by the researcher, the majority of the control group participants felt that they needed more one-on-one attention or individualized time to better learn. They felt challenged and at times indicated that they were slow learners or that dance was simply not for them. From one participant’s response, it can be concluded that she was self-doubting and leaning towards low



confidence by saying, “I discovered my friends were right when they said I have 2 left feet, it is so hard to coordinate my feet that I got lost pretty often in class, and I think I made a fool out of myself.” Participant number two expressed, “that I get impatient when I don’t understand the moves and that I definitely need a lot of review to learn something as complicated as dance.” In contrast the experimental group, expressed positive outcomes by saying that they discovered they needed to believe in themselves more and not give up when they encountered obstacles.

Participant fifteen indicated the following:

The teacher said that if we can walk we can dance and is so true. When she explained the basic step, I realized that it was the shift of the weight and some hip movement that made the step look so graceful. In other words, I learned that I do have the capability to learn with the right guidance.

Adding to this optimistic comment participant twenty noted, “I discovered, that people like me think because being shy we cannot ever do activities like these, can for sure have a lot of fun and find a nice hobby to do.” These responses demonstrated that students’ self-esteem was being positively impacted by this dance experience.

The fourth question asked how they felt on the way to each class. By asking this question again, since it was also in the post survey, the researcher wanted to reinforce the answers and provide reliability. The data continued to show a pattern of negativity for the control group and positivity for the experimental group. Answers to this question from the control group can be summarized in the words of two participants, as participant two said, “I felt good at the beginning, but then I started to feel disappointed at myself as I continued to fail at learning,” and participant four shared, “I felt interested at first but then I felt I was not going to learn much, so I felt discouraged.” The contrary was true for the experimental group, as a majority expressed

wanting to show up to each class and being eager to learn. Participant eleven said, “For the very first class I was nervous and did not want to be the only male in the class, but luckily there were a few other men. At the end of the first class I felt more relaxed and hopeful than when I came in.” Participant twelve stated, “I felt happy because I was connecting with my husband and we both had a big smile on our face, we were looking forward to dancing together and with the rest of the group.”

The fifth question in the interview asked if there was anything specific that triggered certain emotions during the times they were taking each of the four classes. This was a crucial question, as the responses would manifest the teaching style used with each particular group. It is evident that this approach had a direct positive or negative impact on their learning and their feelings about dance. Feelings of frustration were evident in responses such as the one from participant six, who admitted, “I felt sad that there were moves I simply could not do and I wish I would have had more time with the instructor to learn them right, this made me feel incompetent.” Comparable to this was the response from participant two who revealed, “I felt overwhelmed with information that I could not retain.” On the other hand, responses from the experimental group continued to express that their experience was quite different. Participant eighteen, who had shared in one of the questions that she used to dance as child, but had lost interest in dance in general as she grew older, with a big smile on her face, commented about this question:

The instructor said something that resonated with me, she said that if ‘we were all dancing no one would be sad and the world would be a better place.’ I often find myself sad, bored and depressed but being in the classes made me forget about all of that and made me want to dance again to forget my troubles.

Participant fifteen's response complimented this answer by saying, "the teacher made me feel good after the second class by telling me that I was making progress and that I was looking good. She also used me in one class to demonstrate a move that I was doing right, and that made me feel appreciated for my effort."

The sixth question was very direct and asked if they would recommend others to take this class and why or why not? From the control group four participants said they would not recommend this class, one was undecided, and the other five that said they would recommend it depending on the circumstances. For instance, one participant said, "I would recommend to anyone who is a fast learner and is ready to take on a tough challenge." Another response stated that he would recommend taking salsa dance classes but "with a teacher that worked with more beginner students." Surprisingly, from the experimental group all ten participants said that they would recommend others take this course. Responses varied, and participant sixteen confidently said, "Yes I would recommend it to others because the instructor will make you feel like you are the best dancer, and that will motivate you to learn more and believe more in yourself, in turn you will help others learn and also make them feel the same way." Another participant also happily shared, "Yes, anyone that suffers from depression can benefit from dancing any type of dance, but specifically salsa dancing I found even more fun because of the upbeat music and the way the instructor made everyone feel was just awesome." Some of the key words that stood out from these responses were: "absolutely, without a doubt, and of course." These words made it clear that this group had experienced a satisfying experience and therefore wanted others to experience the same.

The seventh and final question, asked the participants how they felt the instructor had treated the students throughout the course and asked them to provide examples they may recall

from the experience. The response that best describes how the control group felt can be summarized in participant one's response, where, without hesitation, he said, "It was clear that the instructor wanted to teach the students what she had in mind; however, I feel that she was moving on too fast and did not review as much for us to actually learn the steps and feel comfortable. At some point I even felt embarrassed asking to explain something." Participant three said, "Instructor covered everything she said she was going to teach us but not everyone was able to successfully learn all of it and feel good about it at least I know I did not." Others expressed that even though the instructor was nice, she was very direct and went to the point. The experimental group also had a lot to say about this final question. The participant who had taken dance lessons when she was younger brought to light what the researcher had been eager to learn about through this study, saying,

I recall the studios where I took my tap dance lessons when I was a kid, and the dance teachers there were mean, they would often scream at the class and honestly it was one of the reasons I did not want to continue dancing, I thought most studios were the same. With this instructor I felt more at peace and relaxed with my learning, my experience here was nothing compared to the one I had growing up, I am happy to have been a part of this experiment as it made me want to dance again.

Talking about feeling supported participant sixteen expressed,

My drive was about an hour to the studio and another hour on the way back. The instructor asked me if I wanted to take some water and snacks on my way back home since it was a little late at night and I had a long drive. Because it was getting late, she also told me that she would send me a video of what we had learned in class via text

message in case I needed to review before the following class. I felt that she genuinely cared for each student's progress in the class.

Last but not least, a very similar response was this of participant twenty, saying,

This instructor made sure all of us felt like we belonged, she made the environment welcoming and supportive. I even exchanged phone numbers with the person I partnered up during the first 2 classes, we wanted to practice what learned but unfortunately because of the pandemic we were not able to meet after all, but I think overall this was a nice experience I would totally do it all over again.

### **Summary**

It is normal for students to experience feelings of frustration and discontentment when they do not connect with their instructors on a personal level. Connecting with someone on a personal level includes factors such as feeling cared for, talked to with compassion and especially being treated with the dignity each individual deserves. An instructor that cares to treat students with dignity and respect will take into account students' feelings, capabilities, and limitations in order to provide the best supportive learning environment. Overall, the data collected from research instruments helped gain evidence of outcomes in students when they were taught in a traditional format compared to a non-traditional format with the accommodations focused on meaningful and intentional teaching methods. The control group continued to answer negatively about their experience in this dance course whereas the experimental group seemed to agree that incorporating teaching approaches that involve dignity and respect in the salsa dance classroom, regardless of their talent, fosters healthy self-esteem and promotes compassion.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if treating students with dignity and respect in the salsa dance classroom, regardless of their talent, fosters healthy self-esteem and promotes compassion. This research took place in a privately owned dance studio in Aurora, CO and included twenty voluntary participants that signed consent forms, as well as the instructor who was also the researcher. The objective of this research was to gain evidence of outcomes in students when they were taught in a traditional dance education format compared to a non-traditional format with the accommodations focused on meaningful and intentional teaching methods. The guiding research question of this study was:

Q1 In what ways do intentional teaching practices with an emphasis on dignity and respect attribute to self-esteem and compassion in the salsa dance classroom?

This chapter discusses the implications and limitations of the study as well as recommendations for further research.

#### **Implications of the Study**

Based on the outcome of this study, it seems that teaching a salsa dance class with the intentional focused method and accommodations which included teaching at a slower pace, giving student's time to have their questions addressed, and offering after class help when needed does have a positive impact in student learning outcomes and the way it makes them feel about themselves and other people around them. In addition, this teaching format implemented a

more compassionate and considerate tone which also contributed to a positive effect on the student participant learning experiences.

During this study, participants were placed in a group based on their preferred class time, which gave the opportunity to be placed without bias. Group one became the control group, and group two the experimental group. The participants from group one were dismissed at the scheduled end time, therefore they did not have the opportunity to meet and share their experiences with any of the participants of group two which had a later start time. The experimental group was encouraged to stay after class ended to ask questions, review learned material in the class, and record themselves dancing if they wanted to. All participants in the experimental group stayed after their scheduled class time and also had the opportunity to connect, on a personal level, to the instructor as well as the other participants. This happened in the first two classes which were conducted in the dance studio. As previously mentioned, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on social distancing restrictions, two of the four scheduled weeks were conducted via zoom video conferences. Although it was a different delivery method due to the circumstances, the instruction was live and remained the same as originally planned, the control group was also dismissed at the scheduled end time and the experimental group was invited to stay in the zoom conference just as they had been invited to do in the in person learning environment in the dance studio during the first two classes.

At the beginning of the study, all participants expressed feelings of excitement towards the course; however, at the culmination of the study four participants from the control group had lost that excitement as opposed to all ten participants in the experimental group who expressed that they continued to feel excited after the course due to their individual perception and experience during the class. Responses to post survey questions which were discussed in more

detail in the previous chapter indicated that the experimental group participants had encountered a more positive experience than did those of the control group. More evidence in support of the outcomes from the study can be observed through the response to the interview questions which asked participants if they would recommend the same course to other people. All ten participants from the experimental group said they would recommend the course, and shared that it was because they had such a wonderful experience and they thought anyone would highly benefit from the course. One even mentioned that it would be good for anyone with depression. Only two participants from the control group said they would recommend others to take this course but specified that it would have to be to people that had the ability to learn fast or had patience to learn.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were a few limitations associated with this study. The first limitation was that the researcher was also the instructor leading the four week course. All the research instrument questions were created by the researcher who was also the instructor. The researcher attempted to create questions without bias; however, the research instruments were not validated.

Another limitation was the short duration of the study. The number of participants for each group was ten which may have been a limited sample size. Another limitation was the Covid-19 pandemic which placed social distancing restriction therefore limiting the in person interaction time with the participants.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

According to this study, it is apparent that treating students with dignity and respect in the salsa dance classroom, a concept that incorporates accommodations focused on meaningful and



intentional teaching methods, does have a positive impact which in turn fosters healthy self-esteem and helps promote compassion.

The researcher is compelled to conduct additional research in the future with a higher number of participants and for a longer period of time. The public education sector, such as a high school, might be a productive location to further expand this research.

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APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DOCUMENTS



*Institutional Review Board*

DATE: January 31, 2020

TO: Diana Sanchez  
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1511397-2] Dignity and Respect in the Salsa Dance Classroom: Fostering healthy self-esteem to promote compassion

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: January 31, 2020

EXPIRATION DATE: January 31, 2024

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

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

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.



CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Dignity and Respect in the Dance Classroom: Fostering healthy self-esteem to promote compassion  
 Researcher: Diana Sanchez  
 Phone: 909-235-2218 E-mail: sanc4400@bears.unco.edu  
 Researcher Advisor: Christy O'Connell-Black  
 Phone: 970-351-4133 E-mail: christy.oconnellblack@unco.edu

**Purpose and Description:** Several studies support the theory that dancing is good for the brain, aids improve academic achievement, and helps increase self esteem. However, in light of discovering that many people have felt discouraged from taking dance classes due to having negative experiences with instructors based on how they were treated on a personal and professional level, this research will ask: In what ways do intentional teaching practices with an emphasis in dignity and respect attribute to self esteem and compassion in a dance classroom. This research intends to prove that treating students with dignity and respect in a dance class setting regardless of their talent will foster a healthy self-esteem and will promote compassion.

A free four week course that will meet once a week will be offered to learn the basic steps of salsa dancing. You are being invited to join this course at no monetary cost to you. The course will consist of four classes which will meet once per week for four consecutive weeks. Each class will be one and a half hour in length. A syllabus of what you will be learning will be provided prior to starting the course. You will be able to record the material after each class for individual use should you want to or need to review the steps on your own prior to the following class. You will follow a set of stretches for about fifteen minutes prior to learning dance moves to warm up the body. You will be on your feet and physically moving the majority of class time. Comfortable workout clothes are highly recommended.

At the end of this research, I would be happy to share my findings about the topic with you at your request. The data collected will consist of pre and post surveys, interview questions after the course, and some video recordings of class time. The pre and post surveys will ask your level of comfort and confidence prior to taking the course, and after. In the interview questions you will be asked to express your overall opinion and feelings about your experience during the course. The videos will be for my personal observation notes, to draw conclusions on how students reacted to teaching method used. Rest assured 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 I report data, your name will not be used. Data collected and analyzed for this study will be kept electronically in a password protected external drive, which is only accessible by the researcher.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initials





APPENDIX B  
RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

#	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Pre Survey Questions</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree</p>
1	How excited are you to take this class?
2	Do you think you will learn fast or slow?
3	Has anyone ever said “you have two left feet?” basically implying that you cannot dance.
4	Do you think dance will make you nervous or relaxed?
5	In a class setting, do you get impatient when other people around you learn slow?
6	Do you feel a sense of accomplishment when you do things right?
7	Do negative interactions with others bring your self-esteem down?
8	Do you feel comfortable social dancing at gatherings/parties?
9	Do you know enough moves to dance a full salsa song?
10	Do you feel confident dancing when other people are watching you?

#	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Post Survey Questions</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree</p>
1	How excited did you feel after taking this class?
2	Did you learn the material fast?
3	Did you learn as much as you expected to learn?
4	Did you feel nervous during the classes?
5	Did you feel confident during class time?
6	Do you feel a sense of accomplishment after taking the class?
7	Would you take another four week class again?
8	Do you feel you learned new moves to dance at a gathering?
9	Do you feel confident enough to dance in front of people to show them what you learned in the class?
10	Do you feel the teaching method used accommodated your needs?

#	<b>Interview Questions</b>
1	What was your opinion about dance prior to taking the class and did any of that change as a result of taking it?
2	What did you learn about the instructor and her teaching techniques?
3	In terms of understanding how you best learn, what did you discover about yourself and your learning style after taking this course with the instructor?
4	How do you feel on the way to each class?
5	Was there anything specific that triggered certain emotions?
6	Would you recommend others to take this class why or why not?
7	Overall, how do you feel this instructor treated the students? Please provide examples you may recall.

APPENDIX C  
COURSE SYLLABUS

<b>Week</b>	<b>Content</b>
1	Basic step, Regular and crossed side to side step, right turn. Partner Up and put the steps together with a partner. (right turn for both lead/follow) closed position, open position
2	Review week 1 – add left turn and Susi-Q to open style. In partners add CBL, open break with follow right turn, CBL with follow's turn. (CBL-cross body lead)
3	Review weeks 1-2 -add shoulder catch cumbia step, the cape step and practice everything.
4	Review weeks 1-3 – add around the world, copa step, wrap step and practice everything.