

Linked Together:

Creative Movement as a Way to Promote Creativity,
Collaboration, and Ownership among At-Risk Youth

by

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ABSTRACT

“Linked Together” is a choreographic piece inspired by at-risk youth and their ability to learn, grow, and transform their lives through dance. The idea for the piece originated from dance programs implemented with under-resourced populations in Virginia, Panama, and India. My teaching experiences in these places sparked the development of a longer, more comprehensive dance program in Arizona, with a Boys and Girls Club. The Arizona dance program included specific somatics exercises, focused on the integration of mind and body, as well as other types of improvisations, to help the participants learn about movement concepts and develop original movement.

The title “Linked Together” suggests that all people are connected in many ways, regardless of personal differences such as socioeconomic status or language. The dancers included myself, Arizona State University (ASU) dance students, as well as Boys and Girls Club dance program participants. For the concert, all dancers portrayed stories and concepts related to empowerment through emotionally charged movement, and thereby provided audience members with a visceral lens through which to see the transformative powers of dance. The data collected from this project through observations, surveys, and interviews suggest that constructive behaviors that are internalized through dance can flow seamlessly into the non-dance world, encouraging people to think creatively, collaborate with others, gain a sense of ownership, and feel empowered in all parts of life.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Dance Education for Youth

In the early 20th century, leading American educators approved certain dance forms to supplement formal education, largely based on the idea that movement and morals were interlinked. Physical educators and social reformers of this era believed that children who learned to move lightly, gracefully, and rhythmically would internalize wholesome values and become responsible, productive adults. Dance was a regular part of schools' physical education programs for decades, primarily directed at girls for whom sports were not an option. Children also learned to dance, usually for pageant purposes, in youth groups such as 4-H, Campfire Girls of America, and Girl Scouts of America.

A hundred years later, countless American youth continue to benefit physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially through positive dance experiences, whether at their school, a dance studio, or a community center. At-risk youth in particular can achieve tremendous empowerment through dance, and their individual transformations can make a significant social impact in the long run. The term "at-risk youth" broadly refers to children and teenagers who are susceptible to any of the following: violence, bullying, sexual harassment, racism, poverty, homelessness, learning difficulties, low expectations, illiteracy, boredom, apathy, misbehavior, dropout, drugs, gangs, teen pregnancy, and dysfunctional families. Thousands of programs for at-risk youth operate throughout the United States, and many of these programs embed dance into a larger arts curriculum. Unfortunately, as history has shown, it is usually the arts programs and especially dance classes that are the first to suffer as a result of budget cuts.

Working with at-risk youth requires a great amount of patience, compassion, and flexibility. Dance educators who come from at-risk backgrounds, such as myself, have a unique advantage when it comes to creating effective dance programs for at-risk youth. In many cases, formerly at-risk dance educators can relate to at-risk youth on an intimate level and quickly gain their trust, which can facilitate transparent communication, honest self-expression, and creative risk-taking. Additionally, formerly at-risk dance educators can offer valuable advice to other dance educators who are interested in helping at-risk youth, but who have trouble relating to the youth because of socioeconomic and cultural differences. My early dance experiences have led me to believe that an empathetic and encouraging dance teacher is as important as a fun and well-structured dance class. As my personal story illustrates, a good dance teacher can make the difference between a life full of passion and meaning, and a life of indifference or even crime.

Personal Background

I was raised in a low-income environment plagued by domestic violence, drugs, and shootings. Always on guard, and unable to imagine a worthwhile future for myself, I became increasingly apathetic toward academics. My home life was characterized by constant frustration and worrying, which kept me awake at night and contributed to my deepening lack of interest in school. When I went to school, I lashed out and disrespected the teachers, just to get their attention. I constantly used negative language. Underneath it all, though, I was physically tired from being in fight-or-flight mode, I was mentally beaten down, and I was emotionally unavailable. I developed a distorted self-image that seemed impossible to break. I needed an outlet. Due to limited finances, afterschool activities such as dance were not an option for me. Then, I discovered dance.

My high school was one of the few schools in the country with a dance program. The dance teacher, Cynthia Thomas, taught basic technique and choreography, and she also helped students feel empowered through positive feedback. She told me things like, “You’re going to make it,” and, “I always knew you were creative,” and, “You are a great dancer, and if you stay positive, the sky is the limit for you.” Her encouraging words transcended the classroom and became part of my daily life. Dance class proved to me that I could be creative and successful, so I looked for opportunities to be creative and successful in other parts of life. Dance class also taught me about leadership, ownership, confidence, communication, collaboration, and passion. Dancing became my primary means of escaping my struggles and fears. I went on to pursue a bachelor’s degree and then a master’s degree in dance, while many of my former acquaintances dropped out of school and succumbed to at-risk behaviors.

My positive experiences with dance have inspired me to give back to society. I have taught dance to at-risk youth since 2008, but my studies at Arizona State University have encouraged me to think more critically about my teaching strategies and desired outcomes. In 2013 and 2014, I facilitated dance programs with at-risk youth in Virginia, Panama, India, and Arizona. The programs ranged from two weeks to four months. My work in Virginia, Panama, and India laid the groundwork for a longer and more comprehensive program in Arizona, with a Boys and Girls Club. The Arizona program had a strategically designed curriculum that focused on creative movement and Laban Movement Analysis (LMA). The curriculum provided structures for the participants to explore diverse movement concepts, and to develop unique, empowering movement. The end goal was to choreograph a dance to be performed in the piece “Linked Together.”

“Linked Together”

“Linked Together,” my culminating work as a graduate student, was influenced in part by my experiences as a formerly at-risk dance student, and as a dance educator for at-risk youth. The piece is divided into four sections. It begins with my West African solo, entitled “OSHUN,” in which I explore the theme of empowerment by embodying Oshun, the West African goddess of fresh water. My personal experiences also drove the fourth section, “Beneath the Surface,” my duet with spoken-word artist Charque Bacon, for which I improvise to a poetic portrayal of my growth and life transformation, using a combination of modern dance and hip-hop movement. The middle sections of the piece were co-choreographed with nine ASU dancers and eight Boys and Girls Club dancers, and the theme of empowerment resonates throughout those sections, as well.

The second part, “We must not be anything other than what we are,” is based on the ASU dancers’ personal experiences with dance as an empowering activity. The dancers use a variety of dance forms and to convey their deep, authentic feelings. The third section is prefaced by a film entitled “Moved to Inspire,” by Steven Law that featured excerpts from my classrooms with at-risk youth in Virginia, Panama, India, and Arizona. When the film fades, the Boys and Girls Club dancers begin their section, “BE CREATIVE.” Besides the overarching theme of empowerment, this section depicts the concepts of creativity, collaboration, and ownership. I had strived to embed these concepts into my lesson plans throughout my program with the Boys and Girls Club, and the concepts clearly had influenced the dancers’ choreography. The dancers’ surveys and one-on-one interviews provided additional validation that the dancers had enhanced their awareness about these concepts and understood how to incorporate them into their lives.

At a basic level, the intent of “Linked Together” was twofold: to show audience members that everyone is connected regardless of personal differences, and that at-risk youth can benefit from dance education. As a researcher, however, I wanted to test a specific type of curriculum for at-risk youth. I chose to design the Boys and Girls Club curriculum around the concepts of creativity, collaboration, and ownership after critical reflection about my own history with dance. As a youth, my experiences with creative movement in particular taught me the most about thinking creatively, working with others, and owning my decisions and actions. Furthermore, many dance educators and scholars have written about these concepts as fundamental benefits of dance education. In *Dance for Young Children: Finding the Magic in Movement* (1988), Sue Stinson suggests that creative dance can help youth, as early as preschoolers, become “more aware of themselves, sensitive to others, and actively conscious of the world we share” (9).

So, as I helped the Boys and Girls Club dancers explore empowering movement and co-choreograph their section of “Linked Together,” I investigated my main research question: How can creative movement promote creativity, collaboration, and ownership? I also attempted to address two sub-questions concerning the program design: How can LMA enhance creativity; and how can LMA and the community dance circle (an improvisatory exercise) stimulate movement and cultivate a safe environment for collaboration? Lastly, I was curious about the greater social impact of my program, so I sought to answer the following question: How can creative movement help at-risk youth connect to the greater world? Consequently, the choreographic project “Linked Together” was not just about making art; it also was about testing and assessing a carefully crafted, empowerment-driven creative movement program for at-risk youth.

Summary

There is great need for dance educators, as well as other people who are interested in making social change through the arts, to discuss best practices, collect data, and share their research about dance education for at-risk youth. In Chapter 2, Review of Literature, I summarize the history of dance education, advocate for the inclusion of creative movement activities into community arts programs, and point out a sizable research gap concerning creative movement education for at-risk youth in particular.

In Chapter 3, Methodology, I share how my graduate work addresses this research gap. I begin by describing how my dance teaching experiences in Virginia, Panama, and India inspired me to create the Arizona dance program. Next, I summarize my interview with dance educator Susan Bendix, who informed my program design. Finally, I discuss the program attributes: participants, class structure, tone, somatics emphasis, units and themes, data collection methods, teaching approach, discipline, and challenges.

I then analyze the outcomes of the Arizona dance program in Chapter 4, Analysis and Reflection. I use my personal observations as well as participants' surveys and interviews to answer the research questions proposed earlier in this chapter. In addition, I assess how well "Linked Together" portrayed the benefits of dance education for at-risk youth and showed that everyone is, in fact, interlinked.

In Chapter 5, Discussion, I discuss shortcomings regarding the research methods and point out ways they could have been improved to produce more accurate results. I also offer recommendations to dance educators who plan to work with at-risk youth. Working with at-risk youth can be incredibly challenging, but an empathetic and well-prepared teacher can make a lasting impact on individual lives and the greater world.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A Brief History of Dance Education

Dance has been part of human life for thousands of years, but dance as a form of education for the betterment of society has a much shorter history. The Western dance trends that preceded the contemporary dance education movement are succinctly summarized in dance historian Erica Nielsen's reference book *Folk Dancing* (2011). Although Nielsen's book primarily is about the history of the educational and recreational folk dance movement, it is useful for this study because Nielsen contextualizes folk dancing within larger historical dance trends and sheds light on early dance education practices. While discussing early dance education, I also cite the contemporaneous work of Luther Halsey Gulick Jr., whose efforts were critical for a nationwide dance movement in public schools. Lastly, because Nielsen does not extensively cover the history of modern dance and creative movement in educational contexts, I look to dance educator Patricia Reedy's 2009 article "A Mini History of Dance Education" in order to provide a more thorough summary of the history of dance education for youth in the United States.

Nielsen writes that the Ancient Greeks (1100 BC-146 BC) used dance as part of their formal education and in their everyday life. The Ancient Romans (509 BC-AD 476) borrowed dance traditions from the Ancient Greeks for their own educational training and festivities. Knowledge about how these early dances appeared, however, is very limited. For the next several centuries, Europeans continued to dance as part of religious worship, secular festivities, and even military drills. As time passed, though, dance lost its value as something educational for the betterment of society. (19)

Then, during the European Renaissance (15th-16th centuries), dance reappeared for educational purposes. The earliest known dance manual for urban use was *L'art et instruction de bien dancier* (circa 1488) by an unknown author in Paris. Other manuals appeared in England, Germany, and Italy soon thereafter. In 1588, a French monk named Jehan Tabourot wrote *Orchésographie*, a then-popular manual about French court dance, under the pseudonym Thoinot Arbeau. In this era, music, poetry, drama, philosophy, painting, architecture, astronomy, and dance all thrived in European courts in a way that had not happened since Antiquity (21). The modern physical education movement began at this time, too, with the publication of Girolamo Mercuriale's *De Arts Gymnastica* in 1569, although dance activities would not be incorporated into physical training programs until the 18th century (42).

Most early European dance manuals were written by dancing masters, men who taught movement, etiquette, and manners to the social elite. Before the 17th century, dancing masters actually were fencing instructors who taught dance movements in order to improve their pupils' sword-handling technique. By the 17th century, however, the prestigious art form of ballet had spread throughout the royal courts of Europe. The popularity of ballet validated the importance of dance training, and ultimately redefined the role of dancing master as dance specialist. Aristocrats and members of the upper class consulted dancing masters to learn popular social dances, perfect their balletic footwork, and refine their social graces (21). European peasants imitated the popular dance trends of the social elite, so graceful and elegant court dancing inspired similarly structured folk dances across Europe. Americans of European decent also imitated the European social elite's dance trends through the 19th century (34).

European dancing masters stressed the importance of good manners and graceful movement, but a philosophical movement known as Muscular Christianity took these concepts even further. Muscular Christianity was based on the idea that physical strength and moral strength were entirely interrelated. The philosophy thrived in England and the United States from the mid-19th century through the early 20th century. Physical trainers of this era focused on weight training, gymnastics, and other exercises for men's muscle development and joint suppleness (42). Some trainers incorporated rhythmic exercises called "gymnastics dancing" into their programs. Gymnastics dancing evolved from musical drills, artistically arranged exercises to music, which were popular in the United States and England from 1865 to 1885 (43). YMCAs, which originated in London in 1844, were inspired by the Muscular Christianity movement, and they were important hubs that helped bring gymnastics dancing to men in England and the United States (42).

Females were not encouraged to engage in vigorous physical activity in the 19th century. *Sex and Education: A Fair Chance for Girls* (1873), by Edward H. Clarke, stated that intense exercise overstressed women's purportedly fragile bodies and weakened their reproductive organs. At the turn of the century, however, François Delsarte, a musician and teacher of emotional expression through voice and gesture, developed a system of breathing techniques and movement exercises that were deemed appropriate for women. His work inspired hundreds of physical trainers as well as the pioneers of aesthetic dance in the United States. Melvin Gilbert officially introduced aesthetic dance into physical training at the Harvard Summer School of Physical Education in 1894. As the number of females in educational institutions grew, educators proposed gymnastics dancing and aesthetic dancing as the ideal methods of fitness for women and girls (43-44).

The Progressive era (1890s-1920s) was a time of extreme social reform in the United States. Social reformers founded educational youth groups such as 4-H (1902), Boy Scouts of America (1910), Girl Scouts of America (1912), and Campfire Girls of America (1912) (44). They also established settlement houses and international institutes to help assimilate millions of immigrants (mostly Italians, Eastern Europeans, and Jews) who arrived in the United States from the last quarter of the 20th century through the beginning of World War I (41). Social reformers believed that these centers would help the poor and disenfranchised, which in turn would help society improve. Settlement houses and international institutes generally were run by upper class and middle class women of Anglo-Saxon Protestant heritage. The women taught subjects such as English, American customs, and music and dances from the immigrants' homelands (45). Through these community dance experiences, diverse groups of immigrants were encouraged to appreciate each other's cultures, overcome cultural and gender prejudices, and learn how to interact democratically in a culturally pluralistic society (47).

Progressive era social reformers perceived children as the most impressionable members of society, and they theorized that society would improve significantly if children were taught to internalize important values such as democracy, equality, responsibility, and loyalty. John Dewey, a prominent educational theorist in the early 20th century, believed that such values were best taught through fun and organized play (48). Luther Halsey Gulick Jr., the first director of physical training for New York public schools, and the first president of the Playground Association of America in 1906 (the National Recreation and Parks Association as of 1965), was inspired by Dewey's concept of play. In his book *The Healthful Art of Dancing* (1910), Gulick writes,

Play is for the whole child -- for his heart, mind, and imagination, as well as for his arms, legs, and chest. Play is far more important than mere muscular activity. It is the most natural and the most potent expression of the child's personality. The future lies in it. (17-18)

Gulick states that certain European folk dances, along with some singing-games, are the best type of organized play for children, because large groups of children can move together in small spaces and internalize the good values embedded in the dances (36-37).

Gulick's folk dance program quickly became a requirement in the New York City public schools' physical education curriculum and spread to other cities. Over 30,000 schoolgirls, and a few dozen boys, were taught folk dances and singing-games in the 1908-1909 school year (7). Many of the children belonged to poor families who had recently emigrated from Europe. They lived in small, stifling apartments and played on filthy, dangerous streets. Some children had never even seen grass prior to performing in the annual May Day celebrations at Central Park (64). Gulick reflects,

Manhattan children -- and this is true of the children of all congested cities -- have almost no place in which to play except the streets; but of all the children in the world, city children have the greatest need for healthy play (14).

Gulick does not use the term "at-risk" to describe the children who benefited from his experiment with folk dancing in schools, but by modern definition, Gulick's work might be considered the first study in dance education for at-risk youth. His methodical research approach and clear data assessment provide an excellent framework for similar studies.

In order to assess the efficacy of his folk dancing program, Gulick used a simple, open-ended survey to gather information from teachers and principals about how children at their schools benefited from a folk dance program. Gulick asked the participants:

1. Did [dancing] make [the children] more healthy?
2. Did they become happier?
3. What dances did they perform?
4. How many girls took part in them?
5. In what way did the social effect of these dances show itself? (56)

Gulick dedicates nearly 40 pages of *The Healthful Art of Dancing* to assessing participant responses (57-95). There are many benefits from the folk dance programs, including better cooperation for the common goal of a dance performance, improved poise and grace, enhanced social awareness, and less selfishness (58, 70).

Gulick's personal beliefs about a dance education, combined with the qualitative feedback he received from dozens of education specialists, informed a list of folk dances and singing-games that he deemed the most appropriate for children. Gulick published the list at the end of his book (246-262). Elizabeth Burchenal, who collected folk dances in Europe, worked closely with Gulick, and helped to develop the folk dance curriculum, offered dance descriptions and accompanying tunes for piano in her plethora of teaching manuals (Nielsen 49). Through the efforts of Gulick and Burchenal, and the hundreds of people who shared their thinking, folk dancing in public schools became a nationwide movement and opened the door for other dance forms to be taught in schools (48). By the 1930s, dance manuals in the United States commonly featured folk/traditional dances, aesthetic dances, character dances, and clogging and tap dances. (51)

In “A Mini History of Dance Education,” Patricia Reedy describes the work of other dance educators and theorists who helped to shape the nature of children’s dance education in the early 20th century. Notably, Margaret H’Doubler, who had studied with Dewey and had worked with Gulick and Burchenal, organized the first teacher-training program in dance in the 1920s. H’Doubler believed the future of dance as a democratic art activity rested with the public educational system, and she treated dance as both a science and creative art. From the 1920s-30s, Emile Jacques-Dalcroze developed Eurhythmics, an approach to children’s music and movement that strove for body-mind balance using free play, expansion of imagination, and joy.

Also in the 1930s, Rudolph Laban wrote extensively about dance education, strongly advocated modern dance over ballet, and proposed a developmental plan for children dancing from birth through adulthood. Laban went on to develop a series of movement concepts related to the body in space, weight, and effort. These movement concepts, which became known as Laban Movement Analysis, were popularized through the work of Laban’s protégé, Irmgard Bartenieff, and became the foundation of dance educators’ understanding of creative movement. (Reedy)

Dance pedagogy continued to evolve in relationship to educational trends. The popularity of psychology in the 1950s inspired dance educators to include self-esteem building as a goal in their curricula. Creative movement books of this era stressed the importance of individual awareness and expression. In *Creative Rhythmic Movement for Children* (1954), author Gladys Andrews advocates a child-centered curriculum. Her proposal that teacher and child could learn together was ahead of its time, however. The “open classroom” movement did not gain ground until the 1960s-1970s. (Reedy)

For decades, leading dance educators have pointed out the physical, mental, emotional, and social benefits of creative movement, especially for youth. Some dance educators have dedicated their careers to researching and experimenting with creative movement teaching methods and strategies. For example, Anne Green Gilbert, founder of the Seattle-based Creative Dance Center, has spent over three decades developing Brain-Compatible Dance Education, a “structured methodology for teaching dance using a lesson plan and strategies that create an environment in which the brain is ready, willing, and able to learn” (CreativeDance.org). Green Gilbert’s holistic teaching approach represents an ideal model for dance educators who are interested in working with at-risk youth specifically. At-risk youth often have serious mental hurdles as a result of feeling continuously depressed, oppressed, or worthless, so the importance of mental preparation cannot be understated in their case.

Green Gilbert, along with other leading dance educators such as Sue Stinson, have facilitated the spread of creative movement-based dance education for children via their publications, classes, workshops, and conferences. Unfortunately, despite all of its proven benefits, creative movement still represents a small percentage of the type of dance being taught to youth today. Since the 1980s, school budget cuts and emphasis on subjects considered more applicable to real-world scenarios, such as math and science, have triggered the widespread decline of dance in schools. Youth who want to learn to dance usually enroll in classes at a dance studio or through a community recreation program, and most of these dance classes focus on technique and following the teacher, and they rarely include structured creative exercises and improvisations to help the students find their own authentic, meaningful, expressive movement.

Community Arts

“Community arts” can be an ambiguous term. To some people, the term refers to the work of community arts councils, local arts agencies, nonprofessional artists, or a single cultural group. For the purposes of this document, “community arts” refers to a highly collaborative effort between different kinds of people, including both professional and nonprofessional artists, and typically people from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. In “Community Arts: A Little Historical Context” (2011), community arts historian Maryo Gard Ewell provides the following definition for “community arts”:

Community art is of and by the people of a place and culture, often facilitated by a professional artist. It reflects the values, concerns, and meaning of living in that place or culture.

Gard Ewell also mentions that some people think that community arts focuses more on process than on product, but product is a critical component of the community arts experience, as well. A highly collaborative creative movement program, for which the end product is a dance concert, easily complements the community arts definition proposed by Gard Ewell. Therefore, community arts programs are an ideal setting for creative movement activities to take place.

The concept of community arts is hardly new. Several prominent educators and philosophers recognized the need for community arts during the Progressive era. In addition to the youth clubs, settlement houses, and international institutes that originated at this time, Americans created community centers. Community centers supported John Dewey’s contemporaneous idea of “organized play” because they enabled people of all ages to convene for the purposes of constructive fun.

In response to the nationwide spread of community centers and community arts programs, the National Guild for Community Arts was founded in 1937, with a mission to support and advance access to lifelong learning opportunities in the arts. The National Guild currently supports over 460 member institutions, which serve more than 1.2 million students, employ over 16,00 teaching artists, and reach about six million people annually through performances and exhibitions. The National Guild also collects information and statistics on community arts in general. As of 2015, the National Guild reports that in the United States, there are more than 7,000 not-for-profit arts organizations and government agencies that provide open access to classes, lessons, and workshops in dance, literary arts, media arts, music, theater, visual arts, and other disciplines. These programs, when they are sustained and meet community needs, “encourage cognitive development, increase creativity, improve self-esteem, and promote better health.” (NationalGuild.org).

Since the last quarter of the 20th century, socially engaged arts practitioners, people who seek to improve society through hands-on experiences with the arts, have established a plethora of not-for-profit arts programs and organizations specifically for youth, largely in response to the decline of arts in public schools. In recent years, there has been a surge in arts programs for at-risk youth in particular, supported by a growing body of research that links arts education to positive attitudes, productive behaviors, and social improvement. In 2012, for example, James Catterall, Susan Dumais, and Gillian Hampden-Thompson, with support from the National Endowment for the Arts, published “The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies,” which concludes that at-risk youth who are exposed to an arts education have better academic outcomes, higher career goals, and are more civically engaged.

In 2004, the California Endowment for the Arts sponsored another comprehensive study entitled “The Power of Art: The Arts as an Effective Intervention Strategy for At-Risk Youth.” Co-authors Susan Anderson, Nancy Walch, and Kate Becker examine the effect of arts education for at-risk youth in the following types of environments: juvenile justice, foster care, after-school programs, education, and workforce development. They conclude from their research:

[A]rts programs for youth produce a variety of benefits, intended and unintended, including academic achievement, workforce preparedness, enhanced self-esteem and self-sufficiency, increased pro-social identity, and avoidance of risky behaviors. (8)

In addition, the authors find that the most distinguished youth arts programs, of which at-risk programs comprise a majority, share certain key attributes, including:

. . . long-term contact with participating youth; a core relationship between youth and professional artists; the emphasis on youth participation in making art; youth accountability for the public presentation of their art; high standards and expectations of the creative process and product; the objective of providing channels for a youth “voice.” (8)

These findings suggest that community arts leaders should strongly consider the above-listed attributes while developing their programs, so that program participants will be more likely to receive the many “intended and unintended” benefits of the programs.

Community arts programs for at-risk youth often are embedded into recreational programming for at-risk youth organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club of America or Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America. In addition to these types of programs, some not-for-profit programs are entirely dedicated to bringing the arts to at-risk youth. One such program is the Greater Tomorrow Youth Art Program (GTYAP), a summer program that has served artistically gifted, underprivileged youth in the Austin, Texas area since 1999. Dr. Christopher Adejumo, developer of the 2013-2014 GTYAP program, explains the intended program outcomes:

Through methodically planned art programming, participants will acquire cognitive growth, develop habits that promote good physical and emotional health, and refrain from activities that are destructive to oneself or to others. In short, participants are taught skills, attitudes and values that will contribute to their abilities to become good and productive citizens.

These program outcomes resonate with the findings from the aforementioned studies by Catterall, Dumais, and Hampden-Thompson; and Anderson, Walch, and Becker.

Most community arts programs have a curriculum that includes several art forms. Dance is typically integrated into such general community arts programs, but there are a few not-for-profit community dance organizations, as well. One such organization is the Foundation for Community Dance, based in the United Kingdom, which “works with, and on behalf of artists, organizations [sic] and teachers involved in leading, delivering or supporting community and participatory dance.” The Foundation for Community Dance

plays a unique role in the dance world because it operates with the belief that anyone can dance with intention and purpose, and it facilitates opportunities for all kinds of people, including deaf and disabled people, to enjoy dance (CommunityDance.org). Another socially engaged organization is Movement Exchange, which partners university dance students with under-resourced populations around the world (MovementExchange.org).

An important component of all community arts programs, whether they are general arts programs or art-form-specific programs, is that they give people an outlet to express themselves in a positive manner within a community context. Dance provides a unique means of expression because it enables people to physically embody and thereby internalize ideas and concepts. Creative movement, a dance activity that emphasizes mind-body balance, self-reflection, creative expression, collaboration, and ownership, is especially well suited for a community arts setting. Yet, many dance teachers even in community arts settings still rely on a technique-centric approach to dancing.

Community arts leaders, socially engaged arts practitioners, and dance educators have a responsibility to reflect upon how dance is taught to at-risk youth, and to advocate the type of dance activities that are most likely to encourage positive life transformation. Dance educators have researched the effects of creative movement for decades, but this body of research is still minimal compared to general community arts studies. There is a significant research gap concerning dance education for at-risk youth, too, although many dance educators work in this field. It is important that teachers and researchers continue to collect data and share their ideas about strategies and goals regarding dance education and especially creative movement for at-risk youth. Expanding this body of knowledge will result in better dance programs to meet the unique needs of at-risk youth.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Preliminary Work

My inspiration for the piece “Linked Together” began in the summer of 2013, when I spent three months teaching dance to low-income boys and girls in Virginia. I taught three classes daily, Monday through Friday, through my church, and the children were grouped into the following age categories: 5-6, 7-11, and 12-17. The hour-long classes involved a mixture of hip-hop and modern dance technique, choreography, and a community dance circle concluded each class. The community dance circle, popular in urban dance contexts, originated from a dance tradition in many West African cultures. The exercise involves all participants in a circle, standing or moving, as they desire, and entering the circle at any time to perform free-style, expressive movement. Through verbal feedback, I learned that many of the children preferred the community dance circle to the technique and choreography. Self-expression was extremely important to them.

In May 2014, I traveled to Panama to volunteer with Movement Exchange, an international organization that strives to make dance accessible everywhere by partnering university dance students with underserved communities. I went to Panama with seven dance colleagues from Arizona State University, and we worked with dance professionals from Universidad de Panamá Dance Department. Anna Pasternak, the founder of Movement Exchange, instructed us to develop hour-long lesson plans in different dance forms, for 15 to 30 children per class, for three approximate age groups: 5-8, 8-12, and 12-17. The classes took place at two orphanages, Aldea and Malambo. Each weekday, for two weeks, I facilitated two classes at Aldea and one class at Malambo.

In my first dance class at Aldea, for boys who ranged in age from 9 to 12, I experienced severe inattentiveness from the participants. Some children even stood against a wall, seemingly indifferent, while I taught a short modern dance phrase. Rather than ignoring the rapidly diminishing rapport and continuing with my planned lesson, I stopped the music and asked the children what dance form they would prefer to learn. Several of them said, "I like hip-hop." I then asked all the children if they would prefer to learn hip-hop, to which they replied a unanimous "yes." So, I changed the music and taught a short hip-hop phrase. Some boys precisely followed the choreography, while others loosely followed the choreography and added their own improvisations. It was apparent that some children wanted, or needed, to move in their own way. At the end of class, I asked the children to stand in a circle, and I told them that anyone could enter the circle and dance in any way. The energy, smiles, and passion that came out of the community dance circle inspired me to use the exercise in the rest of my classes. I also continued to teach hip-hop movements at Aldea for the rest of the week.

The younger group of children at Aldea, all girls whose ages ranged from 5 to 8, offered a different type of challenge because they were reluctant to dance, regardless of the dance form. I attempted several dance activities with the girls and finally resorted to giving them colored markers to make drawings. I then showed the children how to create movement gestures inspired by their drawings, and they slowly warmed up to dancing. I believe that if I had tried to force my original lesson plan upon the children, it might have damaged my relationship with them, and made them even more apprehensive about future dance opportunities. So, I encouraged artistic expression on paper and provided moral support, and gently guided them into the dance experience at their own pace.

At Malambo, I taught a group of girls from ages 12 to 17. Unlike the children at Aldea, the Malambo girls were required to carry out adult responsibilities, including cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the younger children. Play and creativity were not major aspects of their lives. When I introduced myself and tried to generate excitement about dancing, the children were skeptical. I attempted different dance activities with them, and then I had a break-through moment while teaching house dance, a form of hip-hop characterized by quick footwork. I taught the children a house dance routine and asked them to practice it independently and in small groups. Day after day, the children showed increased confidence and willingness to collaborate with one another. From a dance educator perspective, my favorite part about teaching at Malambo was seeing the children practice the steps on their own, outside of an organized class. I felt as though I had provided an expressive form of play that they could use for as long as they wanted.

At both the Aldea and Malambo orphanages, I was able to spend time with some of the children after the classes. A few children spoke limited English. A couple of my colleagues spoke Spanish, but I did not. My observations of the children's behavior in the classes, combined with after-class conversations about the children's lives, led me to believe that the children had positive dance experiences overall. Even in our short time together, dance had helped them to feel more empowered and creative, and it had taught them about collaborating with their peers as well as people from other cultures. I blogged about my teaching experiences and the children's positive reactions on the Movement Exchange blog, Movementexchange.wordpress.com. The blogging helped me to reflect upon teaching strategies when working with at-risk youth in cross-cultural contexts. I then continued to deepen my understanding about this type of work in India.

In June of 2014, I went to India with a volunteer group from my church, with the goal of helping underprivileged people at Home of Hope, a homeless shelter/orphanage. As an independent artist, I was in charge of developing my own lesson plans and goals. Based on my teaching experiences in Panama a few weeks earlier, I knew that my lesson plans might be met with resistance, and that they might change quickly based on the needs of participants. My main goal, however, was to help participants feel empowered through a fun and creative dance session, not to refine their technique in any particular kind of dance form. So, with only two weeks to accomplish my main goal, I approached the Home of Hope dance program with the mindset that the participants could largely determine the type of movement that was the most meaningful and fun to them.

The Home of Hope dance program participants were females who ranged in age from 12 to 17, and they all seemed eager to participate in the 90-minute classes. I believe that their English abilities helped them to feel comfortable, as compared to youth in Panama who mostly did not speak English and were reluctant to do the dance program. Also, in Panama, I had my own music to accompany the classes. In India, on the other hand, I did not bring any music. The classes that I taught either employed hand-clapping and foot-stepping to keep the rhythm, or I borrowed Bollywood music from someone involved with the program. Bollywood is a popular form of Indian music that is rhythmic, quirky, and highly expressive with lots of dynamics. The Indian program participants always were excited to hear Bollywood. When I asked them to develop short movement phrases to the music, they did so without hesitation. By the end of the session, the youth had cultivated a strong sense of community, and we had much fun, as well, through shared exercises in modern dance, hip-hop, and Bollywood-inspired improvisations.

My international dance teaching experiences increased my desire to know more about strategies for teaching dance to at-risk youth. In Virginia, I learned that the youth preferred to dance on their own, in front of their peers, without being told how to move. In Panama, I struggled to engage the youth in the dance activities I had planned, and I resorted to allowing them to choose the type of artistic expression they wanted to explore. In India, the youth were enthusiastic and guided a large part of the classroom experience, but oftentimes my role felt more of participant-observer than of community dance leader. I wanted to have a more proactive role in the dance education process, while still respecting the children's strong desires to move however they wished. I began to research teaching strategies and look for dance educators who successfully taught at-risk youth.

On September 12, 2014, I interviewed dance educator Susan Bendix, whose work and teaching philosophies inspired my subsequent project with at-risk youth. Bendix has over twenty years of experience teaching dance to people with little to no formal training, including inner city youth and incarcerated youth. She has a doctorate in education and has successfully integrated innovative dance programs into a range of educational settings. When I met with Bendix, she asked what I wanted to achieve through my work. I told her about my personal background and life transformation. I said that my early dance experiences had taught me a great deal about creativity, collaboration, and ownership. I told her that I wanted to design and test a curriculum that would help other at-risk youth learn how to be creative, collaborate with others, and take ownership over their decisions and work. I asked Bendix, based on her experience, what types of dance activities would help me to achieve this goal. She advocated creative movement as a very effective framework for teaching youth who are generally difficult to reach.

Bendix provided the following example to illustrate her choice of using creative movement with youth. One day, when Bendix was leading a dance class at the Silvestre S. Herrera Elementary School in Phoenix, she found that the students were resistant to participating in follow-along modern dance technique exercises. When Bendix changed the focus of her class to structured creative movement improvisation, the students opened up and began exploring the same dance concepts she intended to teach during the lesson, but within the new framework. Bendix encouraged creativity and ownership by asking the students to develop movement phrases based on their own life narratives, but she also directed the improvisations using somatics principles that focused on mind-body balance. The somatics enhanced the students' awareness of their internal physical perception, so that they could focus on how the movement felt, not just how the movement looked.

During the interview, Bendix offered advice about being a dance educator for youth, and she stressed the importance of creativity and collaboration in the classroom. She also reflected, "Creativity does not happen in a power relationship; it happens in a setting of an open environment." The example from the previous paragraph shows how Bendix was able to empathize with students and meet their needs, but at the same time, she did not give the students overwhelming control over the direction of the class. To help the students remain focused, Bendix gave encouraging feedback while the students were working, and she actively listened when students wanted to ask questions or share relevant ideas. When students veered off-track, Bendix gently guided them back to the task at hand. Overall, Bendix provided clear instruction, treated the students with respect, validated the students' work, and allowed them to play within an appropriate structure. As a result, the students successfully completed the lesson.

Bendix proposed that each student has a “gem” to offer, and dance educators have a responsibility to nurture that gem. The nurturing process involves providing students a safe and comfortable environment where they can explore movement without the fear of harsh criticism or judgment. Bendix suggested that dance classrooms should cultivate community, so that students are more likely to engage in critical reflection and honest, unrestrained movement expression. She stated, “Collaboration is key for youth. It requires them to learn how to give, take, and listen.” She added that students who share a strong sense of collaboration more easily engage in creative exploration; and through creative exploration, students refine their understanding of collaboration. In other words, the creative process helps students internalize collaboration, and collaboration therefore becomes a greater part of their life outside of the dance classroom.

Bendix’s classroom example and teaching philosophies provided a viable model for my next dance project with at-risk youth, a four-month program with children from a Boys and Girls Club in Arizona. From my teaching experiences in Virginia, Panama, and India, I understood the importance of allowing the at-risk youth to improvise and engage in dance forms that were most relevant to them. Although these programs were successful in the sense that the children had fun with dance, explored some original movement, and seemed to feel more empowered, I also felt that time had been wasted when I struggled to reach out to the students on their own terms. Furthermore, I believed that more organized, focused, goal-oriented classes would have enabled the children to better internalize skills and values that they could use in the greater world. My interview with Bendix led me to believe that the combination of creative movement with somatics might be the best way to promote creativity, collaboration, and ownership among at-risk youth.

The Arizona Dance Program

The first step in creating my dance program was to determine its basic structure and goals. As I worked on the curriculum, I thought about dance programs that had made me feel empowered. I felt that creativity, collaboration, and ownership were key lessons that I had taken away from those experiences. Furthermore, I thought that those concepts could be easily integrated into lesson plans. Creative movement naturally lends itself to creativity and collaboration, and the choreographic process for the end-goal of a concert naturally encourages all three concepts. Thus, I thought that my program, if successful, might provide a viable model for other dance educators who want to help at-risk youth feel empowered through dance. I do not mean to imply that creativity, collaboration and ownership together are the quintessential recipe for life change, or that all at-risk youth benefit the most from internalizing these three concepts. I basically chose to focus on those concepts because they made sense to me, and I had limited time with the children.

I decided to implement my creative movement program with a Boys and Girls Club because of my previous non-dance volunteer experiences with this organization. Boys and Girls Clubs typically do not offer dance programs, either, so that was another reason why I wanted to introduce my curriculum there. It was important for me to bring creative dance into a setting where people normally were not exposed to that type of artistic expression. I contacted a friend who worked at a Boys and Girls Club near ASU, and he connected me with the director. Soon after, I met with the director to share my vision and program design. He initially approached my idea with hesitation, doubtful that the children would follow through with the program. He eventually agreed to include the creative dance program as a special activity in their Fall 2014 after-school program.

The Arizona dance program began in late September and officially ended in mid-December, although I continued to meet with the group for concert rehearsals in January. For the fall semester, the group met twice a week: Thursdays from 3:30pm to 5:00pm, and Fridays from 1:30pm to 3:00pm. In January, then, we met from 4:00pm to 5:30pm on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays until the concert, January 30th to February 1st, 2015. My program initially included fourteen participants, two boys and twelve girls. The boys, feeling outnumbered, almost immediately left the class and joined a football group. In the weeks that followed, four girls left the dance program due to behavioral issues at home, conflicts with a parent's work schedule, or a strong desire to participate in different club activities. There were eight girls, ages 9 to 11, who stayed with the program until the end.

The eight girls had different kinds of personalities. Two of the girls always were respectful and demonstrated a good work ethic in every class. They regularly stayed after class to help me replace the tables and chairs for the next activity in the room. Two other girls showed negative attitudes toward their classmates and myself, so I frequently had to stop the entire class to talk about the meaning of respect. The other four girls fluctuated in terms of their behavior. The greatest challenge I experienced when working with this group overall was their tendency to get sidetracked. Sometimes the girls became "lost" while looking at themselves in the mirror, or they stopped paying attention while trying to sneak a snack behind my back, or they simply pursued side conversations instead of listening to me teach. On numerous occasions, I had to stop an exercise and remind the children what they were supposed to be doing. Up to 10 minutes of each class was spent on impromptu behavioral management, so I had to adjust the lesson plans accordingly and sometimes skip planned exercises or reduce the time spent on certain exercises.

For most of the program, the classes began with an icebreaker that lasted 5-10 minutes. For the next 15 minutes, I led a warm-up accompanied either by instrumental music with a strong beat, or clean (censored) versions of hip-hop songs. The next 45 minutes or so were spent on creative movement exploration, using the same type of music. I explained each exercise beforehand, demonstrated it to the children, and guided the children when necessary during their exploration. The exercises, which often employed LMA principles, were inspired by dance activities I had done in college and graduate school. The creative movement exploration section almost always ended with a community dance circle. The class concluded with a 5-minute group discussion and a 10-minute journaling activity, at which time the children had snacks and drinks. The children were allowed to drink from a water fountain or use the bathroom at appropriate transition times, namely after the warm-up and after the movement exploration. I discouraged the children from leaving the room at all other times, so as not to interrupt the class flow.

The icebreakers helped to set the tone of the classroom. I wanted the children to perceive the space as a fun, open environment where they played a critical role in their learning. The icebreakers included sentence-making games, name-learning games, and guessing games such as Two Truths and a Lie, where a person makes three statements and people have to guess which statement is a lie. The icebreakers also included physical activities such as the Human Knot, where the participants stand in a circle with hands outreached, grab any two hands, and try to unravel the “knot” without letting go of hands. The verbal icebreakers enabled the children to share personal information and learn about other people in the group. The physical icebreakers encouraged the children to jointly solve problems and trust one another.

After the icebreaker and the warm-up, I led the creative movement exploration. Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) exercises comprised a large number of the creative movement exercises. LMA is a method for describing, visualizing, interpreting, and documenting all kinds of human movement. The method divides movement into four general categories: body, effort, shape, and space. “Body” refers to how a body moves in space, the relationship between body parts, as well as how different bodies relate to one another. “Effort” refers to the dynamics of the movement. Common effort descriptions include direct or indirect, strong or light, sudden or sustained, and bound or free. “Shape” refers to static body shapes in space, the shape of body parts, as well as shapes made while moving. “Space” refers to a broad range of spatial concepts, including how people are arranged in a given space, and how people relate to their surrounding environment and each other in terms of their levels, pathways, and directions.

LMA is a somatics practice, which means that it encourages inner body awareness regarding how movement feels. I chose to incorporate LMA exercises into the movement exploration section of each class so that the children would be less concerned about how they looked, and more focused on how they felt. LMA exercises also taught the children about basic dance elements, so the children were able to think more critically about how they approached creating original movement. Furthermore, the LMA concepts provided the children with a specific vocabulary to help them to describe their movement in detail. In addition to the LMA exercises, which were designed to help the children internalize a range of dance concepts, the movement exploration section of the classes included other types of creative movement exercises that were designed to help the children internalize concepts such as creativity, collaboration, and ownership.

The Arizona dance program consisted of three units: Creativity, Collaboration, and Ownership. Each class had a unique theme related to the unit. The first unit focused on exploring creativity through: space and energy, images, building a movement phrase, shapes, and self-awareness. The second unit examined the following themes: working together, defining community, exploring creativity within a community, and diversity within community. Finally, the third unit drew attention to these themes: personal values, community values, exploring personal movement, exploring movement that describes oneself, movement inspired by individuality, ownership in a community context, and embracing oneself and one's community. Appendix A contains a complete set of the Arizona program lesson plans. I will describe specific movement exercises in the next chapter as part of my analysis of the dance program outcomes.

I assessed the dance program's effectiveness through my personal observations in the classroom as well as the children's surveys and on-on-one interviews. At the end of each class, I assigned the children a journal topic related to the theme of the class. The journaling activity reemphasized the main topic of each class and encouraged the children to relate the topic to their personal lives and community outside of the dance classroom. In addition, I administered surveys and conducted interviews both at the beginning of the session and after the concert. The survey, shown in Appendix B, was exactly the same on both days, so that I could see how the children's responses changed over time. The interview questions, also in Appendix B, were nearly the same on both days; for the second interview, I just removed the question about the children's future career goals, and added a question about what they learned from the program. Chapter 4 provides the analysis of this data, in order to answer the research questions laid out in Chapter 1.

Over the course of the program, I aspired to build a relationship with each girl. I often stayed after classes or rehearsals to help the children work on their choreography. I also listened to anything they wanted to discuss about their personal lives, and I offered moral support when they felt depressed. I shared stories from my own life to illustrate that tremendous change is possible. In every class, I reminded the children to be the best they could be, and that their circumstances did not define them. We regularly talked about our hopes, dreams, and talents. One girl relayed that she was interested in singing, so I asked her to lead the group in a song during the concert. I wanted to show each girl that she was important and valued by the people around her. The week before the concert, I also drove the program participants from the Boys and Girls Club to ASU for technical rehearsals, and I treated the group to dinner. By the end of the program, I felt as though my role was more than a dance teacher; I was a mentor and big sister to the girls.

Empathy guided most of my interactions with the children, but I still had to implement a disciplinary framework to ensure that the program operated smoothly. In other words, I wanted the girls to know that I cared about them, but also that I would not tolerate disruptive behaviors, distractions, and negative attitudes. Disciplinary actions included time-outs, snack forfeitures during journal time, and one-on-one conversations about the behavior or attitude. During these conversations, I drew the girl's attention to positive attributes that I saw in her, and I encouraged her to embrace those attributes. I made remarks such as, "You are intelligent, and right now you are not showing that." When children misbehaved frequently, I threatened to release them from the program, although I never actually followed through. I did, however, give the more troublesome children less prominent roles in the concert.

My biggest challenges with the children were inattention and lack of commitment, both of which I addressed verbally when necessary. Poor time management was another challenge with the children and their parents; some parents did not understand that their children had an active role in the choreographic process, and picked up their children a few minutes into our classes or rehearsals. My efforts to educate the parents about the choreographic process were mostly in vain, so I conducted the majority of classes and rehearsals without the complete group. The director of the Boys and Girls Club stated that intermittent attendance was normal for these children, and that there was nothing I could do about it. Despite these circumstances and my frustrations, I approached every class with clear plan, a positive attitude, and the desire to help the children improve their lives through dance. I always strived to set a good example and be a role model to them.

To summarize, this chapter describes how my dance program with the Boys and Girls Club was inspired by my prior teaching experiences with at-risk youth, and how the program content was influenced by my personal background with dance, as well as my interview with Susan Bendix. This chapter also summarizes the Arizona dance program in terms of participants, class structure, tone, somatics emphasis, units and themes, data collection methods, teaching approach, discipline, and challenges. All of this information provides context for the next chapter, in which I will analyze the data from my personal observations and participants' surveys and one-on-one interviews to determine the overall effectiveness of the program, based on my original research questions from Chapter 1. The next chapter also describes the piece "Linked Together" from beginning to end, and examines how well the piece conveyed the ideas that all people are interconnected, and that at-risk youth can change their lives through positive dance experiences.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION

Dance Program Outcomes

The purpose of this section is to address my initial research questions by means of data collected through the Arizona Boys and Girls Club dance program. Data sources include my personal observations as well as the participants' surveys and on-on-one interviews. With this data, I will first assess how well the dance program met its goals of teaching creativity, collaboration, and ownership to at-risk youth. Next, I will examine how the LMA exercises were used to enhance creativity, and how the LMA exercises and the community dance circle both helped to stimulate movement and a safe environment for collaboration. Lastly, I will look at the greater social impact of the dance program.

The program outcomes are analyzed through a combined lens of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and ethnography. IPA aims to offer insight into how a group of people, in a shared context, generate meaning from a given experience or event. For my project, the "people" are the eight program participants. The "shared context" is the dance program and related activities, namely after-class interactions, rehearsals, and the final performance. The participants' verbal, written, and artistic reflections represent the "meaning" they generated from the dance experience. The other component of the analysis lens, ethnography, is characterized by the researcher observing and interacting with a group of people in their own environment. While studying the given group, the researcher also recognizes biases that may influence his or her interpretation. In both IPA and ethnography, the researcher seeks to understand and accurately portray how a given group of people makes sense of their world, in their own terms.

To effectively analyze the program outcomes, it is important to recognize how my personal role in the research process may have influenced the outcomes. First, as already discussed in Chapter 3, I chose to focus the curriculum on creativity, collaboration, and ownership because I believed that these concepts were most critical in my own journey to empowerment. Second, because of my experiences as a formerly at-risk youth, I assumed that the participants would engage in disruptive behaviors at times. By preparing for these situations, I was able to resolve problems relatively quickly and proceed with the lesson. Third, the students, who were African-American and Hispanic females and at-risk, recognized me as someone like them. My comparable background may have given the children hope or motivation to improve their own lives, but I believe that my empathetic, mentor-like teaching approach was a more important factor in establishing strong rapport with the children. In any case, I felt as though the children trusted me enough to provide honest responses through their various modes of reflection.

My personal observations provide the first evidence that the dance program was a success, in that the participants felt more empowered after using dance to enhance their senses of creativity, collaboration, and ownership. From the beginning of the program, the children grasped the notion that dance could convey their stories and ideas. In the first class, for example, I demonstrated how everyday experiences could be turned into dance. I asked the children to think about their future career goals and to create a corresponding movement, and they completed the exercise successfully. Also, in the class about space and energy, I asked the students to come up with three adjectives that best described their personality type, and then to find spatial concepts that demonstrated their adjectives. This exercise inspired many movements that rose, shrank, advanced, and enclosed.

The children took more creative risks as they learned about dance elements and became more comfortable working together. I conducted several exercises that focused on community in order to cultivate interpersonal trust and collaboration. In the “Working Together” lesson plan, there was one exercise in particular where the participants seemed to strongly internalize community-related concepts. For this exercise, I asked the children to answer the question “What does community mean to you?” by writing their responses on a poster board. The children’s responses included: helping others, sharing, picking up trash, and working together. The children then worked with a partner to create three movements that best described their collective understanding of “community.” This exercise generated a lot of on-topic discussion among the children, and the children worked diligently in their pairs in order to successfully complete the assignment.

As the program progressed, the children exhibited increased enthusiasm toward partnering and group exercises. This suggested to me that the children were internalizing a greater passion for collaboration. A popular collaborative exercise entailed mirroring a partner. One person was the leader and improvised slow movement through high, medium, and low levels; the other person was the follower and imitated the leader as closely as possible. Halfway through the exercise, the children switched roles. This exercise encouraged a high level of concentration and nonverbal communication, and the leaders took pleasure in making the followers do silly and strange movements. After the exercise, the partners smiled and laughed together; the face-to-face mirroring exercise was something fun that they had shared, and it had created an invisible bond between them. I wanted to build these types of bonds between all the children, so I asked the children to collaborate with different people for each partnering or group exercise.

Week after week, the children showed increased confidence regarding their original movement choices, working both individually and with others. They also used more words related to self-empowerment in their journal entries and group discussions. The third unit of the program, Ownership, helped to reinforce the children's growing sense of self-worth and contributed greatly to their journey toward empowerment. During this unit, I asked the children to write statements about themselves, with the objective of turning the statements into a poem to be recited in their section of "Linked Together." The exercise generated statements such as: "I am smart, intelligent, and brave. I am a ten-year-old girl living an extraordinary life." When the children read their statements for the first time in front of the group, I was surprised by how much confidence they exhibited through vocal projection and eye contact with others. At the beginning of the program, these same children often mumbled and looked down while speaking about themselves.

The community dance circle recurred throughout the program and is therefore a good way to measure changes in behavior over time. I almost always used this exercise as a cool-down at the end of the creative movement exploration, even when it was not included on the lesson plan. The children asked for it on a daily basis. For this exercise, the children stood in a circle, moving however they wanted, and entered the circle one by one to improvise. At the beginning of the program, some children were apprehensive about the exercise and went into the circle only for a few seconds. Under the watchful gaze of their peers and myself, some of the children took a safe route by using popular urban dance movements, cartwheels, and flips. As time passed, however, the children stayed in the circle for longer durations, and they played with more original kinds of movements. They also continued to use urban dance movements and gymnastics.

The children's survey responses provided additional validation that the children had become more empowered by the end of the program. The survey form, shown in Appendix B, consisted of fourteen statements for the children to evaluate based on their immediate feelings. The statements fell into one of three categories: 1. Competence, which focuses on student learning and motivation toward achievement; 2. Environment, which deals with the relationship between the students and their peers, teacher, family, and aspects of the home environment and learning environment; and 3. Self, which includes freedom of choice, creativity, self-expression, and aesthetic values. The same survey forms were given to the children at the beginning and end of the program. For each statement, the surveys used a numeric rating system of 1 to 5, with 1 as poor, 3 as good, and 5 as excellent. The purpose of the two surveys was to determine changes in how the children perceived themselves and the world around them.

Many of the children answered with 5s to most of the questions on both surveys, so change was difficult to measure. The surveys did not provide a way for the children to qualify their responses, either. The surveys did, however, suggest attitude shifts that were consistent with my personal observations. A big shift occurred in regards to the first item, "Feel good about myself." At the beginning of the program, only three children circled 5. In the second survey, all the children circled 5. To complement that item, for "Feel good about my future," seven children circled 5 in the first survey, and all the children circled 5 in the second survey. Another slight shift occurred in regards to "Love to build friendships/work with other people," where seven children circled 5 in the first survey, and all eight children circled 5 in the second survey. Overall, the survey results indicated a trend toward more empowering and collaborative attitudes.

The interviews, which I conducted with the children at the beginning and end of the program, shed more light on what the children gained from the dance program, in their own words. The interviews questions elicited information about the children's ages, grade levels, future career goals, ideas about working individually and in a group, definitions of creative movement, and things they learned from the program. I recorded the children's names for the purposes of comparing first and second interview responses, but I do not use their names in the data analysis in order to protect their privacy. I asked their ages and grade levels for basic background information. The career goal question, which was only for the first interview, gave me insight into each child and helped me to relate to the group on a personal level. When the children accomplished goals in class, I sometimes reminded them that they had the power within them to accomplish other life goals such as reaching their dream career. The remaining three questions were used to qualitatively assess what the children learned from the program.

A language analysis of the children's interview responses suggests that, in fact, they had a greater interest in collaboration, and they felt more empowered individually and supported by a community by the end of the program. Similar to the survey trends, the second interviews revealed that more children had a greater appreciation for group work. Several children equated group work to building friendships with their "sisters," and they stated it was sometimes "more fun" than working alone. When asked to define creative movement on the first round of interviews, the children all spoke about creative movement as an individual process; in the second interview, however, two children added collaborative terminology. They said creative movement is: "to dance with friends and create something new," and "working together and expressing your feelings."

The first interview took place a couple of weeks into the program, so the children had already developed a basic understanding of creative movement when I asked them to define it. Therefore, their first and second interview responses about creative movement were fairly consistent. The children largely interpreted creative movement as a means of creative expression throughout the program, as shown in the following definitions for the term: “Showing how artistic you can be in movement and in art and everything you do,” “To express yourself and do whatever you want,” “Expressing your feelings and being you” “Expressing myself,” “To express yourself and be free,” “To show how you feel with all that you have,” “Letting yourself go and using your imagination,” “Creating something new,” and “Being creative.” Freedom of expression, a concept that relates to empowerment, was the biggest theme in the definitions of creative movement.

The interview responses also revealed that some children associated creative movement with a sense of ownership, physical dance skills, and personal growth. Three children made statements suggesting that creative movement involves ownership: “Figuring out your own ways to do stuff,” “Making your own things and not copying someone else,” and “Sticking up to people and not being afraid to say no.” In the second interviews, two children pointed out physical skills: “Gaining new dance skills,” and “When someone has talent and they can do anything when they are dancing.” Only one participant remarked on creative movement as a pathway to personal growth: “Building something like confidence and your priorities up higher and higher.” Although most participants did not formally recognize the personal growth benefit of creative movement in the definition question, their responses to the next question, “What is one thing you learned from participating in this project?” indicate that personal growth did occur.

The children gave a variety of responses about what they learned by participating in the dance program, but the concepts of collaboration and community came through in several of the responses. The interview responses are listed below.

1. New friendships, new songs. My fear of stage fright is gone, and my friends helped me through this. I use to be very scared of performing.

2. We can change the world in one day. Since the first time I met [Ms. Daniel], all I wanted to talk about was dance.

3. In working together, you can learn new moves and be creative.

4. New dance skills, and learned how to work with a large group. I feel confident and cheerful. At the beginning of the program I didn't have enough spirit, but at the end I had much spirit.

5. Better moves and working better with others.

6. We are all sisters and friends. Dance brings us all together and makes our friendship bigger. I enjoyed working with people and not by myself. Working by myself is sometimes boring.

7. Dancing is fun, and I gained new friendships and new dance moves.

8. We all are creative, confident, and smart.

All of these responses indicate a strong sense of empowerment because of the program.

To summarize thus far, my personal observations of the dance program provided ample evidence that the creative movement program, with its somatics emphasis, helped to promote creativity, collaboration, and ownership among the participants. I described a few exercises that were especially effective in helping participants to become more aware of these concepts. The surveys indicated that most of the children began the program with positive ideas about their lives, families, peers, decisions, interests, and environments. By the end of the program, a comparison of the two surveys showed that even more children felt good about themselves, and even more children enjoyed group work. The interview responses further highlighted the children's growing preference for collaboration, and the responses also revealed that the children associated creative movement with freedom of expression (creativity) and ownership. Altogether, the data suggest that the Arizona dance program, with its strategically crafted exercises, helped the participants to learn about and embrace their natural desires to create, collaborate, and own their work.

The surveys and interviews did not address my next research questions about the how LMA exercises enhanced creativity, or how LMA and the community dance circle stimulated movement and helped to create a safe environment for collaboration. It was beyond the scope of the study to ask the children about these topics. I wanted the children to focus their attention on the main concepts embedded in the lesson plans as well as their choreography. In fact, toward the end of the program, I even cut out the icebreakers and reduced the time spent on movement exploration, so that the children could concentrate on finishing, practicing, and owning their choreography. Therefore, my conclusions about the LMA exercises and the community dance circle are based on personal observations of how the students handled these activities over the course of the program.

At the beginning of the program, the children, when asked to make movement, demonstrated great creativity but gravitated toward gestures that literally conveyed their ideas. The LMA exercises showed the children that the same ideas could be conveyed through abstract movements. For example, a movement phrase about being a firefighter does not necessarily need to include gestures such as sliding down a pole, driving a truck, or putting out a fire; instead, the movement phrase could capture the excitement, urgency, and pride that one would expect to feel as a firefighter on a call. The children learned about body, space, time, and effort through the LMA exercises, and they experimented with improvisations to convey specific ideas through movement. As the instructor, I encouraged the children to look at a wide range of creative possibilities by asking questions such as, “How else could you show that idea through movement?” Overall, I felt as though the LMA exercises significantly contributed to the children’s ability to make increasingly innovative, creative, multilayered movement phrases.

Further classroom observations led me to believe that the LMA exercises and community dance circle stimulated movement and helped to provide a safe environment for collaboration. For the LMA component, the children had much freedom to explore original, meaningful movements within the framework of the exercises. The dance circle was less structured, but hip-hop music with a strong beat literally moved the children to dance. It seemed as though the LMA exercises appealed to the more introverted children, whereas the dance circle appealed to the more extroverted children. I believe that both types of improvisations, in addition to stimulating movement, enabled the children to have fun and build rapport. Consequently, the LMA exercises and the community dance circle both promoted a safe environment for the children to collaborate and share.

My last research question was: How can creative movement help at-risk youth connect to the greater world? Unfortunately, my interactions with the participants were limited to 30 classes and rehearsals at the Boys and Girls Club, and the concert-related activities at ASU. Furthermore, the survey responses and interviews suggested that the children already had a good understanding of their place in the greater world, so I was unable to answer this question based on the data I had collected.

Fortunately, Clare Santos-Gacad, a volunteer with the Boys and Girls Club, and a student at the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at ASU, saw my students in a variety of capacities each week. Santos-Gacad was responsible for ensuring that the children arrived at their assigned activities, and she assisted the club director with miscellaneous tasks. Santos-Gacad remarked that my students in particular showed positive changes in their attitudes and social interactions as the semester progressed. Referring to the students, she told me, “To have someone acknowledge and believe in them, I believed you planted a seed in their lives, and that positive reinforcement is going to make a difference.”

Time will tell whether the Arizona dance program will make a difference in anyone’s life, but one participant hinted at this possibility. During the concert week, as I walked around the ASU campus with the Boys and Girls Club dancers, one girl smiled at me and said, “I want to go to college when I grow up and be just like Ms. Daniel.” The concert “Linked Together” had many outcomes, as I will discuss in the next section, but perhaps its most significant outcome was that it proved to a small group of at-risk youth that they could work together to create something amazing about themselves, and that they could courageously express their stories and deepest feelings on a professional stage. Hopefully, it is an experience that inspires them to tackle other great ventures in life.

Choreographic Outcomes

The previous section of this chapter described how the Arizona dance program helped the participants to enhance their senses of creativity, collaboration, and ownership primarily through somatics exercises and the community dance circle. The data suggested that the participants exhibited personal growth and became more empowered by the end of the program. The piece “Linked Together” is my artistic reflection about how positive dance education experiences can help to empower, and even transform the lives, of at-risk youth. The title “Linked Together” suggests that everyone can find commonalities and successfully work together, regardless of their personal differences. In the paragraphs that follow, I will examine each section of the piece to assess how well the performance conveyed its messages of dance as a means of empowerment for at-risk youth, and that invisible threads connect everyone regardless of personal differences.

“Linked Together” consists of four sections. I perform as the only dancer in the first and last sections. The second section features ASU student dancers, and the third section features the Boys and Girls Club dancers. During the ASU rehearsals, the dancers engaged in similar movement-generating activities as the Boys and Girls Club dancers. For example, I asked the dancers to journal about dance teachers who inspired them or changed their lives, and then the dancers developed original movement based on their written responses. I also led the ASU dancers through LMA exercises and the community dance circle, so that they could feel more comfortable openly expressing themselves in front of one another. I focused ASU rehearsals on the theme of empowerment, because I wanted the third section to strongly portray dance as a means of empowerment before introducing the audience to the Boys and Girls Club dancers in the fourth section.

The first section, “OSHUN,” is my own solo, choreographed by African dance instructor Lendo Abdur-Rahman. In this solo, I aspire to embody Oshun, the coquettish and charming West African goddess of fresh water. Oshun originated among the Yoruba people, who brought her to the Americas and Caribbean Islands during the slave trade. Although the slaves were oppressed in many ways, they still preserved aspects of their cultures, including their religious beliefs. Sometimes, the slaves were able to transcend their hardships through religious ceremonies that entailed evoking or embodying their gods and goddesses. Oshun, whose name has many spellings as a result of cross-cultural appropriation, is associated with water, love, charity, health, fertility, and prosperity. The slaves’ ability to feel empowered through Oshun metaphorically reflects my own ability, and that of countless others, to feel empowered through dance.

To prepare for the solo, I researched Oshun and discussed her personality traits with the choreographer. We developed movement that felt empowering, courageous, and authentic to my own life path. In the beginning of “OSHUN,” I lay upstage in a pool of dim light, and pretend to be asleep until awoken by a bell. Abdur-Rahman begins to sing onstage in a West African dialect, accompanied by Sonja Branch and Austen Mack on drums. I stand up and boldly walk downstage, looking out at the audience with a sincere and confident gaze. I fan my golden dress in circular motions to tacitly evoke Oshun’s beauty and femininity. The fabric ripples in waves that were symbolic of water. I continue to perform large, circular movements throughout the piece, but I also incorporate smaller gestures such as looking in a mirror, gathering water, and placing a crown on my head. A shiny crown with red and green jewels serves as a tangible representation of empowerment at the completion of my onstage journey as Oshun.

The next section, entitled “We must not be anything other than what we are,” featuring the nine ASU dancers, is a celebration of different kinds of people being united through their love of dance. The inspiration for this section came from my high school dance class, where the teacher fostered a strong sense of community among culturally diverse students, and helped the students to feel creative and empowered. The dancers in “We must not be anything other than what we are” represent that community. The dancers come from culturally diverse backgrounds and had different skill levels in dance. I selected dancers based on their ability to do energetic, physically demanding movement. Most of the dancers had taken a hip-hop or modern dance class with me through ASU, so some of the dancers already knew one another. A strong sense of camaraderie going into the process helped to facilitate open, honest conversation and improvisation.

For the most part, the movement in “We must not be anything other than what we are” originated from the dancers’ journal entries and LMA exercises during rehearsals. Many of the exercises involved weight bearing and being off-balance, and required the dancers to intensely trust one another. I also used the community dance circle at the end of each rehearsal, so that each dancer could explore self-expression inside a circle of encouraging and nonjudgmental peers. Over time, the dancers became more confident, took more creative risks, and attempted more challenging feats. The result was a variety of aesthetically pleasing and physically demanding movement phrases. In my role as the choreographer, I made artistic recommendations and decided the order of the movement phrases, the number of dancers who did each phrase, and their spatial arrangements. The movement itself, however, predominantly came from the dancers, which enabled them to feel a strong sense of ownership over the final work.

“We must not be anything other than what we are” is a mixture of jazz dance, modern dance, hip-hop, and West African dance. Once again, Sonja Branch and Austen Mack provide a drum accompaniment, which emphasizes the quick, sharp, and dynamic nature of the movement. The dancers’ exaggerated eye make-up, leopard-spotted pants, and tight, solid-black shirts highlight their fun, fierce, take-charge attitudes. The shirts have different cuts, in order to show the dancers’ individuality; yet, the costumes match stylistically in order to show the dancers’ cohesiveness as a group. The choreography also juxtaposes individuals against the group. The dancers perform solos depicting their personal stories and backgrounds, and illustrate their creativity and confidence; yet, the dancers also perform together, with a strong sense of egalitarianism and collaboration. For artistic purposes, expansive, traveling movement phrases are accented with small, intricate gestures, and sometimes evolve into still shapes. The musicians watch the dancers and respond to their movement dynamics in terms of volume and tempo.

The next part of the dance piece is the film “Moved to Inspire,” by Steven Law, projected onto the stage’s Cyclorama. The three-minute film was created specifically for “Linked Together” and featured excerpts of my classes with at-risk youth in Virginia, Panama, India, and Arizona. I had collected the source files at each location through my laptop’s webcam, and I then commissioned Law, a talented videographer friend, to edit together the final product. Law used captions to show where each class took place, and he replaced the actual audio with a light, playful instrumental score in order to streamline the entire film. The film gives the audience a behind-the-scenes glimpse of dance classes for at-risk youth and thus helps to contextualize the fourth section of the piece, entitled “BE CREATIVE,” which features the eight dancers from the Boys and Girls Club.

“BE CREATIVE” begins with the dancers’ poem “I am,” based on a journaling exercise. The dancers stand onstage in a scattered, evenly spaced formation, facing the audience, and each dancer recites a part of the poem. For emphasis, all of the dancers assertively speak the word “strong” and the last line, “Be creative,” in unison.

I am powerful, creative, smart, bold, strong, talented, a leader.

What does it mean to be creative?

Is it using your imagination?

To use things around you?

Expressing your feelings?

To use what you have?

Or showing how artistic you can be ?

Let yourself go.

Be creative!

After the poem, one dancer sings a series of words, and the group echoes every word in a call-and-response manner.

Empower (group echo)

Creativity (group echo)

Collaboration (group echo)

Ownership (group echo)

Plus Confidence (group echo)

Makes me powerful (group echo)

The purpose of the song is to show audience members that the dancers feel good about themselves, but the song also reflects the Arizona dance program content and outcomes.

The concepts of creativity, collaboration, and ownership are deeply embedded in “BE CREATIVE,” because the dancers had spent a large amount of time exploring these concepts through their choreography-generating exercises. As the choreographer, I made aesthetic recommendations and determined how the movement should be arranged, but the movement mainly came from the dancers. Their creativity is shown through a wide range of abstract movements, which take into consideration the LMA concepts of body, effort, shape, and space. Weight sharing, partner lifts, and other types of physical contact comprise much of the choreography, illustrating the dancers’ enjoyment of collaboration. Also, the dancers deeply care about their performance; they approach the concert with great focus, conviction, and determination, in spite of their nerves. In other words, to the best of their ability, they own their onstage presence.

For costumes, the dancers wear shirts onto which the words “BE CREATIVE” are printed. Each shirt is a different color, to highlight individuality, but all of the dancers wear the same style shirt and black leggings to provide a sense of group cohesion. For accompaniment, Sonja Branch and Austen Mack play on drums. The dancers only practiced with Branch and Mack a couple of times before the performance, however, so they sometimes struggle to match their movement to the drumming. An overwhelming amount of adrenaline could have been the source of timing issues, too, because the girls are young and have never performed in such a professional setting, or in front of such a large audience. On top of that, the girls are expressing extremely personal goals and aspects of their lives through their choreography. Even with the timing issues, however, the dancers remain confident throughout the entire piece, as shown by their strong vocal projections and their consistently bold execution of the choreography.

For the last section, “Beneath the Surface,” I perform alongside a spoken-word narrator, Charque Bacon. The concept behind this section is my childhood desire to be creative, while not knowing how to express myself. Several weeks before the concert, I discussed my personal growth through dance with Bacon, who then developed a script that brought attention to the importance of creativity for at-risk youth. Bacon performs onstage next to me, and her words are the only accompaniment to my movement. I chose to improvise because I wanted my movement to be spontaneous and convey my authentic feelings as I went through a mental journey of my life metamorphosis. My performance is different each night, but I always use a blend of modern dance and hip-hop movements that became increasingly large, sharp, determined, and confident.

The costume that I wear for “Beneath the Surface,” a black-and-white hoodie and black dance shorts, represents a popular clothing style from my childhood in Virginia. I want the costume to be pedestrian-like so that audience members would be inclined to identify me as a regular person, versus as a trained dancer. Bacon wears black jeans, a button-up shirt, and a fedora. As I perform this section, I feel intense emotions from my childhood; it is like reading a tell-all autobiography out loud to a roomful of strangers. In both my body and mind, I revisit difficult, stressful times when all hope seemed lost. I then think about my high school dance class and how dance provided me with an expressive outlet to vent my frustrations and literally move beyond my anger and feelings of worthlessness. As I approach the end of “Beneath the Surface,” I feel a wave of empowerment sweep over me. The narration and my movement also feel purposeful on a greater level, as if my own story, told through the choreography, might inspire others to make positive changes in their lives through dance or another type of creative outlet.

Altogether, I believe that “Linked Together” successfully conveys that dance has the potential to empower people and even change lives, and that at-risk youth especially can benefit from strategically designed creative dance programs. These ideas are more implicit in the first and second sections of the piece, but they become clearer as a result of the film “Moved to Inspire.” The film introduces audience members to dance programs specifically for at-risk youth. Then, when the audience members see the Boys and Girls Club dancers in “BE CREATIVE,” they are encouraged to perceive the dancers as participants in such a dance program, and they see the results of the program, firsthand. “Moved to Inspire” features the dancers creating their own choreography, as well, so the audience is aware that I did not create the movement and set it on the dancers. Some audience members gave informal feedback on “BE CREATIVE,” stating that the dancers seemed highly creative and exuded a surprising amount of confidence and passion.

“Beneath the Surface,” the last section, also strongly conveys the idea of dance as a form of empowerment for at-risk youth, mostly because of the 921-word narration. In one part of the narration, Bacon clearly associates dance with positive life change as she recounts my personal story through her own poetic voice: “I only needed to know where to start... little did I know that it all started with me... the visions that I had to, cultivate a world, and show them that I wasn’t just a poverty stricken girl, but I had the moves... to change a generation... dancing is my passion...” Other parts of the narration highlight that everyone has the potential to improve their circumstances, and that this potential can be realized through creativity. Bacon closes the narration with the following empowering statement: “You’ve got the tools you need and they’re placed right in front of you; don’t let anyone ever limit the potential that can come from you! Be creative!”

Another goal for “Linked Together” was to honor the invisible threads that I had developed with my dance students, teachers, and colleagues. I wanted to show, however, that the connections cultivated through dance are symbolic of something much larger; that is to say, we all are connected to our communities in multiple ways, and we can nurture these connections and help one another to grow and succeed. “Linked Together” suggests these thoughts in a few ways. Notably, in “We must not be anything other than what we are,” the dancers are diverse in terms of cultural backgrounds, and sometimes do solos, yet they frequently come together as a cohesive unit. “BE CREATIVE” also contains several powerful movement phrases in unison. For both group sections, the dancers wear costumes that are slightly different in order to show that each person can be unique but also coexist seamlessly with a group. Also, the same drummers play in three sections, I perform in the opening and closing sections, and the theme of empowerment resonates strongly in all of the sections; these structural choices help to tie the piece together and encouraged audience members to consider how the eighteen dancers in the piece are all interconnected in terms of an overarching message.

The section “Beneath the Surface” is about me, and the other sections contain content that parallel aspects of my journey from an at-risk youth to an educated artist, but I did not intend for “Linked Together” to be autobiographical. Nonetheless, a few audience members, people who knew me personally, interpreted the entire piece as an autobiography. No doubt my aesthetic recommendations and technical directives flavored the group sections with my character, but I was surprised that these audience members perceived the other dancers’ deeply personal stories and ideas as my own. Based on this interpretation, “Linked Together” did, in fact, suggest that everyone is interconnected.

In summary, the Arizona dance program fulfilled its objective of helping the participants to become more empowered through an enhanced understanding of their senses of creativity, collaboration, and ownership. The LMA exercises were a critical component in this growth process, because they encouraged the participants to deepen their understanding of body, effort, shape, and space, and then use these dance elements to artistically express personal stories and ideas. The community dance circle also was a critical component of the growth process, because it encouraged freedom of creative expression in a safe, nurturing environment. The program participants already were very creative at the beginning of the program, but the program helped them further develop their creativity. The survey results and interview responses suggested that the participants learned the most about the benefits of collaboration as a result of the program activities.

The dance piece “Linked Together” portrayed the outcomes of the Arizona dance program, but it also contained a greater social theme; the piece suggested that youth of all ages, all over the world, can benefit from empowering dance experiences. Children have a natural tendency to be creative, and an ability to easily overcome perceived differences and collaborate with one another. Dance can help hone these skills. Furthermore, when youth create their own movement for the goal of a dance concert, they realize that their work has a purpose and are encouraged to take ownership over their accomplishments. It is important to foster creativity, collaboration, and ownership at a young age, because a deep internalization of these concepts can help people to overcome many challenges as they go through life, and can help them to reach major life goals. I believe that my own successes in life were a direct result of the lessons and skills that I learned in dance class. Positive traits and skills were always inside of me, but dance helped me to embrace them.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Research Modifications

A somatics-based creative movement program can be a valuable experience for at-risk youth, who often struggle with low self-esteem, lack of engagement in school, poor social skills, and other circumstantial frustrations. The lessons learned through creative movement can flow seamlessly into the greater world, encouraging participants to feel empowered in life situations that extend far beyond the dance classroom. As the Arizona dance program progressed, the participants demonstrated enhanced awareness in terms of their creativity, collaboration, ownership, and general empowerment. Overall, I believe that the program was a success, but a few modifications to the methodology would have provided better data to analyze in terms of the research questions, as well as improved choreographic outcomes as related to the messages conveyed to the audience.

One oversight with the study design was my assumption that pure-movement exercises should dominate the movement exploration section of each class. In the rare instances that I included writing, verbal, or image components, the children responded with great enthusiasm, focus, and determination. I believe that the multifaceted exercises were so popular because they appealed to the visual and auditory senses, complementing and enhancing the more kinesthetic movement experience. In other words, the additional creative components helped the children to generate deeper meaning. Knowing this now, I would have included more poetry, acting, painting, and other types of expression into the curriculum. I was afraid that such activities would detract from the dance component, but now I believe that such activities can substantially enhance learning through dance.

More study shortcomings occurred with regard to the surveys. Unfortunately, the limited usefulness of the surveys was a direct result of my initial assumptions about the program participants. At the outset, I expected that the children would have difficulty being creative, collaborating, and owning their work. I projected my own biases onto the children and expected them to have low self-esteem and poor work ethic, due to their at-risk backgrounds. I later discovered that my assumptions were invalid. The children were very creative, willing to collaborate, and interested in owning their work. Not realizing that the children already possessed these attributes, however, I designed the survey with the belief that the children would have low-number responses in the first survey, and high-number responses in the second survey, thereby demonstrating growth. The children responded with high-number responses to the first survey, though, so it was difficult to measure their empowerment-related growth through the surveys alone.

My goal with the surveys was to compare how the children felt about themselves and their work ethic, environments, interactions with others, and creative movement, from the start of the program until the end. I wanted to determine whether a positive creative movement experience would help the children feel more empowered in various parts of their lives. Unfortunately, the surveys had another major flaw. They did not take into account circumstances beyond the creative movement program that could have influenced the children's responses. For example, if some of the children had learned about collaboration in a different Boys and Girls Club activity, this experience might have influenced their survey responses for my program. The surveys did not allow for the students to qualify their responses in any way, so it was unclear whether the creative movement program was the sole or primary influence on any survey response changes.

Another problem with the surveys was that they did not sufficiently address my research question about how creative movement could promote creativity, collaboration, and ownership. In retrospect, the surveys focused too much on the participants' life experiences, and not enough on their classroom experiences. The other data collection method, the interviews, also fell short in this area. The second interviews provided some valuable data related to lessons and skills learned from the program, but the responses were not comprehensive enough for a standalone analysis. So, neither the surveys nor the interviews directly addressed whether the children felt they had enhanced their senses of creativity, collaboration, or ownership as a result of the program. Along the same vein, neither tool addressed how creative movement helped the children to grow in these areas. Still, the surveys and interviews were useful in the sense that they supported the general trends that I observed over the course of the program.

When I designed the research methodology, I assumed that the children would not understand, or be able to articulate, how they learned through dance activities. For this reason, I did not ask the children for their opinions about how creative movement promoted creativity, collaboration, and ownership. I also felt that asking the children the secondary research questions, concerning the LMA exercises and the community dance circle would be beyond their comprehension level. I did not want to frustrate the participants with critical reflection on pedagogy. In retrospect, the children could have spent more time journaling about and discussing their feelings and experiences related to movement exercises. This level of reflection would have been appropriate for their age group, and the journal entries could have been analyzed in terms of language to determine whether the children learned the intended lessons from given exercises.

If I were to recreate the study in the future, I would modify the program design to include more types of creative activities in order to enhance the movement experiences. Also, I also would ask the children to both quantify and qualify their perceived growth in terms of their senses of creativity, collaboration, and ownership. A survey with numeric scales and open-ended questions, administered at the beginning and end of the program, should be enough to measure personal growth, but additional questionnaires could be distributed throughout the program if allowed by class time. Qualitative responses from the children about their own growth would be extremely valuable for trying to measure concepts such as creativity, collaboration, and ownership that are not easily quantifiable. Furthermore, I would ask the participants to do more reflection on movement exercises. It would be tedious to request a reflection for each exercise, but occasional reflections could provide valuable data to analyze in terms of answering the research questions.

One problem with my study design was beyond my control: the cohort size. An ideal study design would include several classes and participants from a wide range of demographics, incorporate the study modifications pointed out in this section, and as best as possible, employ the same curriculum across all programs. A larger study would be a better way of testing my research questions and drawing conclusions about the overall effectiveness of a creative movement program for at-risk youth. In addition to the size of the program, though, the length of follow-up is also a critical factor. I was unable to determine the far-reaching social impact of my program based on the original study design, but long-term follow-up with the participants at five, ten, and fifteen years, for example, could shed light on how the creative movement program influenced aspects of their lives, and the lives of people around them, beyond the dance classroom.

Besides the changes to the Arizona dance program, I would make a few changes to “Linked Together” to help clarify its main messages. One shortcoming of the concert was that it encouraged audience members to perceive all the sections as autobiographical, whereas I wanted to show that everyone is unique but interconnected. Another weakness is that the first two sections do not adequately address the notion that dance can lead to empowerment. The second half of the concert effectively shows the importance of dance education for at-risk youth, but the first half of the concert simply suggests the theme of empowerment, not so much dance as a means to empowerment. In other words, the first half of the concert could better complement, and thereby enhance, the second half of the concert. To improve the clarity of the messages in “Linked Together,” I would modify the choreography to reveal more about the dancers' personal stories, and I would include more contextual information related to the idea of empowerment through dance.

Most of the movement in “OSHUN,” my solo, is expansive, flowing, and circular. “We must not be anything other than who we are,” features similar kinds of movement, because it was shaped by my aesthetic preferences. If I were to redo the choreographic process for the second section, I would make fewer aesthetic directives in order to show the dancers as individuals, not as carbon copies of myself. My artistic guidance actually obstructed the motivation behind the piece, different people coming together through a common love of dance. In addition to showing more of the dancers' natural movement tendencies, I would allow more time for the dancers to perform their original movement phrases. Also, I would include remarks from the dancers about their unique, empowering dance experiences. These remarks could be projected onto the Cyclorama or spoken by the dancers during the piece, or the remarks could be printed as program notes.

The film “Moved to Inspire” and subsequent section “BE CREATIVE,” illustrate the positive effects of dance education for at-risk youth. If I were to redo these sections, knowing what I do now, I would give more attention to creative movement as an ideal type of dance education for at-risk youth. In the film, I would include more footage from the creative movement classes, such as icebreakers and the community dance circle, to show that the program was about more than technique and choreography. Also, for the choreographed section, I would include a greater variety of improvisations so that the onstage content would more accurately reflect an actual creative movement class. Finally, “BE CREATIVE” could have better portrayed the concepts of creativity, collaboration, and ownership, thereby showing audience members how the children grew as a result of the program. These concepts could have been made more explicit in the children's poem and song, or “Move to Inspire” could have included brief interviews with the children about how they grew as a result of the creative movement program.

Lastly, I would make some changes to my solos, the first and last sections, to help clarify the main messages of “Linked Together.” To begin, “OSHUN” effectively shows the theme of empowerment, and it is similar to the other sections in terms of movement forms and style, but its content does not directly relate to the main messages I wanted to convey to the audience members. If I were to redo “Linked Together,” I would consider omitting “OSHUN” and lengthening the second and third sections, in order to focus more on the themes that everyone is interconnected, that dance education can empower people, and that creative movement can empower at-risk youth. I still would include “Beneath the Surface,” however, because it sends a strong message about my personal transformation through dance, while hinting that everyone can grow through enhanced creativity.

Recommendations for Dance Educators

Dance educators who work with at-risk youth may encounter more classroom interruptions, difficulties, and challenges than with other types of students. Above all, working with at-risk youth requires a great deal of empathy in order to keep the class running smoothly. In Chapter 1, I discussed how my own life path changed as a direct result of a positive, well-structured dance experience facilitated by an empathetic teacher who encouraged my creativity and sense of empowerment. As a dance educator myself, now, I understand the importance of empathy and took time to listen and relate to at-risk youth whom I taught. Sometimes, at-risk youth simply need someone to listen and to validate that their ideas and art is meaningful and valuable. They may not necessarily get this type of validation at home or among their peers, and positive words can go a long way in helping an at-risk child gain self-esteem and empowerment. Dance educators of all backgrounds can help at-risk youth by asking questions to learn about them, listening to them, validating their ideas, and complimenting their accomplishments.

Consistency, patience, and hope are other critical attributes that a dance educator can bring to an at-risk-youth dance program. A consistent class structure along with well-defined expectations, rules, and responses to misbehavior give the children a framework in which to clearly define their own roles and behavior. Initially, the children may not know how to behave in the dance classroom, though, because dance may be a new type of experience for them, so the educator needs to have patience with them. Additionally, the dance educator can encourage the children through hopeful discussions about what the children want to happen in their future. Consistency provides a structure for learning, patience allows time for learning, and hope inspires the action of learning.

In terms of curriculum design, it is important for dance educators to include a wide range of activities that promote the internalization of positive skills and values. In the Arizona dance program, the LMA exercises and the community dance circle were useful for promoting creativity, original movement, and a comfortable environment for collaboration, but these were not the only exercises in the program; I also facilitated other types of improvisations, as well as writing activities and an image activity to generate original movement. Variety is important, because children have different interests and modes of learning. Some children are more visual learners, while others are auditory or kinesthetic learners. By offering a variety of creative activities, dance educators can cater to all the different types of learning and help the entire group to learn and thrive. Variety in lesson design is important for all types of youth, not just at-risk youth.

Lesson flexibility is crucial when working with at-risk youth, as well. There is no doubt that unexpected situations will arise. When I taught in Panama, for example, many children were resistant to participating in my planned lessons, so I had to make quick adjustments to provide them with a positive dance experience. When I taught in India, I allowed the youth to have a significant amount of control over the direction of the class. In both of these places, though, I felt that any potential long-term benefits of the dance experience were compromised by too much flexibility. My role as dance educator was not proactive enough. I addressed this problem with the Arizona dance curriculum, which allowed the students to explore preferred types of movement within structured activities. Furthermore, I had prepared a variety of activities to promote learning about creativity, collaboration, and ownership. If the children became too frustrated with one activity, I simply moved onto another activity designed to accomplish a similar learning experience.

Reflecting upon the Arizona dance program outcomes, I believe that freedom of expression, as cultivated through a variety of creative activities, was the most important driving force behind the program's success. Creative expression facilitated collaboration and ownership, and it was the basis of self-esteem building and personal empowerment. I strongly encourage dance educators who work with youth, especially at-risk youth, to include creativity as a main theme in their program designs. All children are creative, but they do not always know how to express their creativity. Dance educators can help youth to discover and nurture their natural creativity through a carefully designed program that includes somatics exercises and emphasizes authentic, unbiased expression. In addition to a well-planned program, however, a creative movement program should incorporate the following attributes: empathy, consistency, patience, hope, variety, and flexibility. Together, these attributes will encourage open expression, creativity, and empowerment.

Working with at-risk youth can be challenging, but the rewards can be fantastic. To begin, dance educators can build strong bonds with their students and have a lasting impact on their lives. Furthermore, reflection on best practices for teaching encourages dance educators to further develop their pedagogical skills and methods. Also, the process of demonstrating and explaining somatics exercises gives dance educators greater insight into their own movement preferences. Altogether, the process of teaching a creative movement program enables dance educators to hone their skills as both educators and artists. During my work with the Boys and Girls Club, I gained deeper awareness of my own creativity, which introduced me to new choreographic possibilities as I worked on "Linked Together." The Arizona dance program experience, therefore, was also a learning experience for me, and it will have a long-lasting effect on my life.

Dance educators who work with at-risk youth have another critical responsibility beyond teaching dance. As dance programs continue to be underfunded and cut, there is great need to spread the word about the positive results of creative movement programs for at-risk youth. Dance educators can collaborate with each other, as well as community arts leaders and other socially engaged arts practitioners, to help spread awareness and also discuss teaching strategies and best practices. This type of collaboration can happen through national conferences whose mission is to help at-risk youth or to promote dance education and research, as well as academic journals with similar missions. The National Guild for Community Arts Education sponsors a conference. The National Youth-At-Risk Conference is hosted by Georgia Southern University's College of Education. In the dance community, the National Dance Education Organization (NDEO), Congress on Research in Dance (CORD), and Dance/USA hold conferences and publish academic journals. When dance educators share information about their work with at-risk youth through such conferences and publications, other professionals may become inspired to take action and establish at-risk youth dance programs in their own communities.

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APPENDIX A

ARIZONA DANCE CURRICULUM SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 2014

Unit #1: Creativity

Date: 9/25, Theme: Introduction

Icebreaker: Two truths and a lie

Introduction: Introduce myself; explain the purpose of the project, explain the importance of community and individuality

Exercise A: What are your career goals?

Exercise B: Hand out sheets of paper (ask students to write down their future goals)

Exercise C: Community circle (individual movement)

Exercise D: Create movement for every career goals

Exercise E: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 9/26, Theme: Introduction

Icebreaker: Two truths and a lie

Exercise A: What are your career goals?

Exercise B: Community circle (individual movement) with music

Exercise C: Review movement for every career goals (with music)

Exercise D: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 10/2, Theme: Exploring dance elements that influences creativity

Icebreaker: Anyone who?

Exercise A: Explore efforts (strong/heavy weight, direct focus)

Exercise B: Explore movement (strong/heavy weight, high/mid/low)

Exercise C: Explore traveling (strong/heavy weight)

Exercise D: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 10/3, Theme: Exploring creativity through space and energy

Icebreaker: Sit down if...

Exercise A: Shape qualities (rising, sinking advancing, enclosing, spreading)

Exercise B: Physical embodiment of the different shape qualities with partner

Exercise C: What shape qualities best describes you?

Exercise D: Learn about your partner (three shape qualities that describes them)

Exercise E: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 10/9, Theme: Exploring creativity through images

Icebreaker: Find someone who...

Exercise A: Review efforts (add more efforts)

Exercise B: Explore light weight, sustained movement, free flow

Exercise C: Surveys

Exercise D: Journaling/Reflection

Homework: Bring a picture of someone who inspires you (parent, sister, teacher, football player, etc.)

Date: 10/11, Theme: Exploring creativity through building a movement phrase

Icebreaker: Simon Says

Exercise A: Review shape qualities and efforts
Exercise B: Create three gestures that describes your image
Exercise C: Connect your shape quality phrase to your effort gestures/phrase
Exercise D: Play with traveling, directional changes, high/mid/low
Exercise E: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 10/16, Theme: Exploring creativity through shapes

Icebreaker: M&M's and Skittles game

Exercise A: Introduce still shapes (when the body is not moving)

1. Pin: linear, elongated (one dimensional)
2. Wall: flat (two dimensional)
3. Ball: round, spherical (three dimensional)
4. Screw: twisted, spiral (three dimensional)
5. Pyramid: tetrahedral with a strong, wide base (three dimensional)

Exercise B: Experiment with different still shapes

Exercise C: Interviews

Exercise D: Add to the shape (build upon shapes created by peers)

Exercise E: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 10/17, Theme: Exploring creativity through self-awareness

Icebreaker: Write down three things that you like about yourself

Exercise A: Create three movements that best describe what you like about yourself; use any of the still forms, shape qualities, and efforts

Exercise B: Show and tell

Exercise C: Journaling/Reflection

Unit #2: Collaboration

Date: 10/23, Theme: Working together

Icebreaker: Human Knot

Exercise A: Mirroring exercise

Exercise B: Writing exercise: What is community? What is your community at home?

Exercise C: Circle three words that best describe your idea of community

Exercise D: With a partner, create three movements to show your ideas of community

Exercise E: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 10/24, Theme: What is community?

Icebreaker: Blindfold/trust game

Exercise A: Continue to work on three movements that represent community

Exercise B: Share original movements

Exercise C: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 10/30, Theme: Exploring creativity in a community

Icebreaker: Build a sentence

Exercise A: Review shape qualities
Exercise B: Explore shape qualities in groups of 3
Exercise C: Pick three shape qualities and build a phrase together
Exercise D: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 10/31, Theme: Diversity within a community

Icebreaker: Build a movement phrase
Exercise A: Review shape qualities
Exercise B: Explore shape qualities in trios
Exercise C: Work on movement phrase
Exercise D: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 11/6, Theme: Diversity within a community

Icebreaker: Build a movement phrase (with certain body parts)
Exercise A: Review efforts
Exercise B: Improvisation (with effort categories)
Exercise C: Create an image that represents your favorite effort quality
Exercise D: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 11/7, Theme: Diversity within a community

Icebreaker: Build a movement phrase (based on words)
Exercise A: Review efforts
Exercise B: Improvisation (with effort categories)
Exercise C: Finish working on your image
Exercise D: Journaling/Reflection

Unit #3: Ownership

Date: 11/13, Theme: What are my values?

Exercise A: Body map (How do you view yourself, what are your weaknesses, what are your strengths, hobbies, goals)
Exercise B: Create movement based on the body map
Exercise C: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 11/14, Theme: What does your community value?

Exercise A: Body map review
Exercise B: Walk around and see all the body maps
Exercise C: Create movement based on all the body maps
Exercise D: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 11/20, Theme: Exploring personal movement

Exercise A: "I am" (Turn body maps into a poem)
Exercise B: Create movement using the body maps
Exercise C: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 11/21, Theme: Exploring movement that describes who I am

Exercise A: “I am” (continuation)

Exercise B: Create movement using the body maps

Exercise C: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 12/4, Theme: Movement inspired by individuality

Icebreaker: Encouragement circle

Exercise A: Community dance circle and individual values

Exercise B: Dancing freely with a partner

Exercise C: Improvisation (everyone in small community dance circles)

Exercise D: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 12/5, Theme: Owning who I am in community context

Icebreaker: Encouragement circle

Exercise A: Small community dance circles

Exercise B: Big community dance circle

Exercise C: Review “I am” and continue movement creation

Exercise D: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 12/11, Theme: Embracing self and community

Icebreaker: Encouragement circle

Exercise A: Small community dance circles

Exercise B: Big community dance circle with “I am”

Exercise C: Second interviews

Exercise D: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 12/12, Theme: Embracing self and community

Exercise A: Small community dance circles

Exercise B: Big community dance circle with “I am”

Exercise C: Second interviews

Exercise D: Journaling/Reflection

Date: 12/18, Theme: Embracing self and community

Exercise A: Small community dance circles

Exercise B: Big community dance circle with “I am”

Exercise C: Second interviews

Exercise D: Journaling/Reflection

12/19, 1/7, 1/9, 1/14, 1/16, 1/21, 1/23: Rehearsals

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW AND SURVEY QUESTIONARE
SEPTEMBER-JANUARY 2014, 2015

Survey

Age:

Gender:

For each item identified below, circle the number to the right that best fits your judgment of its quality. Use the scale to select the quality number.

Item	Scale					Item	Scale				
	P o o r	Good			E x c e l l e n t		P o o r	Good			E x c e l l e n t
1. Feel good about myself	1	2	3	4	5	2. Feel value and loved.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Love creative dance	1	2	3	4	5	4. Love to express my feelings in a positive way	1	2	3	4	5
5. Feel safe and secure in my neighborhood	1	2	3	4	5	6. Make good choices	1	2	3	4	5
7. Feel good about my future	1	2	3	4	5	8. Enjoys learning	1	2	3	4	5
9. Resist bad influences	1	2	3	4	5	10. Overcome challenges in a positive way	1	2	3	4	5
11. Love working by myself	1	2	3	4	5	12. Love to build friendships/work with other people	1	2	3	4	5
13. Care about school	1	2	3	4	5	14. Avoid things that are dangerous and unhealthy	1	2	3	4	5

Interview Questions #1

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender?
3. What grade are you in?
4. What is creative movement?
5. Do you like to work by yourself or in a group?
6. What do you want to be when you grow up?

Interview Questions #2

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender?
3. What grade are you in?
4. What is creative movement?
5. Do you like to work by yourself or in a group?
6. What is one thing you learned from participating in this project?