

SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENT PROFESSIONALISM IN THE  
MIDDLE SCHOOL DANCE CLASSROOM

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## INTRODUCTION

As a dance educator, I am tasked with the duty of training and directing students who are new to dance. I am currently teaching dance at the middle school level in the Dallas Independent School District. Most students I teach approach learning dance as a fun activity rather than with a desire to have a career in dance. Over the past three years, I have also prepared students to perform at sport events, pep rallies, school assemblies, and at the annual fall and spring concerts. Whenever my students compete or perform within the Dallas Metroplex, we are often at events in which other area schools are performing as well. Many dance teachers I meet at these events comment about the ways in which many of my students are professional in their interactions and performance. Often, they comment specifically about how many of my students demonstrate advanced movement knowledge, understand dance vocabulary, and practice professional dance etiquette.

I have high expectations for all my students and I constantly work to push them to grow not only in their dance ability, but also in their appreciation and value for dance learning. My students excel in these areas because they work hard, but I have begun to wonder, could this demonstration of professional behavior and performance growth be related to specific classroom policies, procedures, and communicated expectations I use to manage my classroom? It is this question, which led me to investigate further my classroom practices that may support student development of professionalism and respect for dance learning.

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this research was to explore my classroom policies, procedures, rules, and strategies I use to reinforce and support expectations of professionalism for middle school dance

students. My goal was to first analyze my Student Code of Conduct in relation to other school's dance classroom codes of conduct. Additionally, the goal was also to conduct a teacher self-study to learn about possible effective strategies to reinforce professional expectations in the dance classroom. At the conclusion of this research, my intention was to offer dance educators an informed and edited example of a Code of Conduct with teacher strategies for student redirection towards professionalism. My hope is that the results of this work can assist teachers in helping students to become more professional and respectful of dance learning.

### RESEARCH QUESTION

How can I explore and create a dance student code of conduct and teaching strategies to reinforce and teach middle school dance student's rules, policies, and procedures in promotion of student professionalism and respect for dance learning?

### METHODOLOGY & PROCEDURES

I approached this study using a qualitative methodology. The procedures I followed for this project are as follows:

#### **Comparative Analysis of Codes of Conduct**

First, I gathered nine student codes of conduct from secondary school websites in Texas. The codes of conduct were either from middle and high school dance programs, or they were codes intended for all students within a secondary school. I analyzed and compared all the codes of conduct along with my own to take note of the differences and, most importantly, the similarities. This method was important because it allowed me to see what other schools use, and what they believe works. I used this comparative analysis as the basis for editing my own classroom Code of Conduct, as well as developing a definition of professionalism.

## Teacher Self Study

To study, reflect, and analyze the teaching practices and strategies I implement in the classroom, I conducted a teacher self-study. I recorded videos of myself teaching during the advanced class period at the end of the day. These videos were taken every Tuesday for four weeks. The videos captured moments before the class period began, during the passing period (five minutes between classes) and until the end of the warm-up. I included this passing period because it is a time during the day in which my students are held solely responsible for their time and their tasks (ie, the teacher is not directing activities or lessons) in preparation for the class. The video also captured students preparing on their own at the start of class. These individual preparatory tasks were things such as, putting shoes in the correct location, spitting out gum, getting dressed out for movement activities, warming up on their own, reviewing choreography, and gathering their assignments they needed for that class period. When class began I greeted the class, provided an introduction for the lesson of the day, led the warm-up, and delivered the instructions/directions at the start of class. After directions were given the video was shut off.

Once the class period was over, and the school day came to an end, I would use the time I had before after-school rehearsals to review the videos taken during the last dance class of the day. At this time, I took notes on what I observed while watching the videos and wrote a personal reflection of my experiences during that time. The notes I would take considered the following questions:

- At what times did I have to repeat directions and redirect students?
- Could I easily get through the directions? If not, what was stopping me from doing so?
- What methods or strategies did I use to keep students engaged?
- What questions did the students have?
- What did I have to remind students about?

- What types of conversations did I have with students, and what was my tone as I spoke to the students?

This data collected helped me to analyze the teaching practices and strategies I used, as well as how students were reacting to the procedures required of them and the procedures themselves. Once all the self-study videos, notes, and reflections were collected, I analyzed and looked for moments where the class continued with little to no disruption and the teaching strategies which might be connected to these moments. I wanted to be able to listen to myself interact with them and the language I used to explain and reinforce the policies, procedures, and rules.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

“Developing routines enable instruction to proceed smoothly and efficiently and share socially scripted patterns of behavior and serve to reduce the cognitive complexity of the instructional environment” (Jackson-Hardin, 2004, 64). This quote significantly guided me in this work because these ideas helped me evaluate and construct smooth and efficient management routines for my middle school dance class, while reducing confusion overall. In pursuit of this goal, and before setting out to embark on this project, I read widely in the areas of classroom management policies and procedures, student professionalism, and professionalism & classroom management for the dance classroom. From this review, I was able to understand the positive effects classroom strategies and systems can have on students’ performance and its association with preparing students to enter the professional world more clearly. I also looked at multiple definitions of professionalism, and how researchers describe professionalism for the dance classroom. This review of established literature helped me to widen my understanding of

how educators support student success through the creation of classroom practices, policies, and procedures.

Further, establishing a definition of professionalism became an important step for this project and arose out of this literature review. For the word professionalism, its Latin root is to ‘profess,” which means to be an expert, improve the quality of service, and one’s attitude and behavior towards his/her job. Since my goal was to support students in becoming experts when it came to their work/school behaviors, and improve the quality of their attitude while performing at the highest standards, I came to compose a definition that would serve as a foundation for this project. For this project, I define professionalism as my students' ability to respect the process and purpose of learning.

#### ANALYSIS and FINDINGS

Here I outline for the reader my steps for analysis and the resultant findings that helped to guide the development of an informed and edited Code of Conduct. Further, the teacher self-study findings helped to guide my development of teacher strategies for guiding and supporting students in their development of professionalism.

#### **Codes of Conduct Analysis**

To begin analysis of the documents of conduct, I looked across all the gathered codes and noticed not only how similar they were, but also how clear they were in the language. They were clear, concise, and to the point so that teachers new and old, students, and even non-dancers could understand them. In comparison to my own code of conduct, I realized that I had room to improve the clarity of language in order to outline for my students the policies and procedures within my dance classroom.

During this analysis, I created four categories to identify the common kinds of directives for students found in the codes of conduct that I gathered; behavioral, expectations, policy, and procedures and implementation. This categorization helped me to see what kinds of expectations and directives were important to many schools across Texas. This knowledge helped me later to edit my own Code of Conduct. Further by creating these categories and understanding common parts and values across many codes of conduct, I was able to understand how other schools might be defining professionalism for their students.

### **Teacher Self Study Findings**

I began by analyzing my teacher self study videos, notes, and reflections and highlighted moments in my teaching that I identified as positive moments in which I was reinforcing professionalism and respect for dance learning. For example, funny moments, moments in which I was able to grab my students' attention easily, moments in which students had engaged conversations with me about the rules, and moments in which they followed my procedural directions or corrections with positive attitudes and follow through.

Next, I reviewed each highlighted positive reaction and identified the teaching practice or strategy I had employed in each of these moments. Then I named each strategy/teaching practice I used for reinforcing rules, policies, and procedures that were common across all the highlighted notes. The teaching strategies and practices that I found in this analysis were:

- Build Relationships with Students
- Use Humor to Communicate Rules
- Demonstrate/Act Out Consequences of Choices for Students
- Let Students Fail in the Moment then Help them Reflect



- Find Different Ways to Say the Same Thing

### **The Importance of Communication**

Fortunately, the students in the class in which I conducted my self study were advanced dance students who have taken my class for the past two or three years prior to this project. Because of that, I was able to put the above findings into action quickly, and often in a way that was new to them. For example, as I discovered that it was valuable to say the same thing in many ways when I was teaching I began to expand my communication ability with students. I experimented with changing my tone, clarity, and delivery, I began seeing noteworthy differences in my student's overall behavior and engagement. I soon realized that not only what I expected was important, but how I communicated my expectations to my students matter more.

Further, these changes allowed me to better model the behavior I desired for my students. I began to trust them to know when and how to make their own behavioral corrections which I believe made students feel safe and secure in their journey to become more professional. Ultimately, it is important to understand the importance of delivery, if students cannot relate and have mutual respect for you as their teacher then it will be close to impossible for the students to work towards success of any kind within the middle school dance classroom.

### **ARTIFACT: CODE OF CONDUCT OF CONDUCT AND ACCOMPANYING TEACHING STRATEGIES**

From the findings above, and in relationship to the literature review, I offer to the reader and the field of dance education, a code of conduct for use in a middle school dance classroom. Following the code of conduct, I provide a teaching strategy chart to guide educators in helping students to focus and become engaged in the dance classroom. My intention is that these

strategies can support positive conduct for all. The “I” statements in the code of conduct can be edited to support students at different grade levels.

It is important to note that these strategies and code of conduct may not work for all teachers, all students, and all settings. The below charts and their information arise from a personal teacher self study and are not intended as the only way to promote professionalism and respect, but might serve as a starting point for other dance educators.

<b>Code of Conduct Middle School Dance Classroom</b>
<b>Respect the Rights and Feelings of Others</b> “I will keep my hands to myself and my belongings only.”
<b>Demonstrate a Positive Attitude</b> “I will encourage others and try my best.”
<b>Support the Learning Environment</b> “I will ask questions and offer my ideas.”
<b>Exercise Self-Control</b> “I will stay focused and on task. ”
<b>Protect the Learning Environment</b> “I will keep the classroom safe and clean by picking up after myself.”

<b>Teacher Strategies to Support the Code of Conduct</b>
<b>Build Relationships with Students</b> Take time out to get to know who your students are outside of the classroom, and allow them to do the same with you. Show them you are more than just their teacher by having one on one conversations and sharing about your life.
<b>Use Humor to Communicate Rules</b> Find a place for humor within redirection. Silliness and fun interactions can be a part of giving directions and reminding students of rules. Also, give breaks during instruction time so students can laugh and interact with others.

**Act Out Natural Consequences**

Demonstrate natural consequences that are common to the classroom by acting them out in a fun way. This helps students understand how consequences are a direct outcome of their choices and actions.

**Let Students Fail in the Moment and then Help them Reflect**

Give students the opportunity to fail and then assist them in reflecting and figuring out how to succeed. By allowing a student the opportunity to reflect on personal outcomes they will be better able to create steps for future success.

**Find Different Ways to Say the Same Thing**

Establish new and exciting ways to keep common instruction and directions fresh and engaging. This helps students relate to the material while becoming more eager and ready for future lessons.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the analysis of my practices in the classroom helped me to see that my expectations of professional student behavior, ie. following the code of conduct, was significantly related to the kind of relationships I had with my students. When students valued dance learning and followed the code of conduct, I felt it was most often because I respected them as a person and my teaching practices modeled this respect. From this awareness, I offer that when seeking to support the development of a student's professionalism and respect for dance learning, it first requires a foundational and positive teacher/student relationship. My hope is that this newly developed code of conduct and practices can be of service to dance educators, especially new and first year teachers at the middle school level. I believe that this is important for first year teachers because by having these teaching strategies in their toolbox it could relieve some stress and pressure they might be under as they begin their career.

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