DANCE ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH IN ADOLESCENTS
IN THE HIGH SCHOOL SETTING


A PROFESSIONAL PAPER

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN DANCE

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY


DIVISION OF DANCE

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES


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JULY 2022

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family and friends who supported me through this educational journey. First, I dedicate this work to my family, especially my boys who graciously shared me with my research and loved me through it. Secondly, I dedicate this work to my best friend, Penni Cross, who supported and encouraged me, even when I doubted myself.

I would also like to thank my parents, who love and support me, and encourage me to follow my dreams. To Dr. Ilana Morgan, thank you for the endless time, love, and knowledge you poured into me. To my incredible cohort, we did it and I love each of you!

ABSTRACT

MONICA HACHTEL

DANCE ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH IN ADOLESCENTS IN THE HIGH
SCHOOL SETTING

AUGUST 2022

After 21 years of teaching high school and seeing the increasingly common presence of

mental health issues in students, the author arrives at this project to investigate the use of dance

to support mental health in adolescents. Because the author perceives that dance can assist in the

improvement of mental health through self-expression, she began by gathering information on

mental health statistics, dance learning in relation to mental health, the *WhyTry* curriculum (a

social-emotional learning program), and the National Core Arts Standards in Dance. She then

chose three activities from the *WhyTry* curriculum and enhanced them with dance and in

alignment with the National Core Arts Standards in Dance while still maintaining the

social-emotional learning elements. The three activities the author enhanced have an

easy-to-follow plan for the teacher and provide students an opportunity to use movement to

explore and perhaps conquer difficult situations they may face in life.

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INTRODUCTION

I am beginning my 22nd year of teaching high school dance and drill team, and as I reflect on the years, I see significant changes in curriculum, advancements in educational technology, and most importantly the increasingly common presence of mental health issues in students. As a drill team director and credit recovery teacher, an online, computer-based class where students who have missing credits can recover those credits, I observe the many struggles students experience as they navigate high school. From schoolwork to friendships to relationships to home life, the daily life of a teenager is complicated and can be tumultuous, which can sometimes lead to depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues. On a daily basis, I see many students battle with these issues, and, for many, the consequence is a hindrance in their learning.

Currently, the school in which I work is considering implementing the *WhyTry* program, an evidence-based social and emotional learning curriculum. Because I am known as someone who forms impactful relationships with students, I have been asked to consider being a member of a future mental health support team. Due to this invite, I have begun to study the *WhyTry* curriculum as a way to prepare for this role. And as I study this curriculum, I have begun to imagine ways the activities might be enlivened or taught via dance or movement.

Because I perceive that dance can assist in the improvement of mental health, I arrived at this research project in which I set out to enhance *WhyTry* activities with dance components to encourage self-expression. Further, as someone who experienced severe anxiety as a child, I build these activities as someone who understands how anxiety feels and the ways in which it can affect students' lives. My long-term goal, once this project is complete, is for high school

teachers to be able to implement these activities in their classrooms to support and improve students' mental health.

## PURPOSE

- To gather and analyze established research concerning mental health and adolescents, dance learning in relation to mental health, the *WhyTry* curriculum and activities, and the National Core Arts Standards in Dance (NCAS).

- To identify key theories, concepts, and ideas from established research that will assist in creating dance learning activities that support mental health and well-being.

- To enhance three *WhyTry* activities that support mental health and positive well-being for high school students with dance.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

How can I enhance three *WhyTry* activities with dance to support mental health and positive well-being for high school students?

## METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

- This research began with a **review of literature** in the areas of adolescent mental health statistics, dance learning in relation to mental health, and two educational frameworks, the *WhyTry* curriculum and the National Core Arts Standards in Dance, that support the study. I read broadly across published literature and focused on areas that addressed students in the high school setting.

- Next, I **chose two significant frameworks**, the *WhyTry* curriculum and the National Core Arts Standards in Dance, to guide the development of dance activities that support mental health in adolescents in a high school setting. The *WhyTry* curriculum provided me with social-emotional learning concepts and activities for support of

mental health. The National Core Arts Standards in Dance provided a framework to guide how to incorporate dance into the activities while meeting the standards appropriate for the age level and the art-making process of dance.

- Utilizing the above frameworks as a guide, I then **chose three *WhyTry* activities and enhanced them with dance learning** in support of mental health and positive well-being for adolescents in a high school setting. When rewriting or enhancing three *WhyTry* activities I made sure to still address the *WhyTry* concepts in that particular activity. My dance enhancements worked to support the concepts of the *WhyTry* curriculum: relationship, relevance, and resilience.

- I then had a **critical conversation with Amanda Hail, a Licensed Specialist in School Psychology (LSSP)** in the district where I work, to gain her insight as to how or if the activities met the *WhyTry* curriculum standards and kept the *WhyTry* concepts at the center of the activities. I shared my activities with her and she made notes on aspects she would add to the activities to make them more teacher and student friendly.

- I then **revised the activities** according to the suggestions made by Amanda Hail where appropriate.

- Next, I **completed a three question self-reflection of curriculum** to evaluate and assess if the learning outcomes of the *WhyTry* curriculum and student needs were met in the activities. I researched a variety of reflection questions for teachers to use in the evaluation of the effectiveness of the curriculum and chose three I felt were most relevant to the assessment of the activities I created, "Pain to Power," "Surrender the Doubt," and "Breaking Free."

- Lastly, I **revised the activities** again based on ideas and shortcomings that arose from the curriculum reflection/assessment.

## LIMITATIONS

It is important to note the specific limitations of this study. First, it is imperative to highlight that I am a dance educator, I am not qualified in the field of mental health, and I do not claim these activities can be used as therapy. My intention was to enhance some activities from a program that I consider promising in its ability to teach and reach students who may need guidance and learning in the area of social-emotional skills, or interpersonal skills as support for mental health. Due to the time limitations of this study I have not tested or evaluated the activities in terms of their effectiveness, but instead have focused on developing them in an informed way. The enhanced activities may not be applicable to all students, school settings, or cultures.

Additionally, to be able to view all the *WhyTry* curriculum, one must purchase the program in its entirety, so this research project was limited to information that was available without purchasing the full program. With a broader knowledge of the program, these enhanced activities could become more informed and embody the objectives of the *Why Try* program in a more holistic way.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examines published research that seeks to illustrate ways dance can improve mental health in adolescents. I have gathered some studies that present adolescent mental health statistics, discussions on dance learning in relation to mental health, and two educational frameworks, the *WhyTry* curriculum and the National Core Arts Standards in Dance, that support the study. The goal of this literature review is to gather important ideas and concepts

that will provide a framework from which to enhance some *WhyTry* activities with dance to support mental health for 9th-12th graders in a public school setting. However, in this first section, I  define what mental health is and the statistics surrounding mental health for adolescents, ages 10-19, in the United States.

**Adolescent Mental Health Definition and Statistics**

As stated by The US Department of Health and Human Services (2020), mental health encompasses our emotional, psychological, and social well-being and affects our emotions, actions, and thoughts; moreover, mental health helps to determine how we will handle stress, relate to others, and make choices in our lives. Further, there are many factors that can affect mental health such as physical, emotional, and social changes, living in poverty, or experiencing abuse and violence (World Health Organization 2020). Also cited by the World Health Organization (2020) in their article, "Adolescent Mental Health,"

- One in six people in the world are aged 10-19 years.

- Mental health conditions account for 16% of the global burden of disease and injury in people aged 10-19 years.

- Half of all mental health conditions start by 14 years of age, but most are undetected and untreated.

- Globally, depression is one of the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents.

- Suicide is the third leading cause of death in 15-19 year-olds.

- The consequences of not addressing adolescent mental health conditions extend to adulthood, impairing both physical and mental health and limiting opportunities to lead fulfilling lives as adults.

In addition to the factors that affect mental health, the World Health Organization (2020) also states there are multiple components that determine mental health outcomes and contribute to adolescent stress. Some they list include:

- A greater desire for self-directed freedom

- Peer pressure

- Discovery of sexual preference

- Increased exposure and access to technology

- Quality of home life and relationships with peers

- Violence

- Socio-Economic issues

- Sexual abuse

Examples of the above factors and their outcome for adolescents are outlined in Susan Schwarz's (2009) article entitled, "Adolescent Mental Health in the United States: Facts for Policymakers." Here, Schwarz states that untreated mental health issues may negatively affect performance in school, contribute to school dropout, cause stress with family relationships, increase the likelihood of the adolescent being involved with child welfare or the juvenile justice system, and contribute to substance abuse and the urge to engage in risky behavior. She continues to say, as many as seventy percent of adolescents in the juvenile justice system have a diagnosable mental health disorder.

To conclude, "Mental health promotion and prevention interventions aim to strengthen an individual's capacity to regulate emotions, enhance alternatives to risk-taking behaviours, build resilience for difficult situations and adversities, and promote supportive social environments and social networks" (World Health Organization 2020). Recognizing the need for mental health

interventions in adolescents informs and motivates this project, and reminds me that creating an environment in the classroom that builds a sense of community among the students is paramount in supporting mental health.

## Dance and Mental Health

A study conducted by Cordis (2012) titled, "Influencing Self-Rated Health Among Adolescent Girls with Dance Intervention," is an example of how dance can have a positive effect on adolescent mental health. The objective of the study was to investigate whether dance intervention affected self-rated health for adolescent girls dealing with an issue such as stress and/or symptoms such as anxiety, depression, fatigue, headaches, and back, neck, and shoulder pain. One hundred and twelve Swedish girls from the ages of 13-19 were randomized into two groups: a group of fifty-nine girls who regularly attended dance classes twice a week and a control group of fifty-three girls who did not change their living habits. The dance classes met twice a week for eight months with each class lasting seventy-five minutes and focusing on the joy of movement rather than on performance. The results of the study showed regular dance training could be a strategy for preventing and treating depression as well as enhancing self-esteem and improving the capability to deal with everyday problems. The positive effect continued eight months after the dance training ended and ninety-one percent of the girls reported a positive experience. Further, Dr. Anna Deberg, the physical therapist who ran the study, commented that despite the stress and other challenges that affect adolescent girls, dance can result in a high adherence and a positive experience for those participating, which creates new healthy habits leading to a more healthful lifestyle.

In addition to the above influential study, Professor Peter Lovatt also contributed to the topic of dance and its mental health benefits through his studies on dance in relation to mental

health. Lovatt, a dance psychologist from the University of Hertfordshire, states, "Dance psychology is the study of dance and dancers from a scientific and psychological perspective" (Cashin-Garbutt 2017). Using his knowledge of dance psychology, Lovatt has conducted studies in non-clinical settings that have shown teenagers with mild to moderate symptoms of depression showed improvement in their levels of depression after participating in a twelve-week program of dance and movement. In addition, a ten-week dance program was shown to improve mood and evoked a feeling of overall happiness in the participants. Lovatt was questioned if the increase in mood lasts after the participants leave the dance class. To answer this question, he conducted another study reported by Cashin-Garbutt (2017) in which he measured participants' moods one week before and one week after the aforementioned ten-week dance program and found there was an increase in the participants' moods and happiness.

These studies, while specific and varied in nature, help me to understand the positive significance dance can have on the mental health of adolescents. Within the studies, Cashin-Garbutts (2017) mentions that Lovatt speaks on how the positive effects of dance on mental health can last months after participation, can encourage new healthful lifestyles, and can improve mood and evoke a feeling of happiness.

### Educational Frameworks to Support the Study

In this next section, I outline concepts from the *WhyTry* curriculum and define and highlight elements of the National Core Arts Standards in Dance. The goal of this section is to explore social-emotional learning in the *WhyTry* curriculum and the ways it can incorporate the creative aspects of the National Core Arts Standards in Dance.

According to The *WhyTry* Organization (n.d.), the *WhyTry* program uses the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) definition of social and

emotional learning: "…the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions." Its curriculum focuses on three foundational elements: relationship, relevance, and resilience. As cited by the *WhyTry* Organization (n.d.), research shows students who participate fully in the program show improvement in these areas:

- Locus of control

- Ability to set and achieve goals

- Relationships with teachers and fellow students

- Classroom engagement

- Attendance records

- Behavioral and Emotional Screening System (BASC) scores

Specifically in the secondary school setting, the *WhyTry* curriculum supports student improvement through a reduced number of disciplinary referrals, a decrease in aggressive behavior, reduced expulsions, and an improved grade point average. Overall, the statistics show the *WhyTry* program has a positive impact on students in the classroom and emphasizes life-long coping skills (Bird 2010).

Much like the *WhyTry* curriculum serves as a guideline for social and emotional learning, The National Core Arts Standards in Dance serve as a guideline for teaching, learning, and experiencing dance through an art-making process (National Dance Education Organization, n.d.). According to the National Dance Education Organization (n.d.), "The National Core Arts Standards in Dance are rooted in a creative approach to teaching and learning. They describe expectations for learning in dance regardless of culture, style or genre and impart the breadth and

depth of the dance experience through the art-making processes." In addition to anchor standards, enduring questions, and an essential question for each process, the dance standards have four artistic processes across the arts disciplines which are, creating, performing, responding, and connecting. Within the standards, there are also levels, of which I mainly focused on the 8th-grade and high school proficiency levels to align with the experience level of students with which I work (National Coalition for Core Arts 2014).

I chose the *WhyTry* curriculum and National Core Arts Standards in Dance as my framework because they help set guidelines for social and emotional learning and dance teaching and learning. These frameworks serve as a blueprint for dance educators to reach students where they are in life emotionally and educate the whole student in the field of dance.

GUIDING FRAMEWORKS TO SUPPORT THE STUDY

The framework below was created to guide this project. To build this framework, I identified social-emotional learning concepts from the *WhyTry* curriculum that were important to include, and dance learning standards from the National Core Arts Standards in Dance. Then with my experience and knowledge as a dance educator, I matched dance learning standards that seemed to best align with particular *WhyTry* concepts. I then used this framework to guide me as I interwove dance into the social-emotional *WhyTry* activities. I also utilized the framework to ensure my activities were following the foundations of the *WhyTry* curriculum while providing a creative outlet for students guided by the National Core Arts Standards in Dance.

The foundation of the *WhyTry* curriculum is based on three elements: relationship, relevance and resilience. While focusing on these three elements, the curriculum emphasizes life skills. In the following charts, I present each element and show how it relates and connects to these life skills and the National Core Arts Standards in Dance used in the activities.

# Relationship

| Life Skills | National Core Arts Standard in Dance |
|---|---|
| Coping with peer pressure | Performing/Express- Sculpt the body in space and design body shapes in relation to other dancers, objects, and environment. Use focus of eyes during complex floor and air patterns or direct and indirect pathways. |
| Utilizing support systems | Creating/Explore- Explore a variety of stimuli for sourcing movement to develop an improvisational or choreographed dance study. Analyze the process and the relationship between the stimuli and the movement. |
| | Connecting/Synthesize- Analyze a dance to determine the ideas expressed by the choreographer. Explain how the perspectives expressed by the choreographer may impact one's own interpretation. Provide evidence to support one's analysis. |

# Relevance

| Life Skills | National Core Arts Standards in Dance |
|---|---|
| Decision making | Creating/Plan- Develop an artistic statement for an original dance study or dance. Discuss how the use of movement elements, choreographic devices and dance structures serve to communicate the artistic statement. |
| Following laws and rules | Responding/Critique- Use artistic criteria to determine what makes an effective performance. Consider content, context, genre, style, or cultural movement practice to comprehend artistic expression. Use genre-specific dance terminology. |
| Envisioning the future | Responding/Analyze- Describe, demonstrate and discuss patterns of movement and their relationships in dance in context of artistic intent. |

# Resilience

| Life Skills | National Core Arts Standards in Dance |
|---|---|
| Impulse control | Performing/Express- Direct energy and dynamics in such a way that movement is textured. Incorporate energy and dynamics to technique exercises and dance performance. Use energy and dynamics to enhance and project movements. |
| Valuing hard work | Creating/Explore- Experiment with the elements of dance to explore personal movement preferences and strengths, and select movements that challenge skills and build on strengths in an original dance. |

CREATING/ENHANCING THE *WhyTry* ACTIVITIES

In this section, I outline for the reader, how I chose the activities for movement enhancement, ways I understood and identified applicable concepts in the original activities, and ways I edited the activities.

To begin, I researched various *WhyTry* activities and envisioned enhancing them with movement while still incorporating the *WhyTry* concepts. I read many *WhyTry* activities and decided which ones I felt would benefit the most from the addition of movement. The three original *WhyTry* activities I chose were "Our Class Against the World," "Switched-up Commercial," and "Mission Impossible." After choosing the three activities, I analyzed each component of the activities, deleted and added information, and incorporated movement by using the National Core Arts Standards in Dance as a guide to facilitate students learning dance concepts rather than just moving randomly. I also created a script for the teacher so it is easily understood and deliverable, even if the teacher nor students are familiar with dance.

The first activity, "Our Class Against the World," was enhanced with dance and renamed, "Surrender the Doubt." The original activity leads students to reflect and discuss the perceptions

of how adults see them. Then as a class, they make a plan to demonstrate their capabilities while releasing that "one-up" feeling that the adult is better than them, or that they are inadequate. I expanded the activity by having students work in pairs while integrating words and movements as a way to help overcome feelings of personal doubt that can occur in relationships. Instead of just focusing on encounters with adults, I also broadened the activity to include other relationships the students might experience. Additionally, movement was incorporated to give students the option of communicating their feelings through the movement instead of only verbally. The students end the activity by processing their feelings verbally with their partners, if they are comfortable.

Much like "Surrender the Doubt," the second activity I altered, "Switched-Up Commercial," by incorporating movement as a way to communicate feelings. I renamed "Switched-Up Commercial" as "Pain to Power." In this activity, the students are introduced to the *WhyTry* concept of "flipping the switch," which focuses on resilience and turning one's emotional pain into power. The original *WhyTry* activity divides the students into teams and asks them to pretend they are a company that is trying to teach the world about the importance of "flipping the switch." Each team is competing to create a commercial that will be chosen as the official "flipping the switch" ad.

As I reflected on this activity, I chose to take a more literal translation of "flipping the switch." To begin the activity, the students are asked to think of a painful experience in their lives. Instead of students working in groups, they work individually as a way to encourage focus on personal emotions as they create movements to represent painful and powerful moments in their lives. To emulate the concept of "flipping the switch," the lights are used to represent pain when they are off and power when they are on as the students perform their painful and powerful

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movements. The students then use these movements to create a one minute movement sequence. I also chose to add music, throughout the activity, for a dynamic component.

Next, I focused on the *WhyTry* activity, "Mission Impossible," which I renamed "Breaking Free." This activity also focused on communication of feelings. In the original and the enhanced activities, students are introduced to the "rock bottom resilience" concept. "Rock bottom" refers to the feeling that one has hit their lowest and there is no solution to the problem. In this activity, students identify this feeling and then imagine multiple solutions to the problem, thus practicing resilience. The original activity begins with two students who are connected with a rope using a safe handcuff knot and asked to find ways to disconnect from their partner without untying the knot or slipping the rope off their wrists. Like the original activity, I chose to utilize partners, a rope, and the task of disconnecting from the rope. The difference between the original activity and the enhanced activity, is that students are asked to incorporate dynamics into the movements they use to disconnect, and they are asked to make this disconnecting a dance or memorized movement sequence. The students are given a list of five vocabulary words that represent dynamic movements and asked to use at least three of the movements while choreographing their solution.

I was inspired by many of the *WhyTry* activities, but was most excited to enhance these three activities with dance. The movement aspects of these activities give students an alternative to verbal communication by allowing them to express their emotions through the movements. The activities are simple enough for most students to perform, yet extensive enough to guide them, with movement, through social-emotional skills presented in the *WhyTry* curriculum. **(**See Appendices for the enhanced *WhyTry* activity lesson plans.)

ANALYSIS OF CREATED ACTIVITIES

After I created the activities, I next analyzed them using two methods. The first method was a critical conversation with a colleague in my district named Amanda Hail. After this conversation, I was able to apply her suggestions and edit my activities to improve their overall effectiveness. The second method was a three question curriculum reflection. Using this method allowed me to reflect back on my activities and analyze them based on my guiding framework and my many years of experience as a dance educator in order to further edit and finalize the activities.

## Critical Conversation With Colleague

Since Amanda Hail was the person who invited me to join the crisis team, along with her expertise in the field of counseling and psychology, I asked her to evaluate the activities and provide feedback. After meeting with Amanda to explain the goals of the project and the intent of the activities, she read through each of the activities twice. The first time she read through them as someone who was not familiar with the *WhyTry* curriculum or social emotional learning. The second time she read through them as a professional in the field and someone who is familiar with the curriculum and read the instructions aloud as if she were the teacher. The feedback I received was:

- Insert pauses in areas of the instruction to allow for student reflection.
- Add a "teacher's guide" or tips for when a student becomes emotional or overwhelmed
- Create an alternative to the performance aspect of the activities for students who may be uncomfortable with performing their work.
- Give specific amounts of time for tasks within the activities.

While my dance background has helped me feel confident in the movement aspects of the activities, I found that I was not as confident in the area of mental health and the foundation of

the *WhyTry* program and elements. After collaborating with Amanda and applying her feedback, I feel more confident with the mental health aspects of the activities. I am thankful to have had someone as knowledgeable as Amanda to provide feedback on my activities. I propose that this step of the project added more validity and clarity to the activities.

## Three Question Self-Reflection of Curriculum

As I researched ways to assess and evaluate the curriculum, I found several websites that offered a variety of teacher self-reflection questions that are used to evaluate curriculum development. After reading through many questions in the articles, "Self-Reflection Questions Teachers Should Ask Themselves" and "21 Questions to Ask About Curriculum Development," I chose three that I found most relevant to the goals of the activities:

1. What critical skills am I trying to develop through these activities?

2. How do the activities create a positive and safe climate for learning and sharing?

3. How will the activities implement the 4 C's- Critical Thinking, Collaboration, Communication, and Creativity?

Below I outline for the reader the answers to these questions according to each activity.

**Question #1**: What *critical skills* am I trying to develop through these activities?

Surrender the Doubt
- Working with others
- Forming positive relationships
- Creating a positive self-image
- Building confidence and trust in others

Pain to Power
- Relating to real world experiences
- Increasing levels of determination
- Promoting problem solving skills
- Encouraging self-reflection practices

Breaking Free
- Building resilience
- Teaching persistence
- Finding support systems

**Question #2**: How do the activities *create a positive and safe climate* for learning and sharing?

- The teacher is provided with a guide and script so he/she is educated on the topic and prepared if an emotional situation arises.
- Students are provided with opportunities to hear positive words from their partners.
- Students are able to communicate through movement instead of verbally.
- Students are given options on presenting their works based on their comfort levels.
- Students are given positive feedback from peers and teacher.

**Question #3**: How will my activities implement the four C's - *Critical Thinking, Collaboration, Communication, and Creativity*?

Critical Thinking
- Each activity begins with questions explored in the activity and ends with questions the teacher can use to facilitate a discussion.
- Questions are designed to evoke higher-level and critical thinking skills and encourage deeper conversation.
- Essential questions included in the National Core Arts Standards in Dance promote critical thinking and guide students in their thought processes as they create their movements.

Collaboration:
- Two of the activities involve partner work, which helps the students learn how to collaborate effectively.
- Collaboration occurs through feedback as the students discuss their work with the class.
- The student is given opportunities to collaborate with the teacher as the lesson is presented.

Communication:
- Students use movements, written words, and voice to communicate their feelings.
- Artistic intent is communicated through movement.
- Students must communicate with others as they navigate the activities that require partners.

Creativity:
- Whether the activities are leading them to choreograph an emotion, a sequence, or a solution, the students are using creativity to produce a final product.
- In each activity, the students are asked to create various movements. No matter the impetus for movement, the creative process is the guide.
- The National Core Arts Standards in Dance provide teachers and students with a guide to the creative process.

Through this analysis, I was able to reflect on my activities and edit them in order to bolster specific areas that were lacking and to check and solidify those areas that were most crucial and important to the learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This journey towards earning a master's degree affected my mental health at times, which also reminded me of how fragile mental health can be when placed in stressful situations. Because of my journey, I have become more empathetic to the stresses students experience and more aware of their mental health. Through my research, I learned alarming statistics regarding mental health in adolescents and how important it is for mental health issues to be addressed and not ignored. This research has also highlighted ways that dance and movement can be an outlet through which mental health can be improved in adolescents.

One of the goals in completing this project is to develop more practices that help me to reach and teach the whole student. I want students to learn movement, coping strategies, and empathy for others. I want them to learn how to be creative, resilient, confident, persistent, positive, and think outside of the box. I also want them to be able to take the skills they learn from the activities and apply them to other classes, situations, and aspects of their adult lives.

My interest in improving mental health in high school students is what led me to my project of creating activities that connect dance with social emotional learning. I do not want to just teach students how to dance. I want to give them an experience, a safe space to share and

learn, and life lessons for their futures. For me, creating these activities is a starting point to begin incorporating mental health support in my dance classes. I plan to continue researching the *WhyTry* curriculum and create more activities similar to these. In the future, I plan to incorporate these activities into my curriculum, and I cannot wait to see how they are received by my students. Further, Amanda Hail shared that she thought the activities were beautiful and inspiring and she suggested I contact the *WhyTry* organization to see if they would be interested in implementing these activities into their curriculum, which is an idea that excites me. These activities are just the beginning of my journey to hopefully support the improvement of mental health in adolescents through the freedom of dance.

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APPENDICES

**Surrender the Doubt**

Spatial Requirements: Dance room or gymnasium
Activity: Movement/Individual/Partner
Grades: 9-12
Dance Level: Beginner
Time: One, 45 minute class period
Materials Needed: Paper and marker

**Teacher's Guide**
These activities may bring forth emotions in students of which they are unaware exist. Below are some tips on how to handle these type of emotional situations:

- Before presenting the activity, establish a rapport with the students. These activities should not be introductory.
- Prior to the activity, share the activity with the counselors so they are prepared to assist students, if needed.
- Prepare the students by communicating the idea of the activity and inform them they may become emotional. Also, let the students know it is normal to experience emotion during the activity.
- If an emotional situation arises and the teacher does not feel equipped to handle it or a conversation becomes uncomfortable, the teacher should ask for help from the counselors.

**Introduction**
This activity is based on the "Surrendering the One-Up" concept from the *WhyTry* program. The activity promotes the idea that the relationships adults form with students are key to student success; however, students often feel they are seen as insignificant or inadequate by adults, and sometimes their peers. Additionally, students may hear negative comments from adults in their lives that contribute to this perception of inadequacy. The "surrendering the one-up" concept represents the act of releasing oneself from the idea that the other person is better than them.

In this lesson, students have a partner, a sheet of paper, and a marker and will use words, movements, and new ways of thinking to overcome feelings of personal doubt that can occur in relationships.

This activity explores the questions:
- Why is it important to be confident in oneself when in a relationship with others?
- How can our perceptions of how we are seen by others positively or negatively affect a relationship?
- How can you overcome doubt when building relationships?

**Original Activity**

The original *WhyTry* activity leads students to reflect and discuss their perception of how adults see them, then as a class, they make a plan to demonstrate their capabilities while releasing that "one-up" feeling that the adult is better than them, or that they are inadequate. For example, sometimes a teacher or administrator might say, "We have never had 100% attendance in this class," or "This class has never had everyone make the A/B honor roll." Once they identify what they want to prove, make a plan of action, then meet that goal, the teacher and class celebrate their accomplishment.

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***WhyTry* Skills This Activity Promotes**
- Utilizing Support Systems
- Decision Making
- Valuing Hard Work

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**National Core Arts Standards in Dance Supported in This Activity**

- **Creating - Explore**

  - **Anchor Standard 1:** Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

    - **Essential Question:** Where do choreographers get ideas for dances?
    - ➢ Explore a variety of stimuli for sourcing movement to develop an improvisational or choreographed dance study. Analyze the process and the relationship between the stimuli and the movement.

- **Creating - Plan**

  - **Anchor Standard 2:** Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

    - **Essential Question:** What influences choice-making in creating choreography?
    - ➢ Develop an artistic statement for an original dance study or dance. Discuss how the use of movement elements, choreographic devices and dance structures serve to communicate the artistic statement.
    - ➢ Experiment with the elements of dance to explore personal movement preferences and strengths, and select movements that challenge skills and build on strengths in an original dance study or dance.

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Activity: **Surrender the Doubt- Movement Study**

**Learning Plan**

First, students are introduced to the concept of "surrendering the one-up.".
The teacher says:

> *As young people, we sometimes view adults or even our friends or classmates as being above or better than us, whether we think they are better at a skill, smarter or prettier, or they are more confident or more popular. We are often discouraged by our perception of what people think of us and our abilities, which can affect our relationships. And then we may find ourselves doubting our abilities or worth.*
> *Think back to an encounter you have had with an adult or friend in which you doubted yourself. What about the encounter led you to feel insecure or caused you to doubt yourself? How did it affect the relationship you had with that person?* (Teacher gives students a minute to think.)

The students are then introduced to the activity:

> *For this activity, let's focus on the encounter you remembered. Think of how you felt and how you responded to the feeling. I am going to give you a partner, a piece of paper, and a marker. I want you both to find a place in the room and sit facing away from each other on the floor with your paper and marker.*
>
> *I want you to think about your encounter and write four words that describe your feelings of doubt you had in yourself. Did you feel less intelligent than the other person? Did you doubt your ability in a skill? I am going to give you a few minutes. Once you have written the words, I want you to stand, continuing to face away from each other.*

*Now that you're standing, think about your words and the immediate feeling each one evoked. Next, take 10 minutes to create a pose that represents each of those feelings. The pose can be standing or on the ground. It can involve your whole body or just one part. For example, if you felt embarrassed, you could cover your face. Let the emotions you felt in that encounter guide you in creating each pose. For example, when I did this activity I created:*

- *A closed off and small shape with my body when I thought about the feeling of self-consciousness*
- *A small pose on the ground when I thought about the feeling of insecurity*
- *A silly, childlike pose when I thought about the feeling of stupidity*

*Now face your partner and give your partner your paper. Take turns letting your partner say your written words out loud while you demonstrate the pose you choreographed for each word. Pay close attention to how you feel as your partner says the words out loud while you pose. Once you and your partner have both demonstrated your poses for each other, sit down, facing each other, and take five minutes to tell each other how you felt as you heard the words out loud and posed. In other words, how did your partner's words affect how you felt? Or, how did your feelings guide your poses?*

*Now that you are finished discussing, look at your partner and think about all the positive traits you see in that person or know about that person. Take five minutes, and, on your partner's paper, write four positive traits you see in your partner. You can think about: What are your partner's talents? What are your partner's strengths? Is your partner smart, kind, intelligent, helpful, generous, or funny?*
*Once you both finish writing, stand up and face each other. Each partner will take turns reading the words they wrote about the other out loud. As the partner reads each word they wrote about you, create a pose in the moment that reflects the feelings that word evokes. For example, when my partner said the word confidence, my pose was lifted, bold and exemplified strength. When my partner said the word intelligent, my pose was intricate and involved my whole body.*

*Once you each have a turn, take five minutes to discuss how you felt as your partner read the words and you posed. How did your partner's words affect your feelings? How were these poses different from your poses about doubt? Did your partner's words help you feel more confident?*

*Who would want to share their thoughts?* (Allow for response time)

*This activity reminds me that most of us have encounters that cause us to doubt ourselves, but we must remember that most of the time we are harder on ourselves, and people see*

*the positive in us and not the negative. It is important to erase the doubt in ourselves by focusing on our positive attributes. By realizing we have these positive traits and surrendering our doubts, we can be strong, and confident in our relationships and encounters with others.*

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**Processing the Experience**

The teacher can use these questions to facilitate either a class discussion or a free write that supports the meaning of the activity and encourages higher-level thinking.

- What emotions motivated your initial poses and how did your poses change when your partner read their words describing you?
- Why is it important in your life to know how to "surrender the one-up" and not believe in the doubts that arise?
- What, from this activity, can you put into action in your current and future relationships?

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**Extension of the Activity**

To build on this activity, the students can take their second set of poses, insert movement transitions between each pose, and choreograph a short combination. Once they create the combination, the class can learn each other's combinations, combine them and the combination can be the warm up activity each day. By performing the combination together, the students can be reminded of their ability to face the doubt of others with positivity and determination and continue to strive for their goals. When the students are confident with the combination, music can be chosen and added to the warm up.

**Pain to Power**

Spatial Requirements: Dance Room or Gymnasium
Activity: Movement/Individual
Dance Level: Beginner
Grades: 9-12
Time: Two, 45 minute class periods
Materials Needed: None

**Teacher's Guide**
These activities may bring forth emotions in students of which they are unaware exist. Below are some tips on how to handle these type of emotional situations:

- Before presenting the activity, establish a rapport with the students. These activities should not be introductory.
- Prior to the activity, share the activity with the counselors so they are prepared to assist students, if needed.
- Prepare the students by communicating the idea of the activity and inform them they may become emotional. Also, let the students know it is normal to experience emotion during the activity.
- If an emotional situation arises and the teacher does not feel equipped to handle it or a conversation becomes uncomfortable, the teacher should ask for help from the counselors.

**Introduction**
This activity is built upon the "Flip the Switch" lesson from the *WhyTry* program, which focuses on resilience and the concept of turning one's emotional pain into power. In this lesson, students practice this idea of turning pain into power by using improvisation to choreograph a dance sequence.

This activity explores the questions:
- Why is it important, for our mental health, to change pain into power?
- How can we change how we feel about past experiences?
- How can movement capture and convey the meaning of painful and powerful life experiences?

**Original Activity**
The original *WhyTry* activity divides students into four teams and asks them to pretend they are a company that is trying to teach the world about the importance of "flipping the switch." Each team is competing to create a commercial that will be chosen as the official "flipping the switch"

ad. They are given a bag of props to use in their commercial and once their commercial is created, they act out the commercial in front of the class, who are pretending to be the board of directors.

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*WhyTry* **Skills This Activity Promotes**
- Utilizing Support Systems
- Following Laws and Rules

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**National Core Arts Standards in Dance Supported in This Activity**

- **Creating - Explore**

  - **Anchor Standard 1:** Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

    - **Essential Question:** Where do choreographers get ideas for dances?
    - ➢ Explore a variety of stimuli for sourcing movement to develop an improvisational or choreographed dance study. Analyze the process and the relationship between the stimuli and the movement.

- **Responding - Interpret**

  - **Anchor Standard 8:** Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

    - **Essential Question:** How is dance interpreted?
    - ➢ Use artistic criteria to determine what makes an effective performance. Consider content, context, genre, style, or cultural movement practice to comprehend artistic expression. Use genre-specific dance terminology.

- **Connecting - Synthesize**

  - **Anchor Standard 10:** Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

    - **Essential Question:** How does dance deepen our understanding of ourselves, other knowledge, and events around us?
    - ➢ Analyze a dance to determine the ideas expressed by the choreographer. Explain how the perspectives expressed by the choreographer may impact one's own interpretation. Provide evidence to support one's analysis.

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Activity: **Pain to Power - Solo Movement Improvisation**

**Learning Plan**

First, students are introduced to the metaphor "flipping the switch" when it comes to turning pain into power.

The teacher says:

> *Sometimes in our lives we have moments that are painful. We might be in a fight with a parent, a friend betrays us, we get kicked off the team, or we might experience losing someone close to us. In those moments, though they are painful, we can work to explore our pain and find ways to become powerful rather than becoming lost in the painful experience. For some, this powerfulness is called resilience. For example, you tryout for the dance team at your school and you don't make the team. Are you upset? Of course you are, but instead of letting the pain and disappointment defeat you, you use those emotions to fuel your desire to practice more for the next try out, or you decide to focus on a different goal in your life; in other words, you turn pain into power. You used the pain and disappointment of defeat to power you to accomplish your goal. You showed resilience by "flipping your switch."*

The students are then introduced to the activity:

> *Let's begin today by thinking about a time when you had an emotionally painful experience. You can think about something big that happened, or something small. You can think about something that is happening now or something that has happened in the past.* (Teacher allows a minute for students to think.) *Choose something you feel comfortable thinking about and exploring today. There might be painful experiences that you don't want to think about right now, and that's ok, so pick something that feels manageable to you today.*
>
> *As we begin moving, use the experience you chose as your focus:*
>
> - *Find a space and sit in a comfortable position.*
> - *I am going to turn off the lights and turn on music.*
> - *As the music plays, create an arm movement that reminds you of how you felt when this painful experience happened.*
> - *Was it a feeling of emptiness, angry explosion, stillness of shock, urgency of escaping?*
> - *Show me how your arms can express these feelings in this experience.*
>
> *Now think about the opposite feeling of what you just explored with your arm. If the feeling you felt was anger, what would the opposite feeling be for you? What if the feeling you felt was emptiness? What would the opposite feeling be for you? Is it a feeling of excitement, joy, relief, peace?* (Teacher pauses)

*Once you have decided on your opposite feeling, imagine what movements you could use to portray that feeling. For example, if your original feeling was anger and your arm movements were sharp, quick, and harsh, your opposite movements could be soft, slow and flowy.*

*We will explore the first feeling again with the lights off, and then when I turn on the lights, that is your cue to switch to moving your arm with the opposite feeling. Really think about the quality of your movements when the lights were off and how they can now change to convey this opposite feeling with the lights on.*

The teacher allows one minute for movement with the lights off and then switches the light to on. After another minute with the lights on, the teacher says:

*Now freeze. What did it feel like when I flipped the switch on and you changed the movement? Did you feel a more positive energy as you created the opposite movement? How would you describe the positive energy you felt? How did your movement qualities change? In what ways did your movement interact with the music? Did you feel the music combined better with one feeling versus the opposite? Why or why not? Take a minute to explore how you changed your emotional pain into power. Raise your hand if you would like to share your experience.*

*Next, create a one minute movement sequence using movements and qualities you explored and created during your improvisation. Choose movement that shows your audience how, once the light turns on, you "flipped the switch." How can your movement show the experience of turning pain into power? The first part of your dance should look completely different than the second half. Our goal is to complete half of your dance by the end of class today and completely finished and ready to share by the end of class tomorrow.*

*This activity reminds me that most of us will experience a painful or disappointing moment in our lives, but it is how we choose to handle that moment that is most important. If we choose to "flip the switch" and turn our pain into power, the moment can fuel our desire to rise above the pain and show resilience.*

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**Processing the Experience**
The teacher can use these questions to facilitate either a class discussion or a free write that supports the goal of the activity and encourages higher-level thinking.

- What was the most challenging part of this activity for you?
- What were the main ideas about "flipping the switch" or turning pain into power you were trying to convey in your choreography? What movement choices did you make to help convey these ideas?
- What did you see in a classmate's choreography that inspired or moved you?
- What important ideas from this lesson will you take with you into your own life and apply to your experiences?

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**Extension of the Activity**
To build on this activity and create a sense of community and empathy in the class, the students can get in small groups and choose aspects of their own dance to combine in order to create a group dance. The students can also choose music that embodies the collected meaning of the dance they create together.

**Breaking Free**

Spatial Requirements: Dance Room or Gymnasium
Activity: Movement/Pairs
Grades: 9-12
Dance Level: Beginner
Time: 45 minutes
Materials Needed: One five-foot rope per pair of students

**Teacher's Guide**
These activities may bring forth emotions in students of which they are unaware exist. Below are some tips on how to handle these type of emotional situations:

- Before presenting the activity, establish a rapport with the students. These activities should not be introductory.
- Prior to the activity, share the activity with the counselors so they are prepared to assist students, if needed.
- Prepare the students by communicating the idea of the activity and inform them they may become emotional. Also, let the students know it is normal to experience emotion during the activity.
- If an emotional situation arises and the teacher does not feel equipped to handle it or a conversation becomes uncomfortable, the teacher should ask for help from the counselors.

**Introduction**
This activity is based on the "rock bottom resilience" concept from the *WhyTry* program. In a situation where one feels they have hit their lowest or "rock bottom," it can feel like there is no solution, however with resilience and problem solving it is possible to rise above or change the situation. In this activity, students identify this "rock bottom" feeling and then are led to imagine multiple solutions to the problem, thus practicing resilience. Students combine choreography and artistic expression while finding a way to become untangled from a rope and their partner. This task represents working through difficult situations and finding a solution with others, and the closing discussion helps students to process and reflect upon ways in which they solve problems in their own lives.

This activity explores the questions:
- Why is it important, for our mental health, to recognize our "rock bottom" moments and find solutions?
- How can working with others help us in times we feel there is no solution to a problem?
- How can having persistence and resilience help us see solutions we wouldn't normally see?

**Original Activity**

In the original *WhyTry* activity two students are connected with a handcuff knot (a knot that does not cinch and is safe). Then students are asked to find a way to disconnect from their partner without untying the rope or slipping the rope off their wrists.

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***WhyTry* Skills This Activity Promotes:**
- Coping with Peer Pressure
- Impulse Control
- Envisioning the Future

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**National Core Arts Standards in Dance Supported in This Activity:**

- **Performing - Express**

  - **Anchor Standard 4:** Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.

    - **Essential Question:** How do dancers work with space, time and energy to communicate artistic expression?
    - ➢ Sculpt the body in space and design body shapes in relation to other dancers, objects, and environment. Use focus of eyes during complex floor and air patterns or direct and indirect pathways.
    - ➢ Direct energy and dynamics in such a way that movement is textured. Incorporate energy and dynamics to technique exercises and dance performance. Use energy and dynamics to enhance and project movements.

- **Responding - Analyze**

  - **Anchor Standard 7:** Perceive and analyze artistic work

    - **Essential Question:** How is a dance understood?
    - ➢ Describe, demonstrate and discuss patterns of movement and their relationships in dance in context of artistic intent.

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Activity: **Breaking Free - A Choreographic Study**

**Learning Plan**

First, students are introduced to the concept of hitting "rock bottom."

The teacher says:

> *Have you ever been in a situation where you feel there is no chance of a positive outcome? How did you feel in this situation? Did it make you feel hopeless, anxious, or desperate?* (Teacher gives students a minute to think.) *These emotions can contribute to the feeling of "hitting rock bottom," in other words, the feeling that there is no solution. However, there are often multiple solutions to a problem that may not be obvious. Sometimes we have to analyze the situation and exercise our problem-solving skills. Solutions may also require more time, effort, and teamwork with others.*
>
> *Sometimes in life, we find ourselves tangled. And sometimes it feels difficult and we have to find a solution to help untangle ourselves. Think of a time in your life when you felt you had hit "rock bottom." What emotions did you feel? Did you feel tangled in your emotions? Did you feel there was no solution to your problem?* (Teacher pauses to allow for reflection.) *Sometimes we can find the solution to our problems on our own, but sometimes we may need help from others.*

The students are then introduced to the activity:

> *Look at this rope and imagine the rope represents a difficult situation in your life and you need to find a solution to your problem. You and a partner will take the rope and entangle yourselves in the rope. You will go under, over, around, and through each other's limbs until you are completely tangled.*
>
> *Once you are tangled, you will find a solution using movement or dance to untangle yourselves and break free from the rope (your difficult situation).*
>
> *Before you begin, let's talk about how to make movement dynamic. This will help your movement to have qualities, changes, and become more interesting to the viewer. I have posted a list of six vocabulary words on the board that represent dynamic movement qualities.*
> - *Sustained- slow, smooth, continuous*
> - *Percussive- sudden, sharp, choppy*
> - *Swinging- sway, to and fro, pendulum*
> - *Suspended- stillness, balance, high point*
> - *Vibratory- shake, tremble, wiggle*
>
> *As you choreograph your solution, think about ways you can incorporate these dynamic qualities into your dance to convey or communicate the solution. Use at least three of*

*these dynamic qualities in your choreography. As you incorporate these dynamic qualities, also be conscientious of the pathways you use throughout your movement. Is there a pattern in your pathways that enables you to find the solution more efficiently? You have this class period to complete the assignment.*

*This activity reminds me there are and will be moments in life where we feel there is no solution to a problem or that we have hit "rock bottom." When we feel entangled in our problems, it is important for us to remember there is often a solution, but it may not be obvious or we may need to rely on others to help us find that solution. Relationships, persistence, and support systems are all tools we can use to untangle ourselves and break free from or solve our problems.*

---

**Processing the Experience**

The teacher can use these questions to facilitate either a class discussion or a free write that supports the meaning of the activity and encourages higher-level thinking.

- What was most challenging about this activity?
- Did you ever feel like finding the solution was impossible?
- Did you ever want to give up? If so, what motivated you to keep going?
- Was finding a solution easier or harder with a partner? Why?
- Did you feel stuck or like you had hit "rock bottom?" What did it feel like when you found the solution? Do you think this is what it feels like to be resilient? Explain.
- How did your choreography communicate the feeling of "rock bottom" and resilience?

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**Extension of the Activity**

To encourage and promote teamwork, more than two students can share one rope, which would make the activity more challenging and require the students to work together. The students can also choose and incorporate music to accompany their movement sequence.