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WHITNEY HASLAM WARNER

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

A NEW CURRICULUM: SUPPORTING SOCIAL  
EMOTIONAL LEARNING USING  
MINDFULNESS MOTIVATED  
CHOREOGRAPHY IN  
HIGH SCHOOL

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

Whitney Haslam Warner

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

December 2021

This Thesis by: Whitney Haslam Warner

Entitled: *A New Curriculum: Supporting Social Emotional Learning Using Mindfulness Motivated Choreography in High School*

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

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## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways in which a mindfulness-based curriculum would inform and effect creative, choreographic, and performance processes, as well as the effectiveness of serving as a social-emotional learning teaching tool in a high school dance classroom. Based on the results of this study, findings showed that implementing a mindfulness-based curriculum, alongside connecting movement explorations, created an increase in the depth and breadth of student-created movement. Through this study, 37 student participants practiced mindfulness alongside correlating movement explorations to create movement for a culminating dance concert. Participants reported an increased sense of calm, focus, self-awareness, mind-body connection, and connection to the movement. These results suggest that the implementation of a mindfulness-based curriculum, in connection with movement, could simultaneously, and effectively, serve as a social-emotional learning teaching tool in a dance education setting.

Limitations to this research study were unique due to COVID-19 restrictions and schedule changes arising in response to the global pandemic. Other limitations included possible bias, as the researcher also served as the student participants' teacher. Restrictions to answering questions on the first questionnaire, which served as a research instrument, could also be considered a limitation to this research study.

Findings from this study suggested a positive correlation between the implementation of a mindfulness-based curriculum in terms of student creative and choreographic process, performance process, as well as social-emotional responses in and out of the dance classroom. Further research is suggested to limit biases and determine consistency of these findings across different curricula and populations. Integrating mindfulness as a core part of a dance education curriculum could be a key factor in broadening and deepening meaning behind student-created movement, while simultaneously educating the “whole” student through social-emotional learning practices.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Goal of Thesis**

If you are a teacher, you may realize that it could be beneficial to teach your students and encourage them to cultivate greater awareness of the body, of their thoughts, and of their emotions both in the classroom and at home. It can nurture greater emotional balance and intelligence in children, adolescents, and young adults. (Kabat-Zinn 118)

In addition to the existing academic structures, educators and school systems are beginning to openly implement curricula that teach moral and ethical standards under the umbrella of social-emotional learning. Social-emotional learning can be summarized as an educational learning environment that advances educational equity through authentic relationships and collaboration (*CASEL*). Social-emotional learning cultivates healthy identity development and emotion management, aids in achieving personal and collective goals, decision-making, supportive relationships, empowerment, and creativity through safe, healthy, and just communities (*CASEL*).

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Zen master and spiritual leader widely revered for pioneering teachings on mindfulness, describes a teacher's mission as "not just to transmit knowledge, but to form human beings, to construct a worthy, beautiful human race, in order to take care of our precious planet" (Hanh and Weare xvii). This is the driving force behind social-emotional learning implementation in the classroom: to educate and support the "whole" student.

Recognizing that 1 in 3 adolescents will meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder by the age of 18

(*Mindful Schools*), and that mental health issues are the primary cause of all non-fatal illnesses across the globe, the importance of increasing mental and emotional competence in schools through social-emotional learning has resulted in the emergence of mindfulness-based practices in the classroom. In order to stay relevant and valid in education, dance educators should utilize mindfulness ideals in their own dance classrooms, supporting and educating the whole student through utilization of mindfulness and creative movement practices (Hanh and Weare xxxv).

The goal of this study was to create and implement a mindfulness-based curriculum into dance education classes at the high school level. Beginning, intermediate, and advanced dancers were exposed to mindfulness ideals through meditation practices and mindfulness activities that coincided with movement explorations at each rehearsal. The results of these movement explorations formed the core of the choreography for a culminating dance concert based on an overall theme of mindfulness. Determining the effects of mindfulness on the whole student as a social-emotional learning tool was also a focus of this study. The following questions were used to guide the study and its accompanying research:

- Q1 In what ways do mindfulness practices inform and effect choreographic, performance, and creative processes?
- Q2 In what ways do mindfulness ideas translate into effective teaching tools in regard to social-emotional learning through dance movement?

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of mindfulness on choreographic, performance, and creative processes by implementing a mindfulness curriculum into beginning, intermediate, and advanced classes (referred to as Dance Company). The *Mindful Schools* and *Learning to Breathe* programs were major contributors in the creation of the mindfulness-based curriculum that was implemented into the dance classes participating in this study. The *Mindful Schools* program is geared toward elementary school classrooms, while the *Learning to Breathe*

curriculum aims to reach secondary classrooms. Adaptation and combination were used to decipher which components of each program would be included in the mindfulness-based program for the high school dance classes. These programs were also used as inspiration for the design of this curriculum, serving mostly as a platform to gain ideas regarding scope and sequencing.

Student choreographers, as well as dancers, were exposed to a mindfulness-based curriculum composed of mindfulness practices and related movement. Dance students were asked to compare and contrast their experiences with choreographic and creative processes, improvisation, and approaches to performance without the use of mindfulness practice for two weeks prior to this research study, and with the use of mindfulness practice after the eight-week research study concluded.

There are three dance classes at the involved high school: beginning, intermediate, and advanced. Each class was taught the same mindfulness-based curriculum, with the same corresponding movement explorations, despite the students' varying dance experience. Mindfulness practices included anchor focus (specifically breath, sound, thoughts, and emotions), mindful walking, mindful conversation, mindful eating, the 4-7-8 breathing method, body scan, loving-kindness practice, 5-4-3-2-1 sense practice, mantra meditation, intention-setting meditation, hand-tracing meditation, coloring meditation, and visualization. Mindfulness ideals, such as non-judgment, non-attachment, equanimity, heartfulness, self-reflection, self-awareness, interbeing, and presence also were focuses of discussion and catalysts for movement exploration.

These discussions and movement explorations were the springboard for each student participant's movement creation and choreography. These activities also provided insight for

students in terms of intention and performance for dance pieces choreographed by professional choreographers brought in from the community, outside the typical school setting.

It was anticipated that as a result of experiencing, practicing, and studying mindfulness, dance students would nourish individual creativity, cultivate collaboration, and gain the ability to effectively approach and experience stress in a healthy way. It was hypothesized that mindfulness on emotion, mind, and body would create positive effects among dance students academically, as well as personally. The researcher also estimated that regular mindfulness practice would positively impact choreographical creativity and performance ability, providing evidence that practicing mindfulness in connection with movement is an effective social-emotional learning teaching tool.

### **Significance of Study**

Use of mindfulness in education is on the rise in the United States as a form of social-emotional learning and teaching practices. Educators, administrators, school boards, and mental health professionals are discovering the benefits of implementing mindfulness components into educational practices in terms of student behavior, academic performance, and building school and classroom communities. In order to maintain the validity of dance education in public schools, it is crucial that dance educators implement the most relevant educational findings into their dance classrooms and curricula. As part of this study, the researcher hoped to inform current and future dance educators and administrators of the benefits of implementing mindfulness through movement in the dance classroom. The researcher also hoped to provide direction to dance educators on creating and integrating a mindfulness-based curriculum for the artistic and mental benefit of the student dancer into current dance practices.

As an educator and dance educator, it was clear to the researcher that students experience increasing stress and anxiety both within and beyond the classroom. Over the years, it has become more necessary to teach students methods of dealing with stress, anxiety, and emotions for them to be successful academically, educating the whole student, as opposed to solely focusing on an increase of intellect. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, this need became even greater. “Stay at Home” quarantine orders installed by state and local governments required learning to move to a virtual platform, adding to the stress experienced by students and teachers alike. Online and remote learning created a new level of need for stress and anxiety outlets. Fine-tuned skills for handling mental, physical, and emotional stress became necessary, as well. Ultimately, social-emotional learning research and personal experience suggested that utilizing mindfulness as a teaching tool could educate students about stress and anxiety and simultaneously nourish creativity:

Taking care of this moment can have a remarkable effect on the next one and therefore on the future—yours and the world’s. If you can be mindful in this moment, it is possible for the next moment to be hugely and creatively different—because you are aware and not imposing anything on it in advance. (Kabat-Zinn 16)

This study examines a mindfulness-based curriculum in a corporal dance classroom setting, using (dance) movement as not only a choreographic medium, but also as a social-emotional teaching tool. Recognizing, analyzing, and understanding the results of this study will provide valuable insight for dance educators on implementing mindfulness into the dance classroom as a teaching method, as well as inspiration for creative and original movement. In addition, administrators of public schools will find the results of this study beneficial as they embed social-emotional learning strategies into their schools. These mindful-movement activities could

translate across grade levels and content areas, such as physical education, health, and fine arts. While these classes already incorporate movement into daily classroom activities and foster a conducive environment for mindful movement-based curricula, appropriate and related movement could be integrated into all classrooms, non-discriminate to age or content area. Adaptation of mindful-based movement curriculum could expand relevance in its implementation beyond wellness and the arts, even into core subjects such as English, math, science, and history. The possibilities of mindful movement implementation in education are endless, as they support creation and implementation of wellness education, or overall wellness, courses in public school systems. Many athletic programs may also see benefits from regular use of breath practice, including increased focus, awareness, and body-mind connection in their athletes.

Outcomes of this study may also be of interest to community members, as more mindful students could expand to more mindful families. Students could teach their parents what they learn regarding mindfulness, explicitly and by example. As students practice mindfulness in and out of the classroom, the effects would reach those around them wherever they were: at work, at school, at home, or even while taking part in extracurricular activities.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Overview**

The goal of this study was to create and implement a mindfulness-based curriculum into dance education classes at the high school level. Beginning, intermediate and advanced dancers would be exposed to mindfulness ideals through meditation practices and mindfulness activities that would coincide with movement explorations at each rehearsal. The results of these movement explorations would be the basis of the choreography for a culminating dance concert based on an overall theme of mindfulness. Determining the effects of mindfulness on the “whole student,” as a social-emotional learning tool, was also a focus of this study. The following questions were used to guide the study and its accompanying research:

- Q1 In what ways do mindfulness practices inform and effect choreographic, performance, and creative processes?
- Q2 In what ways do mindfulness ideas translate into effective teaching tools in regard to social-emotional learning through dance movement?

In this chapter, the researcher defines critical terms, describes mindfulness practices and ideals, and reviews relevant research literature to support the goals, purposes, and motivations for this research study. This chapter provides background information that is crucial to understanding mindfulness, social-emotional learning, and the roles and purposes of each in an educational setting, specifically within a dance curriculum and classroom.

## Defining Mindfulness: What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness comprises three core elements: intention, attention, and attitude. Intention involves knowing why we are doing what we are doing. Attention involves attending fully to the present moment and to both our inner and outer experiences. Attitude, or how we pay attention, enables us to stay open, kind, and curious. (Sousa and Shapiro 115)

Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Center of Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society, and co-founder of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) clinic and program, has centered the focus of his career research on “mind/body interactions for healing, as well as the clinical applications of mindfulness practices in relation to chronic pain and stress-related disorders” (Kabat-Zinn and Overfelt). In his book, *Mindfulness for Beginners*, Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as:

Awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a sustained and particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. It is one of many forms of meditation, if you think of meditation as any way in which we engage in systematically regulating our attention and energy, thereby influencing and possibly transforming the quality of our experience in the service of realizing the full range of our humanity and of our relationships to others and the world. (1)

Dr. Kabat-Zinn earned the title “Father of Mindfulness,” from his contributions to mainstreaming mindfulness into American society through medical institutions, academic environments, businesses, prisons, and professional sports organizations (165). He introduces mindfulness in *Happy Teachers Change the World: A Guide for Cultivating Mindfulness in Education*, a book written by Thich Nhat Hanh and Katherine Weare, by saying: “Mindfulness is all about paying attention and about the awareness, inquiry, discernment, and wisdom that arise from careful and

care-filled attendance” (xiii). Hanh explains that “mindfulness and concentration together can bring insight” (xix), while Weare, a professional educator, connects the practices of mindfulness to education through a “framework of practical guidance on how to cultivate mindfulness in our lives and in our everyday work in schools and universities” (Hanh and Weare xxxv), thus, providing the context and viable approaches necessary for mindfulness implementation in public school settings.

#### *What are Mindfulness Practices?*

Hanh and Weare provide educators with 17 in-depth, core mindfulness practices including: mindful breath, mindful walking, mindful eating, body awareness, mindful movement, and emotional awareness based on regular mindfulness practices performed at Hanh’s Plum Village community in France (xxix). The Plum Village community offers retreats and teachings on engaged Buddhism and educates visitors about Thich Nhat Hanh, meditation, and mindful living practices that mirror those included in the Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. This program adds mindful conversation, focusing both on mindful speaking and mindful listening, as well as the use of anchors, such as breath, thought, emotion, and sound (Kabat-Zinn and Overfelt).

Each practice included in *Happy Teachers Change the World: A Guide for Cultivating Mindfulness in Education*, and those included in the MBSR program, can be adapted for use by everyone from beginners to advanced practitioners and are built upon in proceeding practices (Hanh and Weare xxix). Mindfulness practice generally begins with a “sit,” focusing on the breath. By focusing awareness on the breath, the mind quiets, the breath deepens, and a feeling of “grounded-ness” increases. This use of focused awareness, known as an “anchor” in MBSR,

can be transferred from the breath to sound, thoughts, emotions, sights, and physical sensations (Kabat-Zinn and Overfelt).

As practitioners gain experience and expertise in focusing their awareness on present moment occurrences without judgment, such as the breath, practices can progress to include movement, walking, eating, listening, speaking, conversation, and even in-depth analysis of emotion. These activities can include individual, partner, and group activities, discussions, and analysis. In MBSR programming, mindfulness practices and activities culminate in a day of silence, which includes the aforementioned activities performed individually, and with the guidance of teachers.

### *Mindfulness Practices in Education*

Mindful Schools originated in 2007 with the purpose of addressing “overall health and sustainability within learning environments and supporting the well-being of every educator, student, and member of the school community” (*Mindful Schools*). The Mindful Schools program focuses on teachers first, encouraging teachers to “reconnect with their strengths and passion for teaching by providing immediate tools for self-care and practices to become more intentional, grounded, and fully aware” (*Mindful Schools*). Teachers then create an individual mindfulness practice, which includes many of the practices offered in the Plum Village and MBSR programs. The driving idea behind this approach is that teachers are better equipped to teach what they have experienced themselves. “Programming then shifts to sharing mindfulness with students” (*Mindful Schools*), in hopes of nurturing change from the inside, through example, and from the top down.

The school district and site of this research study began providing their teachers with opportunities to train in the Mindful Schools curriculum in 2016, with classroom implementation

at the onset of the 2016-2017 school year. In 2017, the school district went on to adopt Patricia C. Broderick, Ph.D.'s mindfulness-based curriculum, Learning to Breathe, which is geared toward adolescent secondary students. The school district, in collaboration with a local behavioral health clinic, provided interested teachers with Broderick's program in the form of a three-day workshop. Both Mindful Schools and Learning to Breathe trainings provided by the school district and clinic were funded by a grant allocated to the clinic for the purpose of mindfulness implementation among youth and adolescents through education.

“This curriculum is intended to strengthen attention and emotion regulation, cultivate wholesome emotions like gratitude and compassion, expand the repertoire of stress management skills, and help participants integrate mindfulness into daily life” (Broderick). Lessons contained within the curriculum provide educators with discussions, activities, and mindfulness practices appropriate for secondary classroom settings.

According to a pilot study regarding marginalized youth at risk of school failure, the Learning to Breathe program resulted in adolescents, aged 17-20, experiencing a “reduction of stress upon completion of the program,” as well as “higher levels of self-esteem” (Eva and Thayer 583). Further, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) recognizes the Learning to Breathe curriculum as “meeting research criteria for effective social-emotional learning programs” (Broderick).

### *Social-Emotional Learning*

Social-emotional learning, known as SEL, is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show

empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (*CASEL*)

Social-emotional learning utilizes collaborative and authentic partnerships among schools, families, and communities to advance educational equity and empowerment among students and adults. Through modeling, instruction, and practice, social-emotional competencies can be adopted and lead to positive outcomes and student success (*CASEL*). Implementation of a social-emotional learning curriculum or program has repeatedly shown long-term improvement in students' social skills, emotional regulation and management, attitudes, relationships, academic performance, and perceptions of their educational environment, while simultaneously declining their anxiety, behavior problems, and substance use (*CASEL*).

CASEL describes itself as a leader, a catalyst, and a collaborator, serving the field of social and emotional learning since its founding in 1994, stating on their website:

Through research, practice, and policy, we collaborate with thought leaders to equip educators and policymakers with the knowledge and resources to advance social and emotional learning in equitable learning environments so all students can thrive.

(*CASEL*)

Research suggests that implementation of social-emotional learning into classroom settings “leads to academic outcomes, improved behaviors, has long-term impacts, sustains an 11:1 return on investment, reduces poverty, and improves economic mobility and lifetime outcomes” (*CASEL*).

CASEL approaches social-emotional learning from the framework of five major components: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness, and expresses that the combination of these fosters educational equity and

academic excellence. This approach further emphasizes that “integrating social-emotional learning throughout the school’s academic curricula and culture” is most beneficial in fostering voice, agency, engagement, support, competence, and authenticity (*CASEL*).

The CASEL Secondary Guidebook supports the use of mindfulness as a supplemental social-emotional learning teaching tool, defining appropriate mindfulness curricula as, “School-based programs that promote mindful awareness in students and often include yoga, breathing, brief meditations, and other strategies designed to help students focus attention and regulate emotions” (*CASEL*). As interest and application of mindfulness in education grow, the “pairing of social-emotional learning programs with mindfulness technology is a natural fit” (Gueldner and Feuerborn 166). While mindfulness practices often include breathing techniques, sitting meditation, yoga-related movement, and body scan practices, both mindfulness and proper social-emotional learning require regular occurrence and practice in a classroom setting, options for practice outside of the classroom, inclusion of supportive materials, and promotion of independent practice outside of the school environment. Both may also be executed by practitioners with or without technical training (Gueldner and Feuerborn 167).

### **Creative and Choreographic Processes, Dance Education, and Mindfulness**

Creative thinking requires an attitude that allows you to search for ideas and manipulate your knowledge and experience. With this outlook, you try various approaches, first one, then another, often not getting anywhere. You use crazy, foolish, and impractical ideas as stepping-stones to practical new ideas. You break the rules occasionally, and explore ideas in unusual outside places. In short, by adopting a creative outlook you open yourself up both to new possibilities and to change. (Oech 6)

While there are as many approaches to creativity as there are people on the planet, a common creative process includes: content immersion, incubation, as well as occurrence of insight, evaluation, and elaboration (Minton, *Choreography 2*). “The challenge with thinking creatively is that it requires you to change how you think. More than that, creativity requires that you change how you think about thinking” (Christensen 6). In order to change thought processes about thinking, one must first become aware of their own individual patterns of thought. Regular mindfulness practice can cultivate the awareness necessary to recognize individual thoughts and thought patterns that can ultimately lead to a change in thinking habits. Continued practice strengthens the ability for individuals to approach situations and problems with a beginner’s mind, non-judgment, and non-attachment, while decreasing the constant mind-chatter known in mindfulness as “monkey-mind.” Oech explains:

The creative person wants to be a know-it-all. He wants to know about all kinds of things: ancient history, nineteenth century mathematics, current manufacturing techniques, flower arranging, and hog futures. Because he never knows when these ideas might come together to form a new idea. (6)

In fact, Oech further argues that the connection between creativity and knowledge makes the classroom an ideal setting to foster and nourish creativity:

I think the real need for creativity is in our basic institutions—especially in the family and in the schools. That’s where it needs to be cultivated. I think that anyone who graduates from high school who isn’t able to write a cogent paragraph or balance a checkbook-basic critical thinking skills—has been greatly disserved [*sic*] by their school system. By the same token, I think that because the world is continually changing,



students—indeed all people—need creative thinking skills. These creative thinking skills must be encouraged and developed. (x)

Similarly, the art and practice of dance requires more than just a technical approach to movement. “During rigorous technical training, students must have the opportunity to explore their own movement and validate the uniqueness of their own voices” (Erkert 15). Dance as an art requires practitioners to have a knowledge of movement technique, an awareness of their own body’s movement vocabulary, as well as the ability to execute and create meaningful movement.

Mirroring the creative process, choreography, too, incorporates various stages of creating. “The important part about choreographing, however, is that these stages are fluid and can and should be revisited often so that the dance becomes an ever-evolving creative effort” (Minton, *Choreography* 3). The choreographic process includes observation that inspiration, a feeling response, memories and imagination equal movement, dance and visual design (Minton, *Choreography* 3). Improvisation can also be a vital tool when utilized in the choreographic process, aiding in the connection of mind and body in dance-making:

Identifying an inspiration (mind), identifying movement responses (body), creating movement phrases (body), finding order (body), varying movement sequences (body), creating structure (mind), designing dance (mind), observation (mind) and performance (mind and body). (Minton, *Dance* 142)

While all choreographers and dancers approach the choreographic process differently, with each component differing in order and time, inclusion of each element plays a vital role in the choreographic process and requires awareness and connection of both the mind and body.

Dance provides students with the opportunity to explore and create their own movement through improvisation and choreography. “As a choreographer you can do many things to refine

your creativity. The first of these is to strengthen the connection between your mind and body” (Minton, *Choreography* 10). Improvisation, the act and art of creating movement in the moment, can be utilized for a variety of purposes in the dance classroom, including creating original choreography.

Each mindfulness anchor activity explained at the beginning of this chapter provides the practitioner with practice of focused presence and awareness. Regular practice of these anchor meditations allows the practitioner to become more aware of the present moment, an experience that enhances and is required in dance performance and dance creation, such as improvisation and choreography. As dancers create movement, they must be physically present and mentally aware of the movement in order to commit the movements to memory:

The Sanskrit word *smriti*, most often translated as “mindfulness,” literally means “remembering.” To re-member or re-collect is to bring back together all the (seemingly) disparate parts of our experience into an integrated whole. When we remember, we pay attention to what is happening. (Boccio 57)

As choreography is practiced and repeated, dancers are able to coordinate expression and emotion into the execution of the movement. Facial expressions, body language, projection, and the quality of movement execution contribute to a dancer’s performance and audience experience. In order to authentically express emotion and intent through performance, an awareness and presence in each individual moment and movement is required by the dancer.

*Dance Education, Social-Emotional Learning, and Mindfulness*

The purpose of dance education is to:

Develop the knowledge and skills required to create, perform, and understand movement as a means of artistic communication. A comprehensive education includes improvisation, technique, choreography, performance, observation, and analysis.

Exposure to dance history and cultures, kinesiology and anatomy, and movement theories further enriches the dance educational experience. (“Evolution of Dance”)

The integration of dance into education began in the early 1900s, as part of physical education programs. In 1926, the University of Wisconsin approved the first dance major, founded by Margaret H'Doubler, under the umbrella of the women's physical education department (“Evolution of Dance”). H'Doubler believed the future of dance as an art relied heavily on our country's educational system (Reedy). Further, H'Doubler approached the teaching of dance conceptually, theorizing “a framework for thinking about and experiencing dance and a philosophical attitude toward teaching it as a science and a creative art” (Reedy). In the 1930s, Rudolf Laban wrote extensively about dance education, specifically modern dance, through the lens of “scientific inquiry with the natural,” as well as movement analysis (Reedy).

Psychology's influence in educational curricula expanded in the 1950s, impacting how dance educators integrated the ideas of self-esteem, individual awareness and expression, and supporting the teaching of the “whole” child through creative dance (Reedy). Over the next 30 years, dance education blurred the lines between falling into the category of physical education and fine arts. As physical education became more specialized, focusing on the areas of human kinetics, sports science, and athletics, dance distanced itself, aligning more closely with the arts-based standards of the fine and performing arts:

Throughout this transition for dance, from physical education to fine arts, professional preparation and pedagogy in dance changed dramatically. More and more dance educators emerged from colleges and universities trained in creative and artistic processes in dance (creating, performing, and analyzing dance) as well as cultural, historical, and artistic contexts of dance. (“Evolution of Dance”)

As the appreciation for dance as an art form grew culturally and academically, dance joined music, theater, and visual arts to support national initiatives in arts education:

National standards and assessments in the arts, opportunity-to-learn standards, teacher guidelines for certification and licensure, national arts surveys in American schools, and national task force committees on a myriad of arts issues (assessments, research, early childhood education, professional development, teacher training, etc.). (“Evolution of Dance”)

The adopted initiatives aided in cementing the arts in education and aligning the value and relevance of the arts among academic disciplines. In addition, and more specifically, engagement in dance study has been shown to naturally increase creating and performance processes, as well as critical analysis:

Participation in dance technique and study requires students to “read symbols, use critical thinking skills, excel in nonverbal reasoning and communication, exchange ideas, work collaboratively and cooperatively, and interact within a multi-cultural society. More comprehensively, education in the art of dance develops kinesthetic and spatial learning as well as intra-and interpersonal knowledge of self and others. (“Evolution of Dance”)

In conjunction with increased academic related skills, research proves that students who study dance have increased self-motivation, are more disciplined, more focused and are better able to

express and communicate their emotions, thoughts, and feelings. Dance students also display more creativity and imagination in their everyday lives (“Evolution of Dance”).

The National Dance Education Organization, known commonly as NDEO, is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to advancing dance education for everyone. NDEO provides resources for the community and serves as a base for advocacy and research. They also offer dance-focused professional development (“Evolution of Dance”). NDEO has been recognized as an informed voice and leader for dance in arts education since its inception in 1998, and has aided in dance certification and accreditation in dozens of states across the United States. NDEO also established and published several national dance standards for dance in public schools.

Most recently, NDEO was instrumental in the creation and publication of the 2014 National Core Arts Standards in Dance, as well as the 2005 Standards for Learning and Teaching Dance in the Arts. Both collections of standards are:

Organized by the Artistic Processes of Creating, Performing, Responding and Connecting; developmentally appropriate, considering the physical, cognitive, and psychological needs and abilities of students at each age group; adaptable to a variety of teaching settings including K-12 schools, dance studios, and teaching artist programs; and applicable to all genres and styles of dance, as the framework can be adapted to meet the technical demands of each. (“Evolution of Dance”)

The two sets of standards can be used individually, but are most effective when used together, providing a framework for what to teach and how to teach it.

The NDEO dance standards encompass the implementation and understanding of the elements of dance: time, space, and energy. In *Dance Mind & Body*, Minton explains, “To

become more conscious of yourself and your environment, you must observe the space around and you and the way you move within that space” (2). Utilizing these basic dance concepts requires an awareness of yourself, those around you, the space in which you are dancing, the timing of your movement in relation to others and the music, as well as a kinesthetic awareness of movement execution:

Dance is a discipline having an organized set of theories, concepts, principles, and skills. It consists of a distinct body of knowledge that needs to be studied in order to be understood. The study of dance as a discipline involves the acquisition of concepts, facts, and skills related to developing an understanding of the nature of dance, how dance functions in culture, the making of rational decisions and informed value judgments about dance, as well as actual dance performance...Dance is experience. It involves the physical, mental, and emotional aspects of the individual and is experienced through dancing, creating dance and responding to dance. (Kraus et al. 322)

Due to the “involvement of the physical, mental, and emotional aspects of the individual experienced through dancing, creating dance and responding to dance” (Kraus et al. 322), and the required focused attention on the present moment, dance training can be conceptualized as a mindfulness practice in and of itself (Serrano and Espirito-Santo 725). Just as MBSR practices and other mindfulness-based curricula integrate the idea of mindful movement, often through the use of walking and yoga asana, dance also a form of mindful movement practice.

In her book, *Moving Consciously: Somatic Transformation Through Dance, Yoga and Touch*, Sondra Fraleigh explains how dancing became a personal form of walking meditation, arguing that “we cultivate consciousness and memory in the ways we move, registering correlative emotional attunements. We absolutely cannot escape the affectation of our

movements and emotional life” (213). This deep connection between body, mind, emotion, as well as the necessity of being aware of the present moment, inherent in dance, creates a bridge between existing dance curricula and those offered through social-emotional learning and mindfulness-based programs.

*Connecting Mindfulness, Social Emotional Learning, Creativity and Choreography*

Rumi observed, “In order to understand the dance, one must be still. And in order to truly understand stillness, one must dance” (Sousa and Shapiro 114). Rumi suggests that stillness and movement support one another through their seeming opposition. The more we understand how to be still, in both mind and body, the better we can fill time and space with complete and expanded movement. Likewise, the more we understand the ability and desire of our bodies to move, the more we will relish, cherish, and learn from the stillness and quiet of our mind and body. As such, “movement-based courses can increase mindfulness” (Caldwell et al. 433). The somatic practices and presence innate in dancing foster the ideal coordination of mind, body, and emotional and spiritual aspects. “It is tempting to conceive of mindfulness as taking place in the mind alone, but mindfulness is both a state of mind and an embodied way of being in the world” (Sousa and Shapiro 114). Although the mindfulness aspects of dance are not always explicitly explained, the benefits of connecting mental, physical, and emotional aspects of oneself are intrinsically affected through movement, reinforcing the argument that dance itself is a mindfulness practice. “Mindful movement such as dance not only enhances our awareness of what is happening in our own skin, but it enhances our awareness of energetic exchange between bodies in space and other forms of nonverbal communication” (Sousa and Shapiro 120).

“Dance as a mindfulness practice offers the opportunity to experience the embodied harmony of physical and emotional expression” (Sousa and Shapiro 120). Like dance,

mindfulness practices often bring repressed emotions and experiences to the surface, which can be difficult for individuals to unpack, especially in a classroom environment. “Movement training specifically designed to enhance both visceral and somatic awareness may not only increase positive affect, but also may improve the accuracy with which internal emotional states are communicated to others” (Sousa and Shapiro 126). Dance provides a safe outlet for dancers to physically work through hard emotions without the need to verbally articulate their emotion and experience.

“You can incorporate this mind-body connection through exploration and improvisation” (Minton, *Dance* x). Improvised movement is an effective way to utilize mindfulness in dance, express and work through emotions, as well as to explore the basic elements of dance and choreography:

As a developing artist whose canvas is the body, I have often turned to the tools of time, space, and energy to craft my creative expression in response to suffering as a way to process and express my experiences and emotions. Through improvising dance, I discovered what was lacking in my asana practice: freedom of intuitive expression through movement. I had always known that asana supported my dance practice...but it also helped me develop a yearning for deep exploration of spontaneous movement and its potential to act as the physical basis of a phenomenological practice. (Minton, *Dance* 3)

Cultivating an awareness of body and mind is crucial to successful movement creation, both in choreography and improvisation, as well as for dance performance. As just one example of how improvisation can be used as a movement-based mindfulness practice in the dance classroom, Laura Diane Black utilized it as a form of mindfulness practice by focusing on the ideals of non-judgment and non-attachment. In her thesis study, *{Sati} {Natya} / Mindfulness in*



*Movement: An Investigation of Practicing Mindfulness in Improvisational Dance through the Lens of Non-Attachment*, Black studied the practice of non-judgment and non-attachment within the realm of dance improvisation, identifying ways in which this practice would translate outside of the studio into dance performance and beyond the stage into everyday life (4). Black focused on and expressed the importance that “in any mind/body practice to not only notice, but to notice what it is that we are noticing and accept it rather than judge” (37). Observing—rather than judging—movement created in the moment, like improvisation, allows the dance practitioner to create authentic movement, as opposed to recreating movement previously explored and performed by the dancer.

One of the remarkable aspects of Authentic Movement is what happens when we are moving in a more or less spontaneous matter, fully conscious, paying attention, but without any limit on what we do. When we say paying attention, we mean noticing the feelings, images, thoughts, bodily sensations, lapses, compulsions, remembrances, sequences and emotional charges of everything that we are conscious of as we move or do not move. (Black 37)

Black also utilized the work of choreographer Anna Halprin, known for playing “with structure to balance the authenticity of movement with life experience for the purpose of expressing and healing from within” (Black 38). Halprin’s approach to Authentic Movement improvisation includes sensations, movement, feelings, emotions, and imagery as a starting point to transform dance into a person’s life experience. “The past experience is there in the present, especially when one does not dwell upon it or intend to present it; it simply is” (Black 39). Black argues that the act of improvising dance movement, true improvisation created in the moment without judgment, “is a perfect method by which to experience and experiment with the past, present,

and future through the synchronicity of body and mind” (Black 46). Black described one improvisational movement exploration experience as “effective movement meditation,” freed of monkey-mind, and falling naturally into a pattern of “enjoying the alignment of gesture and breath” (Black 70).

The use, focus, and control of breath is one of the most foundational aspects of mindfulness practice used to connect the mind and body. Incorporating the use of the breath adds a richness and authenticity to a dancer’s movement quality, pulling not only the dancer, but also the audience, into the present moment. Using the breath as an anchor in dance and mindfulness practice requires awareness of the present moment, both in stillness and in movement. “What we practice becomes stronger” (Sousa and Shapiro 118), and with regular practice and implementation of breathing techniques, the breath can be used to settle the mind, grounding and revitalizing the body. “When you breathe with your movements your actions have a feeling of vitality” (Minton, *Dance* 69), adding to performance and the quality of movement execution:

In general, dancers breathe in to lift or suspend movement, and they breathe out when they give into the pull of gravity. This method of breathing encourages the flow of energy from the center of the body and contributes to body awareness. Moving with awareness and vitality also means filling different parts of the body with breath...Dancers can breathe with the whole body or into many body parts. In fact, breathing into different parts of the body appears natural and satisfying to the observer. (Minton, *Dance* 69)

Yoga is another movement form that naturally connects movement to breath. Yoga, in the form of yoga asana or poses, is most often the movement associated with mindfulness practice. MBSR includes standing, sitting, and lying down yoga practices within the program. Both Mindful Schools and Learning to Breathe also incorporate simple yoga asana within their curricula. Yoga

innately provides practitioners with increased body awareness through connected movement and breathing techniques. Both modalities of movement, dance and yoga:

Build a strong, flexible body and mind capable of attuning to the surrounding environment, while simultaneously regulating the internal state of the body. These skills both develop and sustain mental and physical well-being. Equally, dance offers both insight and lifestyle changes as one becomes more aware of one's own difficulties in relating to others and learns to express or accept oneself.

Yoga and dance/movement therapy both address the fact that emotions are dealt with in practice; they address the issue of knowing the body/body awareness observation skills, and anatomy; dance/movement therapy speaks to the issue of verbalizing the emotional process; and yoga provides a method of self-care as a way to bring more people to the movement experience. (Barton 160)

In addition, both dance and yoga utilize breathing techniques to encourage mind-body connection, “release energy points in the body, and foster alertness and relaxation” (Minton, *Dance* 69):

Breath work is an integral part of yoga; it is used to slow breathing, expand lung capacity, and build energy. Breathing is also an important part of Bartenieff Fundamentals (a dance technique created by Ingrid Bartenieff). The Bartenieff technique breathing allows a person to feel the connection among the different body parts and between the whole body and the surroundings. Breath should be experienced as a centering activity so that it enlarges support to and from the core of the body. Breathing also helps dancers connect with the audience and enhance expression because it energizes the body. (Minton, *Dance* 69)

Similarities between dance and yoga are also found in approaches to emotional awareness and control. The practices found in each to create emotional awareness and emotional outlets result in the improvement of impulse control and self-awareness (Barton 160):

Yoga and dance both address the fact that emotions are dealt with in practice; they address the issue of knowing the body/body awareness, observation, skills, and anatomy; dance, specifically dance movement therapy, speak to the issue of verbalizing the emotional process; and yoga provides a method of self-care as a way to bring more people to the movement experience. (Barton 160)

The importance of emotional awareness and practice is demonstrated in its inclusion in current mindfulness and social-emotional learning curriculums. Mindful Schools incorporates various lessons approaching topics dealing with identifying, naming, labeling, experiencing, and sitting with emotions (*Mindful Schools*), while CASEL identifies emotional control under the framework of self-regulation (*CASEL*).

Dance and Yoga operate under similar principles: movement as a metaphor and the use of opposition to improve impulse control and self-awareness (Barton 160). Consequently, movement is a vital component of self-regulation and pro-social behavior: two vital aspects of intended social-emotional learning outcomes.

Similar to yoga, somatic movement involves gentle movement performed with full awareness, has the effect of breaking down old habits of posture and movement, opens up the possibility of moving in diverse ways, increases the connection and integration of brain and body, and improves mental and emotional states by changing movement patterns (Dunn). Somatic movement can also be used to aid in the performance process for performers and athletes. As a result, utilizing somatic movement practices within the art of dance can “ensure

that movements don't become rote or automatic" (Dunn). This creates an ideal environment for movement creation in the form of choreography and improvisation:

The study of improvisation encourages unique movement choices and opens up the movement palette. Experience in improvisation allows the dancer to consistently sort out what is ego, what is idiosyncrasy, what is worth keeping, and what needs to be hugged, folded up, and put away in the old cedar chest for use later on. Learning how to move, based on imitation, is not the same as discovering, with help, one's own movement.

(Erkert 15)

As students experience and practice mindfulness and other forms of social-emotional learning instruction, research indicates that individuals gain the ability to focus awareness, be present, gain creativity, reduce reaction responses, cultivate heartfulness and the ability to approach situations with non-judgment and a beginner's mind (Fultz). Emeline Lotherington contends, "Although training can instill resilience and open-mindedness, it can also lead to the habit of ignoring your instincts." Lotherington goes on to say that "rest and thoughtful insight" enhanced both her artistry and her performance more than technique and repetition of movement alone (Lotherington). She continues, "There is a sense of decreased judgment of my own physicalities. Non-judgmental improvisation and Gaga dance classes have provided catharsis for me, releasing held tensions. I discover new and innovative ways to use my body" (Lotherington). Through the discovery of "new and innovative ways to move the body," dancer students can move from imitation and movement repetition to cultivating improvisation practices and movement explorations that result in expanded movement vocabularies and original choreography.

Implementation of a mindfulness-based curriculum in public education dance classes has the potential to positively impact students and teachers. Dance educators experience similar

benefits as they implement and practice mindfulness alongside their students. Demonstrating and experiencing mindfulness practices and movement explorations in preparation for teaching lessons, as well as alongside students in class, cultivates a safe environment that fosters exploration, creativity and acceptance.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Overview**

The goal of this study was to create and implement a mindfulness-based curriculum into dance education classes at the high school level. Beginning, intermediate, and advanced dancers were exposed to mindfulness ideas through meditation practices and mindfulness activities that coincided with movement explorations at each rehearsal. The results of these movement explorations were the basis of choreography for a culminating dance concert, which was based on an overall theme of mindfulness. Determining the effects of mindfulness on the whole student as a social-emotional learning tool was also a focus of this study. The following questions were used to guide the study and its accompanying research:

- Q1 In what ways do mindfulness practices inform and effect choreographic, performance and creative processes?
- Q2 In what ways do mindfulness ideas translate into effective teaching tools in regard to social-emotional learning through dance movement?

This chapter describes the methodology used to conduct this research study, as well as the data collection process. The researcher used electronic surveys for quantitative data, as well as self-reflection responses and interviews for qualitative data. These research instruments were used to gauge and measure dance, choreography, performance, and mindfulness experience. Responses were collected before, during, and after implementation of the mindfulness curriculum to determine the effectiveness of mindfulness as a social-emotional teaching tool in the dance classroom and its effect on the creative and choreographic process.

Prior to conducting the study, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was required. A formal narrative including the purpose, methods, data procedures, risks, and benefits of the study were submitted to the board for approval. Each assent/consent form, questionnaire, interview format, and interview questions were also submitted for review. The IRB approved the study, deeming it low-risk. A copy of the IRB approval document and consent form can be viewed in Appendix A.

### **Preparation of Study**

Participants for this study were high school sophomore, junior, and senior students ranging in age from 15 to 18 years of age. The participants were current students of the researcher, who were enrolled in Intermediate Dance or Dance Company (advanced-level dance) through the high school. The classes met twice a week for 90-minute class periods during the regular school day.

Students were informed verbally, and in writing, that participation in the study was optional, and that choosing to participate, or not participate, would in no way impact their grade over the course of the semester. Student assent forms can be seen in their entirety in Appendix B, as well as the Parent/Guardian consent forms.

The research process was also outlined in detail, verbally and in writing, providing both students and guardians with the opportunity to ask questions. Students were informed that they could opt out of the study at any time without their grade being impacted. The researcher explained to the students that all students, regardless of their decision to participate, would be taught using the mindfulness-based curriculum, as well as participating in the questionnaire, self-reflections, and interview. The researcher further explained that only those responses from students with assent and consent to participate in the study would be included in the data. The



questionnaire, self-reflections, and interview used for the study can be viewed in their entirety in Appendix C.

### **Implementation of the Mindfulness-Based Curriculum**

The researcher created a curriculum based on Mindful Schools and Learning to Breathe curricula, as well as including and adapting a number of activities, explorations, and practices found through the researcher's personal study, readings, and experiences. These sources can be seen in their entirety in Appendix D. Participants who were enrolled in Intermediate Dance and the school's Dance Company/Advanced Dance were introduced to mindfulness both verbally with definition and explanation, and kinesthetically through practice. Prior to beginning the study, members of the school's administration were notified via letter that the curriculum had been approved for implementation, which can be found in Appendix D. During each class session, the researcher presented a new and different mindfulness practice and/or activity.

First, students were guided through a mindfulness practice. Next, the researcher connected that practice to movement. Each movement practice was improvisational, allowing students to create and move their bodies as they made connections to the mindfulness practice. After two weeks of providing examples, the Dance Company students created their own mindfulness practices and related improvisational exercises that they then shared with their peers.

Mindfulness practices and the related improvisational movement exercises utilized in the researcher's curriculum included using the breath as an anchor or point of focus during an eight-week rehearsal process.

Next, students were verbally guided through options of how to focus on their breath during meditation. Additional breath-work mindfulness practices included the following:

- 4-7-8 breathing technique (inhaling for 4 counts, holding for 7 counts, exhaling for 8 counts)
- STOP practice (stop, take a breath, observe, proceed)
- Hand tracing (tracing up each finger on an inhale and down each finger on an exhale)

Related improvisational movement practices included exploring rise and fall, connecting these movements with the rise and fall of the breath. This particular improvisational exercise was especially effective when paired with the hand-tracing practice, emphasizing the rise of the inhale and fall of the exhale. Connecting movement to the 4-7-8 breathing technique guided students to move for 4 counts, hold for 7 counts, and move again for 8 counts. The researcher guided students through the STOP practice, then had them walk around the room, stop, take an exaggerated breath, relaying with movement what a breath feels like in the body, dance what they observed, proceed by continuing to walk around the room, and then repeat.

The researcher also guided students through a body scan practice, connecting this practice to movement by having the students isolate their movement to a single body part. Inspirations for specific body movement were based on the sensation presented during the body scan practice (numbness, tingling, heat, coolness, itchiness, pain, relaxation, or ease). Other activities, such as mindful walking, mindful coloring, senses meditation, and somatic yoga, were also used to help students strengthen the mind-body connection and increase their connection with themselves. Among these activities, writing a six-word memoir, an “I Am” and “I Am From” poem alongside creating movement that told the story of each line specifically inspired the senior

Dance Company participants. These dancers chose to focus on the mindfulness ideal of self-acceptance and how self-acceptance leads to self-love.

As student participants became more familiar and comfortable with mindfulness practices and connecting those practices to movement throughout the eight weeks of rehearsal, the Dance Company participants chose mindfulness ideals as themes for their original student-choreographed pieces. Each dancer shared a mindfulness practice and guided their peers through a related improvisational exercise. The movement created during these explorations were later combined, manipulated, and expanded to culminate in choreography for the related dance piece performed at the culminating dance concert.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the school district began the school year on a hybrid schedule, with half of the school population taking classes in-person on Mondays and Wednesdays (referred to as hybrid MW), and virtually on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The other half of the school population participated virtually on Mondays and Wednesdays and in-person on Tuesdays and Thursdays (referred to as hybrid TTH). All students were virtual on Fridays. This approach to the school year decreased face-to-face teaching time, and therefore required some alterations in terms of curricula implementation. Hybrid MW participants chose to focus their study on emotions, the effects our emotions have on others, and the effects others' emotions have on us. Hybrid TTH participants used mindful conversation as their inspiration and motivation for movement and mindfulness practice.

Members of the hybrid MW group studied the effects that outside influences, especially other people, had on their individual emotions. Students practiced sense meditations, as well as utilizing mindful coloring as a way of expressing where and how each individual participant experienced varying emotions in their body. This group of students decided to use masks as a

performance prop. They choreographed the removal of their masks as part of their performance to convey the impact others have on our emotions, as well as the freedom experienced when emotions are expressed instead of hidden beneath a mask.

Dancers from the hybrid TTH group, who focused on mindful conversation, led each other through a variety of mindfulness practices related to mindful speaking and mindful listening. Student participants discussed the relationship between self-talk and the way we speak with others, as well as the way others speak to us, and the effect that has on our internal self-talk. These participants used the game of “telephone,” where one person whispers a statement in the ear of a peer and the statement is passed from person to person. When the message has been passed to the last participant, they share what they heard with the rest of the group. This is then compared to the original statement, which was used as motivation for improvisation. The participants mirrored the telephone game, replacing the whispered statement with a particular movement. One dancer performed a phrase, the next dancer tried to repeat the phrase, with the final dancer repeating the phrase back to the original dancer to compare movement. This exploration, among others, created effective and meaningful movement that was later included in the student choreographed piece relating to Mindful Conversation.

These mindfulness practices and correlating movement explorations exemplify the process of implementing a mindfulness curriculum, alongside movement, in the dance classroom.

### **Research Participants**

This study was conducted in a high school dance department with participants ranging in age from 15 to 18, with varying previous dance, performance, choreography, and mindfulness experience. Students were made aware that regardless of their decision to participate or not participate in this research study, the mindfulness-based curriculum would be implemented into

their dance course. As such, all students, regardless of their participation in the study, would experience the same mindfulness-based curriculum and accompanying movement explorations. Although participation was optional, all students in both the Intermediate dance classes and the Dance Company chose to participate in the study. All dance students returned signed assent and consent forms, which can be found in Appendix B. Students were informed verbally and in writing that their grade was in no way attached to or impacted by choosing to participate, or not participate, in this study. Students entered the study fully aware that student responses would not be anonymous to the researcher, but that their responses and related data would remain anonymous when reported in this thesis study.

All questionnaires, self- reflections, and interviews were conducted during the class period, with the understanding that any student wishing not to participate would not have their responses included for the purpose of this study. If a student was absent on the day of the questionnaire or interview the researcher tried, to the best of her ability, to ensure that the student had an opportunity to respond. However, if the student was absent on the day of a self-reflection, those responses were not included in the data collection for that specific self-reflection. Due to COVID-19, class time was limited to twice a week; student participants therefore completed a self-reflection every other week for a period of 8 weeks. The researcher determined it would be more effective for students to not respond to a missed self-reflection and instead focus on the curriculum to provide more meaningful, less repetitive responses on the following self-reflection. The 8 weeks of rehearsal and self-reflections, combined with the 2 weeks of curriculum introduction, brought the total length of the study to 10 weeks.

Students were enrolled in two dance courses: Intermediate Dance and Dance Company. Students self-described their dance ability and experience as one of following classifications:

beginning, intermediate, or advanced. All rehearsals during the school day were held in the high school dance classroom, also known as the dance studio. Rehearsals held outside of school hours were held in both the dance studio and high school auditorium. Rehearsal time, inside and outside of class, was held in 90-minute increments. The culminating dance concert took place in the high school auditorium, was held for 2 nights, comprised of 12 dance pieces, and lasted 90 minutes, with a 10-minute intermission. Of the 12 dance pieces, 8 were student-choreographed. The remaining 4 pieces were choreographed by professional choreographers. Along with creating the choreography, students also chose the theme and music for each of the student-choreographed pieces, assisted with lighting and design choices, and decided which props, if any, would be used for each piece.

Prior to entering this study, 54.29% of participants self-described as advanced dancers, with 25.71% of participants self-describing as intermediate dancers, and the remaining 20% self-describing as beginning dancers, shown in Figure 1. Participants determined dance ability based on years of study, variety of styles studied, and their ability to learn and remember choreography.

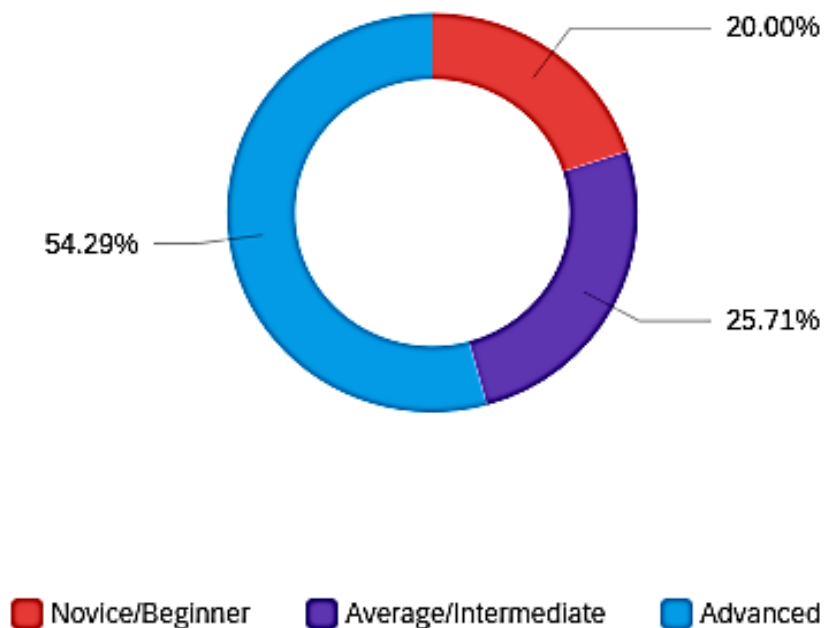


Figure 1. Participants' Self-Described Dance Ability

## **Instrumentation**

### *Questionnaire*

At the onset of this study, participants filled out an online questionnaire via Qualtrics, detailing their prior dance, performance, choreography, and mindfulness experiences. This questionnaire was completed during week three of the study, after assent/consent forms had been collected. A copy of the questionnaire in its entirety can be found in Appendix C. The questionnaire items included both multiple choice and open-ended questions, allowing participants the opportunity to expand on the reasoning for their answer choices and provide personal detail regarding their experience. The purpose of this questionnaire was to provide the researcher with background information regarding each participant and their relative experiences to the areas of dance, performance, choreography, and mindfulness, and provide information to compare with the participant's experience after participating in the mindfulness curriculum. The qualitative data was later analyzed for reoccurring themes by the researcher.

The questionnaire was comprised of 20 questions and asked students to self-identify as a beginning, intermediate, or advanced dancer. Students then had the opportunity to answer why they identified as they did. The questionnaire prompted students to identify their dance experience, detailing the styles of dance they had previously studied or were interested in studying. Again, students were provided the opportunity to expand on and further explain each answer. Questions regarding performance, choreography, and mindfulness were similarly formatted to provide participants with the opportunity to further explain each answer.

### *Self-Reflection Questions*

Participants completed four self-reflections over an eight-week period. All self-reflection prompts can be found in their entirety in Appendix C. Self-reflection questions provided insight into the student experience and connected the students' mindfulness ideals to the movement they were exploring, creating, and practicing. Participant responses to self-reflections provided insight to the participant experience throughout the process. Self-reflection questions prompted students to share their experiences with the guided mindfulness practices at each class rehearsal, their feelings of the effects of mindfulness in and outside of the dance classroom, as well as how the movement in their dance piece connected to mindfulness. They also provided a space for students to express any concerns they had about the experience.

Each self-reflection prompt built upon the previous prompt and related to a participant's current point in the creative, choreographic, and performance processes. Because each prompt related to specific points in these processes, self-reflections were not "made up" later if a student was absent. The researcher determined that having a student revert to a previous point in the process would not provide accurate insight to their evolving experience. Self-reflection responses



were analyzed by the researcher, who then identified reoccurring themes and compared discovered themes with previous self-reflection responses.

### *Interview Format*

In order to gather more information and a more complete, well-rounded understanding of the student experience, the researcher interviewed each participant after the dance concert performance. The interview format allowed the researcher to ask individual participants questions specifically related to their questionnaire and self-reflection responses. Further, it provided the opportunity for follow-up questions to ensure accurate interpretation and understanding of student participant responses. Each interview was conducted during the dance class period, and audio was recorded via Zoom. Interview responses were later transcribed and analyzed by the researcher, identifying reoccurring themes and quantitatively determining the effects of the mindfulness curriculum on dancer performance, choreography, and dance education experience.

Interview length and questions varied from participant to participant. Each participant was asked to convey their previous experience with dance, performance, choreography, and mindfulness prior to this course and to compare that with how they would describe their current experience. Participants with prior choreography and dance performance experience were asked follow-up questions, more specifically comparing their previous understandings compared to that of the mindfulness-based curriculum used in this study. Other follow-up questions included identifying any specific mindfulness activities that were individually practiced by the participant, when they were practiced, and how often. Participants also explained their emotional state prior to the concert and whether mindfulness practices were utilized to aid with neutralizing emotions before the performance. Each participant was asked for feedback regarding the mindfulness

curriculum and whether they felt it was something that should continue to be implemented in the dance classroom. A complete list of interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

### **Data Analysis**

Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis were utilized in this study. Qualitative data was collected from the questionnaire responses over a 10-week period, including 2 weeks at the beginning of the study. Over the next 8 weeks, participants completed 4 self-reflections. Final interviews were held after the culminating dance concert performance. The questionnaire, self-reflection, and interview responses were analyzed using quantitative methods to provide statistical analysis of the effects that the mindfulness curriculum had on student performance and choreography. Additional analysis was implemented to measure the effectiveness of mindfulness in a dance classroom as a teaching tool for social-emotional learning.

Responses from the questionnaire, self-reflections, and interviews were used qualitatively to identify reoccurring themes in student responses. These themes were then analyzed and reported quantitatively. Research questions posed at the beginning of this chapter provided a guide, enabling the researcher to find emerging themes and determine the effectiveness of the mindfulness curriculum in relation to the research questions. Further information on these findings can be found in the Discussion chapter of this thesis.

Quantitative analysis was applied to a portion of the participants' questionnaire responses. These quantitative responses were then supported by qualitative responses within the questionnaire, providing the researcher with a more in depth look at the participants' dance, choreography, performance, and mindfulness experiences prior to this study.

## **Summary**

The researcher obtained IRB approval to appropriately conduct the study (Appendix A), which was conducted in a high school setting, with participants in grades 10-12. Participants involved in the dance department entered the study with varying dance, performance, choreography, and mindfulness backgrounds and experiences. Participants completed a questionnaire at the beginning of the study, including four self-reflections completed over eight weeks of the rehearsal process, and an interview following the culminating dance concert performance. The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and analyze the data accumulated during the duration of this study. The researcher used the collected qualitative responses to identify emerging and universal themes, to quantitatively analyze the data to determine the effects of a mindfulness-based curriculum on the creative, choreographic, and performance processes, and to determine whether implementing such a curriculum in a dance classroom is an effective teaching tool for social-emotional learning.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

#### **Overview**

The primary goal of this study was to create and implement a mindfulness-based curriculum into dance education classes at the high school level. Beginning, intermediate, and advanced dancers would be exposed to mindfulness ideals through meditation practices and mindfulness activities that would coincide with movement explorations at each rehearsal. The results of these movement explorations would be the basis of the choreography for a culminating dance concert, based on an overall theme of mindfulness. Determining the effects of mindfulness on the “whole student” as a social-emotional learning tool was also a focus of this study. The following questions were used to guide the study and its accompanying research:

- Q1 In what ways do mindfulness practices inform and effect choreographic, performance, and creative processes?
- Q2 In what ways do mindfulness ideas translate into effective teaching tools in regard to social-emotional learning through dance movement?

When the study began, participants self-identified previous dance, choreography, performance, and mindfulness experience in the form of a questionnaire. As they were exposed to the mindfulness-based curriculum, participants filled out self-reflections to gauge what impact the mindfulness curriculum was having on the student experience. At the conclusion of the study, participants met with the researcher individually for private interviews so that the researcher could better understand what impact the mindfulness curriculum had on the overall student

experience. Each form of research instrumentation was analyzed from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective.

The focus of this chapter is discussing and presenting the analysis of data gathered from the student participant questionnaires, self-reflection responses, and interviews.

## **Participant Demographics**

### *Beginning and Intermediate Dancers*

Students enrolled in the Intermediate Dance course self-determined their dance ability as a beginning, intermediate, or advanced dancer. Of the 36 questionnaire responses, 15 came from students who were enrolled in the Intermediate dance course. About 86.7% of the dance students enrolled in this level described themselves as beginning or intermediate dancers, with only 2 students self-describing as advanced dancers. The 2 students who self-described as advanced dancers based their choice on “years danced, and variety of styles studied.” Intermediate Dance was the first dance class for 45% of the 13 self-described beginning and intermediate dancers, with the remaining students having between 1 to 5 years of previous dance training.

Of the responding 15 students enrolled in Intermediate Dance, none had previous experience choreographing dances and only 18% had improvisational dance experience. In contrast, 82% participants from the same group described themselves as having some kind of performance experience. For 69% of participants, performance experience consisted of performing in front of small groups such as family, friends, or church groups.

In terms of mindfulness, 92.3% of Intermediate students had at least heard of mindfulness and had some experience practicing it. Only 7.7% of students reported having heard of mindfulness, but not really knowing what it was. Of the 92.3% of students who had some

previous experience with mindfulness, 100% had experience with breath-focused mindfulness practice prior to the beginning of the study.

### *Advanced Dancers*

Of the total 36 questionnaire responses, 21 responses came from members of the Dance Company. Of those, 21 self-described as an advanced dancer. The only participant who self-described intermediate from the Dance Company cited “limited dance experience, and not being able to quickly pick up choreography,” as determining factors in establishing their dance ability. The school district in which this study was held considers Dance Company an advanced-level dance course. Styles of dance previously studied by members of the Dance Company included: jazz, tap, ballet, contemporary, hip hop, cultural dancing, and ballroom, with 86% having studied dance in some capacity for 10 or more years.

Considering the vast experience of these dance students, it was not surprising that 100% of the self-described advanced dancers reported having a lot of performance experience and felt comfortable performing in front of others. Even the self-described intermediate dance company member identified as an experienced performer, comfortable performing in front of others with a group.

Of the Dance Company members who entered this study, 100% began with previous movement creation experience, through either improvisation or choreographing for self or others. Of the same group, 86% entered this study having previously choreographed movement for a performance setting. It is probable that this is the most distinguishing factor between the Dance Company and self-described advanced dancers compared to the intermediate students, self-describing as beginning and intermediate dancers. This information was vital to the researcher in terms of approaching movement creation during class time. More time was spent in

the Intermediate course to front-load improvisation practice before any connection was made between the mindfulness curriculum and movement. However, because of the familiarity with dance creation, the Dance Company was able to immediately begin connecting improvisation to mindfulness ideals.

Upon entering this study, 100% of Dance Company dancers knew what mindfulness was and had practiced it before, though only 48% felt they knew mindfulness practice well enough to comfortably lead themselves or others through a mindfulness practice. Dance Company members expressed experience in breath work, anchors, mindful coloring, loving kindness, STOP, body scan, hand tracing, yoga, and senses related mindfulness practices. This information led the researcher to incorporate student-led mindfulness practice into the mindfulness curriculum for the Dance Company.

## **Questionnaire Analysis**

### *Dance Experience*

Participants entered this study with a variety of dance experience. Dancers responded with years of study spanning from this being their first experience with a dance class to over 10 years of dance training, as shown in Figure 2.

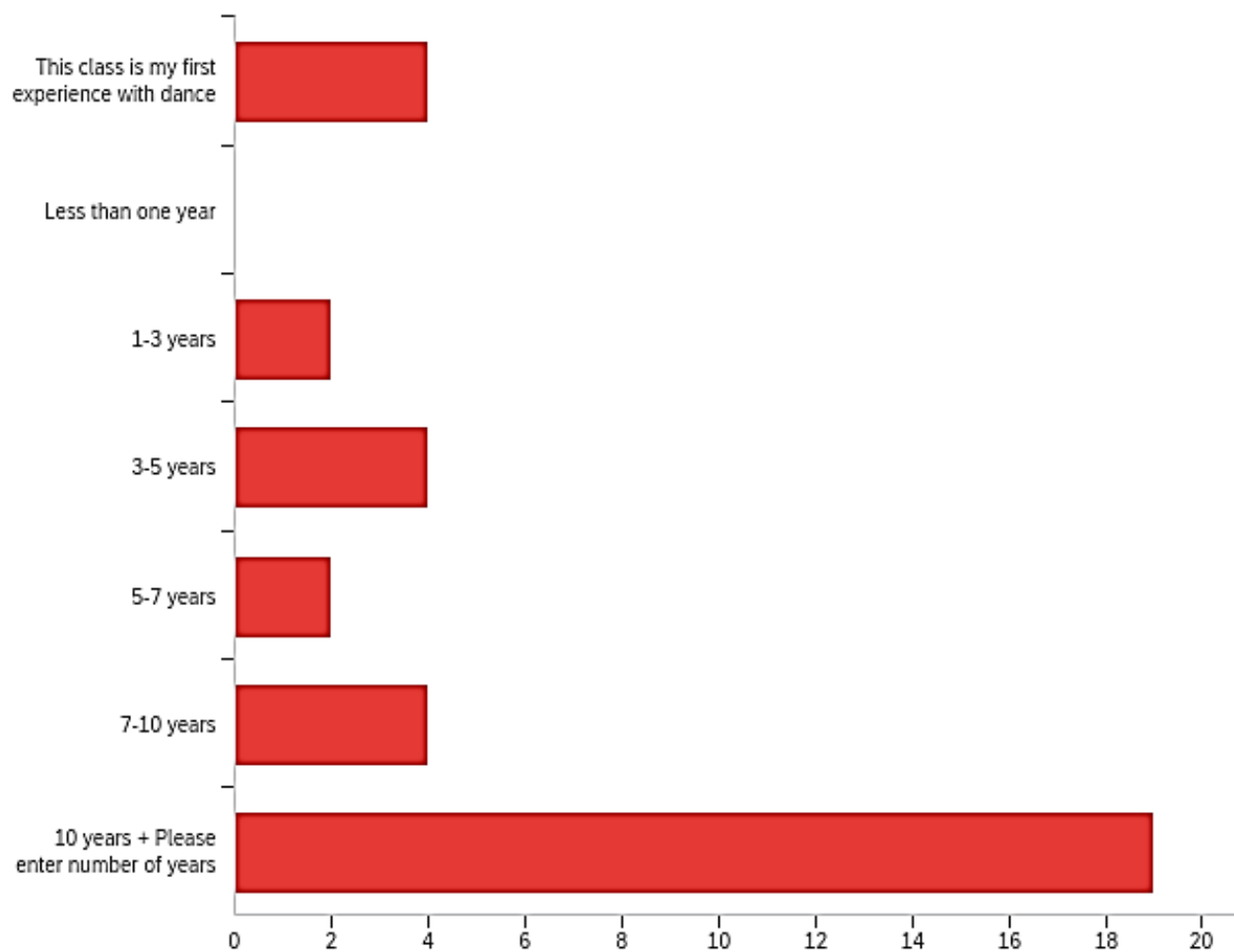


Figure 2. Participant Years of Dance Experience

The dance styles participants had studied also widely varied, with 100% of participants selecting “Other” as a dance style they studied. In the comments section of the questionnaire, participants who selected “Other” specified that they had practiced most, if not all, of the dance styles listed. Cultural dance experience was expanded to include worship and traditional cultural folk dances, with ballroom experience including Latin and standard styles. A breakdown of the different dance styles students used to categorize their experience is represented in Figure 3.



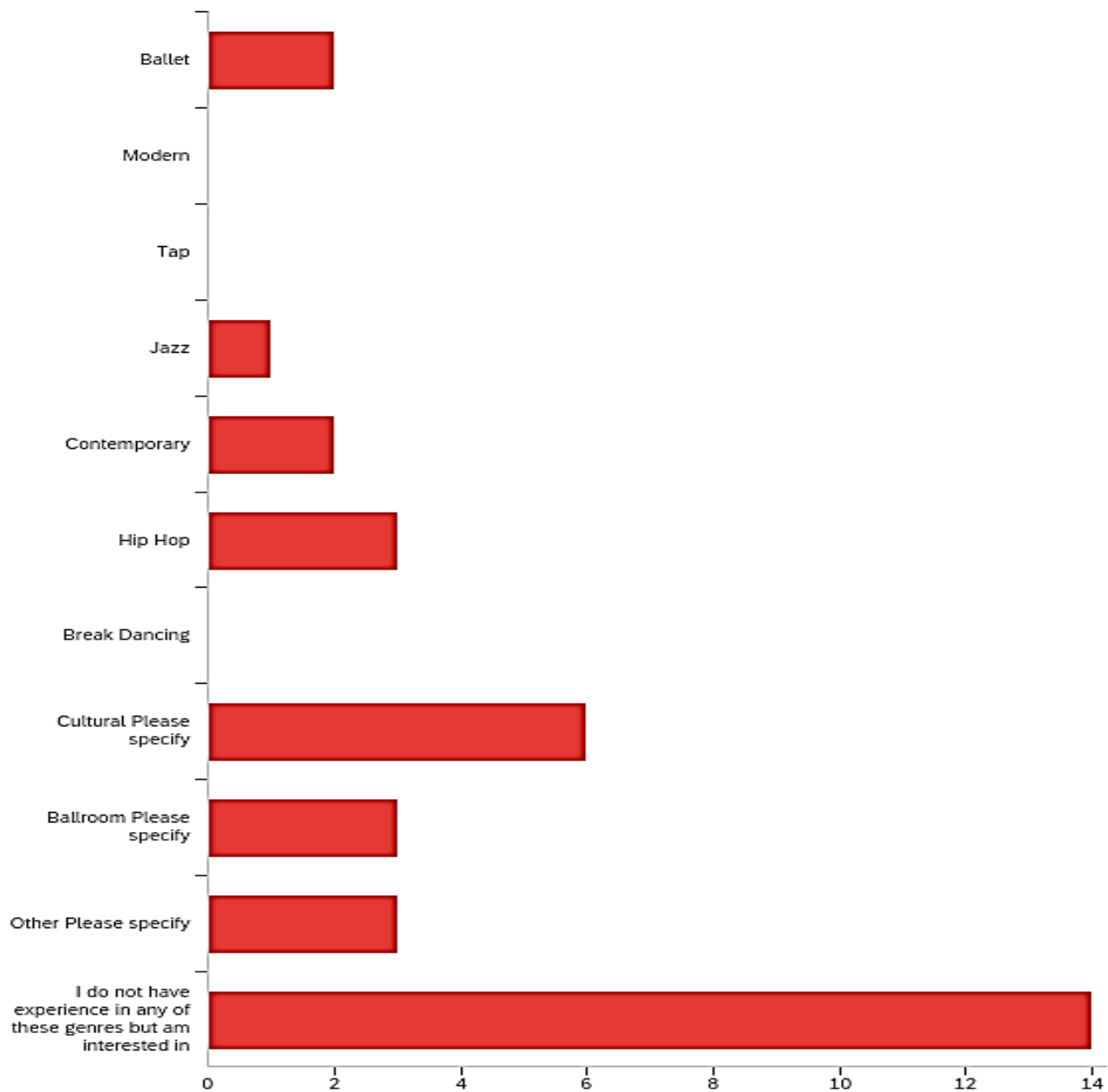


Figure 3. Styles of Dance Studied by Participants

### *Performance Experience*

The level of dance performance experienced varied greatly among participants, with 2.8% of participants having never performed in front of an audience of any kind, and 52.8% of participants considering themselves experienced performers. Some participants explained that they had only performed in front of family, friends, or to small groups prior to this class, while

others explained that their prior performances were not dance related. These participants further explained their experience with performance by clarifying that they had performed in front of an audience in some capacity, such as singing in a choir.

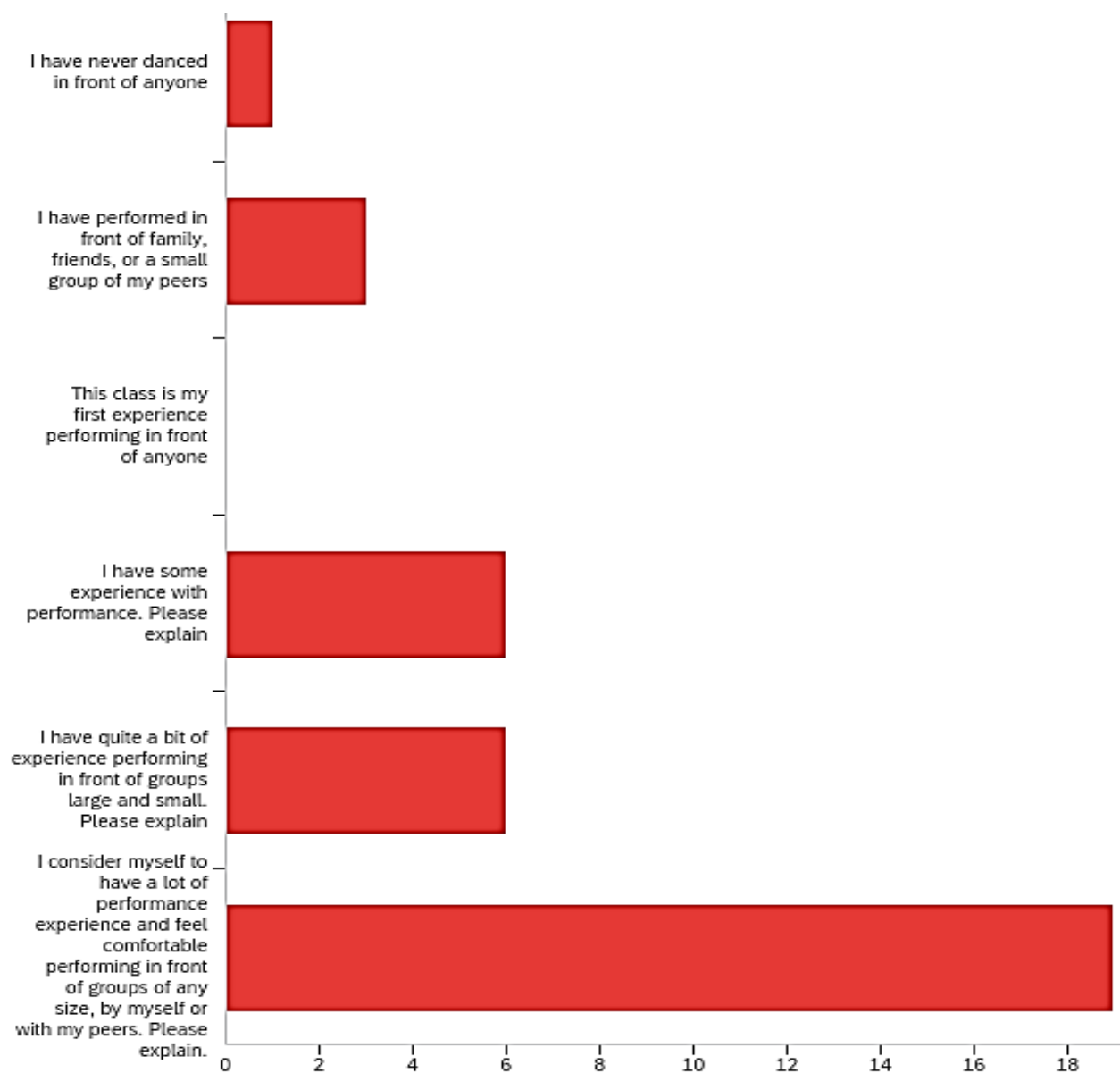


Figure 4. Participant Performance Experience

### *Choreography Experience*

Of the 36 student participants who responded to the questionnaire, 16.7% had never experienced creating movement and had only ever been taught choreography. By comparison,

only 25% had experience with improvisation, and 50% reported choreographing movement that had been performed by themselves or others. It should be noted that participants were limited in selecting a statement from the following options, with results shown in Figure 5:

- I have only been taught dances
- I have choreographed dances I have performed at home for family or friends
- I have done a little improvisation in previous dance classes
- I feel comfortable and experienced with improvisation
- I have choreographed dances for myself and/or groups that have been performed at school, in the community, etc.

As a result of this oversight in the questionnaire set up, students could not report feeling experienced with improvisation and having choreographed for a performance, so the data collected may not accurately reflect their objective improvisational and/or choreographic experience.

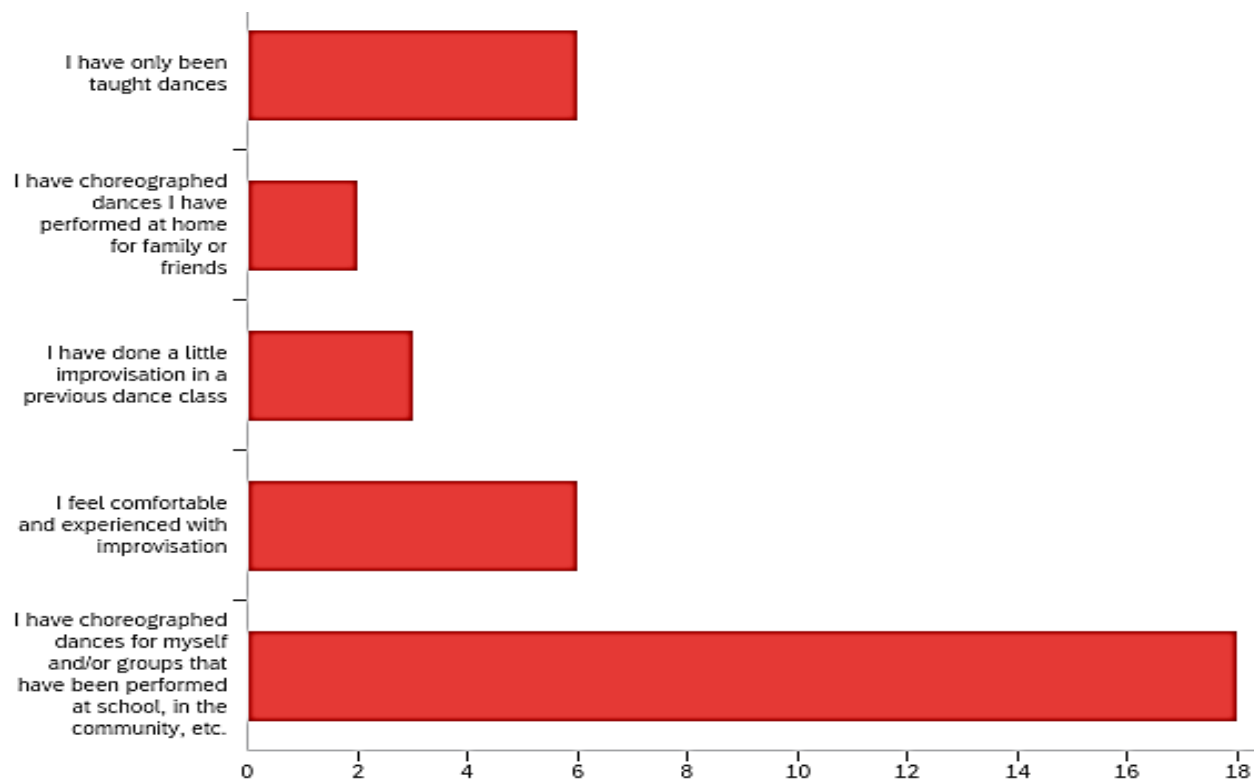


Figure 5. Participant Choreography Experience

### *Mindfulness Experience*

Responses related to previous experiences with mindfulness reflected that 100% of student participants were familiar with the term “mindfulness.” Interestingly, none of the participants indicated that they had never heard of mindfulness or that they were not familiar with how to practice it. Every participant reported familiarity with the term, with 97% of them knowing how to practice mindfulness. Of the research participants, 36% reported feeling somewhat comfortable in guiding themselves and/or others through a mindfulness practice, while 16.7% of participants reported feeling very comfortable guiding themselves or others through a mindfulness practice and could do so easily, shown in Figure 6.

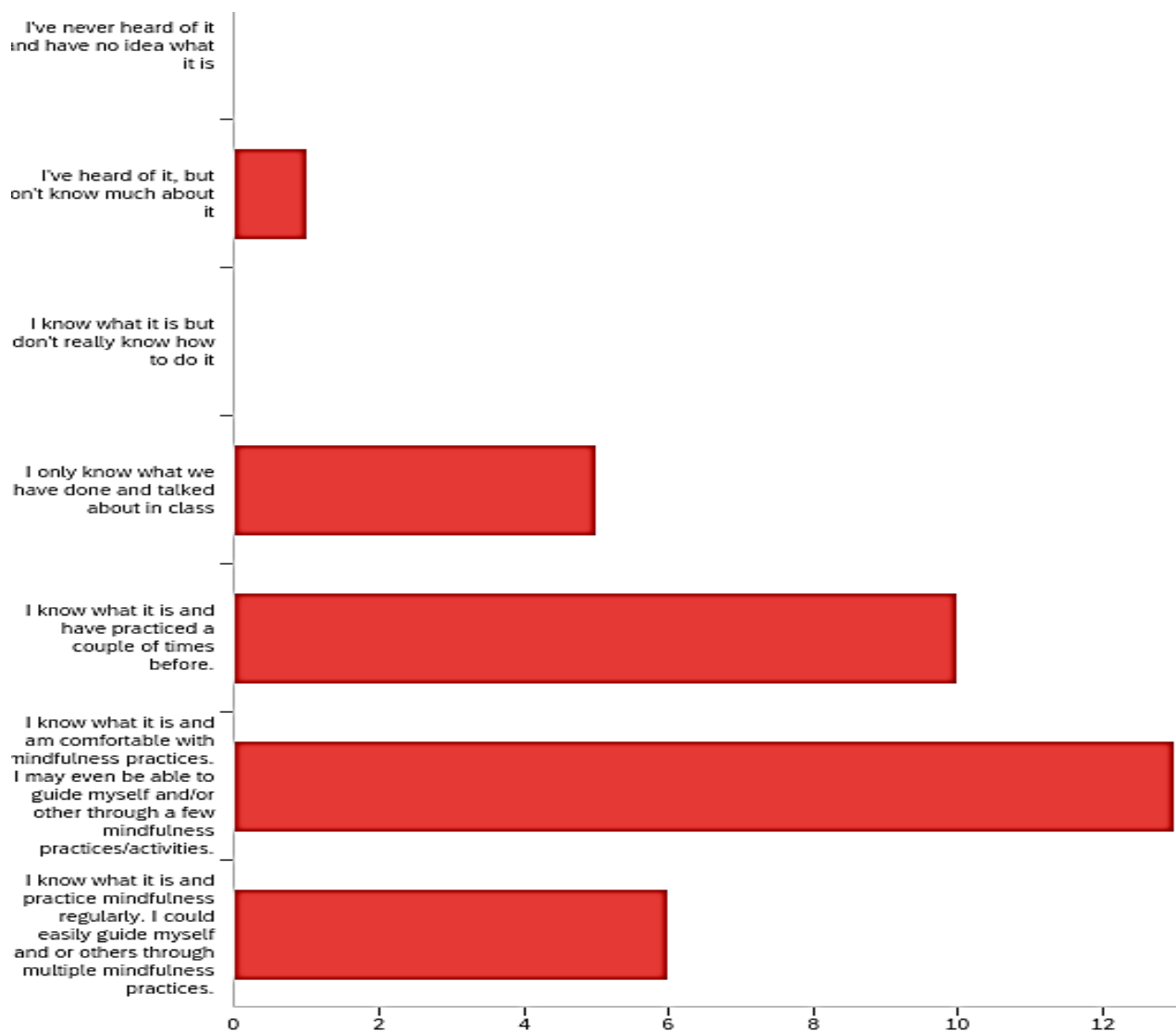


Figure 6. Participant Mindfulness Experience

Questionnaire responses showed that 61% of participants had previous experience with breath work in terms of mindfulness practice. Among participants, 52.8% reported having practiced the STOP method, 38.9% reported prior experience with a loving-kindness practice, 50% had participated in mindful walking, and 66.7% had experienced sensation-focused meditation. Other mindfulness practices participants reported experience with included: 33% with mindful coloring, 30.5% with mindful eating, 47% with mindful conversation, 61% with the

use of an anchor, and 5.5% with body scan and hand tracing. Only 2.8% of participants reported having used yoga as a mindfulness practice.

### **Self-Reflection Analysis**

Student participants wrote self-reflection responses four times throughout the eight-week rehearsal process. Every other week, participants were given a handout with five questions that aimed at gaining insight into the student experience. The five questions required students to internalize and reflect upon their experience with the mindfulness curriculum and then analyze the connections made, if any, between mindfulness practices and movement. Self-reflection responses were then analyzed by the researcher for common themes and insights were given to guide later interview questions (Appendix C).

#### *Self-Reflection 1*

The first self-reflection was designed to gain insight into the connections that student participants were making between movement and mindfulness, and was completed during week four of the full ten-week mindfulness curriculum implementation. The researcher began implementing the mindfulness curriculum during the second week of classes, providing two weeks for students to turn in consent/assent forms before beginning the study. All 37 participants responded to this self-reflection. The researcher was interested in identifying whether the practice of mindfulness was consciously and/or unconsciously influencing student movement creation, understanding, and execution, so each participant responded to a specific dance piece of student choreography. Intermediate students focused on their dance theme of Body Awareness through Brain Dance. Dance Company participants were focused on the dance created in their Hybrid groups: the MW Hybrid group's theme was Emotions and the TTH Hybrid group's theme was Mindful Conversation.

Regardless of their dance theme, each participant responded to the same self-reflection questions, which were comprised of five open-ended questions that can be found in Appendix C. The researcher then analyzed these responses for emerging themes, as well as consistency among the responses. Participants were instructed to respond with as much detail and explanation as possible and were given as much time as needed to complete the self-reflection. The first self-reflection question contained two parts: “Which aspects of mindfulness motivated your movement? Which mindfulness practices influenced and inspired your movement?” These questions were designed to gain insight on the choreography process and the effectiveness of mindfulness as motivation for movement. All but one student accurately explained the connections between mindfulness ideas, practices, and outcomes related to the movement created and were able to identify the ways meaning and purpose were expressed through movement.

The next self-reflection question asked: “Where and how in your movement can I see these ideas based on mindfulness and your dance theme?” All students were able to describe, with specific examples, where and how the mindfulness theme was expressed through the movement of the dance piece. Interestingly, even the participant who had previously misidentified the overall theme for the dance piece was able to accurately identify the ways in which movement expressed that mindfulness theme.

The last three self-reflection questions asked students to identify feedback and critiques received on their dance pieces, their mental, emotional, and physical reactions to this feedback, and how they would apply this feedback moving forward. The intent of these questions was to help participants internalize the feedback, apply it to themselves, and connect the feedback to their rehearsal, performance, and movement moving forward.

### *Self-Reflection 2*

The second self-reflection was presented during the week 6 of the mindfulness curriculum, about halfway through the study, and 4 weeks before the culminating dance concert. At this point in the process, students had choreographed a dance piece in its entirety and were working on the performance elements of projection, execution, timing, cleaning, energy, and facials. Like the first self-reflection, the second self-reflection was comprised of 5 questions. Again, all 37 participants responded. This self-reflection can be found in its entirety in Appendix C. For Self-Reflection 2, participants reflected on their experiences with the same dance piece used for their Self-Reflection 1. The purpose of the second self-reflection was to identify student participation and experience with mindfulness inside and outside of the dance classroom and rehearsal time.

Participants were asked: “Do you practice mindfulness outside of class? Which practices? How often?” Of the responses, 32% responded that the only time they practiced mindfulness was during dance class time. The remaining 68% reported practicing mindfulness outside of class, anywhere from once per week to every day. Student participants overwhelmingly reported using breathing practices as their preferred form of mindfulness practice. Other mindfulness practices participants used on their own included guided meditations, yoga, body scan, and positive thinking.

The second self-reflection question prompted student participants to reflect on the following: “How has mindfulness practices influenced your experience in dance? School? Life?” While student responses to this question varied, all participants reported seeing a positive change in at least one aspect of their lives. Other responses to this question included: feeling an increase of calm, decreased stress, decreased anxiety, more focus, ability to study better, feeling more



peaceful, more centered, more relaxed, happier, more connected to their dance movement, having an increase in energy, better able to recognize emotions, better able to control reactions, help with sleep, and that dance was more fun and enjoyable. One participant even said, “Practicing mindfulness had made me realize I am enough.”

The third and fourth questions dealt with frustrations and challenges the participants may have been experiencing, and explored whether mindfulness could be applied to aid in approaching these frustrations and/or challenges. While COVID-related issues were reported as frustrations and challenges to overcome, the remaining responses dealt with individual frustrations. Of the participants, 5 reported feeling frustration with remembering movement and changes, 13 with timing challenges, and 8 with the slow pace of the cleaning process. The remaining responses indicated frustration with flexibility issues, not being able to stay grounded, physical endurance, injury, particular sections of the piece, and difficulty collaborating and working with peers. Despite various frustrations, participants also responded with multiple mindfulness practices and ideals that could be applied to positively approach each challenge. These practices included: taking a breath break, using visualization, increasing understanding and patience with others, and maintaining a positive attitude.

The final question posed to participants for the second self-reflection asked students to identify the emotions that applied to their specific dance piece. Students were then asked to detail how these emotions could be applied to their movement execution and performance. Due to the variety in dance themes, various emotions were described in connection with each piece. Reflecting on which emotions the dance theme evoked provided participants with the opportunity to focus on how to apply these emotions to their dancing and performance. Ideas included: practicing facials underneath their masks (required to be worn at school due to

COVID-19), staying grounded, making sure that their movement was free and unbound, being animated, exuding fierceness, power, and confidence, and using breath to guide their movements.

### *Self-Reflection 3*

Self-Reflection 3 was completed during week 8 of the mindfulness curriculum implementation, just 2 weeks before the dance concert performance. The focus of this self-reflection was performance preparation and can be found in Appendix C. Of the 37 study participants, 34 responded to this self-reflection.

Each participant performed in anywhere from 1 to 9 of the 12 dances included in the dance concert. A question on Self-Reflection 3 asked, “How prepared do you feel for the performance as a whole?” Self-reflection responses indicated that 32% of participants felt “very prepared” for the performance, 38% felt “prepared” for the performance, 29% felt “prepared but still felt as if some work needed to be done and/or [they] were experiencing some nerves,” and 1 participant reported that they felt “not super prepared” for the upcoming dance concert performance.

Participants were then asked to describe which aspects of performance they felt most prepared for. As shown in Figure 7, 85% of those who completed the self-reflection described feeling most prepared for the movement and dance aspects of performance. Of the 34 responders, 1 participant reflected feeling most prepared to perform in front of an audience and 2 participants reported feeling most prepared for the emotional expression required in performance. Another student participant reported feeling prepared for “all of it,” and 1 student reported feeling the need for more practice.

## Performance Preparedness

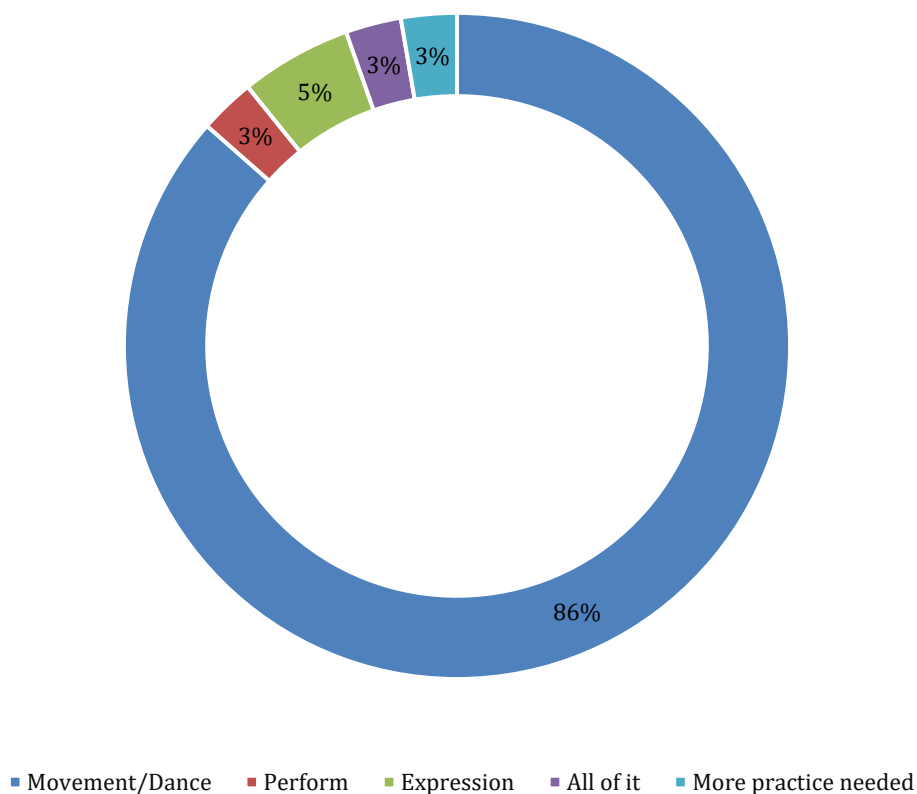


Figure 7. Participant Performance Preparedness

The final questions of this self-reflection asked student participants to reflect on what they could do individually to feel more prepared for the performance and whether they thought mindfulness could play a role in performance preparation, performing, and/or after performance. Feedback showed that 44% of participants thought practicing outside of class would most help them feel prepared for the performance, but only 18% reported the need to practice their facial expressions underneath their COVID-required mask. Regarding mindfulness, 7% of participants reported practicing mindfulness as a way to feel more prepared for performance. Other responses for performance preparation included using visualization, giving 100% effort at each rehearsal, focusing during rehearsal, and leaning on teammates for confidence.

Feedback data showed that 68% of participants reported that mindfulness helped them stay calm before, during, and after their performance. Further, 15% of participants said that mindfulness helped with focus and memory during performance, and 6% indicated that mindfulness would help dancers reflect on their performance afterward. Of the participants, 29% described mindfulness as helping with body awareness, body-mind connection, movement execution and authenticity, being present in the moment, and maintaining a positive mindset while performing. Another participant mentioned that using mindfulness to cool down after the performance would be beneficial.

#### *Self-Reflection 4*

The fourth, and final, self-reflection was completed 10 weeks after the mindfulness curriculum had been first introduced, with the first self-reflection completed during the second week. This was also the week of the final dance concert and took place during the class period following the performance. The purpose and focus of the last self-reflection compared prior performance experience to performance after implementation of a mindfulness-based curriculum, and can be found in its entirety in Appendix C.

The impact and effects of the curriculum on the choreographic and learning process, performance process, and overall experience were of particular interest to the researcher. Of the total 37 participants, 33 responded to this self-reflection.

Student participants began the self-reflection by detailing a dance-specific performance prior to the dance concert, or by stating that the dance concert was their first dance performance experience. Participants were then asked to detail the effects they believed mindfulness had on their individual performance experiences, comparing to previous performance experience, if applicable. Of the 33 responses, 61% self-described as being very experienced in terms of dance

performance, with 27% self-identifying as having some prior dance performance experience. Only 2 of the 33 responding participants had no dance performance experience prior to the final dance concert.

Most commonly, 58% student participants reported that mindfulness helped them feel calmer and experience less nervousness prior to performance. Of those who responded, 24% reported feeling more focused during their performance after having received the mindfulness-based curriculum than they did in their previous performance experience. Other responses showed that 27% of the participants felt more aware of their body, feeling more in-tune and connected. Another 9% expressed an increase of flow in their performance and 12% responded that they were able to more genuinely perform and express emotion. Another 12% reported that the movement had more meaning, and that they were more easily able to convey that meaning through movement after implementing a mindfulness-based curriculum.

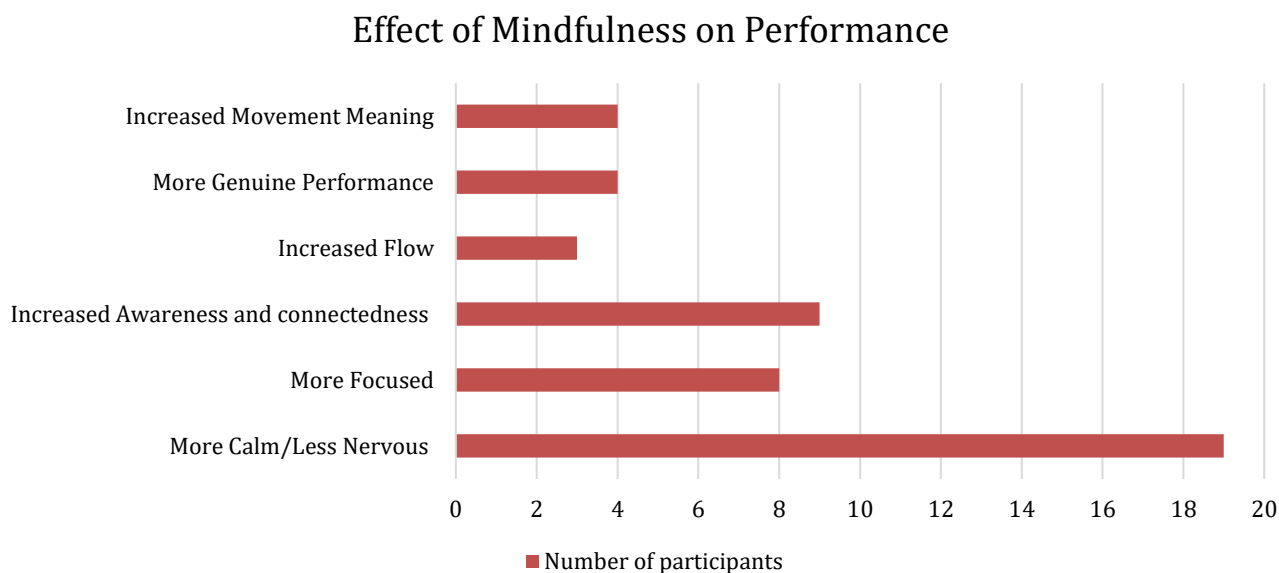


Figure 8. Effect of Mindfulness on Participant Performance

Other self-reflection responses described an increase in positivity, confidence, energy, patience with peers, and understanding of movement. Increased excitement prior to performance,

feeling more connected with each other, and therefore more synchronized in both mind and timing, and more effective use of breath were also mentioned in the final self-reflection as possible effects of the mindfulness curriculum on performance.

The third question this self-reflection asked participants to describe the effects of mindfulness on the choreographic process in terms of creating and learning movement. Of the respondents, 36% relayed feeling a deeper connection between meaning and created movement, with an isolated report that there was not much impact on the choreographic process. In addition, 39% of participants explained that the mindfulness practices created a greater understanding of the movement, more awareness of the movement, increased flow within the movement, and a greater ability to remember the movement. About 6% of participant responses indicated a greater mind-body connection and another 6% indicated a greater ability to breathe through the movement because of the mindfulness-based curriculum. Ultimately, 15% of student participants reported that the regular practice of mindfulness, and correlating movement explorations, increased their ability to communicate through movement and understand the meaning behind a movement.

The fourth question asked students to describe the effect they believed mindfulness had on their performance preparation. Of those who responded, 36% noticed increased focus during performance preparation, while 39% experienced an increase of calm. Less anxiety was reported by 21% of participants, with 12% reporting having experienced more positivity throughout the process. Additionally, 6% of participants noticed an increase in productivity, 3% reported better communication, and another 3% noted increased collaboration among their peers. Results further showed that 6% of participants mentioned feeling increased confidence, 6% noted that the

mindfulness curriculum made the performance process smoother, and 3% connected their individual reflection to their mindfulness practice. These results are shown in Figure 9.

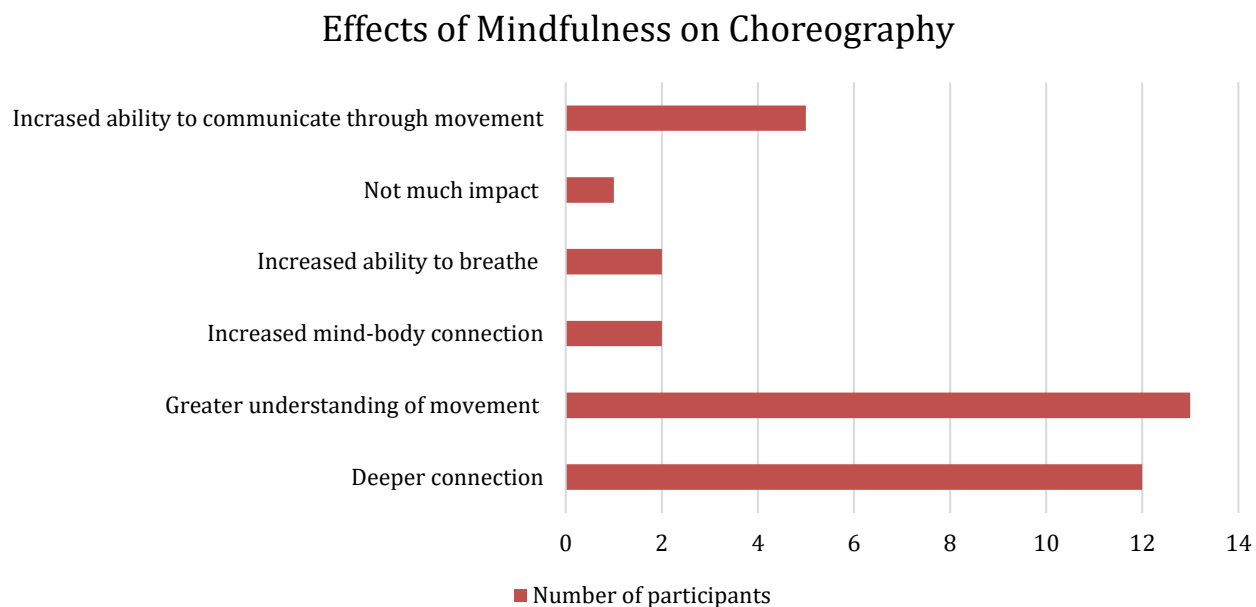


Figure 9. Effects of Mindfulness on Student Understanding of Choreography

The final self-reflection question gave participants the opportunity to provide additional feedback and/or comment on their overall experience. Those participants who had previously been involved in the dance concert process were invited to compare their experience preparing for and performing in dance concerts pre- and post-mindfulness curriculum. One student mentioned, “This year choreography was more collaborative and less confrontational. Everyone seemed to be more open to including everyone’s ideas.” Another participant reported that “The rehearsal time this year was more efficient. We had less time for choreography, due to COVID, but were able to get more done in less time.” Additionally, 9% of participants said the process helped them “understand and create more meaningful movement.” Other participants reported feeling increased calm and confidence. One participant described what it was like to follow along with the narrator who was guiding the audience through a mindfulness practice before each piece: “Backstage I would close my eyes and follow along with the practice the narrator was

talking the audience through. This really helped me to stay calm and focus before I went on stage. It also helped bring me into the present moment without letting my nerves take over.”

### **Interview Analysis**

Following the dance concert, student participants met individually with the researcher in the form of an interview. The purpose of each interview was to gain a well-rounded view of the student perspective and experience in terms of the effectiveness of the mindfulness curriculum in the classroom, as well as the impact mindfulness had on the creative, choreographic, and performance processes. Utilizing an interview format allowed the researcher to ask individual participants questions specific to their unique experiences, provided space for clarifying questions, and gave participants the opportunity to openly talk about, and reflect on, their experience as a whole.

Each interview began with the researcher asking the student participant to explain their dance, performance, choreography, and mindfulness experience prior to this class (Appendix C). Based on those responses, the researcher asked follow-up questions about how students approached each scenario prior to the study, whether their approaches were at all altered during the study, and how students experienced each of those scenarios after the study ended. Student participants who had prior choreography experience were asked to compare their experiences and processes in creating movement prior to this course, during the process with the mindful movement explorations, as well as how they saw themselves approaching choreography in the future. Participants who did not have prior choreography experience were asked to expand on their perspective of the meaning of the choreography, how the movement connected to mindfulness ideals, and whether they noticed any effects mindfulness may have had on learning, remembering, and performing the movement. Participants and the researcher also discussed



which mindfulness practices worked, which did not, how often the participant felt mindfulness should be practiced, and identified specific moments that were most effective for mindfulness practice. The researcher asked participants to reflect on and share any effects noticed by practicing mindfulness outside of the dance classroom. Next, the researcher asked the participants whether they thought a mindfulness-based curriculum should continue to be implemented in dance courses moving forward.

Student participants expressed a vast variation in dance, performance, choreography, and mindfulness experience entering this course and study. Interestingly, of the 37 student participants who were interviewed, all but 2 expressed that the mindfulness curriculum had a positive impact on their dance experience: both of these participants mentioned that it was hard to focus during the mindfulness practices and they had a difficult time engaging and fully participating in the practices. However, all 37 participants stated that mindfulness should continue to be implemented in the dance classroom, noting that even if it did not make a big impact on them individually, it was most likely helpful to others. Overwhelmingly, student participants reported that breath practices were the most effective and that mindfulness should be practiced at least once per week in the dance classroom. Participant opinion on when mindfulness should be practiced (at the beginning, middle, or end of the rehearsal period) varied greatly.

Participants further reported that mindfulness positively impacted their confidence in their ability to perform the movement, increased their body awareness, and strengthened their mind-body connection. One student participated stated, “Imagining yourself doing the movement confidently and being able to do the movement challenges you to feel confident and do that movement in real life.” Another said, “I feel like now I’m more aware of my body and myself in

terms of what I need.” One student expressed how mindfulness helped bring her, and keep her, in the present moment while dancing, “We dance, and breathing with the dance makes it more real and keeps you in the movement in the moment. Your body will do it for you, you just need to be there for it.”

Student choreographers reported that using mindfulness, and mindfulness-based movement explorations helped direct created movement while increasing the depth of meaning behind the movement, “Mindfulness directed the movement, and gave the movement direction and meaning.” One participant, an experienced dancer, performer, and choreographer, explained the effect of mindfulness this way: “I’ve performed and choreographed a lot, but not every movement came from something. Before it was just what looked good or what I was good at. Now the movement I create is more directed and authentic; it comes from a state of mind.”

Participating in the mindfulness-based curriculum also helped increase student understanding of mindfulness practices. The majority of student participants came into the research study with at least some mindfulness experience, but implementing mindfulness and relating it to movement helped make the practice of mindfulness more accessible. “Mindfulness doesn’t have to be sit and meditate or do yoga,” explained one participant. “It can just be taking a quick second to close your eyes and breathe if you are stressed or anxious like before a test or presentation.” Many student participants also noticed how the effects of practicing mindfulness carried over into daily life. One reported, “I feel like I’m more positive and outgoing and that I’m more aware of what I say to other people now.”

## Summary

The intent of this research was separated into two focused questions regarding the ways mindfulness informs and impacts dance processes, such as choreography and performance, as well as the ways mindfulness ideals translate into effective social-emotional learning tools through dance movement. Based on the themes that emerged during this research, it was evident that the effects of mindfulness on choreographic, creative, and performance processes vary from student to student. However, participants overwhelmingly expressed that mindfulness did have positive effects on their experiences, specifically in terms of focus, increasing calm, and decreasing anxiety throughout the rehearsal and performance processes. In addition, student participant responses indicated that choreography and movement creation increased in depth, meaning, and intent when connected to mindfulness practices.

In terms of social-emotional learning, students expressed having a positive experience by participating in the mindfulness curriculum that reached beyond this dance course and performance. As evidenced by their responses, students were able to gain a deeper understanding of both mindfulness and movement by connecting the two ideas. Ultimately, implementation of the mindfulness-based curriculum served student participants both in and out of the dance classroom, on and off the stage, and within and beyond an academic environment.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

#### **Overview**

The goal of this study was to create and implement a mindfulness-based curriculum into dance education classes at the high school level, with beginning, intermediate, and advanced dancers being exposed to mindfulness ideals through meditation practices and mindfulness activities that would coincide with movement explorations at each rehearsal. The results of these movement explorations would be the basis of the choreography for a culminating dance concert and based on an overall theme of mindfulness. Determining the effects of mindfulness on the whole student as a social-emotional learning tool, was also a focus of this study. The following questions were used to guide the study and its accompanying research:

- Q1 In what ways do mindfulness practices inform and effect choreographic, performance, and creative processes?
- Q2 In what ways do mindfulness ideas translate into effective teaching tools in regard to social-emotional learning through dance movement?

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the implications of the study, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research. The research has shown that not only can mindfulness be used as motivation for choreography, but that it is also an effective social-emotional learning teaching tool in the dance classroom, positively informing movement creation and performance processes.

## **Implications of the Study**

Based on the outcomes of this research, it is evident that mindfulness practice has a positive correlation with expanding the breadth and depth of choreography and creative processes, positively impacts the performance process, and serves as an effective social-emotional learning tool. Student participants reported a positive relationship with mindfulness both inside and outside of the dance classroom. Self-reflection responses, as well as interview responses, reflected that student participants felt more connected to the movement, were better able to represent meaning through movement, and that choreographed movement held a deeper meaning after taking part in a mindfulness-based curriculum. These responses also conveyed a greater ability to focus, a deeper mind-body connection, an increase in awareness, and a decrease in stress and anxiety among participants after experiencing mindfulness as part of the dance curriculum.

The most telling question presented by the researcher to student participants asked whether participants thought mindfulness should continue to be taught in the dance classroom regularly as part of the curriculum. All student participants responded that mindfulness should continue to be taught as part of the dance curriculum, even both participants who described mindfulness as not being effective for them personally. Participants overwhelmingly reported that mindfulness should be practiced at least one time per week in dance courses and that mindfulness practices dealing with breath were the most effective forms of mindfulness practice.

As part of the post-performance interview, student participants shared when and how they use mindfulness on their own. Notably, the majority of participants reported using mindfulness prior to performance, and related this to other content areas, practicing mindfulness before tests, quizzes, and presentations. Many participants also shared how implementing

mindfulness practices helped them sleep, and that they had begun regularly practicing mindfulness each night as part of their bedtime routine.

Although more research is suggested in relation to the effects of mindfulness practices on dance students, this research suggests that practicing mindfulness regularly as part of a dance curriculum positively informs and effects choreography and performance processes. It also shows that mindfulness-based curricula can provide students with social-emotional tools that can be used across contents and beyond the school environment.

### **Limitations to the Study**

Despite the findings of this study portraying a mindfulness-based curriculum as both an effective social-emotional learning teaching tool and a way of initiating an increased depth and breadth of exploration and meaning behind movement creation, it is appropriate to discuss limitations to this study. The primary limitations to this research were related to COVID-19. The school district's hybrid schedule that was implemented at the beginning of the school year limited face-to-face class time between the researcher and participants. The school board also required schools to return to face-to-face instruction four days a week, with high school students attending half of their classes on Mondays and Wednesdays and the other half on Tuesdays and Thursdays. One virtual school day per week was held on Fridays, which meant that the researcher saw students face-to-face as a whole class only twice each week. This interruption to the schedule required the researcher to amend the original mindfulness-based curriculum to fit the new school schedule.

Due to the school mask mandate, participants, the researcher, and visiting community members/choreographers, were also required to wear face masks at all times. Performances were the only exception to this rule, as dancers were allowed to perform without a mask, but masks

were required for audience members, stage crew, technology crew, and choreographers at all times. It was mentioned by participants in their post-performance interviews that rehearsing in a mask made rehearsing, particularly facial expressions and projection, difficult. It is unknown whether the mindfulness-based curriculum would have impacted student participants differently in terms of performance if masks had not been required for students during the rehearsal process.

The smaller sample size could also be viewed as a limitation of this study. Moreover, the researcher acknowledges potential research bias, as the researcher was also the participants' teacher. Student participants may have consciously or unconsciously felt pressure to participate and/or respond in a certain way due to the researcher also being their teacher. Since the researcher taught in that position for several years prior to this research study, many students participating in this study had already been students of the researcher prior to the study. The relationship established between researcher and participant, in the form of teacher and student, may have inadvertently effected research study responses and results.

It could also be argued that the varying experiences with mindfulness that students had prior to the study could have altered their opinion and/or experience with the implemented mindfulness curriculum. Multiple teachers who were involved in the study had also implemented mindfulness into their content and classrooms. Previous experience practicing mindfulness, within or outside of a school environment, could have created implicit or explicit bias in regard to mindfulness ideals and practices. For this reason, implementing a similar study at a school or within a district without a previous history of mindfulness implementation may produce different results.

As previously described, the questionnaire that student participants filled out at the beginning of the research study presented some limitations in response capacity. This oversight

by the researcher may have caused confusion or differing outcomes if the questions had allowed students to choose from multiple responses. This limitation was recognized early in the study, and the researcher did have students expand on their responses in interviews at the end of the study. However, the possibility of having the proper information at the onset of the study may have resulted in differences in data analysis. More research should be conducted to determine the effects of a mindfulness-based curriculum implemented in the dance classroom, particularly in terms of choreography and creative processes, the performance process, and as a social-emotional learning tool for students.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Evidence from this study suggests that a mindfulness-based curriculum could expand the breadth and depth of movement creation and meaning in student choreography, as well as provide social-emotional tools that could be applied in and out of the dance classroom. Further research should be conducted to determine the role of the movement explorations connected to each mindfulness practice in terms of choreography and performance, as well as social-emotional learning. In order to obtain a more accurate outcome, this study should be expanded to other schools, student populations, content areas, and age groups.

The students in this study comprised of a somewhat specialized population, as all students voluntarily enrolled in a dance course. This would suggest that these students already had an interest in and familiarity with dance. It would also suggest that they had a connection to movement prior to entering the study. Many participants also entered the study having some sort of experience with mindfulness from other teachers at the school. However, further research could articulate the role of movement connected with mindfulness in students less familiar with movement exploration and mindfulness practice.



The focus for all dance students for the year was mindfulness through movement, as that was the theme of the culminating dance concert. More research is needed to determine the effects of mindfulness on creative, choreography, and performance processes when other focuses and themes are applied to the movement. For example, if the dance concert theme were poetry, would mindful movement exploration and mindfulness practices still positively effect and inform the choreography, creating deeper meanings and connections between meaning and movement? It should also be noted that implementing the mindfulness curriculum did reduce available class time to create concert choreography. However, students reported that the choreography process went more quickly due to the movement explorations providing movement material. Thus, more research is required to determine the impact of a mindfulness-based curriculum in the dance classroom.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, the outcomes of this study reveal that practicing mindfulness regularly, as part of a dance curriculum, expands the depth and breadth of created movement and meaning behind student choreography. The outcomes of this study also suggest that the regular practice of mindfulness as part of a dance curriculum provides students with tools to effectively approach social-emotional regulation and responses with and without instructor guidance.

Although there is potential for further study and research in terms of the effects of mindfulness in the dance classroom, this research study suggests that connecting mindfulness practice with movement exploration serves as an effective social-emotional learning teaching tool, which in turn, helps students increase focus, decrease anxiety, and develop connection with themselves, others, and the movement they create.

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APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FORMS



UNIVERSITY OF  
NORTHERN COLORADO

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Institutional Review Board

Date: 11/23/2020

Principal Investigator: Whitney Warner

Committee Action: **IRB EXEMPT DETERMINATION – New Protocol**

Action Date: 11/23/2020

Protocol Number: [2010012499](#)

Protocol Title: **[REDACTED] New Curriculum: Supporting Social Emotional Learning Using Mindfulness Motivated Choreography in High School**

Expiration Date:

The University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol and determined your project to be exempt under 45 CFR 46.104(d)(701) for research involving

Category 1 (2018): RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS. Research, conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, that specifically involves normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most research on regular and special education instructional strategies, and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

You may begin conducting your research as outlined in your protocol. Your study does not require further review from the IRB, unless changes need to be made to your approved protocol.

**As the Principal Investigator (PI), you are still responsible for contacting the UNC IRB office if and when:**

- You wish to deviate from the described protocol and would like to formally submit a modification request. Prior IRB approval must be obtained before any changes can be implemented (except to eliminate an immediate hazard to research participants).
- You make changes to the research personnel working on this study (add or drop research staff on this protocol).



UNIVERSITY OF  
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

- At the end of the study or before you leave The University of Northern Colorado and are no longer a student or employee, to request your protocol be closed. \*You cannot continue to reference UNC on any documents (including the informed consent form) or conduct the study under the auspices of UNC if you are no longer a student/employee of this university.
- You have received or have been made aware of any complaints, problems, or adverse events that are related or possibly related to participation in the research.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Compliance Manager, Nicole Morse, at [REDACTED]. Additional information concerning the requirements for the protection of human subjects may be found at the Office of Human Research Protection website - <http://hhs.gov/ohrp/> and <https://www.unco.edu/research/research-integrity-and-compliance/institutional-review-board/>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicole Morse".

Nicole Morse  
Research Compliance Manager

University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784

20190012499

APPENDIX B  
ASSENT AND CONSENT LETTERS





## ASSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

This school year I will be implementing a Mindfulness curriculum into our Dance classes at [REDACTED]. Dance students (Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced/Dance Company) will participate in mindfulness practices, activities, outcomes and definitions that will motivate our movement exploration. Movement exploration exercises will lead to the creation of original dance movement in the form of choreography. This choreography will culminate in our 2021 dance concert [REDACTED]. The implementation of this curriculum, alongside choreographic outcomes and social emotional learning, will be the basis of my thesis project for a Master's in Dance Education from the University of Colorado. I am seeking your assent (permission) to include your experience in the writing of my thesis. Assenting or not assenting to participate in this study is in no way tied to your grade or performance benefits. Benefits of participation may include an increase in personal awareness in regard to the creative/choreographic process, performance and/or connection to mindfulness and mindfulness experience.

**Purpose and Description:** The primary purpose of this study is to determine the ways in which mindfulness practices inform and effect the choreographic, creative and dance performance processes, as well as the ways in which mindfulness ideals translate into movement as an effective Social Emotional teaching strategy. Over the course of this dance course I will guide you through a variety of mindfulness practices and activities. Outcomes, experiences, and definitions will be discussed as a class as well as observed by myself, the teacher/researcher. We will explore a different mindfulness practice/activity each class and translate the experience into movement. Students will be asked to self-reflect on their experience as well as share their experiences, thoughts and emotions with the class. These comments could potentially be used as quotes in my thesis project under a pseudonym (fake name) if you choose to participate. Only the teacher/researcher will be aware of which pseudonym belongs to which student. To clarify, all students will participate in the mindfulness curriculum and culminating movement exploration activities, reflections, discussions, etc. However, only comments and quotes from those students that consent to participate in the study will be used in the thesis writing.

Subject's initials \_\_\_\_\_



Assenting to participate in the research aspect of this thesis study will include:

- Filling out a questionnaire (about 20 questions)- questionnaire questions relate to student experience with dance, mindfulness, and performance
- Answering interview questions (this will be done individually with the teacher, and should take between 5-15 minutes. Interview questions will be based off of survey responses as well as the student's personal experience with the mindfulness curriculum, the choreographic/creative process, and performance. Interviews will be conducted via ZOOM and recorded on that platform for transcription purposes.
- Participation in self-reflections, class discussions, and teacher observations. All of these items are done on a regular basis in this class as effective teaching/learning strategies, however, assenting students responses to these tools could be included in the thesis writing and data collection.
- All student responses and information (name) will be locked in a cupboard accessible only to the researcher, as well as saved on a password-protected computer.

Students will be guided through the process of creating movement, and will never be asked to individually perform their original movement, unless the student wishes to do so. Original student choreography will be utilized to create the pieces for our dance concert, [REDACTED] Intermediate and Advanced dancers. Beginning dance classes will perform their choreography in front of their individual classes. Student performances will be done in pairs, small groups, or as an entire class, in front of the class, and in the culminating dance concert (for Intermediate and Advanced dancers). A recording of the dance concert will be available to all concert dancers.

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 [REDACTED]

Subject's initials\_\_\_\_\_

---

Subject's Signature

Date

---

Researcher's Signature

Date



PARENTS CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

PROJECT TITLE: *A New Curriculum: Supporting Social Emotional Learning Using Mindfulness Motivated Choreography in High School Students*  
 RESEARCHER: Whitney H. Warner, Graduate Student  
 PHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED]  
 FACULTY ADVISOR: [REDACTED]  
 EMAIL: [REDACTED]

With the help of my students, I am researching the effects of a mindfulness based curriculum on the social emotional learning of high school students, as well as the ways in which mindfulness practices, activities, outcomes and definitions can motivate and effect the choreographic process and dance performance. If you grant permission, and if your child indicates a willingness to participate by signing the assent form, your child's experience could be documented and utilized in my thesis writing under a pseudonym to ensure the protection of student privacy. Student responses and information (name) will remain in a locked cupboard accessible only to the researcher, as well as saved to a password-protected computer. All dance students will participate in the mindfulness curriculum, movement exploration activities, as well as self-reflections, class discussions and teacher observations. However, only those providing consent (from student and parent/guardian) will participate in the following activities:

- A short questionnaire- all questions relate to student experience with dance, dance styles, performance and mindfulness
- A 5-15 minute interview with the teacher (Whitney Warner) following dance concert- interview questions will be based off of answers to the questionnaire, as well as the student's individual experience with the mindfulness curriculum, choreography and performance. These interviews will be conducted via ZOOM with the meeting "recorded" for transcription purposes.
- Possibility of quotes used in thesis writing from class discussions, observations and self-reflections.

Parent's initials\_\_\_\_\_



I foresee no risks of participating in this study. All students will be getting the same experience through the implantation of the mindfulness curriculum, movement explorations and culminating dance concert. Participation in this study will in no way effect student academic grades, citizenship, or performance benefits/opportunities. Benefits from participating in this study could include an increase of self-awareness, as survey and interview questions will allow students the opportunity for deep, insightful, reflection and expression.

Please feel free to phone me if you have any questions or concerns about this research, methods, etc. Please retain a copy of this letter for your records.

Thank you for assisting me with my research and thesis project.

Sincerely,

Whitney H. Warner

Participation is voluntary. You may decide for your child not to participate in this study and if your child begins 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 your child is otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like 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 selection or treatment as a research participant please contact [REDACTED]

---

Child's Full Name (please print)

---

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

---

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX C  
RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

## Pre Questionnaire

[https://unco.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_eMcZ3dgpCfplVxb](https://unco.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eMcZ3dgpCfplVxb)

\*Please explain your answers using as much detail as possible

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_

2. Age \_\_\_\_\_

3. Dance Class Title \_\_\_\_\_

4. How long have you been dancing?

a. This class is my first experience with dance

b. Less than one year

c. 1-3 years

d. 3-5 years

e. 5-7 years

f. 7-10 years

g. 10 years + Please state number of years \_\_\_\_\_

5. How would you classify your dance ability?

a. Novice/Beginner

b. Average/Intermediate

c. Advanced

6. Please explain why you chose the above answer.

7. What styles/genres of dance do you have experience with?

a. Ballet

b. Modern

c. Tap

d. Jazz

e. Contemporary

f. Hip Hop

g. Break Dancing

h. Cultural Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

i. Ballroom Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

j. Other \_\_\_\_\_

k. I do not have experience in any of these genres but am interested in

8. Please expand on your experience listed above. In other words, how long have you been dancing each of these styles/genres? List the styles/genres by length of experience (most experience first, least experience last) along with the amount of time you have been dancing each style/genre.

9. Please rank the styles/genres you have experienced in order of your favorite (first) to your least favorite (last).

10. Please rank the styles/genres you feel you are best at executing in order from strongest to weakest.

11. What is your experience with dance choreography (creating dance movement)?

- a. I have only been taught dances
- b. I have choreographed dances I have performed at home for family or friends.
- c. I have done a little improvisation in a previous dance class.
- d. I feel comfortable and experienced with improvisation
- e. I have choreographed dances for myself and/or groups that have performed at school, in the community, etc.

12. Please expand on your above answer.

13. When you create dance movement (choreography, improvisation) what do you use or have you used as motivation for your movement (Circle all that apply)?

- a. I have never created my own movement
- b. I repeat, or try to mimic, dance movement I already know that was taught to me by someone else
- c. I tend to repeat the same movement in different ways, movement I'm comfortable with and that I like
- d. I don't pay attention I just let my body move
- e. I've "played" improvisation games that have helped me explore movement.

Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

- f. I dance my emotions. Please explain \_\_\_\_\_



- g. I use personal experiences as my motivation. Please explain \_\_\_\_\_
- h. I've been given themes/ideas/storylines etc to motivate my movement. Please explain \_\_\_\_\_
- i. I've chosen an inspiration, theme, idea, storyline, etc. to motivate my movement. Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

14. What is your experience with dance performance?

- a. I have never danced in front of anyone
- b. I have performed in front of family, friends, or a small group of my peers.
- c. This class is my first experience performing in front of anyone
- d. I have some experience with performance. Please explain \_\_\_\_\_
- e. I have quite a bit of experience performing in front of groups large and small. Please explain \_\_\_\_\_
- f. I consider myself to have a lot of performance experience and feel comfortable performing in front of groups of any size, by myself or with my peers. Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

15. What is your current experience with mindfulness?

- a. I've never heard of it and have no idea what it is
- b. I've heard of it, but don't know much about it
- c. I know what it is but don't really know how to do it
- d. I only know what we have done and talked about in class.
- e. I know what it is and have practiced a couple of times before.
- f. I know what it is and am comfortable with mindfulness practices. I may even be able to guide myself and/or others through a few mindfulness practices/activities.
- g. I know what it is and practice mindfulness regularly. I could easily guide myself and/or others through multiple mindfulness practices.

16. Please explain your mindfulness experiences.

17. I have done the following mindfulness practices (circle all that apply):

- a. 3 breaths
- b. 4-7-8 breathing
- c. STOP
- d. Loving Kindness
- e. Mindful walking
- f. Mindful coloring
- g. Mindful eating
- h. Mindful conversation

- i. senses meditation/ 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 meditation
- j. Use of anchors (breath, thoughts, what you hear, etc)
- k. emotions
- l. other (please list all others here):

18. Please explain your experience with any mindfulness practices you have experienced (how do they make you feel, what are your thoughts, would you do them again, recommend them to a friend, how often have you used/practiced, etc):

19. When you feel nervous, stressed, overwhelmed or anxious what do you do to help calm yourself down?
- a. I don't have any idea how to calm myself down I just get through it
  - b. I don't know
  - c. Other: (please indicate if this was a strategy learned through or related to class this year) This would be included on the post survey portion

20. When you feel nervous to perform, or get up/speak in front of others, how do you stay calm and prepare yourself?
- a. I have never spoken or performed in front of others
  - b. I don't know
  - c. Other: (please indicate if this was a strategy learned through or related to class this year) This would be included on the post survey portion

**Self Reflection One:**

**Name:**

**Class:**

**Dance Theme (for Dance Company dancers you will specify in each question which dance you are referring to):**

- 1. Which aspects of mindfulness motivated you movement? Which mindfulness practices influenced and inspired your movement?**
  - 2. Where and how in your movement can I see these ideas based on mindfulness and your dance theme?**
  - 3. What was the feedback you received on choreography for this piece?**
  - 4. What was/ is your reaction to this feedback emotionally? Mentally? Physically? Choreographically? Creatively? From a performance standpoint?**
  - 5. Based on your feedback, what will your focus be as you approach your movement moving forward?**
- T

## Self-Reflection Questions 2

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_

Dance Theme \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you practice mindfulness outside of class? Which practices? How often?
2. How have mindfulness practices influenced your experience in dance? School? Life?
3. What challenges/frustrations have you experienced in the choreography/performance process (this includes cleaning)?
4. How have you, or how can you, apply mindfulness practices to help with these challenges/frustrations?
5. What emotions apply to your dance? How can you apply these emotions to your dance and performance? How does mindfulness relate/connect to this?

**Mindfulness through Movement Self-Reflection #3**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_

1. How prepared do you feel for performance as a whole? How many dances are you performing?
2. Which aspects of performance do you feel the most prepared for? Company dancers: include aspects of each piece/or piece titles. All dancers please be as specific as possible.
3. Which aspects of performance do you feel the least prepared for? Company dancers: include aspects of each piece/piece titles. All dancers please be as specific as possible.
4. What can you do to help yourself feel more prepared for performance? Please be as specific and as detailed as possible.
5. In what ways can mindfulness help you with performance? Before? During? After? Please be as specific as possible.

Self-Reflection Post-Concert

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_

**Please be as detailed and as specific as possible, use the back of this form if necessary.**

1. Please explain your dance performance experience prior to our dance concert. This could include performing in front of family or friends, dance recitals, competitions, organized performances, church/community performances, etc. Or state if dance concert was your first dance performance experience.
2. Please describe the effect you believe mindfulness had on your performance experience. You can compare/contrast to prior experience if applicable
3. Please describe the effect you believe mindfulness had on the choreographic process (learning and/or creating movement).
4. Please describe the effect you believe mindfulness had on the preparation for performance (class/rehearsal time, individual preparation, etc)
5. Intermediate dancers: Please make any further comments in regard to your experience preparing for and performing in dance concert.  
Company dancers: Please comment on the difference between this year and last year's preparation and choreographic process (if applicable), if you were not a Company member last year, please comment on your experience preparing and performing in dance concert. What are things that you felt did work?  
Things that didn't work?

### Possible Interview Questions

\*Interviews will be held at the end of the study after the dance concert performance is complete

- On your questionnaire/self reflection you mentioned that your experience with choreography was \_\_\_\_\_. How was that experience for creating movement for you? Pleasant? Difficult? Inspiring?
- Was your experience with creating movement different at all this year from the experiences you have had with it in the past? Explain?
- On your questionnaire/self-reflection you mentioned that your previous experience with mindfulness was \_\_\_\_\_. Which mindfulness practices that we did, or that you discovered on your own, resonated with you? If any.
- Can you expand on your response to this questionnaire/self-reflection prompt?
- Do you practice mindfulness on your own now? Which practices do you do? Why do you think those practices are the ones that you find most helpful?
- Have you noticed any changes in your dance experience since practicing mindfulness regularly? In your school experience? In life in general?
- You were on Dance Company last year, compare and contrast your experience last year with your experience this year. What do you think played a role in the differences? Similarities?

OR

- This is your first experience on Dance Company, what insight can you give me into the role mindfulness played in your experience this year? What was your experience this year?
- Did any of the activities we did in class help to motivate or inspire the movement you created? Can you explain and give examples?
- This year was so different and unexpected compared to school years in the past. Beginning with a hybrid schedule, moving to 4 days in school one day remote, (fill in the blank with the rest of the school changes here), what was your perspective and experience with dance in relation to all of the changes, stress, crazy, unexpected, etc. ?
- How would you summarize your experience in dance this year? How would you summarize your experience with mindfulness up to this point?
- What connections did you make this year? Between mindfulness and dance/movement? Classmates? The use of mindfulness/mindfulness practices?

- Let's look at the questionnaire you filled out at the beginning of this project. What is your reaction to some of these responses? How would you compare/contrast that with your experience now?
- Let's look at your self-reflection responses from through out this project? What can you tell me about the overall process and comparing and contrasting yourself (mentally, physically, emotionally, performance, choreographically, creatively, etc) with your pre-project self to yourself now?
- Is there anything you would like to add in regard to dance? Mindfulness? Your emotions? Your thoughts? Your experience?



APPENDIX D  
CURRICULUM RESOURCES



29 September 2020

Members of the [REDACTED] Administration:

This letter authorizes that Whitney Haslam Warner may implement a Mindfulness-based curriculum into all school affiliated dance courses. Students, along with parental/guardian consent, who have consented to participate in Warner's, *A New Curriculum: Supporting Social Emotional Learning Using Mindfulness Motivated Choreography in High School Students* thesis project will be subject to answering a questionnaire, interview questions, submitted self-reflections and a variety of mindfulness practices and activities will be experienced by all students participating in the study or not. Class discussions and observations may also be utilized by the teacher/researcher for data collection in relation to this project. Student responses will serve as data and material for the thesis project. Student privacy will be protected in the thesis writing by way of pseudonyms. The purpose of this project is to implement Social Emotional Learning into public high school dance courses by way of mindfulness. Mindfulness practices, activities, outcomes, and definitions will be used as motivation for movement explorations and choreography. Mindfulness experiences will be translated into movement and culminate in the 2021 spring dance concert [REDACTED].

All research, data collection, and curriculum implementation utilized for this project can be requested and viewed by the administration, participants, or their parent/guardian at any time.

This letter verifies that, due to the nature of this research project, the safety and privacy of students involved as well as the lack of risk to participating subjects, that the [REDACTED] Administration may grant permission for the execution of said project. All research conducted supports the District's mission and purpose: "In partnership with parents and communities, we will foster educational excellence in a safe and nurturing environment where all students can acquire the skills, knowledge, values and commitment to lifelong learn necessary to contribute and adapt to our diverse and changing world."

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Researcher

Whitney H. Warner

Date

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Administrator

Date

RESOURCES USED FOR CREATING THE  
MINDFULNESS-BASED CURRICULUM

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