

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHER STRESS AND PERCEIVED TEACHING SUCCESS

FROM FOUR DANCE EDUCATORS

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DEDICATION

To all my teacher friends who work selflessly for education and dance.

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INTRODUCTION

In my experience directing a dance team and teaching dance at the secondary level for the past four years, I have noticed an emerging theme in my conversations with colleagues in the dance field. This theme is often the high level of stress in their job, rather than about the joy of teaching students, and repeatedly these conversations end with the idea that they are not successful in their job. This recurring topic interests me because I wonder how teachers reach this point of self-doubt, and what that journey might look like. Experiences of stress can be different for every dance educator, but I imagine that prolonged job stress can cause a state of emotional and mental distress which can cause one to feel doubtful about their ability to be a successful teacher. From these kinds of conversations, I am interested in investigating how teachers describe their career success in relation to their experiences of stress in their job.

Teacher stress has been identified in established literature as an occupational multifaceted issue that involves several aspects of one's teaching career. Scholars such as Christ Kyriacou (2001) even defined this state as 'burnout' and describes it as, "the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher" (p. 28). Educators, in addition to preparing lessons and assignments for students, juggle many other responsibilities outside of the educational setting, thus creating stress from multiple directions. Furthermore, in today's typical secondary dance classroom, there are new and ever changing challenges that manifest and affect the teaching experience for dance educators. For example, the increasing concern of school safety, the lack of financial support for class and student resources, and the difference in

parenting styles can create an abrasive dynamic for dance educators. Although these challenges may look different from my own personal experience as a public school dance educator, I begin to wonder about the ways in which these multifaceted challenges cause teacher stress, how teachers describe this phenomenon of stress, as well as the ways in which they cope with it. Moreover, in what ways do they perceive their performance and success in the classroom in relationship to their experience of stress?

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is:

- to understand the ways in which teachers describe moments of stress and their perceived success as a dance educator in the secondary level;
- to analyze participants' descriptions of teacher stress and success in an effort to identify common themes, ideas, and experiences; and
- to create/develop interventions that may decrease dance educator stress in the secondary level in relationship to the analysis of the interviews.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do secondary dance educators describe moments of stress when teaching in the dance classroom in relationship to their perception of personal teaching success?

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This qualitative research took a grounded theory approach, employing open-ended interviews as the primary method of data collection. Since this study sought to understand participant descriptions of teacher stress in relation to their perceived success in the classroom, a phenomenological point of view— a focus on the study of direct experience, was important. I employed ideas from Gallagher (2012) and Craswell and Poth's (2018) on phenomenology in

regards to attempting to separate one's implicit bias from the research while allowing the voice of the participants to be the core of this study.

Recruiting Participants and Conducting Interviews

The participants for this study are inclusive of four secondary dance teachers in the Texas public education sector with 1-15 years of experience in the field. Three participants are teachers who are still in the profession and one participant is a teacher who has left the profession. My intention was not to draw conclusions about why some have stayed in the profession or have left, but rather to include a variety of experiences to develop a diverse pool of data. The teachers for this study were recruited via phone and email and were given pseudonyms for the purpose of this study. The interviews were conducted outside of participant work hours, separately, in public locations chosen by each participant, after signing a consent form. One interview was conducted via Facetime. I applied for and received Institutional Review Board approval from Texas Woman's University one month prior to beginning the recruitment process. Audio recordings of the interviews were sent to *Tumi*, an online transcription website, for transcription. Participants were sent their transcribed interview to mend or extract any undesired information for use in the study.

Attributes of the Participants

All participants in this study were given a pseudonym, and each had varied experience and responsibilities in their job. The participants are:

- Daisy Potters - Dance Director/teacher at a Texas high school. She oversees dance elective classes and directs three competitive dance teams and has been teaching for six years.

- Misty Rodgers- assistant Dance Director/teacher at a Texas high school. She also oversees dance elective classes and assists with their competitive dance/drill team and has been teaching for four years.
- Lindsey Davidson- Dance Director/Teacher at a Texas High School. She has been teaching for 14 years and oversees a large program of over 200 students and directs two competitive dance teams on her own.
- Jaime Anderson- former Dance Director/Teacher at several Texas High and Middle Schools. She taught and directed for 14 years as a secondary level teacher and is now a consultant for a dance company.

Data Analysis Procedures

During all interviews I took notes on participant's body language, voice inflection, and gestures in addition to recording the interviews. I included these notes as part of the data. As I began coding the data I created color coded categories; body gesture (green), voice inflection (pink), and written memos (orange). After this color coding, I created memos that summarized and paraphrased what the interviewee was describing at different moments. I repeated this coding and memoing process twice and during the third pass through, I included listening to the recordings while reading.

After the coding and memoing process, I began analyzing across the data for emergent and common themes. Additionally, I took notes on significant differences that existed among participant experiences.

LIMITATIONS

It is important to note specific limitations for this study. All participants were females who taught secondary level dance in public schools within the central and north Texas area, thus the experiences described within this study do not represent all experiences for all teachers at all grade levels. Additionally, there are only four participants in this study. This small amount does

not allow for this study to gather experiences from a large number of dance educators, therefore the findings in this study cannot represent widely. Although I carried Gallagher's (2012) ideas of separating one's implicit bias, I realize that one may never be able to accomplish that authentically. It is imperative that the reader know that I am a dance educator from Texas, and it is impossible to separate my experiences and feelings about the job and teacher stress even though I work to attempt this.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to organize a theoretical framework to ground this research, I began a review of established literature in four specific areas: occupational stress in non-educational settings, teacher stress and burnout, theoretical concepts of qualitative phenomenological methodologies, and organizational management and bureaucratic organizational systems in the workplace.

Occupational Stress

Established literature on occupational stress was important to this study in order to understand stress as a phenomenon that's present in other work places besides the public education sector. Occupational stress has been recognized by researchers as one of the most significant health hazards in the workplace (Spector, 2002). Research has demonstrated that perceived negative conditions within the workplace influence a worker's perceived experience of stress, causing the individual to develop what Spector (2002) identifies as "psychological distress." He claims that such distress could lead to other health conditions affecting the way in which an employee performs their job. In other studies, Gaziel (1993) claims that occupational stress is also influenced by outside factors of the workplace, suggesting that on occasion, the way in which an individual responds to job demands and tasks could be influenced by cultural and personal variables of their personal life, causing a distressed state of mind (Gaziel, 1993, p.77).

I also bring with me Levi's (1988) metaphorical example of occupational stress when he describes stress as a "shoe that does not fit," adding pressure and discomfort to the person wearing it (Levi, 1998, p.169). He elaborates on how the scientific definition of stress is "a force that deforms bodies," applying pressure to the edges of an object and in nature, strains and changes it (Levi, 1998, p.168). This description of stress made me curious about the way I view stress and how my participants view, experience, and describe stress on their physical bodies.

Teacher Stress and Burnout

In this section I offer the reader ideas about what teacher stress is and how established literature defines facets of this phenomenon. Chris Kyriacou (2001) defines 'teacher stress' as "the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher" (p. 28). In other works, Kyriacou (2001) emphasizes that stress is a unique and individualized lived experience involving an array of sources or reasons that are specific to and emerge from the workspace. These sources can be identified as students that lack motivation, discipline issues within the classroom, workload, self-esteem, school leadership, and poor working conditions, among other identifiers (Kyriacou, 2001, p. 29).

I also bring with me Shiram, Oliver, and Stein's (2009) definition of burnout as a "depletion of teacher's energetic intrinsic resources." I am drawn to this definition of burnout as a "depletion" of intrinsic resources because the word deplete by definition means to excessively or abundantly exhaust the supply of something, suggesting that these intrinsic resources have been exhausted by another source within the teaching environment. These authors further describe in their work that burnout is most likely caused by a numerous amount of stressors that

arise from within the teachers' work environment, causing this idea of depletion. These stressors can be defined and identified as threats present in the work space affecting a teacher's inability to fulfill work related tasks, demands and expectations within the classroom. This effect then translates onto teachers' stability and adaptivity to their work environment, causing psychological strains that over a period of time, Shiram, Oliver, and Stein (2009) suggest impact the physical and/or mental health of a teacher (p. 315).

Similarly, Christina Maslach and Michael P. Leiter (2016) also define burnout as a "psychological syndrome" which emerges from a prolonged state of mind involving stressors in the workplace (p. 103). In a previous study, Maslach et. al (2001) categorizes burnout into three key dimensions such as: overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment (p. 399). Shen et. al (2015) further expands on the concept of burnout and Maslach's et. al (2001) theory by adding that the effectiveness of classroom preparation and involvement decline due to the exhaustion and depersonalization of the job. Additionally, Shen et. al (2015) suggest that there is a relationship between teacher burnout and student motivation and claims that students' decreasing their level of motivation and interest in the teacher is in response to the burnout that they notice from their teacher, thus causing the teacher to feel lack of accomplishment in order to continue teaching, the third component to Maslach's et. al (2001) theory (p. 520).

Qualitative Inquiry and Phenomenology

John Craswell's and Cheryl Poth's (2018) definition of qualitative inquiry urges researchers to maintain flexibility and sensitivity to the people, places, and data that emerge from the research process (p. 42). Craswell and Poth's (2018) elaborates on how the process for

qualitative inquiry is emergent in nature, meaning that the questions posed, the forms of data collection, individuals and places that are visited could change within the process of the research. This allows for the researcher to develop a research design that fits and drives towards the purpose of the study.

Since this study sought to understand participant descriptions of moments of teacher stress in relation to their perceived success in the classroom, understanding a phenomenological point of view— a focus on the study of direct experience, was important. Phenomenology, as defined by Craswell and Poth (2018), is the study of the description of common meaning for several individual's lived experiences (p. 74). This approach employs to suspend judgement about what one perceives as real in order to explore a phenomena through the lens of an individual's lived experience. Craswell and Poth (2018) points out that it almost feels as if the researcher needs to set themselves outside of the study to allow room for the voice of the individual as their experience is being studied, however, this does not imply that the researcher remains on the sidelines of the process, but suggests that the forefront of the study should always be the individual's lived experience. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) claim that an interview is where "knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee" and later describes this process as an attempt "to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, [and] to uncover their lived world" (as cited in Craswell and Poth 2018, p. 163).

Organizational Managements and Bureaucratic Organizational Systems

In this last section of the literature review I surveyed established research that looked at organizational management and bureaucratic organizational systems. I added this section after

finding in the data participant descriptions of experiences with administration and the district at large.

Anne Douglas and Jody Hoffer Gittell (2012) employed a study that explored relational bureaucracy and parent–teacher relationships in child care settings. Their study investigated the shifts they notice between parent-teacher relationships due to organizational managements that were newly set in place. After concluding their study, they suggested alternative models that blended conventional notions of professionalism and bureaucracy within the educational setting used for their study. This study made me curious about the nature of bureaucracy and how it may be in relation to described teacher stress and teacher success.

I also found it interesting to learn about Weber’s theory of bureaucracy from Heinz-Dieter Meyer’s (19915) work on organizational environments, where his article suggests Weber’s theory utilized post-war American organization theorists to consider differences in the institutional and cultural work environments of American and continental European organizations (Meyer, 32). Heinz-Dieter Meyer highlights how European organizations favor centralized, hierarchical, obedience-based organizational forms that promote loyalty to an organization or job, whereas American organizations promote equality, less hierarchical, and organizations in which compliance was based on a temporary contract (32). This article helped me contextualize the interview data as existing within a specific institutional and cultural American work environment that values temporary relationships.

FINDINGS

In this section I outline for the reader findings from participant descriptions about stress and perceptions of personal teaching success emerging from the analyzed interview transcripts. I divide emergent themes into two parts: “What is Stress?” and “What is Success?”

What is Stress?

In the next section I provide six specific findings which arose from the interviews on the topic of stress; Work Culture Stress, Teacher as Servant, Suppressing Emotions, Loss of Autonomy, and Stress into Personal Life.

Work Culture Stress: “There is just not enough time”

At the start of this section I offer for the reader a snapshot of interviewee Lindsey Davidson’s work setting and responsibilities in order to understand the ways in which a school system, its culture, and lack of time can affect a teacher.

Davidson is a solo program director who oversees 200 students on a daily basis. She has two competitive dance teams— a varsity and a junior varsity team who perform weekly in the fall semester and have a competitive season in the spring semester. She has rehearsals before school with her varsity team and after school rehearsals with her junior varsity group. She oversees the budgets for both programs. This requires fundraising, budgeting for costumes, purchasing costumes, hiring choreographers, planning travel and meals. She ensures that school activity funds and booster club finances are allocated correctly, used to enhance the dance program, and maintain supplies needed in a way that addresses student needs. In addition to these budgetary responsibilities, she has fine arts dance elective classes that participate in two full productions a year, each class averaging 45 students per class period. She choreographs a dance routine for each class, produces the show, and oversees all marketing and rehearsal logistics.

This workload and schedule is not unique to Davidson, in fact, all participants interviewed for this study had a similar workload and job expectations, averaging 13-15 hour workdays. Across all interviews there was an understanding that the workload often felt as if it revolved around other duties and responsibilities that had less to do with the act of teaching in the classroom and more on the logistical and crisis management aspect of the job that were often fulfilled outside of classroom work hours or interrupted the flow of instructional time. Davidson

signals this finding when she says, “I feel like I am babysitting more than anything.” She brings this up when she describes the overwhelming experience of transitions between each class period as an example. She explains that between the time spent unlocking and locking the locker rooms up, the “wrangling” of over 45 kids to the classroom during a passing period, and monitoring the hallway for other crisis management situations, eat up so much time into the actual instructional time that, “it feels like there is never enough time to teach...that is one big stressor for me.”

Teacher as Servant: “I don’t want to be selfish, but...”

The concept of “teacher as servant” was described by participants as being successful and able to serve students, the school, and all challenges presented by the job. This pressure to serve all was often described as “looming” and “never ending.” Current challenges for schools and teachers described by interviewees were school shootings, lack of special education adaptations in the typical fine arts dance class, student mental health awareness, and new parenting styles. One participant identified these challenges as “red flags,” and continued by saying that,

“throughout even just the last few years that I’ve been teaching, the responsibility that I guess really the general public, the school district administrators and kind of all be above expect us to take on this role of like understanding, so many more things than just our [teaching] subjects and not in the terms of knowing other [teaching] subjects, but life, mental health, expecting us to be able to identify all of these things that are happening [that are] constant, ever-growing things....” (Potters)

All participants shared that these new challenges were stressful and that they impacted the parameters of their job, creating a new normal of what education is, who teachers are, and expanded the list of their responsibilities. Across all interviews participants described this new normal for teachers as reorienting who and what a teacher is. Potters shares about these feelings:

“There are obviously lots of pressures and deadlines on teachers as far as grades and attendance... all necessary for the district to be able to function the way that it needs to. But there are just constantly a lot of deadlines, constantly a lot of paperwork, constantly a lot of emails and you just kind of can’t drop the ball on anything because it kind of

always feels like everything that you are doing, you have to do or there's like a risk of not being rehired... there's kind of always this looming feeling that you need to get all of this done, or else...." (pg. 5)

After discussing with all interviewees their new responsibilities and feelings surrounding those challenges, I asked what they felt they needed in order to cope and manage the stress they identified as part of the job. The majority were hesitant to answer, many conveyed looks of embarrassment, and all prefaced their response with a version of the daunting phrase, *I don't want to be selfish but...* This pattern across all interviews was quite striking when analyzed in relation to their description of the challenges, responsibilities and their perception that in order to be successful they must serve in multiple roles all the time. Rodgers distinctly captures the feeling of having to serve others selflessly when she explained the dynamic of a stressful situation in her career,

"I feel like a lot of the kids that I have in dance class in particular have really hard home lives and they come to my class with all those burdens and then they just kind of dump them in the class. And like it's great that they like trust me enough and trust their classmates enough to like say these things, but at some point it's just to my stress too. And I don't want to seem, you know, selfish or whatever, but it's, it is like a lot to think about cause then I'll come home and I'll be like: what can I do? Do I need to report this?.... What else can I say to her (student) to help her feel better or help her get out of the situation?" (Rodgers)

Though this situation is a unique circumstance in Rodger's teaching career, most participants expressed concern on the way in which the field is evolving, making it challenging to stick to traditional teaching methods, and alluded to perhaps calling for different strategies and training in order to continue to fulfill their job at a level or standard that makes them feel successful.

Suppressing Emotions: “I bottle it up. My students deserve all of me.”

When participants responded about how they coped with job-related stressors while they were at work, one participant, Potters shared “...honestly, just by suppressing it, until I am able to look back... there are still a lot of people and kids that depend on you to do the rest of your job that day” (Potters, 7). While Potters describes this experience as suppression, some described it as “bottling it up” or ignoring, or moving on. These descriptions were common in all of the four participant interviews. Further, this suppression of emotion sits in relationship to the described concept of ‘teacher as servant’ -- one cannot have emotions when being expected to serve all people and challenges during the school day.

One participant, Davidson, describes the way in which she teaches this coping mechanism to her students. She shared a common practice in class where she asks students to write on a piece of paper something that is weighing them down that day and throw it in a bucket placed by the door. She shares that she notices a difference in her students when they engage in the physical action of “throwing” something and leaving it at the door. Davidson describes challenging herself to model the same practice when she is feeling stressed at work because, “while at work, those kids deserve [her].” Interestingly, the word “deserve” was used by two participants in relationship to their described actions of suppressing emotions. The suppression of emotions can be seen as required action in order to deliver what students deserve.

Body Pain: “Taking the Medicine”

Some interviewees described the ways in which stress affected their body, physicality, health, and ultimately their identity and autonomy. Descriptions about the perceived effect upon the body existed across all the interviews. For example, Anderson illustrated stress as a “nasty

medicine going down your throat” and further described how it caused her to become “someone that [she is] not and [tries] to make up for it all [time]” (pg. 11). She further articulated that in some ways she became “numb” to things going on in her life, and it affected how she acted toward others. Typically medicine is associated with the promotion of health and well-being, but in this case, Anderson uses it to describe a source that causes discomfort and pain, and her identity to morph. She further reflects on a moment in her life when she realized that her loss of control and change in personality was affecting her home life. She shares that when these moments became overwhelming, she resorted to crying in her home while experiencing isolation and mood changes. Similar reflections were shared by Rodgers, Davidson, and Potters during their interviews even though all were at different points in their career.

Losing Autonomy: “What you are requiring me to do is not human”

As participants brought up the way stress affected their body, simultaneously they would mention the feeling of losing control or “losing autonomy” as a person - at work and outside of work. Davidson, a healthy middle aged woman, shares a traumatic experience that shook her health. She had been undergoing a pressing issue with a parent and the lack of school administrative support had caused the situation to develop into a colossal dispute of indifferences with all involved. While on a trip with her students for a dance competition, she had a heart attack. Davidson shared a conversation she had with her administrator before leaving on the trip telling them, “I’m going to have a stroke or I’m going to have a heart attack because what you are requiring me to do is not human, there is no way...” (pg.9). The conversation entailed a series of intervention tactics that she was asked to use while on this trip if a parent, who was also on the trip, caused any issues. Her image of becoming non-human along with her resultant heart

attack emphasizes how these participants perceive the effect of stress as reorienting the body to something it previously was not. Who they are appears to be in jeopardy as they lose autonomy over their situation and self.

Home life & Work Life: “Stress bleeding into my life”

The participants of this study describe the effects of stress as noticing new behavior patterns at home that may have not been present before. Rodgers shares in her interview that students oftentimes find comfort and safety in some teachers. She considers herself one of these teachers for her dance students and has noticed that these student relationships sometimes become discomfoting and weigh on her emotionally. She emphasizes that oftentimes at home she finds herself thinking back at the “burdens” her students “dump” in her class and how oftentimes she thinks about not wanting to “sound selfish...but sometimes it’s too much” while thinking back about her students’ struggles. She also suggests that spending time at home pondering on the weighing details of some students’ lives, leads to isolating herself from her own family. Rodgers expresses how difficult it is to sometimes balance her own personal battles with those of her students.

Davidson and Anderson shared similar anecdotes in which they noticed their temper, energy, and focus divided between work and home life. Anderson, who described stress as a “nasty medicine,” goes further by expressing that these work stressors became so large and present in her home life that at times she questioned her own ability to perform her job, and describes these moments of reflection by saying, “I’m straight up frustrated and lost and betrayed and passionate...It’s enough to like make you just be done. You’re just done.”

In an intimate moment during Potters' interview, she revealed the way stress bleeds into her personal life.

“...it turns into literally taking a toll on my body...I like eating things that are like comfort foods, but then I'm too stressed to go workout, then that results in weight gain and then that equals to unhappiness...kind of like an ugly cycle that keeps happening.” (pg.6)

Potters shares in her interview that her struggles with body image and feeling confident, happy, and content under her own skin have really been caused by the inability to fully balance and create work and home boundaries. She expresses that her body and mental health has been undergoing some changes that have made her feel uncomfortable and blames the “ugly cycle” described above as the root of her unhappiness.

Reflections over Career Choice: “This is not the job I thought I was signing up for!”

Across all interviews, none of the participants interviewed for this study agreed that this was the job they imagined themselves fulfilling when they first set out to pursue it. They had expressed their feelings that the profession had in a way failed to maintain a transparent identity. In discussing this realization with the participants, I noticed that some of these experiences left a mark in their lives so poignant that it caused their perspective on teaching to change. Potters shares in her interview,

“I think that nobody tells you how difficult it's going to be and nobody tells you how much it is going to affect your mental and overall health...I had a very glorified and misunderstood idea of what it was going to be like...so it seems like at some point somebody should have set things aside to say...you should be aware of the things that are going to be difficult.” (Potters)

This “glorified, misunderstood” idea of teaching has the capacity to contribute to a work culture that normalizes teacher work stress. The participants of this study generally felt that

teaching as a profession had evolved in many ways, and perhaps called for a different skill set than they had understood.

What is Success?

In the next section I will outline for the reader three emergent ideas that arose across the participants's interviews on the topic of teaching success: Student Performance and Building Relationships; Surviving the Day; Feeling Proud.

Student Performance/ Building Student Relationships: "Decent human beings."

The participants of this study generally described that student performance, as a result of their existing relationships with their students, are an example of personal teaching success. Rodgers and Potters further expand on the idea of student performance as connected to teacher/student relationships by offering examples of student experiences and snapshots of their teaching careers that support that idea of success.

In Potter's interview she described and identified success by first referring to her teaching philosophy and her goal of students becoming "decent human beings." She further expands on this idea by implying that students becoming "self-sufficient" and "independent" with classroom tasks is an identifier of personal teaching success for herself. Furthermore, she emphasizes that she is far more interested in noticing students' growth and becoming "decent human beings" because "becoming an awesome dancer... falls way lower on [her] priority list."

Rodgers' also identifies and describes teaching success by taking in account the way her students develop relationships with her. She identifies that a strong student-teacher relationship influences students' intrinsic motivation towards meeting and exceeding her expectations.

Survive the Day: “Is success also surviving the day with no complaints?”

Participants who had more time and experience in the field shared ways in which their philosophy of success has shifted to viewing survival as a form of success. Anderson and Davidson were two participants in this study that acquired the most years of experience in the field. Anderson captures this idea when she shares, “I think this sounds really sad, but I think being successful is not having complaints.” In the same way, Davidson shares a similar experience where she reflects on how often she adopts a “survive the day” ideology and tells herself, “If I can make it through the day, If I can get there post my objectives...check my role...go through the day and I can do the teacher duties throughout the day, that’s success to me.” On the contrary, the participants with less experience and exposure to the stressors discussed in this study, didn’t mention or allude to a “surviving the day” and “no complaints is success” ideology as a form of personal teaching success.

Feeling Proud: “What does the community think of my dance program?”

Two participants described feeling that the way in which their dance programs are perceived among their community gives them personal satisfaction in knowing that their work is admired by outsiders. Anderson describes her dance program as a “a well oiled machine.” She relishes in knowing that young dancers, current dancers, and their families felt that this was an organization worthy of investing in and becoming a member of. Moreover, she felt satisfied in knowing that the program ran on its own, her job at that point was maintaining the status of her dance program among the community. Anderson captures her feelings of success and self-satisfaction when she says, “to me it was successful because people were used to consistency and they knew what to expect, I felt like it was successful even though we had

bumps in the roads,” ultimately highlighting that she felt proud of the work she was able to do with her students while she still taught.

Similarly, Potters embodies the same ideas in her interview by adding that she identifies personal teaching success by noticing when her students and dance program are perceived by their community as admirable representatives of the school and school district. She continues to further explain this idea by emphasizing that “there is a certain [standard] for discipline and level for work ethic, commitment and dedication” that she expects from her students. She suggests that creating a reputable and respectful public image also compliments and supports her previously stated goals, which are: developing “decent human beings” and “independent and self-sufficient” learners. Potters affirms that by working towards fulfilling these goals and viewing the harvest of her work with her students, she finds personal satisfaction in her work. She captures this idea when she says, “I think that it’s super important to find ways in your career to look back and be proud.”

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHER STRESS

RELIEF AND WELLNESS

After analyzing the data and better understanding participant lived experiences as dance educators, I offer considerations for stress relief and wellness for teachers. Possible actions for stress relief are:

- Set personal boundaries between one’s personal and professional lives. Differentiate between home time and work time by sticking to a schedule that fits one’s needs and allotting time to take care of oneself.

- Build a supportive community of friends, family, and colleagues who will offer support and encouragement. One can do this by reaching out, asking the questions, and receiving the support one needs to fulfill the job.
- Focus on physical and mental health by setting aside time by pursuing physical activities that don't necessarily involve dance and finding an outlet that holistically nurtures one's mental and emotional state.
- Relish in the simple joys of teaching; they look different in everyone's professional career by acknowledging moments that feel successful in one's classroom.
- Be proud of the work one puts out, even on the days that feel like survival is the ultimate and only goal. Step back and reflect on the small victories and progress one has made towards goals that define success in one's career.

I do not claim that this is a dance educator's recipe for success, nor will the directions above offer complete stress relief. Therefore, since everyone's experience and life is unique, it is important that dance educators take time to discover what works best for themselves.

FUTURE RESEARCH

In this study I set out to better understand the lived experiences of work stress and perception of teaching success for dance educators. While many common themes arose across participant descriptions that are important in understanding a dance educator's job and anxiety, I speculate there are perhaps underlying structures that did not arise in the data that in fact contribute to their stress. Some questions which arose for me for possible future research are:

- Is there a bureaucratic disparity in the field of education and teacher preparation programs and curriculum?

- Are dance educator's teaching experiences and the way in which they are described, influenced by institutionalized issues such as gender, bureaucracy, or culture?
- Is longevity in the dance education field a form of professional success?

CONCLUSION

I write this professional paper in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2020 where teachers are experiencing an increase in demands towards creating a new remote teaching and learning system. Though the circumstances are uncertain and everyone seems to be navigating uncharted waters, I notice a wave of new demands and expectations for teachers that make me wonder about the way the field of education will look like in the near future— not just for dance education, but for all. I am hoping that the way in which teachers are prepared for crisis management on both small and larger scales is further contextualized in order to improve the teaching experience for all. I worry about the kind of repercussions some teachers may experience due to the lack of knowledge on these situations that could question the value of the teaching profession.

This moment in time reminds me of one powerful moment that was consistent in every interview. When I asked these participants if the challenges and stress they experienced ever stopped them from fulfilling their duties at work, they all responded, 'No', followed by silent pause. To me, this moment was a reflection of the servant hearts teachers seem to have despite the need to suppress emotions, experience body pain, perhaps losing autonomy, and even taking these stressors home causing their personal life to be affected. My hope is that we can continue working towards the advancement of the field of dance education.

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