

Lesley University

DigitalCommons@Lesley

Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses

Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences
(GSASS)

Spring 5-18-2024

Moving and Dancing Mindfully: A Community-Based Project for a Competitive Dance Team

Clare Terrio
cterrio@lesley.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Terrio, Clare, "Moving and Dancing Mindfully: A Community-Based Project for a Competitive Dance Team" (2024). *Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses*. 827.
https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses/827

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences (GSASS) at DigitalCommons@Lesley. It has been accepted for inclusion in Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Lesley. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lesley.edu, cvrattos@lesley.edu.

**Moving and Dancing Mindfully: A Community-Based Project
for a Competitive Dance Team**

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

April 24, 2024

Clare Terrio

Specialization: Dance/Movement Therapy

Thesis Instructor: Madoka Urhausen, Ph.D., LMFT, ATR-BC

Abstract

This graduate-level thesis explores the integration of mindfulness and Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT) principles applied to the competitive dance community. Drawing from the personal experience and studies of DMT of the author, there is an exploration of the importance of mindfulness when fostering dancers' connection to their bodies and promoting wellbeing through a community-based project. A one-hour workshop titled "Moving and Dancing Mindfully" was conducted to explore these concepts with a competitive dance team ($N = 18$), aged fourteen to eighteen. The workshop took place at a dance studio located in a suburban, lower to middle-class community in the East Coast of the United States. The results include an exchange between the facilitator's informed approach and the participant's experiences. This data was gathered by creating a word cloud that included the dancer's responses to their experience and journaling of the facilitator's experience and observations. The data was evaluated and interpreted through an arts-based analysis of the dancers' responses.

Keywords: Community Based Engagement Project, Mindfulness, Dance/Movement Therapy, Competitive Dance Community

Author Identity: The author identifies as a White, cis-gender female, from the East Coast of the United States.

Moving and Dancing Mindfully: A Community-Based Project for a Competitive Dance Team

Introduction

When fully participating in dance, the mind and body are deeply connected. Being mindful when dancing can be a piece of one's reflection on the process of dancing and moving. Mindfulness, a purposeful and nonjudgmental awareness to the present moment, is a practice that can be applied in one's lived experiences to enhance the present moment (Rosenbaum & Bohart, 2002; Siegel et al., 2009). Bringing this practice into the competitive dance community was a recent calling of mine stemming from my personal experience of dancing competitively and my current study of Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT). Levy (2005) defines DMT as "the use of Dance/Movement as a psychotherapeutic or healing tool, is rooted in the idea that the body and the mind are inseparable" (p. 1). My project is motivated by the desire to integrate both practices and lenses of mindfulness and DMT, while simultaneously honoring and acknowledging the current methods of teaching implemented with the competitive dancers. These methods of teaching in the competitive field convey emphasis on performance, artistry, technique, and self-expression. Though it felt lost in my personal experience back when I danced competitively, the key concept of mindfulness has the potential to be beneficial to the community of competitive dancers. This question served as the open door to this exploration of moving and dancing mindfully that aligned with Authentic Movement, an intervention used within DMT (García-Díaz, 2018). When one is dancing, is the body moving or is the body being moved?

A common belief among competitive dancers is the tendency to view the body and movement in service of the performance's audience. When I was part of a competitive dance community, we focused so much on what we looked like while dancing and using our bodies as a tool in this process. According to De Bruin et al. (2009), competitive dancers at an elite level are

more likely to experience mental and emotional challenges that emerge from the practices and learnings instilled. Specifically, disordered eating is more present in the population of competitive dancers where the practices of comparison, high expectations, perfectionism, and the ideal body that are fostered (Doria & Numer, 2023). At the time I was dancing, I did not know that my body was more than a tool; it could be a guide and an opening to connectedness and curiosity. I rarely ever focused on the feeling of the movement and only on whether it looked right to mirror in comparison to what was being taught. Mindfulness has the potential to offer a dual-lens, understanding that while competitive dance will always require elements of conformity and precision, there is the opportunity to enhance artistry, promote body awareness, and embrace the feeling of the movement. For these reasons, it is worthwhile to identify ways to ground competitive dancers in mindful practice to support artistry, expression, and body awareness when performing.

For my Capstone Thesis, a one-hour workshop titled "Moving and Dancing Mindfully" was conducted for a group of eighteen high school dancers aged fourteen to eighteen. The workshop, held at a dance studio, incorporated principles from Dance/Movement therapy and mindfulness practices. Through the workshop, I aimed to explore how to share self-awareness and non-judgmental awareness, to promote presence and performance with others in the competitive dance community.

Literature Review

The review of literature focuses on mindfulness, Dance/Movement Therapy, and competitive dance. The integration of the three disciplines is explored and expanded upon through the review.

Mindfulness

Jon Kabat-Zinn, a professor at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, has coined the definition of mindfulness as “a form of nonjudgmental, purposeful attention in the present moment” (Rosenbaum & Bohart, 2021). This definition was intended to separate the term from Buddhist practice, making it inclusive for those who do not align with religious or spiritual affiliations. Mindfulness has ancient roots but has increased in popularity more recently and in recent studies, and has been positively linked to happiness, wellness, and self-disclosure (Aldahadha, 2023).

When considering the uses of mindfulness in relation to athletic performance Noetel, et al. (2019) researched mindfulness and its potential to improve athletic performance by exploring cognition, attention, and emotion. The researchers found significant improvements in performance, flow state, presence of mindfulness, and reducing competitive anxiety. The researcher concluded mindfulness has shown effects to reduce anxiety, stress, and depression that may impact sport performance (Noetel et al., 2019). Similar to these findings, Bühlmayer et al. (2017) found that mindfulness practice had significant positive effects on psychological performance components, mindfulness scores, and performance outcomes in sports, such as shooting and dart throwing. The findings of the research share that mindfulness practice could be beneficial to mental skills training for athletes, particularly in precision sports. The researchers found positive correlation with the increase of mindfulness, there is improvement with the present task and overall wellbeing. Tacuri et al. (2023) researched how dance can be conceptualized as both an art and a sport, with many overlapping and differing components.

Though the research above pointed to the link between mindfulness and athletic performance, embodied mindfulness has typically only been explored through an empirical lens

and not in relation to dancers and other athletes. Thouin-Savard (2019) explains embodied mindfulness begins with the “attentional posture—referring to where the attention is felt to be coming from within the body of the subject (i.e., their egocenter), rather than what the subject’s attention is pointing at” (p. 205). This researcher found the effects of embodied mindfulness with individuals ($N = 115$) helped facilitate a state of presence that enhanced attunement to self and others (Thouin-Savard, 2019). Additionally, Hart et al. (2013) defines Buddhist mindfulness practices with the full awareness of the mind, body, and feelings, highlighting that the body and the mind are equivalents. Focusing on attentional posture and full awareness of mind, body, and feelings, has the potential to enhance presence, attunement to self and others, and the possibility to improve athletic performance among dancers and other athletes.

In systemic review of combining physical activity with mindfulness on mental health and wellbeing by Majore-Dusele et al. (2021), Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) interventions have been found to foster a positive outcome with the overall quality of life. In addition, Block-Lerner et al. (2007) showed that MBSR approaches increased one’s capacity of perspective-taking and empathy and highlighted that present and non-judgmental awareness played a role. Some MBSR interventions with an embodied mindful approach include body scan meditations. Body scan meditations are an introduction to mindfulness as a practice, in which individuals are guided to bring awareness to areas of their body without implementing change or judgment (Brotto & Basson, 2014). Khoury et al. (2017) highlight neuroscientist’s findings of the effectiveness of embodied MBSR on brain regions connected to interoceptive and exteroceptive body awareness that are highly activated. This approach of practices to cultivate present moment awareness, is similar to the integration of top-down and bottom-up processes that is throughout the philosophy of Buddhism and explored through neurobiology.

Dance/Movement Therapy

The American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) defines Dance/Movement therapy as “the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive, and physical integration of the individual” (n.d., para. 1). DMT explores how the movements of the body reflect inner emotional states, differing from traditional psychotherapy, which focuses on verbally processing emotions and feelings (Levy, 2005). Through DMT, symbolic movement is an alternative form of expression when conveying thoughts or feelings that are not accessible through verbal language (Thomas, 1994). Joan Wittig (2010), Board-certified Dance/Movement therapist (BC-DMT), discusses how this psychotherapeutic exploration allows the balance to “experience, clarify, and eventually integrate feeling, thinking, and moving” (Lewin, 1998, p. 9). Berrol (2006) emphasized the significance of interpersonal connections as a fundamental element of Dance/Movement therapy. Empathetic reflection between people is a key concept of DMT. Joan Wittig (2016) emphasized the importance of the interplay between group and individual when she painted this process by saying:

In dance therapy groups, members mirror each other, joining each other in movement and reflecting back to each other. This allows each member of the group to know they are seen, and accepted, as the other members join their movement. This can be a profound experience, to know there is a place for one in the group, and that one belongs here.

(p. 44)

By highlighting Wittig’s emphasis on relational factors to DMT groups, Blum (2016) illuminated important factors of trust-building and mindful affirmation inherent in DMT.

Majore-Dusele, Karkou, and Millere (2021) depict an example of a DMT session structured like the following: check-in and physical warm-up, body-scan, working with a theme,

and ending with closure. A key component of a DMT session is the check-in or introduction, where the group in the space is set up in a circle. Karampoula and Panhofer (2018), highlighted the symbolic significance of the circle in Dance/Movement therapy depicting it as a powerful symbol representing wholeness and completeness. It expands deeper into how DMT frequently incorporates circle formations, specifically in the model developed by Marian Chace, a pioneer of DMT.

Authentic Movement

Authentic Movement (AM) is an intervention that is often used in dance/movement therapy, coined by Janet Adler and developed off of the theories of Mary Whitehouse (García-Díaz, 2018). Authentic Movement has roots in the world of modern dance and DMT while holding mindfulness and meditative elements (Haimerl & Valentine, 2001). In Authentic Movement, “The movements stem from inner impulses, consisting of feelings, thoughts, images, and memories. One goal of AM is to expand the access of the person who is moving to these sensations, movements, images, feelings, and thoughts” (Buraki, 2022, p. 6). García-Díaz (2018) explained these impulses, as one being “moved,” emphasizing being in the stillness until the self is moved. Buraki (2022) explains the structure of the AM model as the following: “(a) Movement of the individual with eyes closed; (b) Movement within a group of people moving; (c) Movement takes place in the presence of a witness or witnesses; and (d) Responses by the witnesses and acceptance by the movers” (p. 6). This is done typically between two individuals. In Buraki’s (2022) study, found that their participants viewed moving in front of witnesses and being a witness during AM sessions as significant experiences, showing the importance of these aspects in personal development and therapeutic process.

Joan Wittig (2016) explored the use of DMT to foster equanimity and mindfulness, through interventions such as Authentic Movement. Furthermore, Wittig explicated the level of equanimity or calmness required to bring self-awareness and interwove DMT and AM:

Mindfulness in Dance/Movement Therapy means noticing what is happening right now, in one's thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations...Understanding comes through just being with, and leads the mover toward a non-judgmental awareness, without attachment to outcome, that allows patience, compassion, and acceptance. (p.42)

Another contribution of Wittig was that she integrated the two by using improvisation as therapy. She emphasized a level of presence that is needed in improvisation without expectations or regrets. Similar elements that are required in AM are patience, compassion, and acceptance (Adler, 2002). This is where there are overlapping similarities in practices of meditation and the use of improvisation as therapy.

Contemplative Dance

Harrison Blum (2016) MDiv, M.Ed., the Buddhist spiritual advisor and coordinator of the Mindfulness programs at Northeastern University, edited a collection of essays on movement and dance in Western Buddhism. While there is limited peer-reviewed literature about mindfulness and dance, Barbara Dilley, former President of Naropa University and founder of their dance program, explained the practice of Contemplative Dance Practice (CDP; Dilley, 2016). CDP is a practice informed through mindfulness and Buddhist practices. Within Buddhist teachings, there is a practice of contemplation taught. This practice is associated with hearing, contemplating, and meditating. Dilley leans into the definition of contemplation as, to observe, consider, to gaze attentively (Dilley, 2016). CDP explores these three practices through the understanding of the mind-body connection. There is an emphasis on synchronizing the body and

mind through the interconnectedness of body sensations and thoughts. This can be done through waking or sitting meditations. A session of CDP includes five parts: Introduction, Sitting Practice, Personal Awareness Practice, Open Space, and Closing Circle. According to Dilley, this practice of CDP shows up in varying ways, it is flexible and adaptable, and it has evolved over the years (Dilley, 2016). Dilley's approach invites facilitators to make the practice individualized and add creativity.

Dance-Based Exploration

There are many ways to interpret and analyze information and results. Kawano (2017) discusses the approach of using dance/movement therapy to qualitatively analyze interview data. The researcher highlights the embodied-artistic premise of DMT, dance, and meaning, and multiple data-analysis frameworks. The method developed was informed by the listening guide method, which emphasized embodying the data of participants to promote sensory input. The key aspect of this sensory input was to uplift introspection, making sense of the intersubjective experience.

Faulkner et al. (2016) highlight the concept of reflexivity in qualitative research through research journals, models, collaborative poetry, and collage exercises as evidence. The authors define reflexivity as the process of, "being aware of and acknowledging the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process" (p.198). The implication here is nearly unattainable for the researcher to remain outside of the subject matter and the researchers explore how to use reflexivity as instrument in the process. Faulkner et al. (2016) suggest that the process of reflexivity and personal experiences enrich the research process. With the understanding that reflexivity in research includes multiple perspectives, the researchers adapted Kieth Berry's conceptualization of reflexivity as spinning. Faulkner et al.

(2016) conclude their understandings as: “Spinning reflexivity creates an opportunity for us to challenge our thought process and make room for alternate ways of interpretation; to move beyond previous knowledge and experiences” (p. 208). Being reflexive within research allows us to explore our own perspectives and assumptions, to create space for different insights and understandings to surface.

Competitive Dance Community

There is limited peer-reviewed literature that helps support some conceptions of what the competitive dance community encapsulates while still honoring the range of experiences different from one another. Janice LaPointe-Crump, an educator and choreographer at The Texas Woman’s University, shares her understanding of the competitive dance world as the following:

In this world, dancers exhibit themselves for the attention of the audience. Viewed in this way, the exquisiteness of their embodied performance invited appreciation and evaluation. What an audience feels and understands is not controlled solely by the dancers but results from an interpretation within the context of the dance and the venue.
(2007, p. 4)

While the audience is often present in organized dance contexts, competitive dancers are uniquely aware of a dual role where they must embody artistic expression while also having an added element to the performance. There is an added element to the performance of the dance, an evaluation, and acknowledgment of placement in relation to the judge/competition.

There are many reasons why dancers compete and what the competition community has to offer. In a cross-sectional study of dancers utilizing online survey, Sobash (2014) found that, among the participants ($N = 58$), competition gives dancers opportunities to receive feedback from experienced judges, provides more opportunities to perform, and allows dancers to meet

and see the work of dancers from different backgrounds. Most dancers reported enjoying competing. There is room for collaboration with other dancers within the same team and a component of challenging oneself from an individual standpoint or among other dancers (Sobash, 2014). It is noted that this study has a limited population sample. Silk (1999) explores the varying themes of community and suggests that community entails “common needs and goals, a sense of the common good, shared lives, culture and views of the world, and collective action” (p. 6). However, it is essential to acknowledge that the experience of a community may vary for all who participate in competitive dancing.

Despite many dancers enjoying competition, Terry Hyde at the Royal Ballet School in London noted competitive dance culture can also result in a negative experience. For instance, dancers are taught to push through the pain, not to invite the emotions in, and to not show weakness (Murray, 2022). As noted above, elite dancers also have a higher likelihood to foster a disconnection between the mind and body.

This is where the importance of mindfulness comes into play. Dr. Jamie Marich, a licensed clinical professional counselor and expressive arts therapist, explores how dancers can add mindfulness to enhance the dance experience. Marich shared with The New York Times,

Dancing isn’t about escaping the stressors of daily life. Dancing offers us a way to embrace them. By being present while dancing, we can learn about ourselves and our bodies. You don’t need to be perfect as a dancer. Instead, we can come home to the present moment through the practice of mindful dancing. (Gelles, 2017, para. 1)

Rather than changing the systems and methods of teaching of competitive dance, how can dancers access this piece about mindfulness to support their artistry and elevate the experience of

their dance community and practices? Introducing these principles to competitive dancers through interventions and explorations can aid the embodiment of understanding.

Summary of the Literature

Building from the existing scholarship discussed above, this Capstone seeks to explore the possibility of fostering mindfulness in the competitive dance community. The idea of being present and aware, without judgment, seems to be a valuable piece of knowledge for competitive dancers to hold and embody based on the evidence of several researchers (Aldahadha, 2023; Block-Lerner et al., 2007; Brotto & Basson, 2014; Thouin-Savard, 2019). Gleaned from literature review, there is potential to improve well-being and foster a quality of presence among competitive dancers (Bühlmayer et al., 2017; Khoury et al., 2017; Majore-Dusele et al., 2021; Noetel et al, 2019). Doing a community-based workshop with a dance/movement therapy-informed approach, seemed to integrate the concepts of AM (Adler, 2002) and CDP (Dilley, 2016) in an embodied mindful way. In addition, my approach for this community engagement project was informed by components of Authentic Movement and Contemplative Dance Practices.

Methods

For a deeper understanding and offering of moving mindfully in the competitive dance community, I conducted a one-hour workshop embodying mindfulness. This workshop was informed by the fundamental concepts of dance/movement therapy and mindfulness practices, encapsulating moving and dancing mindfully. The one-hour workshop took place at a dance studio located in a suburban, lower to middle-class community in the East Coast of the United States.

Participants

I chose to work with this studio due to personal connections and familiarity with the studio. These individuals are ones I believe could benefit from my offerings. Being familiar with some of the dancers as well as the owner made the process comfortable for me to propose this idea and receive openness to the workshop. I contacted the owner of the dance studio via telephone to propose my offerings. We engaged in conversations and collaborated to find a fitting group to participate in the workshop. We discussed the maturity of the group and ensured that the offerings would be relevant to their identities. This included deciding on the time and date as well. It was decided that the workshop would take place on Thursday, January 25th, 2024. This workshop occurred during the dancers' weekly standing improvisational class, taking the place of one hour of the two-hour class. The workshop was facilitated during the second half of the class. The studio occasionally hosts guest teachers and other workshops during this time, so the studio owner was responsible for presenting and informing the dancers about this workshop.

The group consisted of eighteen dancers ranging in age from fourteen to eighteen years old. All participants are current high school students and members of the dance studio. The majority of the group are members of the studio's competitive dance team, who often travel to compete on weekends. Of the group, seventeen identified as female and one identified as male through the disclosure of sharing names and pronouns during introductions. No other identities were explicitly disclosed to the group nor to this facilitator.

Materials

The materials I used for this workshop included my phone to play the music I provided, the studio's space, speaker, and sound system. Additionally, I used my tablet, which had an

outline of the workshop for myself. I presented a slideshow through my iPad via the studio's TV monitor. The participants used their phones at the end of the workshop to provide word responses. It was encouraged and proposed that the dancers gather anything they needed beforehand.

One-Hour Workshop

On Thursday, January 25th, 2024, participants arrived at the studio to begin the one-hour workshop. I reminded the dancers to gather any necessary items, such as water, for their comfort before we began. Once everyone was prepared, I invited them to form a circle for introductions. During this time, I introduced the workshop's title, "Moving and Dancing Mindfully," and briefly explained my background, including my name, pronouns, affiliation with the studio, and my interest in dance/movement therapy from my academic experience. Each participant took turns sharing their name, pronouns, and any other relevant identifiers as we went around the circle.

The dancers were briefed on the workshop's title and informed that physical movement would be involved. I emphasized the importance of self-care, encouraging them to listen to their bodies and take breaks if needed, without feeling obligated to provide explanations. I welcomed any questions that arose at this time.

We collectively took a deep breath as a group before initiating the movement explorations. I played music from a low-fi playlist on Spotify and invited the dancers to mill freely around the studio, guided by my instructions. This initial exploration aimed to help them ground themselves in the present moment and cultivate mindful awareness of their surroundings and fellow dancers.

Afterward, I prompted the dancers to settle into a comfortable position in the room, whether seated, standing, or lying down. We proceeded with a mindful body scan, encouraging

participants to close their eyes or soften their gaze and focus inward. Beginning from their feet and moving upwards, I guided them to tune into sensations in their bodies and minds, fostering a sense of curiosity and awareness without judgment.

Transitioning into thematic movement explorations, I instructed the dancers to stand facing away from the wall-sized mirror. We delved into exploring impulses, posing the question: "When one is dancing, is the body moving, or is the body being moved?". I explained that we would investigate this concept through feeling impulses and clarified that there were no correct or incorrect movements in this exploration. The objective was to sense the impulse to move, starting with one limb at a time and gradually incorporating more limbs. This exploration was accompanied by the same low-fi music playlist. There was emphasis on the encouragement to embrace impulses without constraints, noticing when they come to a close.

Continuing with the theme of impulses, we reconvened in a circle to explore passing impulses through the group. One dancer at a time would tap into their impulse to move sequentially, followed by the next dancer moving as impulses arose. We then transitioned into pairs, allowing dancers to choose their partners. Expanding on this, we introduced mirroring, where pairs faced each other without verbal communication to identify the leader or follower. Participants were encouraged to remain mindful of impulses and observe shifts between leading and following. They were also prompted to experiment with different positions and explore creativity freely.

As this exploration concluded, dancers were encouraged to take a break as needed and retrieve their personal cell phones for the next exercise. They gathered in a semicircle facing the TV and me. I then presented the slideshow I had prepared to initiate the closing and reflection phase. Using *Mentimeter*, an online tool, dancers were provided with a QR code to access the

activity displayed on the TV screen. The prompt asked, "how did that feel for you?" and dancers could input one-word responses on their phones. The responses formed a word cloud, visible anonymously with words enlarging based on frequency. After completing this activity, we returned to the presentation.

The slide contained three questions: 1. What stood out to you?; 2. What can you take from today to apply to your current dance (competitions or performances)?; and 3. Are there any questions or curiosities that came up? This served as a platform for facilitating discussion and allowing dancers to elaborate freely. Contributions were made without a specific order, and dancers were encouraged to raise their hands to share. The final slide provided definitions of mindfulness and dance/movement therapy, opening the opportunity for non-structured questions or comments from the dancers.

To conclude the workshop, I provided my contact information for further discussions or inquiries. I expressed gratitude to the dancers for their participation and shared a final reflection on the joy of dance, JOD, inspired by a concept introduced by a professor. The practice of JOD aims to feature songs that evoke feelings of joy when dancing or moving to the music. I encouraged the dancers to use JOD when getting lost in the technique, choreography, corrections, or competitions. I invited the dancers to reflect on a song that brings them joy and to dance freely and unapologetically. We collectively listened to my chosen JOD song, "You Make Me Feel Like Dancing" by Leo Sayer, and dancers were invited to dance if they felt inspired. The session ended with an invitation to notice the impulse fading and to dance out of the room.

Data Collecting and Processing

To gather my data and record information, I used the process of journaling. This took the shape of movement, written, and voice journals. Before and after the workshop, I engaged in an

embodied movement of my present state. In addition, I recorded my stream of consciousness while speaking aloud using technology on my phone. This log was to gauge where I was on a mental and embodied level at the time of going into the workshop and then coming out of the workshop. This space was used to track myself and was also used as a space to reflect on the results/outcome of the workshop while being aligned with a mindfulness approach. The word cloud created through the Mentimeter aided my reflection and processing of the dancers' responses.

Results

The following results are informed by my experience and observations from the one-hour workshop. With the support of the journal entries, I was able to make sense of and identify prevalent themes that emerged. Below are the journal entries in a summarized version.

Before the workshop

I began by checking in with myself before entering the workshop. Feelings of anxiety were very present as the time of the workshop approached. This included an increased heart rate, warmth throughout the body, and restlessness. I was unsure of what to expect and felt stuck in my head. I set the intention to accept the workshop as it came. It was helpful to acknowledge that the workshop might not go as planned and to be flexible and adaptive. I aimed to do my best and enjoy the present moment by tuning into my body and moving away from overwhelming thoughts. It felt counterintuitive at first to verbally document my experience as it promoted getting lost in my thoughts and anxiety. In preparation for the workshop, I decided to spend time listening to music and exploring the experience of feeling the impulse to move. During this time, the idea of JOD came to mind, reminding me of the benefit this experience had for myself. I set the intention to add this to the end of my workshop as my final offering. I wanted to share with

the dancers that, at the end of it all, my top priority is sharing the joy in dancing. Leaning into judgment-free dance was a true joy for myself. This approach to my stream of consciousness embodied mindful thoughts and allowed them to come without judgment. I closed the journal with “The jitters are coming, they are coming.”

During the workshop

At the beginning of the workshop, I noticed myself rushing through the material I had planned. When preparing for the workshop, it felt that there was a lot to explore and the duration of an hour felt as though it left very little time to do so. After the guided body scan and the initial impulse exploration, I covered everything I had planned for the workshop. There was a brief moment of panic, and I was not sure what to do next. A thought entered my mind: worst comes to worst, I can end the workshop early and allow the remaining time to be used as the owner of the dance studio would like.

I acted quickly in the moment, becoming flexible and adaptable while trusting my intuition. After the individual impulse exploration I had planned, I prompted the dancers to form a big circle. We explored impulses within the circle and how they arise when we are with another person. This intuition of mine prompted the dancers to act on impulses as they arose, without any specific pattern. I felt the energy of the dancers tuning out, and the impulses came to a pause. I cued a shift in exploration to add and develop on this circle. I prompted the dancers to pass impulses along and through one another in sequential order. I felt that it happened very quickly, potentially influencing the dancers to lose the sense of mindful or authentic movement. This prompted me to mention that it is okay to be in stillness, to pause and wait for the impulse to arrive. I invited the dancers to explore movements of varying sizes and speeds, emphasizing that it is okay if the impulse takes time to arrive. I encouraged the dancers to try again with these

prompts in mind and reminded them that the goal was not to complete the circle. After doing this, the movement felt more authentic from the dancers. I had conflicting thoughts because I did not want to give feedback or opinionated input based on my observations, but I also wanted to acknowledge that the experience was different from what I had previously witnessed. I could feel them leaning into mindfulness. I continued to build on the exploration based on my intuition and in-the-moment planning.

I invited the dancers to pair up and mirror each other. I prompted them that it was not decided who would lead or follow. I wanted them to continue following impulses while being mindful of themselves and the dancer in front of them. As they did this for a period of time, I noticed stillness arising and potential feelings of awkwardness. I used this cue to invite the group to notice these thoughts and feelings without judgment. I encouraged the dancers to welcome the thoughts as they were, recognizing that all thoughts are thoughts. Stillness arrived again, and a dancer expressed vocally while moving. I shared with the dancers that noise and sound can be an impulse. I encouraged them to make sounds and explore other impulses beyond movement. I invited them to play around and change their starting positions if they wished.

At this moment, the energy spiked and shifted. The dancers began making noises and laughing; I could sense they were having a lot of fun. I then followed my intuition to explore this joy and happiness that entered the room, although mindfulness was the main intent. I witnessed a lot of joy and connection among the dancers. As the pairs began to wind down, I prompted them to form larger groups, allowing for more interaction. I witnessed the dancers attuning to one another and being mindful of each other. I prompted the dancers to conclude by finding a pause before transitioning to gathering around the TV.

During the Mentimeter exercise, there were technical difficulties, and we could not collectively see it on the screen. However, the dancers could access it on their individual cell phones. We then discussed how this exercise could be applied to current practices in competitive dance or performance, or how they could use this information personally. There were various responses based on each individual's experience.

I briefly shared my goal and hopes for the workshop, emphasizing the awareness of their bodies. I wanted to show that their bodies are not only tools for dance but that they could become curious about them while caring for them. I suggested that if they received recurring corrections in their training, they could explore why these corrections kept coming up. I used my personal experience of receiving corrections to keep my shoulders down as an example. When I receive that correction, it is a cue that I can tune in and check where I am at mentally. This is a cue also to tap into mindfulness. The dancers were receptive to this, and some shared their recurring corrections. I had a moment where it felt like this message was resonating with them and making sense. This could be seen by active listening and non-verbal cues.

I closed by defining mindfulness and dance/movement therapy, noting that the dancers did not have many questions at this time. We then moved into the JOD piece as my final offering. I prompted the dancers, when they feel lost in corrections or after a performance, to tap into the JOD and reconnect with the passion of dance, which could potentially be a time that evokes negative feelings and judgment such as self-doubt. The dancers danced for about a third of the song, with some dancing a bit longer. The dancers expressed gratitude for the workshop, with a general response that they enjoyed the experience. They left the room chatting with each other, and I observed a sense of community, connection, and playfulness.

After the workshop

My initial thoughts after the workshop were very positive. It was a healing process for myself, although this was not the workshop's primary purpose. It showed me that I can still connect with the dance community in a non-technical and performative way. I left feeling fulfilled, proud of myself, and relieved that it was completed. I enjoyed the experience of journaling and being able to express myself freely. It paralleled my workshop's theme of mindfulness and set a space without judgment. The studio owner expressed interest in having me return to do something similar for the dancers, which made me very happy, proud, enriched, moved, and motivated.

In summary, I experienced pre-workshop anxiety surrounding preparation focused on mindful exploration of impulses and the joy of dancing. The workshop implementation included activities emphasizing authenticity, adaptability, mindfulness, and playfulness. There were post-workshop reflections on personal growth, fulfillment, and the positive impact on participants' experiences and connections with dance. This highlights the relevant aspects of my stream of consciousness through journal entries that contribute to this thesis and research on mindful movement and its impact on a competitive dance team.

Table 1 displays all of the anonymous responses from the dancer in descending order from the greatest number of responses to the least. The top four phrases were: Relaxing, Calming, Freeing, and Fun. These responses aligned with my observations and experience. The energy I felt from the dancers during the body scan was very calm. The dancers appeared to be relaxed, all lying on the floor with their eyes closed, and I could hear the inhaling and exhaling of their breath. As the workshop progressed, the dancers seemed curious about their bodies and the impulses, trying new movements. They then engaged in making sounds, and there was a lot

of laughter in the room. The dancers seemed to be having a lot of fun, leaning into this freeing side of dance which seamlessly led to the offering of embodying a spirit of JOD. The other words the dancers responded with were also present in the room's energy. I can recall times of the workshop where I could observe or feel these responses at least once throughout the workshop.

Table 1

Results of responses from Mentimeter (N = 18)

Response	Number of Responses
Relaxing	7
Calming	5
Freeing	3
Fun	3
Creative	2
Mindful	2
Peaceful	2
Relaxed	2
Tiring	2
Authentic	1
Aware	1
Bonding	1
Calm	1
Challenging	1
Comfortable	1
Different	1
Difficult	1
Entertaining	1
Experientative	1
Flowing	1
Fluid	1
Funny	1
Good	1
Goofy ahh	1
Grounded	1
Grounding	1
Happy	1
Intuitive	1
Lit	1
Satisfying	1
Soothing	1
Thoughtful	1
Tingly	1
Trusting	1
Vibey	1

Embodied Word Cloud

With a Dance-Based Exploration informed approach, I chose to take highlights from the study while shaping it into my own knowledge creation through dance/movement. The word cloud the participants created held a lot of value and exemplified the experiences of the individuals. Although I could not share this product of creativity due to the parameter set for this thesis, sharing the essence of their collective responses was important and finding a way to do so creatively. The approach to embodying the word cloud (see Figure 1) seemed like a powerful way to share the themes that came up from the workshop.

Figure 1

Digital Collage, March 2024: Embodied Word Cloud



There were eighteen dancers and fifty-four responses to the Mentimeter. The word cloud displayed thirty-four words, as some were repeated and they were only displayed once. I had the vision and intent to recreate the word cloud in the same manner: the larger the photo in the cloud,

the more frequent the response was. You can see this correspondence of size to match the level of significance in Figure 1. There were nine words that varied in repetition, and the rest of the responses were different from one another. Therefore, there are nine photos varying in size and twenty-five similar in size.

To continue this mindful approach, I did not prepare movement/gestures beforehand and chose to follow the impulse in the moment. I did so by having the photographer call out the phrase, and I would follow the impulse to embody this. Each phrase was a one-attempt photo; whatever was captured with the mindful embodied phrase was the photo used. This emphasized the process of embodying the response and not the product of the collage. After embodying all of the phrases and capturing them, the collage was created through an app called Procreate.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to explore how dancers could incorporate a mindfulness lens and implement principles of Dance/Movement therapy to support their artistry and elevate the experience of their dance competitive community. My approach, a community-based project, was informed by drawing from my personal experience in the competitive dance community and my studies of DMT at Lesley University. Through a one-hour workshop introducing mindfulness practices, I hoped to enhance the dancers' connection to their bodies, promote their artistry, and support their emotional well-being. Often competitive dance tends to prioritize external performance over internal experience, potentially leading to challenges of self-doubt and mental strain. Therefore, it is notable that the majority of the 54 responses submitted by participants after the session can be considered positive ways of describing the experience of the workshop.

After the one-hour workshop, I can conclude that dancers appeared to engage with the mindfulness lens, which was perceptible in their freedom of movement and in their

laughter/interaction with one another. This freedom increased as the session progressed, and dancers were encouraged to bring internal awareness of their external movement. This progression began with the grounding experience of embodying mindfulness and looking internally for the feelings of the body, simultaneously connecting the mind and body. The movement profiles were reserved at the beginning with minimal risk taking. By the end, the risk profiles expanded as dancers engaged in new movements. This was evident in new ways of mirroring and following. This progression suggests that mindfulness practices could help dancers promote artistry and self-expression. While no scholarship explicitly addressed this progression in relation to competitive dance, the research suggests that embodied mindfulness, a practice involving attention to body sensations, potentially increases the presence and attunement to self and others (Thouin-Savard, 2019).

There was also a potential parallel between my experience during the workshop and that of the participants. Leading into the workshop with the presence of anxiety, I implemented my own practices of mindfulness and principles of Dance/Movement Therapy in preparation. This can be seen in my journaling of my stream of consciousness and dancing improvisationally through the Joy of Dance. When facilitating the thematic work, I was additionally embodying these principles. By the end of the workshop, I was overwhelmed with a feeling of joy and confidence. Connecting through the community fostered a connection to self. The literature and research offer that mindfulness can reduce anxiety, stress, and depression. This is evident by my own practice and facilitation of mindfulness.

Limitations and Considerations for Further Study

One critical limitation was the sample size of eighteen dancers being small. Similarly, the diversity of the sample in terms of culture, age, and gender identity could pose challenges to the

significance and validity of the themes and context. Ideally, the impact of mindfulness could be studied with a variety of identifying individuals to diversify and have a more rounded understanding of the experience. In the future, I aim to explore opportunities to extend this workshop to individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultural contexts.

An additional limitation would be related to researcher reflexivity. While stated in the literature the benefits reflexivity has to offer, in contrast, there is room for subjectiveness and biases of the researcher to be overlooked in the process. Another limitation of the thesis was the lack of existing research on the impact of mindfulness on the competitive dance community specifically. While there is extensive research on mindfulness in athletics and therapeutic settings, no studies consider the specific culture/experience of the competitive dance community. A consideration for the workshop is the influence of the genre of music played, specifically the tempo of the music. Another consideration is the preexisting connections between the researcher and participants. This could influence the comfort level and openness of the dancers in participating.

For future study, I hope to consider all of the limitations discussed above and implement changes to minimize the impact of the limitations. I hope to expand on this workshop, developing the workshop to multiple sessions. Incorporating more space for the dancers to elaborate and connect on their experiences is of importance to me. I would also like to consider implementing a trauma-informed approach.

References

- Adler, J. (2002). *Offering from the Conscious Body: The Discipline of Authentic Movement*. Simon and Schuster.
- American Dance Therapy Association. (n.d.). *What is Dance/Movement therapy?*
<https://adta.memberclicks.net/what-is-dancemovement-therapy>
- Barkai, Y. (2022). On the Authentic Movement model: A space for creation—A place to be. *American Journal of Dance Therapy*, 44(1), 4–20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10465-022-09354-5>
- Block-Lerner, J., Adair, C., Plumb, J. C., Rhatigan, D. L., & Orsillo, S. M. (2007). The case for mindfulnessbased approaches in the cultivation of empathy: Does nonjudgmental, present-moment awareness increase capacity for perspective-taking and empathic concern?. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 33(4), 501-516.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2007.00034.x>
- Blum, H. (2016). *Dancing with Dharma: Essays on Movement and Dance in Western Buddhism*.
<https://www.amazon.com/Dancing-Dharma-Movement-Western-Buddhism-ebook/dp/B01C37BLVY>
- Brotto, L. A., & Basson, R. (2014). Group mindfulness-based therapy significantly improves sexual desire in women. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 57, 43–54.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2014.04.001>
- Dilley, B. (2016). Contemplative dance practice: a dancer's meditation hall, a meditator's dance hall. In H. Blum (Ed.), *Dancing with Dharma: Essays on Movement and Dance in Western Buddhism* (pp. 91-97). McFarland.

- Faulkner, S. L., Kaunert, C. A., Kluch, Y., Koc, E. S., & Trotter, S. P. (2016). Using arts-based research exercises to foster reflexivity in qualitative research. *LEARNing Landscapes*, 9(2), 197–212. <https://doi.org/10.36510/LEARNLAND.V9I2.771>
- García-Díaz, S. (2018). The effect of the practice of Authentic Movement on the emotional state. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 58, 17–26. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2018.03.004>
- Gelles, D. (2017, August 30). *How to be mindful when you are dancing*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/30/well/mind/how-to-be-mindful-when-you-are-dancing.html#commentsContainer>
- Haimerl, C. J., & Valentine, E. R. (2001). The effect of contemplative practice of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal dimensions of the self-concept. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 33(1), 37–52. <https://doi.org/record/2001-18400-003>
- Hart, R., Ivtzan, I., & Hart, D. (2013). Mind the gap in mindfulness research: A comparative account of the leading schools of thought. *Review of General Psychology*, 17(4), 453–466. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035212>
- Karampoula, E., & Panhofer, H. (2018). The circle in dance movement therapy: A literature review. *Arts in Psychotherapy*, 58, 27–32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2018.02.004>
- Kawano, T. (2017). Developing a dance movement therapy approach to qualitatively analyzing interview data. *Arts in Psychotherapy*, 56, 61–73. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2017.07.006>
- Khoury, B., Knäuper, B., Pagnini, F., Trent, N., Chiesa, A., & Carrière, K. (2017). Embodied mindfulness. *Mindfulness*, 8(5), 1160–1171. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-017-0700-7>

- LaPointe-Crump, J. (2007). Competition and dance education. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 78(7), 4–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07303084.2007.10598046>
- Lauffenburger, S. K. (2020). ‘Something More’: The unique features of dance movement therapy/psychotherapy. *American Journal of Dance Therapy*, 42(1), 16-32. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10465-020-09321-y>
- Lewin, J. L. (1998). *Dance Therapy notebook*. Marian Chace Foundation.
- Majore-Dusele, I., Karkou, V., & Millere, I. (2021). The development of mindful-based dance movement therapy intervention for chronic pain: A pilot study with chronic headache patients. *Frontiers in psychology*, 12, 587923. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.587923>
- Murray, H. (2022). *Mental Health Awareness Week – an interview with Terry Hyde*. The Royal Ballet School. <https://www.royalballetschool.org.uk/2022/05/09/mental-health-awareness-week-an-interview-with-terry-hyde/>
- Noetel, M., Ciarrochi, J., Van Zanden, B., & Lonsdale, C. (2019). Mindfulness and acceptance approaches to sporting performance enhancement: A systematic review. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 12(1), 139-175.
- Silk, J. (1999). The dynamics of community, place, and identity. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 31(1), 5-17. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a310005>
- Sobash, S. (2014). The psychology of competitive dance: A study of the motivations for adolescent involvement. *e-Research: A Journal of Undergraduate Work*, 3(2), 3. <http://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/e-Research/vol3/iss2/3>
- Rosenbaum, R., & Bohart, A. (2021). Mindfulness is full engagement. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 49(1), 122–132. <https://doi.org/10.1037/hum0000166>

- Tacuri, N., Zinga, D., & Molnar, D. (2023). Sport, Art, or Both?: Analyzing perceptions of competitive dancers as interuniversity artists and athletes. *The International Journal of Sport and Society*, 14(2), 101-123. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2152-7857/CGP/v14i02/101-123>
- Thomas, D.C. (1994) Foundations of dance/movement therapy: The life and work of Marian Chace. *Am J Dance Ther* 16, 127–131. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02358572>
- Thouin-Savard, M. I. (2019). Erotic mindfulness: A core educational and therapeutic strategy in somatic sexology practices. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 38 (1). <http://doi.org/> <https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2019.38.1.203>
- Wittig, J. (2010). The body and nonverbal expression in dance/movement group therapy and verbal group therapy. *Group*, 34(1), 53–66. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41719264>
- Wittig, J. (2016). Fostering equanimity and mindfulness through dance/movement therapy and authentic movement. In H. Blum (Ed.), *Dancing with Dharma: Essays on Movement and Dance in Western Buddhism* (pp. 41-48). McFarland.

Acknowledgement

To conclude, I would like to express my gratitude to the following individuals for their support and contributions to the completion of my thesis. First, I would like to thank my thesis instructor, Madoka Urhausen, and my thesis consultant, Wendy Allen. Both of these individuals significantly influenced the development, exploration, and execution of my community engagement project. Next, I want to express gratitude to my partner, as my honorary photographer and consistent supporter throughout this journey. Additionally, I want to extend my thanks to my family and friends for their unwavering support in pursuing my passion. Lastly, I want to share my appreciation to all of the dancers and the dance studio for offering me this valuable opportunity with openness and curiosity.

THESIS APPROVAL FORM

**Lesley University
Graduate School of Arts & Social Sciences
Expressive Therapies Division
Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Dance/Movement Therapy, MA**

Student's Name: **Clare Terrio**

Type of Project: Thesis

Date of Graduation: **May 18th, 2024**

In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Thesis Advisor: **Madoka Urhausen**