(Un) Tethered Dwellings: A Case Study Exploring One Program's Dancers and Their Experiences with Training, Community, Curriculum, and Identity

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This dissertation titled
(Un) Tethered Dwellings: A Case Study Exploring One Programs' Dancers and Their Experiences with Training, Community, Curriculum, and Identity

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Abstract

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(Un) Tethered Dwellings: A Case Study Exploring One Program's Dancers and Their Experiences with Training, Curriculum, Community, and Identity

Director of Dissertation: John E. Henning

The purpose of this study was to address a lack of reporting and description of dancers’ experiences in college dance programs. Although an area largely unexplored and undocumented, available information suggested that dance training in academe can be distressing for young dancers. This research explored the overarching research question: How do dancers describe experiences of being dancers at “C College?” This qualitative case study examined the experiences of dancers at a small, liberal arts institution in an effort to specifically explore: a) How (or is) previous dance training acknowledged or marginalized? b) How (or does) community inform experience, b) How (or does) the curriculum provide individualized learning experiences? and d) How (or does) one’s dance identity evolve or change?

Over the course of seven months and four field visits, naturalistic inquiry was used to collect data via individual interviews, observations, focus groups, and document analysis. The study included a total of 13 dancers and 3 dance faculty. Extensive coding and thematic analyses were used to analyze and compare data that largely satisfied the research questions but did not confirm the researcher’s a priori expectations. This study revealed that participants placed significant emphasis on the openness of the dance program which made previous training seem unnecessary or insignificant; identified
practices within this academic community that supported dancers; believed that dance curriculum and faculty encouraged personal investigation; and, recognized that dance identity evolves over time and in tandem with personal growth.

Currently, the necessary precursors to study dance in academe are neither clearly defined nor widely understood because there is vast disparity in what constitutes dance training prior to college. Therefore, this study surfaced important implications and recommendations for current or prospective dance students, dance faculty and college dance programs and directions for future research. The goal of this case study was not to generalize findings but instead to explore the bounded phenomenon in the dance program at C College.

Approved: ________________________________________________________________

John E. Henning

Professor of Teacher Education
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Chapter 1: Introduction

If I were reflecting on the model of traditional dance instruction, I would visualize a teacher standing at the front of the studio. Predictably, the technique class would unfold in regimented ways without pause to question the authority of the teacher as the major repository of knowledge (Stinson, 1994). Each dancer would be expected to imitate rather than explore or adapt movement material (Batson, 2008). A culture of modeled artistic practices and codified technical forms would be common place (Hagood, 2000). However, this codified, unitary approach is no longer the norm in college dance programs. Homogenized approaches for teaching and acquiring movement vocabularies have given way to a multitude of eclectic training permutations that place emphasis on individualized, student-centered approaches (Dittman, 2008).

These changes in instructional practices have been, in part, a response to changing student bodies. The composition of students in higher education is influenced by age, gender, sexual identity, ethnic, socio-economic status, and levels of preparation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). As student bodies become increasingly diverse, they are meeting greater economic challenges for funding their education and are forming different expectations of their college experience (Chickering & Kytle, 1999). Accordingly, programs must seek out ways to enhance offerings and interactions that maintain responsive connections with students and more clearly identify and honor individualized learning outcomes that serve the needs generated by this diversity (Chickering & Kytle, 1999).
In addition, the corporatization of the academy, as a shift toward a business model in higher education, has also changed expectations for learning, the value of knowledge, and the perceived cost/benefit of getting an education (Hundley, 2002). Simultaneously, there is an expectation that education will continue to produce a diverse and dynamic workforce to meet the needs of an evolving society. But there is still an expectation that education serves a common good and this is not easily captured by focusing on financial costs and institutional structures. Educators must therefore simultaneously examine what society values as indicators of performance and success (Dooris, Kelly, & Trainer, 2004).

Accordingly, dance programs in higher education must also continue to examine course offerings as juxtaposed with the academy’s struggles with knowledge boundaries, dwindling resources, and changing expectations for how a baccalaureate degree may contribute to the societal good (Hagood, 2000).

Dance in higher education has been and continues to evolve since its initial birth from work of Margaret H’Doubler in 1926. Since its inception, dance instruction in higher education has always been subject to reevaluation and reassessment. The responsiveness of the field, however, has not always been marked by programmatic individuation built upon faculty strengths or molded by unique curricular models (Hagood, 2000). Programs did not always have the flexibility or resources to individuate course offerings or distinguish unique approaches to dance study. In its initial decade, dance in academe was presented with a focus on a modern, creative and humanist approach (Hagood, 2000). In subsequent decades, dance programs struggled with comparisons to physical education, cultural changes in the professional dance field, and
dealing with the resurgence of ballet which placed emphasis and value on a particular aesthetic for dance and the dancing body.

In the 1960s, the post-modern Judson Church era ushered in the deconstruction of traditional dance and fostered the experimentation and imagination of avant-garde choreographers. Prior to this manifestation of post-modernism, dance in the academy had been defined through complicit practices whereby one “was not expected to enroll as a dance major and seriously question the policies and practices of the faculty. The transference of professional attitudes of compliance into the university studio was implicitly understood and expected. Subjective opinions about an appropriate body type, levels of technical virtuosity, demeanor, and potential in artistic talent permeated the culture of the professional dance world” (Hagood, 2000, pp. 226-227).

In response, college dance programs had to once again contextualize new approaches for re-envisioning a dance education that was more open to challenges against the absolutism of the dance world, the inclusion of student activism and voices, and an expressed receptivity to emerging artistic practices (Hagood, 2000; Bales, 2008). Today, dance programs continue to investigate traditional canons, theoretical perspectives, pedagogies, and curricular frameworks (Bales, 2008). The growth in the number of dance programs, curricular offerings, and formation of a national dance organization reflects the continued responsiveness of the field to changing considerations of contemporary practices.

An important consideration in this arena is program diversity. Prospective dancers have vast choice in choosing what can constitute their study of dance (Dance
All dance programs share some common factors but are expressed in a multitude of ways. Individual dance programs distinguish themselves in terms of faculty, facilities, program focus and/or unique course offerings. Although dance programs are not categorically defined or identified in such singularly explicit terms, one could argue that there are indeed, discernible “types” of dance programs. In part, dance programs could be potentially grouped according to their major curricular emphasis. For example, the curricular emphasis might be more focused on choreography and performance studies, or education and pedagogy, or technology, or critical inquiry and personal investigation, or technique/conservatory emphasis, or somatic study and body knowledge. This framework provides a lens for examining possible “types” of dance programs available to prospective dancers.

At this point in dance history, changing practices are rapidly expanding and add to the influences that have crafted a variety of class contexts and course offerings that often lead to individualized training considerations. Such changes generate considerations for how dance classrooms and programs are facilitating ways to enable a dancer to realize how his or her body uniquely discovers and reveals, acquires and expresses knowledge. Much of what shapes understanding of the plethora of options for dance study in higher education is an assumed existing membership in the professional dance community and understanding of its jargon and practices. Accepted membership into this community of practice (Andrzejewski, 2009) is essential for identity development and negotiating self (Wenger, 1998). Specific consideration of how a dancer may experience their previous
training, community, curriculum, and identity in the context of dance major study can help to crystallize this understanding.

**Previous Training**

Every dancer brings some type of previous experience to a program. Laying a strong foundation prior to entering a collegiate dance program is ideal for a dancer’s continued growth (Woerner, 2010). Years of dance classes and previous training have shaped histories and typically contributed to both identification as “a dancer” as well as the decision to pursue dance at the collegiate level (Buckroyd, 2000). Dancers generally expect that this preparation will serve to undergird a complex layer of attunement to learning about the body and its range for nuanced movement capabilities once in the academy.

However, there are innumerable variations on these levels of preparation, training, and skill which often results in inequality among first year competencies. Especially in the transition to dance study, limited knowledge or divergent experience can potentially stifle willingness and ability to facilitate learning and cause dancers to struggle to grasp unfamiliar forms and concepts (Schupp, 2010; see also Schupp 2007, 2008). Often, extended periods of time are allocated in dance major study for the detraining of habitual movement patterns (Bales, 2008) and an inferred devaluing of previous dance experience (Buckroyd, 2000). These challenges can foster a sense that a dancer’s unique story and dance identity are misaligned with collegiate dance study. Moreover, these inconsistencies may create wide ranging expectations of the collegiate dance experience.
which can result in reciprocal tension between idiosyncratic dance histories and how they relate to the definition(s) of dance study within a dance program.

For a young dancer preparing to enter the academy, there can be numerous disparities. Dancers have typically not been exposed to a variety of training practices. Nor have they typically engaged in artistic dance making. Many young dancers have not been taught efficient technique or schooled in the existing modern-ballet paradigm which remains prevalent in college dance programs. Kerr-Berry (2010) contended that reconsidering the long standing modern-ballet paradigm might be a central first step to re-envisioning dance in higher education in order to address varied dance backgrounds, levels of technical training, and participation in the dance community.

Although a majority of programs require an audition to assess students’ abilities, such auditions are seldom used to inform students of the possible differences or gaps in their current knowledge base and what will be expected of them in the program. In addition, their previous training is often marginalized and/or devalued. Further, when programs hear or create only a singular dance story, as defined by the long standing modern-ballet paradigm in higher education, there is risk for critical misunderstanding by students who have studied other genres. And finally, curricular structures or expectations within dance programs may enable certain stories to become the privileged means for sensing and knowing the dancing body.

**Community**

Dance, in the context of higher education, espouses formation of relationships that promote mutually creative approaches to expression and learning. Regardless of
students’ dance backgrounds, relationships with professors, peers, and members in the professional community are fundamental for growth (Schupp, 2010). Collaborative and mutually supportive experiences may serve as a basis to develop a personal aesthetic and scaffold learning in young dancers. Thus, the dance community and curriculum can provide opportunities that foster critical inquiry, articulation, and perception as means to engage students with how they think about dance and its interconnectedness. An understanding of this interconnectedness can inform both “meaning and the quality of life” (Simpson, 1991, p. 181). In part, this “mode of sensuous knowing” develops communal relationships and consciousness through cognitive and physical means of reflection (Abbs, 1991, p. 245).

An ability to articulate these lived bodily experiences, in tandem with expanding awareness, enables dancers to begin cultivating a purposeful practice that deepens an understanding of self, world, and the enunciation of artistic, aesthetic meaning (discussed in Chapter 2) (Fraleigh, 2004). Moreover, such explicit experiences to personally examine relationships, structures, and choices within the dance major community may help to ensure that a singular, codified story does not become the privileged means for sensing and knowing the dancing body. Such considerations will continue to be balanced with the awareness of an increasingly diverse student body and changing expectations within higher education.

**Curriculum**

In cultivating an understanding of performance through practice, it is acknowledged that the body itself is continuously engaged in performative and aesthetic
practices that are shaped by curriculum. Distinctive to dancers, the body is the manipulated tool through which learning is mediated (Fortin, 1998). In addition, the body is the singular vehicle for intimately sensing and consequently communicating complex movement patterns (Siegel, 1972). Aesthetic and expressive approaches (discussed in Chapter 2) are often interwoven into college dance curricula to advance a more personal experience of one’s body knowledge. Although implemented in varying degrees, these can provide both teachers and dancers with the potential for communicating and integrating movement concepts. Such training permutations provide individualized ways for learning, communicating and integrating dance and movement (Bales, 2008). Moreover, these approaches potentially scaffold the means by which programs hear and create multiple stories. When a singular definition for knowing one’s unique body is applied to the dance collective, there is a risk for critically misunderstanding one’s unique capabilities and embodiment. Moreover, as a practitioner, my experience has been that a narrow curricular focus can also reinforce the devaluing of students’ former training and experience.

**Identity**

Curriculum within a dance program molds new dance identities. Since dance is a collective practice where learning and development happen in a social space, collaboration with and comparison to others is inevitable (Andrzejewski, 2009). The public defining of success or failure, especially in terms of others’ performance and successes, sets up a competition in which most students inevitably feel defeated (Ormrod, 2006). Thus, dancers can begin to lose the fundamental feeling of what it is like to be a
capable dancer. Corrections and feedback from teachers contribute to a sense of inadequacy that overrides a sense of learning, development, and belief in self. Regular encounters with perceived failure can yield low self-efficacy and establish a cycle of emotions that perpetuates feelings that one is no longer capable of attaining positive results in the increasingly demanding dance classroom and studio. Because the daily embodiment of emotional and physical limitations for young dancers can increase their vulnerability to feelings of being incapable, dance can become about survival instead of a creative endeavor (Buckroyd, 2000).

Such feelings have been seen, in part, as a necessary rite of passage and were accepted because “there is a tradition in dance training that suggests that in order to be fully available for (professional) training, the student must empty herself (or himself) of everything” (Buckroyd, 2000, p.31). If so, this can distort the telling of dancers’ stories and perpetuate the idea that dance identities formed prior to collegiate study now pose a potential challenge for integrating new body knowledge and evolving dance identities (Buckroyd, 2000). “Learning is stifled in a space where individuals do not feel welcome. Everyone has an entry point; and if the paradigm is circular rather than linear, then all entry points become valid and valuable” (McCarthy-Brown, 2009, p. 122).

**Problem Statement**

There is limited documentation of dancers’ descriptions of their own lived experiences in a dance program. A literature search using the combination of search terms and parameters “documenting dancers’ experiences in college” uncovered no reports. Few reports were discovered specific to aspects of dancers’ body images and the
role of being a choreographer. Thus, awareness of these issues is important for integrating increasingly diverse students who arrive with varied secondary dance experiences and ability levels. Dance programs can open a space to begin to make sense of these conflicts and challenges while maintaining focus on the lived experiences of students as the vehicle for engaging in dialogue that integrates self, social, cognitive and aesthetic understanding. In the context of dance in higher education, these lived experiences must “not be in abstract but in relation to past and present aesthetic and artistic development” (Brinson, 1991, p. 69).

These considerations confirm that dance continues to be, by nature, experiential and provides a portrait of a changing contemporary art form. An agreed upon tenet is the need for continued cultivation of practices that honor both individual and collective voices. Melissa Nunn (2002) wrote that dance is a democratizing force in higher education that embraces a humanizing approach to appreciating differences. Dance can be empowering. Moreover, dance can validate experiences in order to empower and provide dancers with the tools to examine themselves and connect to the broader learning collective (Shapiro, 1998). However, dance major study can be a complex social, experimental and often unpredictable process of finding one’s fit. As previously mentioned, cursory insight into current literature illuminates initial mismatches that may exist between dancers’ previous training and the expectations of the dance program.

**Significance**

Research that specifically focuses on a better understanding of the possible convergence (or existence) of these complexities and if (or how) these translate to dance
majors is noticeably absent from the literature. With increased competition for diminishing financial resources and support, it can be difficult for collegiate dance programs to continue to reevaluate and reassess in order to embrace changing practices to assure that they are responsive to the needs of students. Anytime dance training in higher education could potentially or systematically break students of an existing sense of self, examination as to whether this comes with any benefits is warranted.

This raises two key points for situating the current research: 1) this is an area that is largely unexplored and undocumented, and 2) the information we do have suggests that dance training in academe can be fairly distressing for young dancers. Therefore, a compelling argument can be made for why the absence of this research is problematic and why in depth study of dancers within the context of their respective program is both timely and viable. Attention needs to be paid to the loss of students who may have been highly motivated to study dance for years; who have completed the admission process; and who have not lost desire to dance. If it is assumed that departments cannot thrive without students who choose to study dance in their programs and subsequently remain at the institution to earn an undergraduate degree, then better understanding the experiences of students is a worthwhile endeavor.

**Purpose of the Study**

To address the lack of reporting and description of dancers’ experiences, the purpose of this case study was to explore the overarching research question: How do dancers describe their experiences of being dancers at C College? This study examined these experiences of dancers in an effort to specifically explore: a) How (or is) previous
dance training acknowledged or marginalized? b) How (or does) community inform experience, c) How (or does) the curriculum provide individualized learning experiences? and d) How (or does) one’s dance identity evolve or change? Data was collected via interviews, observations, document analysis, and focus groups. It was assumed that dancers’ experiences at C College were valid and warranted mindful attention. As such, these data provided information needed for thematic qualitative analysis that was interpreted in relation to the experiences of these dancers and related issues.

Consideration of the Case

The primary purpose of the present case study was to understand how dancers describe their experiences of being dancers at C College. Personal experience, or one’s story, is often considered the raw, generative material for creativity, expression, and identity (Smith, 2005). The emphasis of this research focused on specific exploration of previous training, community, curriculum, and identity. First, this research examined where dance programs choose to start the telling of dancers’ stories of training, usually marked by arrival to the academy. Although years of previous dance training have typically shaped a young dancer’s choice to pursue study at the collegiate level, this training is often marginalized and/or devalued. Second, when dance communities hear or create only a singular dance story there is risk for critical misunderstanding (or exclusion) of students who have studied other genres or have diverse interests. Modern and ballet constitute the paradigm in higher education which has generationally defined the narrative for professional, technical training. Next, curricular structures and expectations within dance programs may enable certain stories to become the privileged means for
sensing and knowing the dancing body. Curricular structures often delimit a right/wrong approach to learning dance and preference a particular modality for learning about the body. Finally, deeply personal and collectively shaped dance experiences may inform the story of one’s evolving identity. There are a multitude of factors that may influence how dancers see themselves in the field and juxtaposed against social practices.

While these may not be discrete items, C College provided a context that was considered most salient and accessible for informing the intrinsic goals of this case study research. In addition, the dance department at C College is a small, intimate environment that allowed for maximal inclusion of the dance population in order to illuminate most fully these elements of the study of dance as they are tied to unique human experiences.

Access to resources, funding and facilities were assumed to affect the offerings and structuring of the dance program. It was assumed that dancers, as well as the dance faculty, would be willing participants in addressing and interpreting their individual and collective experiences. Finally, it was assumed that the data collected during the research process would provide a basis for analyzing, understanding and describing what it is like to be a dancer at C College.

Limitations of Design

There are three identified limitations in the design of the current study. First, it was acknowledged that C College does not provide a balanced cross-section that is reflective of undergraduate dance programs across the entire United States. The purpose of this case study, however, was not to generalize findings from this context to other
undergraduate dance populations. The purpose was instead to gain an in depth understanding of the considerations unique to C College.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching designates C College as a more selective institution with an arts and science focus and no graduate coexistence. As such, a second limitation could be inherent in the make-up of the general student body at C College since it is comprised of individuals that can both afford a private education and have already proven themselves to be motivated and academically successful students.

A third limitation acknowledged that the whole of what was happening during the four year dance experience would not be detailed given the length and scope of this case study. This research did not espouse to be able to capture and convey all of the content and processes that were potentially meaningful and/or educative of dancers. Instead, the current case study was limited, preliminary, and conceptualized as the beginning of a research trajectory.

**Rationale for Terms**

It was acknowledged that different terms might have different meanings or applications across settings or cases. As such, understanding certain terms in light of the current research purposes is valuable. Some brief definitions offer relevant context:

1. Secondary dance experiences: any form of dance classes and training that occurred between ninth and twelfth grades.
2. Studio course: a course that is movement-based in nature (i.e., composition, improvisation, technique and etcetera). The primary goal is on development and refinement of technical proficiencies and/or dance making, performance skills.

3. Classroom course: a dance course that is not primarily taught as movement-based (i.e., anatomy, theory, history, criticism, critical inquiry and etcetera). The emphasis is not specifically on technical training or movement acquisition but rather on cognitive understanding.

4. Although the majority of participants in this case study were female, gender neutrality will be employed whenever possible. Unless referring to a specific participant, every effort was made to readily acknowledge the presence and contributions of both male and female dancers and dance faculty in the field. The researcher recognized that the use of male OR female herein can be seen as reinforcing the socially constructed gender binary. In no way was this intended to communicate a lack of acknowledgment or awareness that there are multiple expressions and enactments of gender and sexuality.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to explore the overarching research question: How do dancers describe their experiences of being dancers at C College? An examination of the experiences of dance majors specifically explored: a) How (or is) previous dance training acknowledged or marginalized? b) How (or does) community inform experience c) How (or does) the curriculum provide individualized learning experiences? and d) How (or does) one’s dance identity evolve or change? C College could be considered the “type” of dance program primarily focused on critical inquiry and personal investigation. Inherent in this program is an approach to dance major study that provides a degree of freedom and opportunity for students to develop a personal narrative for how they choose to engage and shape their dance major experience.

Students enter a collegiate dance program from different places, with particular dance training histories, and uniquely formed identities. Once in the program, opportunities supported by the community and/or provided by the curriculum may inform the ways in which students’ learning, prior knowledge, and evolving identities are experienced and/or transformed over time. Thus, the specific tracing of dancers’ stories of experience may provide insight as to how students develop within a particular program of study: from initial entry into dance major study through the culminating final project and graduation.

Herein, I consider literature appropriate to the overarching research question. The preliminary nature of this case study, however, recognized that the literature presented
here is embedded and contextualized within a much larger literature piece. Notably, the potential influences on students’ perceptions of their dance experience, when examined through the types, development, or evolution of dance programs in higher education, are vast. In addition, the current case study examined dancers within a respective program: first year through graduating seniors. It is acknowledged that more finite literature might need to be considered if exploration was limited to a specific stage of development or year of study within the dance program.

As such, exploration was purposefully delimited to literature that arguably could provide a broad framework for examining the threads of dancers’ experience under study: previous training, community, curriculum, and identity. First, in order to contextualize dancers’ previous training, literature on self-efficacy was explored to provide better understanding of the broader educational and learning issues within the current study. Second, literature on community dance was reviewed to locate questions specific to dance education and classroom contexts. Next, curriculum was considered through aesthetics, somatic studies, and theories of the body to identify possible learning constructs within the dance program. Finally, sources were sought that would enable the researcher to map formation of identity specific to the age group under study and dance education.

This framework guided initial understanding for some of the considerations and structures that may dynamically influence dancers’ experiences within their chosen program of study. Fraleigh (2000) called for increased research of personal experiences via “the validation of personal and shared experience” and “dancing as way of knowing”
An examination of this literature and its potential association to the experiences of dancers within a specific program of study has not been presented in any recent, enumerative review.

**Previous Training**

The choice to pursue advanced study of dance assumes that requisite knowledge and skills were acquired through previous training. This previous training ideally lays a strong foundation for dance major study (Woerner, 2010). This prior knowledge and experience is viewed “as complementary and informing to developing knowledge and experience” (Loughran, 2006, p. 124). Furthermore, previous training should provide both direction for students’ learning processes (Schiller, 1954) and produce active participation by encouraging students to trust their experiences and intuition (Kant, 1952). However, because entrance into academe is often scripted as the beginning of professional study, dancers’ previous training is often devalued, marginalized and/or viewed as having “nothing to offer in the way of their (professional) training” (Buckroyd, 2000, p. 60). Resultantly, as dancers attempt to integrate diverse training backgrounds into dance major study, they can struggle to reconcile different expectations in the program (McCarthy-Brown, 2009) with their previously acquired dance knowledge and skills. One way to view this association is through examination of the literature on self-efficacy and how that relates to previous training.

**Self-Efficacy**

Dance knowledge and skills, developed through years of previous training, typically mature in tandem with the belief that one is capable of being a successful
dancer. Thus, to illuminate broader issues that may be present in the educational context, literature on self-efficacy was examined to better understand learners generally and dance majors specifically. Bandura (1989) posited that self-efficacy beliefs regulate assessment of personal capabilities, goal setting, motivation, and action. The judgment of how capable someone believes they will be in performing such tasks or behavior is self-efficacy. Those with high self-efficacy are more likely to persevere and put forth greater effort in the face of adversities, difficulties, or frustrations (Bandura, 1986).

Accordingly, it is having the requisite dance skills in combination with the efficacy beliefs to use those skills competently that are necessary for effective functioning (Bandura, 1997).

Thus, people are more likely to engage in behaviors that they not only feel they are capable of executing, but also the behaviors in which they feel they can be successful. “Among the mechanisms for personal agency, none is more central or pervasive than people’s beliefs in their capabilities to exercise control over their level of functioning and environmental demands. Unless people believe that they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act” (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996, p. 1206). Self-efficacy beliefs are active and ongoing contributors to one’s attainments; shifting understanding to one of personal agency and causation rather than passive circumstance (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, self-efficacy beliefs can play a powerful regulative function in merging a dancer’s previous training with the broad structural network of influences that are present in the dance major program (Bandura, 1986).
This network of evolving learning processes and social influences can challenge one’s prior knowledge, self-efficacy, and the process of individuation (Bonk & Kim, 1998). Thus, the changeover from secondary to college-level (dance) study is an especially profound time of transition as students look to define their future selves (Harter, 1999). Changes in roles and relationships, along with valuation of previous training, can lead to confusion and contradictions (Harter, 1999). Without the skills to fully solve such dilemmas, this time of transition is marked by concerns over “which attributes define the true self” (Harter, 1999, p. 69) and avoidance of adhering permanent labels to evolving identities and sense of self (Raible & Nieto, 2008). Such tensions are a clear demarcation of the period of late adolescence to early adulthood; making it difficult to map the journey of experience and expression (Nelson & Barry, 2005). As this review examines these tensions, the emerging adult will refer to persons between eighteen and twenty four years of age.

Exploration during emerging adulthood can occur in multiple domains. For example, the emerging adult begins to consider the many roles and responsibilities of becoming an adult. One related responsibility is career choice. Self-efficacy drives assumptions about preparedness for one’s future and informs viability of career choice (Bandura, 1997). As acknowledged by Erikson (1968), examining self in relation to possible career choice is a fundamental concern for the emerging adult. “The interactional effects of personal and socio-structural determinants during this major transitional phase in life are important contributors to the organization of personal life courses” (Bandura, 1997, p. 184). The selection of a particular college major is
mediated, in part, by appraisal of the likelihood of success or failure on this career path (Bandura, 1997). Thus, the ability to exercise control over evolving roles and responsibilities allows for management of transitional stressors to collegiate dance study as well as an increased sense of personal competence and mastery: the opposite holds true for those with low self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Emerging adults with low self-efficacy can experience nagging doubts about personal capabilities. Therefore, a second example during this stage of development is personal goal setting and attainment. Personal goals contribute to how individuals situate themselves within their learning environment and community (Ormrod, 2006). Through simultaneous processes of observation and reflection, individuals compare their attainments to others (Erikson, 1968) and against variables that directly shape development and learning (Smith & Pourchot, 1998). Bandura (1997) posited that it is important to understand these natural processes for emerging adults: they often experience a loss of personal control, confidence in their abilities, and develop sensitivity to social evaluation. High self-efficacy can render these doubts more tolerable and support realistic examination of personal goal setting and attainment (Bandura, 1997).

As social structures, relationships, and roles change, the emerging adult may be ambivalent about status as an adult (Nelson & Barry, 2005). Thus, a final example distinctive in the emerging adult is navigation of varied desires and confusions about uniformity versus conformity and individuation versus deviation (Erickson, 1968). In addition, the perceived usurping of personal expression may present challenges that elicit highly emotional responses as the emerging adult seeks new representational framework
for identification. Such dynamic pulls may provide enduring opportunity for the emerging adult to resolve inner and outer conflicts that lead to increased capacity to know one’s self (Erikson, 1968). Taken together, the three domains of career choice, personal goal setting and attainment, and navigation of changing structures illuminate some of the normative processes which unfold in the emerging adult. For dancers, previous training and self-efficacy beliefs have significantly shaped the choice to pursue dance (Bandura, 1997). These factors influence much of what will happen in the future as students navigate changing structures within the dance community (Erikson, 1968).

**Community**

Dancers’ previous training can influence how they interact and experience community within a dance program. Dance, as a collective practice, may contribute to one’s evolving sense of self and place (Greens, 1995). Houston (2008) wrote that fundamentally, “dance is a practice that requires cooperation and communication, a sharing of physicality and mental agility that may precipitate creative energy and communal feeling in the moment of the dance” (p. 15).

First, exploration of writings on community dance contributes to understanding of what factors may support a favorable outcome and/or experience for dancer majors within their community. Some authors provide evidence that community is strengthened through dance practices which require “being excited by the possibilities offered by different people and different dance traditions” (Bartlett, 2008, p. 39). These practices include: a) an inherent valuing for not only who is dancing but also where they come from and what dancing uniquely means to them as a way of appreciating rather than
invalidating experience (Thomson, 1994; Woerner, 2010), b) a fostering of creativity through communication regardless of differing contexts and impacts (Brinson, 1991), c) the ritualizing of respect to “balance self-involvement with group sensitivity” (Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010, p. 16), and d) the production of beneficial results for both the individual dancer and the dancing collective (Amans, 2008; Bartlett, 2008). Taken together, these considerations provide a framework for appreciating differences rather than perpetuating divisiveness (Wilson, 2008).

A second consideration in the literature on community is its relation to classroom contexts. Several general findings emerged. First, democratic classrooms invite students to dynamically learn from each other (Giroux, 2009) and provide students with rights, responsibilities, and shared decision making (Bartolome, 2009). Peterson (2009) wrote that students become autonomous learners as they listen, speak, and collaborate via these democratic relationships. A second, similar finding is traced through the literature on critical pedagogy which aims to cultivate dialogue in the classroom. Students are free to articulate their own world and are provided a democracy for listening beyond differences (Darder, 2009). In turn, this encourages students to create their own learning which serves to actively challenge their reality and embrace their previous experiences (Freire, 1970). Shapiro (1998) echoed that critical pedagogy used in classrooms explicitly validates dancers’ experiences in order to empower and provide the tools to examine themselves in connection to the broader learning community.

A third theme of community in classroom contexts is critical thinking and dialogue as central tenets of experiential learning. Critical thinking promotes openness to
others’ ideas and viewpoints in order to provide insight to examine content and courses of action (Norris & Ennis, 1989). This process is both reflective and interactive; communicating that the object of study is not the exclusive property of a teacher or an educational institution. Peterson (2009) wrote that generative themes that encourage dancers and teachers to mutually engage in such critical reflection and critique are pivotal to creating and sustaining meaningful learning environments that are responsive to developing identities. “Education in general, and dance education in particular, should focus on developing the ability to see the connection between actions and their consequences and between means and ends, to take cognitive risks, and to extend thinking beyond the known in order to deal effectively with what might be rather than with what is” (Hanstein, 1990, p. 57).

Resultantly, a sense of community incites students to break through perceived limits, openly challenge conventions, and examine assumptions through collaborative, dialectic processes (Greene, 1995). Freire (1970) stated, “Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (pp. 73-74). Community can honor individuals generally, and root dance majors specifically, in a sense of place (Greene, 1995) and collective practice.

**Applications to Dance**

As a collective, communal practice, learning dance typically happens in social comparison to others. Such comparison of self to others is ongoing, affirms belonging, and illuminates inconsistencies or contradictions with who one feels they are or how they
are viewed by their community (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2000). Thus, the public defining of success or failure, especially when witnessed in terms of others’ performance and success, sets up a competition in which most students may inevitably feel defeated (Ormrod, 2006). Moreover, the general structure of dance studio courses regularly places a group of collective students in relation to the teacher rather than an individual dancer connecting and integrating new knowledge. As a result, the dance community is where “individual identities and needs meet group standards, expectations, obligations, responsibilities, and demands” (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2000, p. 10).

Although studies have not explicitly indicated causality, there are several reasons why structures in communal dance contexts are worth considering. First, Buckroyd (2000) wrote that when delivered publically and with overt authority from teachers, corrections and feedback can override dancers’ sense of their learning, development, and belief in self. Barr (2009) concurred with the importance of teacher feedback in technique class and highlighted the tremendous impact that this feedback can have on training, classroom dynamics and student voice. A second reason is that dance in higher education espouses formation of relationships that promote mutually creative approaches to expression and learning. Schupp (2010) expressed that building relationships is fundamental for growth regardless of students’ dance backgrounds. However, dancers’ experiences with hierarchical class structures, the teacher/dancer relationship, and perceived failures often make it difficult to establish meaningful models for succeeding in the dance classroom (Buckroyd, 2000).
Regular encounters with perceived failure can trigger a downward spiral of emotions that perpetuates feelings that reinforce a feeling of inadequacy and that one is no longer capable of attaining positive results in the increasingly demanding dance classroom (Buckroyd, 2000). Ormord (2006) cited achievement can be increased when students are encouraged to look at their personal accomplishments and improvement rather than in direct, social comparison to others within their community. Appropriate levels of independence, individuality, connection, and responsibility are especially important for the emerging adult (Nelson & Barry, 2005). As such, “functional rules for evaluating social comparative information can be modeled in a fashion so that the performances of others serve as instructive guides and motivators rather than as demoralizers” (Bandura, 1997, p. 172). A fourth consideration is the ways in which dancers’ identities are developed and reinforced through interactive, ongoing experiences (Bracey, 2004). The daily embodiment of emotional and physical limitations and comparisons can increase young dancers’ vulnerability to feelings of being incapable (Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010) rather than focused on personal acquisition of movement skills and accomplishing individualized goals. Taken together, this literature suggests that attention to the structures and supports within the dance community may be important when examining the experiences of dancers.

Curriculum

Previous training and community are embedded in a multitude of curricular considerations and training permutations. As such, curriculum can be a major organizing factor of experience. The intersectionality between personal experience (previous
training) and social interaction (community) opens a space for learning that can facilitate encounters which shape, adapt, and build meaning (Dewey, 1934).

Curriculum can provide meaningful encounters that produce reflection on the whole of dance training. Applebee (1996) asserted that such encounters should be marked by entrance into a dialogue whereby students become the subjects - rather than objects - of an educative and collaborative process for meaning making. Further, students’ dialogical involvement in curriculum can break down barriers, foster ownership, and strengthen curriculum (Peddiwell, 2004) by providing domains for conversation which generate the “primary means of teaching and learning” (Applebee, 1996, p. 37). As such, involvement in domains for conversation can surface relevant connectedness and interrelatedness to a variety of contexts and skills for students (Applebee, 1996).

Involvement occurs not simply by providing choice for what gets included in the curriculum. Instead, authentic involvement necessitates continuous questioning and exploration for how art and culture are produced and viewed through various contexts of the curriculum (Freedman, 2003). According to Freedman, such curricular exploration thus relies more on the “surprising crossings of aesthetic levels in the creation of knowledge, and for the unexpected outcome that surpasses planned objectives” rather than being tethered to strict course delineations and/or personal agenda (p. 25).

Based on students being dialogically involved in exploration of curriculum, literature further indicates that there are several factors that may need re-valuation specific to instructional and curricular structures long taken for granted in dance (Greene,
First, shifts in training practices reveal that “dancers who create their own curriculum in the service of a unique dancing identity of their own design – is specific to this time and place in the evolution of dance” (Dittman, 2008, p. 22). By providing voice and relevancy to students for how they want their educational experiences to take shape, individualized and eclectic approaches offer choice and ongoing opportunity for independent and self-directed study (Calabro, 1969; Weldy, 1970). Second, there is need to continuously examine the tradition of the hierarchical model of following the teacher rather than finding synergistic relationships and initiations in the dance classroom (Stinson, 1994). Moreover, instructional strategies used in the dance classroom should honor the subjective experience and personal knowledge of students as reliable sources for further development of experiential understandings (Batson, 2008; Fortin, 1998).

Ability to articulate these experiences, in tandem with an expanding awareness, can enable a purposeful practice in the arts to be cultivated (Greene, 2001) that can deepen an understanding of self, world, and the enunciation of artistic meaning (Fraleigh, 2004). As students begin to engage with how they think about dance and its interconnectedness to the broader curriculum, individual experience becomes the starting point for crafting and honoring meaning to advance one’s personal aesthetic.

Aesthetics Considered

As cultural images and social values evolve, education can be responsive to social knowledge’s influence on the development of a personal aesthetic (Freedman, 2003). Moreover, an increasingly visual culture creates multiple means for individuals to shape their learning and understand their experience (Freedman, 2003). Aesthetics are
embedded within complex social relationships because aesthetic experience cannot be separated from daily life that is interactive - and often simultaneously- about culture, social relationships, personal expression, process, and product (Dewey, 1934). Thus, through social interactions an aesthetic education can be “an intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagement with the arts by enabling learners to notice what there is to be noticed, and to lend works of art their lives in such a way that they can achieve them as variously meaningful. When this happens, new connections are made in experience: new patters are formed, new vistas are opened. Persons see differently, resonate differently…” (Greene, 2001, p.6).

Evidence suggests that collaborative interactions provided by the curriculum may serve as a basis for developing a personal aesthetic in young dancers and artists. A curriculum that provides ongoing opportunities to gain understanding of the nature of art and one’s individual experiences with that art can broaden awareness of personal values and ways of communicating (Crawford, 1991). In turn, this understanding develops discriminate approaches for experiencing art; expanding one’s creation, appreciation, and preservation of that art (Crawford, 1991). Dance curriculum can purposefully investigate the “surprising crossings of aesthetic levels in the creation of knowledge, and for the unexpected outcomes that surpasses planned objectives” rather than being tethered to strict course delineations (Freedman, 2003, p. 25).

Through this ongoing investigation of experience, meaning can be constructed or reconstructed to build new knowledge. Students’ ability to communicate multiple connections to art can inform both “meaning and the quality of life” (Simpson, 1991, p.
In addition, development of these connections broadens awareness (Crawford, 1991) and advances sensitivity to the way one produces and processes learning about art. Aesthetic experiences, as provided by the curriculum, can thus expand possibilities for making informed choices about the creation, appreciation, and preservation of art (Crawford, 1991). Aesthetics can foster personal expression for seeing and critically interacting with the world (Eisner, 2002).

It is important to note that some authors voice contention with aesthetic education. One such challenge is that “aesthetics” is albeit a misleading concept that is often left meaningfully un-interrogated (McFee, 1992). In addition, aesthetic studies are better directed towards a theory of understanding (McFee, 1992; Scruton, 1983) because of the explicit and vital connection between expression in dance and understanding dance. Dance must ultimately be deciphered to be fully understood (Wolheim, 1979). Aesthetic education is therefore work that is more accurately described as and based in artistic education (Best, 1984).

**Dance Education**

Aesthetics, “a mode of sensuous knowing,” can develop consciousness through both cognitive and physical means of reflection (Abbs, 1991, p. 245). Marcia Siegel (1972) described the physical means for training the body in dance technique as both the movement itself and a systematic approach to movement processes as a whole. Her “technique-as-aesthetic” supports training of the body as not merely mechanical but also having expressive and aesthetic components (p. 107). Thus, it may be advantageous for continuous, physical reproduction of steps in dance classes - often automatic through
memorization, repetition, and practice - to give way to dancers’ taking risks in order to attend to numerous possibilities within movement (Fortin, 1998). As new knowledge takes different paths through the body, physicality and technical sophistication manifest themselves (Freedman, 2003). A curriculum that provides integration, wholeness, connectedness, and options for bodily organization is central to releasing habitual movement patterns in both the learning and teaching of dance (Fortin, 1998).

**Somatic Study**

To date, writings have focused on evolving methods in dance training with sparse attention given to explicit connectivity between dancers’ experiences and the curriculum as a whole. Given that these evolving methods generally, and somatic studies specifically, have repeatedly emerged across the literature, it is believed that they are important considerations when examining curricular offerings. By definition, somatic practices “emphasize autonomous self-regulation and intentionality as the fulcrum of learning through the undivided body-mind. The somatic learning model emphasizes the embodied, processual nature of the soma, where self-guiding and transformational capabilities are realized through a sensed, bodily experience” (Batson, 2008, p. 146). In dance contexts, somatic study can facilitate opportunities to individually navigate movement as an explorer; envisaging the emergence of new information with freedom that allows “a search for openings without which our lives narrow and our pathways become cul-de-sacs” (Greene, 1995, p. 17). Therefore, the construction and integration of new body knowledge is based, in part, on previous experience and viewed as parcel to the whole of the learning process.
More specifically, pioneers of somatic practices developed specific approaches to learning about the body. Moshe Feldenkrais (Feldenkrais & Reese, 1985; Feldenkrais, 1990) altered the use of body alignment by placing the body in a field of action rather than mere position and static posture. F.M. Alexander (1932) realized that posture and movement were a continuum. Irene Dowd (1981), Lulu Sweigard (1974), and Mabel Elsworth Todd (1937) re-conceptualized the body as a moving system with development of Ideokinesiss: a crafted method of training and realignment through neuromuscular re-patterning based on a moving, sensing image. And, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen developed Experiential Anatomy and Body-Mind Centering practices which make “developmental use of somatic movement awareness” (Fraleigh, 2004, p. 129).

Additional research in this area has extended and expanded on the foundational work of these and other pioneers including: a) use of imagery to train dancers and refine movement practices (Dowd, 1995; Franklin, 1996), b) re-education of dancers based on unique bodily responses and knowledge (Batson 2008; 2010), c) facilitation of experiential anatomy to heighten sensory awareness (Olsen & McHose, 1991), d) examination of teachers’ pedagogical approaches to teaching dance (Fortin, 1998), e) attunement to the specific learning styles of individual dancers (Bolles & Chatfield, 2009), f) enhancement of skill acquisition and self-image (Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010), and g) development of personal approaches for training and knowing the body (Knaster, 1996).Taken together, this growing literature underscores importance for the incorporation of curricular practices that focus on one’s unique body knowledge: ultimately rooted in previous training and supported through community dance practices.
Theories of the Body

Consistent with writings on somatic study, the study of dance magnifies body knowledge as created through performative practices. Cultivation of these practices can tap into bodily functioning at many levels of one’s being; recognizing the body as both the dancers’ primary tool and as a socially inscribed construct (Mauss, 1973). The following literature examines theories of the body as not solely a physical body, but also the relationship of the sensing, social, and receptive modes that construct and train the body. Unique to dancers, the body is the primary source for embodied knowledge and aesthetic experience (Barkan, 1975).

Body as Instrument

Marcel Mauss (1973) posited that the body’s actions are mediated and transformed by culminating techniques of the body as a social, psychological, and biological entity. “Very roughly, technique is bodily training for a dancer, inculcating certain fairly specific sets of bodily skills” (McFee, 1992, p.201). For Mauss, such skills are developed alongside a familiarity of the body’s usefulness which cannot be separated from its connection to the unconscious state of being and development. Thus, numerous interactions impact the use of the body and its means for communication including posturing, gesturing, carriage, and movement of the body (Mauss, 1973). Mauss’s theory advanced thinking of the body as an instrument that is adaptable and malleable over time through imitation, repetition, and skill acquisition.
Self/World: Mind/Body

Continuous navigation of experience requires that an individual define both self and the world experienced whereby the knowledge of self equips one with the ability to access the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1999). The body is capable of expressing its existence at every moment and of symbolizing this existence through actualizing it through an evident body-self relationship that cannot be severed (Merleau-Ponty, 1999). Bodily experiences, therefore, are related to consciousness of meaning and dialectical processes; recognizing the need for the physical body before one can think about what it means to exist and to move from and within that body (Fraleigh, 2004). Initially through perception, bodies are capable of internally taking something in, transforming it, experiencing it, and rendering it a concrete form for later use (Merleau-Ponty, 1999). To this extent, every perception is a form of communication with the body because this is the starting point for unifying things in the environment/world through the instrument of sensation. Accordingly, the curriculum can be the critical connector for what is already carried within (the mind) as well as what is yet to be integrated into being (the body) by ultimately mediating how the body forges new connections and knowledge (Merleau-Ponty, 1999).

Defining the Body

The body is a site constructed by both power and discourse (Foucault, 1990). Bodies are ubiquitous and the materialization of bodies through such discourses, regulations, and practices creates both social and political life (Casper & Moore, 2009). Analysis of power within contemporary society reveals that some bodies are considered
valuable and made more visible while others are rendered invisible or “missing.” (Casper & Moore, 2009). As such, the body is constituted by an ongoing inscription, marginalization, and categorization according to socially contrived meanings and typologies of what does or should define the “normal” body (Grosz, 1996). Body images are thus intimately constructed and tied not only to biology but also to the attributes assigned to the body through socialized norms including: bodily boundaries, perverse or socially intolerable bodies, and the image of beauty and perfection (Grosz, 1996).

As such, subjects acquire an identity in relation to their own unique body because each experience belongs first to the physical body as it directly experiences its environment (Husserl, 1999). The body “is fundamental to the narratives by which we make sense of ourselves and our world” (Garland Thomson, 1996, p. 1). Current literature suggests that a dancer’s identity is often tethered to his or her image and definition of the physical body. The demands by the profession for a socially inscribed, ideal body image can routinely challenge one’s self-image, physical, and psychological health (Thomas, Keel, & Heatherton, 2005; Anshel, 2004).

As dance training can readily uproot held beliefs about the body’s physique and capabilities, some authors contend that multi-dimensional definitions of the physical body should be embraced throughout the curricula and more balanced perspectives of dancers’ strengths and skills should be presented (Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010). Ideally, interrelatedness among teachers, peers, dance community, and the curriculum can establish structures for surmounting doubts and challenges to the training and retraining of a dancer’s body (McCarthy-Brown, 2009).
To better facilitate this training of dancers in academia, programs may need to move beyond the scope of studio-based courses to more broad curricular foci on theory, education, and applicability of more comprehensive skill sets (Van Dyke, 2009). Students seldom learn dance with an ongoing opportunity to gain critical insight on how to utilize material across settings or incorporate skills in differing contexts. Furthermore, “dancers typically learn to reproduce what they receive, not to critique or create” (Stinson, 1998, p. 28). Combined with a continuous utilization and analysis of developing personal aesthetics and body knowledge, such curricular shifts must also maintain cultural relevance for young dancers (McCarthy-Brown, 2009).

**Identity**

It is generally understood that identity encompasses one’s personal characteristics such as race, sex, age, religion, sexual orientation, culture, language, and family/social structures. Although the foundations for understanding these aspects of one’s identity are laid in early childhood, it is during the stage of late adolescence and emerging adulthood that a plethora of changing biological, cognitive, social, and educative expectations can challenge held beliefs (Nelson & Barry, 2005). Ongoing, lived experiences therefore continue to grow one’s identity into an “embodiment of self-understanding” (Nakkula, 2008, p. 11) that is both deeply personal and collectively shaped. As a young dancer’s previous training is integrated into the dance community and then, in turn, is further shaped through the dance curriculum, a personal dance identity also evolves.

As identity evolves, there is continuous and simultaneous examination of “Who am I?” and “Who does the world say I am?” (Tatum, 2000). Peers, parents, teachers,
neighbors, colleagues, habits, media, cultural images, or a sense of being missing from a collective can all powerfully shape and impact identity (Tatum, 2000). As these relationships change over time, so do the corresponding influences on one’s identity. An ability to express identities that are in flux, in both personally meaningful and socially acceptable ways, is therefore a benchmark for the emerging adult (Raible & Nieto, 2008).

**Identity Crisis**

Erikson used the term “identity crisis” to locate the process of identity formation in which individual exploration of identity cannot be separated from the communal culture. As the emerging adult develops both personally and socially, moments of potential crisis arise due to these perspectives being in constant flux. Erikson (1968) referred to these moments of crises as “crucial periods of increased vulnerability and heightened potential” (p. 96). Based on Erikson’s work of potential challenges to identity, there are three key connections relevant to the literature on the emerging adult.

First, turmoil is vital to the formation of the emerging adult’s identity as it directly relates to exploration about occupation, status, and self (Erikson, 1968). Awareness of the temporality of one’s own ideology and values are reflected against an overabundance of changing world images and environmental pressures that are often conflicting and problematic (Erikson, 1968). Second, pressures in the social sphere particularly create the need for the emerging adult to be affirmed and accepted by one’s peers. The establishment of roles within cliques, distinguishing enemies, stereotyping self and others, attacking ideals, and shying from interpersonal intimacy are typical behaviors as the emerging adult resolves conflicts about the construction of their identity (Erikson,
The formation of identity is mapped within a social sphere where a widening range of identities is possible in order to adapt to changing roles and relationships (Erikson, 1968). Thus, individual growth is juxtaposed with changing social structures. Lastly, for the emerging adult’s construction of identity, a sense of being in charge of these changes is a dominant issue and essential part of the process (Erikson, 1968). Various factors can facilitate opportunities for the emerging adult to gain competence, learn what does or does not work, explore the fairness of rules and governance structures, and express morality and reliability. When emerging adults “have an opportunity to reflect on and experiment with their identity, particularly with regard to their skills, interests, and relationships with others, they are likely to move toward adulthood with enhanced possibilities for long-term health and success” (Sadowski, 2008, p. 15). Examined through the emerging adult, these associations a) suggest that it is difficult to isolate the development of identity from the social interactions and relations in which they are embedded in and affected by (Erikson, 1968), b) recognize that cognitive, behavioral, and environmental/social influences interact as determinants for one another (Bandura, 1986), and c) acknowledge that the formation of identity is a life long journey that continuously seeks to integrate past, present, and future selves in order to navigate a complex, social world (Erikson, 1968; see also Schwartz, 2001).

Summary

This literature review covered the multitude of training permutations and individualized approaches for framing dance major study. Given the changes in student bodies and educational climate, dance programs continue to investigate traditional
canons, theoretical perspectives, pedagogies, and curricular offerings. The literature revealed a pattern in the writings that linked these various theoretical constructs to specific considerations of dance study in higher education. Although the full implication of these connections was not explicated, it does suggest that the “type” of dance program and the ways in which the study of dance is posited within educational contexts has the potential to influence a dancer’s experience. Certainly not all educators or dance programs share a singular philosophy for the salience or viability of what should constitute professional study. Thus, this literature reflected a backdrop that was more conducive to an acknowledgement of the potential for dance study as focused on critical inquiry and personal investigation to intercede with how dancers perceive their experiences with previous training, community, curriculum, and identity.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction to the Research Design

The purpose of this case study was to explore the following overarching research question: How do dancers describe their experiences of being dancers at C College? This study examined these experiences of dancers in an effort to specifically explore: a) How (or is) previous dance training acknowledged or marginalized? b) How (or does) community inform experience c) How (or does) the curriculum provide individualized learning experiences? and d) How (or does) one’s dance identity evolve or change? These were, of course, a priori questions. Since qualitative case studies often invoke an emergent design, there was also value in remaining open to post hoc questions that arose during the course of the work (Patton, 2002). This introduction is intended to provide an overview of the study. All data collection procedures and considerations specific to case study methodology are detailed below.

C College was selected for examination in this study. A letter of explanation regarding the case study was sent to the department chair of the dance program. The initial request detailed the nature of the case, research questions of primary interest, time span of the study, and burden put on C College’s dance program as a function of study participation (see Appendix A). All data collection and reporting used pseudonyms and was treated confidentially. It was understood that this research would contain no identifiable institutional, departmental, or personal markers. In order to secure approval to conduct the current research study, application to the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) at both C College and Ohio University were submitted and approved. My status as
both an insider and connoisseur (Eisner, 1998) served as assets for both gaining entre and sustaining research relationships.

The overall research design reflected commitment to understanding human experience within the context of an evolving and dynamic research process. Appreciation of the unique human experience, while honoring multiple realities, is generally at the heart of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A researcher must therefore maintain a commitment to being noninterventionist within the context of an observational study, witness the ordinary through naturalistic observation, capture personal experiences, search for patterns and inconsistencies and acknowledge subjectivity as essential to understanding the case (Stake, 1995). The methodology presented herein was a framework for both surfacing and honoring the unique voice and experience of each participant.

**Research Setting**

A non-random, purposive sample was selected from a single dance program at a single institution (Creswell, 2009; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The choice to use purposeful selection implies difficulty with generalizing findings. However, as guided by my research questions, the purpose of the study was not to generalize outside of the research setting, but rather to do justice to this particular case through analysis of the data within this dance program. As such, the reader must determine transferability or the degree of congruence for which this research has valuable application to other contexts and considerations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). The setting for this case study was the dance program at C College, a highly selective, private, liberal arts institution in
the Midwest. Along with celebrating its rich and prestigious history, C College fosters excellence in academics, values a robust sense of community, offers a curriculum that is steeped in the liberal arts and sciences tradition, and expounds numerous interdisciplinary programs.

The dance program at C College offers both a major and minor in dance, is deeply invested in artistic collaboration and openly welcomes students to explore the field of dance through a range of directed investigations. Dancers have the opportunity to study historical contexts, performance problems, various roles of artists, and independent work focused on critical research or creative activity. Through its course offerings, the dance program aims to foster a sense of community and nurture the interests and abilities of each student. According to the expressed goals of the dance department, students are encouraged to create, perform, read, write and critically think about movement in a manner that embraces a learning-by-doing philosophy that emphasis openness to individual experience. The programmatic focus reflected that C College has responded to change and complexity in contemporary dance practices by refocusing and/or refreshing emphasis on student directed investigation and exploring how they might further develop and/or strengthen commitment to personalizing students’ experiences.

As detailed in Chapter 1, prospective dance majors have a plethora of options for framing and contextualizing their study of dance. Dance programs could be potentially grouped according to their major curricular emphasis: choreography and performance studies, or education and pedagogy, or technology, or critical inquiry and personal investigation, or technique/conservatory emphasis, or somatic study and body knowledge.
This framework provided a lens for examining the possible “types” of dance programs available to prospective dancers. The current exemplar case study of C College illuminated what is or might be possible under certain circumstances in the “type” of dance program that is predominantly focused on critical inquiry and personal investigation. Inherent in this program is an approach to dance study that provided a degree of freedom and opportunity for students to develop a personal narrative for how they choose to engage and shape dance experience. Therefore, this research might resonate with the experiences of others who attend a similar type of dance program. All data was collected within the context of C College, which served as the sole site for the research.

**Research Participants**

This study aimed to include all dance majors (n=7) as well as the dance faculty (n=3). The intimate setting at C College allowed for the attainment of all dance majors and faculty within the dance program as participants in the case study. The defining characteristics of participants were dancers who were approximately 18-22 years old. Individual dance histories and previous training did not limit participation. Data regarding individual participants and their dance histories (i.e.: years of previous dance training, specific training and performance experiences, and etcetera) was collected via a personal information response sheet (see Appendix B). Although the primary interest of this research was students’ experiences, for comparison purposes and to examine relationships and possible disconnects between students and faculty, all faculty members teaching in the dance program at C College were included.
Generally speaking (detailed below), dancers were consulted via interviews, observations, and focus groups for information about their lived experiences of being dancers at C College. In addition, various document sources were analyzed to determine how the dance program described the presence of its courses, program, history, mission, and etcetera. Semi-structured interviews were used to interact with participants on an individual basis. A series of focus groups and observations involving dancers and faculty allowed for ongoing relations with the collective dance community. Individual interviews with each faculty member were a consideration. However, the research focus was on dancers’ experiences. It was determined that opportunities to observe group thinking among faculty via focus groups was more adept for triangulation. The dance faculty assisted in identification of key informants, arrangement of data collection schedules, acquisition of documents for analysis, and plans for debriefing and sharing of the data.

In qualitative research, there are factors that warrant mindful consideration for obtaining an adequate sample size. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) contended that in order to understand the phenomena being studied, the sample size must prominently reflect an adequate attempt to capture voice. A related concern is considering the sensitivities and methods for sustaining the research process, especially during data collection. Prolonged engagement, conducting interviews, and observations in the natural setting (each discussed further below) reveal the complexity and dimensionality of experience and convey the views of individuals navigating these experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Using case study methods to examine all dance
majors and faculty should promote the collection of an “adequate sample of words” that can accurately represent their lived experiences; ultimately leading to data saturation (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 107). Data saturation occurs when new information is no longer being heard or seen (Glesne, 2006). As a type of assumption, this required continuous analysis of the data throughout the case study.

**Rationale for Case Study Research**

A case study is generally an inductive and highly interpretive form of research that explores the complexities, interactions and circumstances of a particular case. In addition, case studies examine a bounded phenomenon and “describe that unit in depth and detail, holistically and in context” (Patton, 2002, p. 55). According to Yin (2003), there are several things that further distinguish case study research from other methods: 1) asking predominantly “how” and “why” questions, 2) often having little control over events, 3) focusing on contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, 4) desiring to understand complex social phenomena, and 5) dealing with a wide variety of evidence including documents, interviews, and observations. The richness of a case study results from the amount of detail and contextualization that is possible when analyzing a small, highly focused phenomenon. Attuning to these considerations allows for the description and balance of the uniqueness, as well as the ordinariness, of the singular case (Stake, 1995).

In this regard, particularization, not generalization, emphasizes uniqueness and accentuates gaining an understanding of the case itself (Stake, 1995). According to Stake (2000), an intrinsic case study provides better understanding of a particular case rather
than aiming to make broad generalizations or provide insight into an issue. The research questions did not aim for a typified or general understanding and as such, the study of C College was a unique bounded case study that was intrinsic rather than instrumental. Thus, the contextual conditions at C College were highly pertinent to the questions and phenomena under study and distinguished the single case study as the ideal research method to explore the experiences of students in the dance program.

**Critiques of Conducting Case Study Research**

Case study is a form of inquiry that “is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied” (Stake, 2000, p. 435). This approach to research may draw criticism that falls under the auspices of lack of rigor. Rooted in concerns of sloppiness, critics assert that biased views of the researcher can potentially influence the direction of findings and consequently minimize adherence to necessary and systematic procedures (Yin, 2003). In response, case study researchers must be diligent in communicating their methodologies and reporting the research evidence with fairness and accuracy. A second critique of case study research is that it has no basis for scientific generalization (Yin, 2003). Researchers must not make generalizations to other populations, programs, or institutions. Instead, researchers aim to expand or develop theoretical propositions and/or seek transferability and particularizability; making analytic generalizations rather than statistical ones (Yin, 2003). Thus, transferability is not a trivial issue but rather provides appreciation of and attention to the context of the research in order to offer conclusions as potentially applicable rather than definitive (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In essence, theory becomes the template for comparisons of the research findings.
A third common critique of the case study approach is the real possibility of excessive time and a voluminous amount of information to analyze (Yin, 2003). To direct the research, case studies must clearly state what is being explored, the purpose of the exploration, and the criteria for analyzing the results. Admittedly, case studies are difficult to conduct and warrant careful consideration, extensive planning and assiduous reporting. What follows is the plan that addressed these critiques.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Some authors argue that the arts can serve as an emergent means for conducting qualitative research and argue that arts-based approaches can further challenge and advance unique possibilities for illuminating experience and voice (Eisner, 1998; Hervey, 2000; Barrett & Bolt, 2007; Knowles & Cole, 2008). Literary forms, dance and theatre, visual art, folk art, and print media are all arts-based domains that can serve as primary means for understanding and examining experience (Hervey, 2000; Barrett & Bolt, 2007; Knowles & Cole, 2008). Although each is dynamically different, these arts-based inquiries not only appreciate interconnection and harmony, but also acknowledge that parts cannot be divided from the whole if a researcher wants to elicit an accurate reflection of the questions being studied (Hervey, 2000). It is important to note that there is a considerable precedent for studying art endeavors via qualitative techniques. Thus, the following data collection plan acknowledged connection between qualitative techniques and studying dancers’ experiences.
Engagement

Prior to entering the field, preliminary work was done to prepare for engagement in the field. This work included perusal of C College’s website, preparatory work in communicating the research questions and agenda to dance faculty, and initial analysis of publically available documentation of C College and its dance program. Primary data collection resulted from approximately four weeks in the field. Four field visits were proposed (one visit in May, September, October, and November respectively). Table 3.1 details the primary data collection schedules and corresponding purpose. Specific dates were determined and structured in conjunction with the dance program at C College. In addition, responsiveness to participants’ needs was maintained and the schedule adjusted accordingly. One could reasonably argue that four field visits and data collection spanning seven months could not be considered prolonged engagement. On a more abstract level, however, my connoisseurship and background as a dancer did suggest a type of prolonged engagement that provided knowledge and experience for how to conceive questions and navigate research relationships. This view of prolonged engagement required heavy reliance on journaling, negative case analysis, triangulation, and peer debriefing (each discussed below) to monitor researcher bias.

The time period provided scope and depth to the data collection and aimed to honor both individual and collective voices in the naturalistic research setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Logistically, the planned length of time to be spent in the field along with ample time between field visits to fully analyze and follow-up on the data negated concerns of an occasional absence, sickness, or non-reporting on the part of individual
participants. The fact that participants were already enrolled in the dance program and were given an active role in the research were factors believed to help minimize disinterest and/or dropping out among participants and maximize response and willingness. Since all dance majors were part of the study, the loss of a participant was considered to not significantly impact the study.

Table 3.1

*Primary Data Collection Schedule*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field Work</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pilot Study (3 days in late April or early May)</td>
<td>Pilot the interview, observation, and focus group protocols.</td>
<td>Ohio University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early May (1 week)</td>
<td>o Introduce myself and meet dance majors and faculty</td>
<td>C College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Observe presentation of senior projects and performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Informed Consent Forms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Interview seniors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Conduct focus group with seniors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Gather documents to begin analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early September (1 day)</td>
<td>o Reacquaint myself with dance majors and faculty and meet new dancers in the program</td>
<td>C College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Informed Consent Forms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Solidify schedules and purpose for each fall semester field visit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Secure additional key documents for analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Identify key informants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.1 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| September (1 week) | o 1st Interview with individual dancers  
 o 1st Focus group with faculty  
 o 1st Focus group with dancers  
 o Daily observations  
 o Continue document analysis | C College |
| October (1 week)     | o 2nd Interview with individual dance  
 o 2nd Focus group with faculty  
 o 2nd Focus group with dancers  
 o Daily observations  
 o Continue document analysis | C College |
| November (1 week)     | o 3rd Interview with individual dance  
 o 3rd Focus group with faculty  
 o 3rd Focus group with dancers  
 o Daily observations  
 o Continue document analysis | C College |
| January (2 days)     | o Member checking, triangulation of data, etc.  
 o Debriefing | C College |

**Interviews**

This study was primarily informed by interviews. Of particular interest were individual dancers’ perceptions and experiences of being a dancer at C College. Thus, interviews provided the fundamental narratives and context that allowed for a more profound understanding of how a dancer’s personal experiences and knowledge are revealed, acquired, and expressed (Barrett & Bolt, 2007). To illuminate the specific questions under study, this research plan called for a series of three individual interviews to be conducted with each participant with each interview approximately sixty minutes in length. This series of interviews with individual participants over the course of several months provided relevant data to illustrate patterns and exceptions when examining the
research questions. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. In addition, at the beginning of each round of interviews, the researcher reviewed and clarified information that participants’ discussed during their previous interview. Level I member checking was therefore an ongoing part of the research process with each individual participant (Creswell, 2009). During the course of the study, the researcher remained open to the identification of key informants, college personnel, or alumni that could serve as valuable sources of information. If these individuals emerged and might be able to contribute to the research, decisions were made in the field as to their inclusion in the interview process.

Interviews have the potential to reveal the complexity of experience and to communicate the perspectives of individuals navigating these experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The interview process thus begins with establishment of trust and rapport, which are essential to encouraging participants to provide in-depth and descriptive details of their lived experiences (Patton, 2002). Accordingly, interviews with participants sought depth, breadth, and detail through eliciting responses that were vivid and nuanced as well as material that was rich and thematic (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). When participants are involved in the conversation and have the opportunity to articulate and negotiate their own lived encounters, they are validated and recognized in the research process. Interviews uniquely shape and frame the research questions by providing a lens to the whole of what is happening and giving voice to what is being studied (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).
Questions were asked in a semi-structured format (Patton, 2002). However, it was also necessary to remain reasonably unstructured due to numerous interactions with participants in the course of the study. Questions allowed participants to pursue whatever direction they wanted in order to express themselves in their own words and without a presupposed feeling or assumption being implied by the interviewer (Patton, 2002).

Thus, it is the interviewer’s responsibility to ask well-posed initial questions, as well as follow-up and probing questions to elicit thought provoking dialogue and description (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

Part of a researcher’s preparation is aligning interview questions with the primary research question(s) under study. Accordingly, interview questions for the current study (detailed in Chapter 4) were designed to provide ample and ongoing opportunities for participants to voice their own experiences of being dancers at C College with particular focus on their reflections on previous training, community, curriculum, and identity. A preliminary framework for interview questions was formed and was assumed to continue to evolve and expand as I talked with participants and learned more about the dance program (see Appendix C).

**Observations**

Daily observations, mostly unstructured in nature, were conducted during each scheduled visit during the study (approximately 20-25 total days). The time and length of these observations varied as observations were planned within the context of dancers’ existing schedules and coursework. The research questions under study (i.e.: training, community, curriculum, and identity) guided what was addressed and reported from
observations. Themes that were thought to potentially inform observations were the types of explicit and/or implied feedback from faculty and peers, any evidence of curriculum and instruction’s connection to a central narrative, the voicing of student questions, perspectives or experiences, and/or the presence of the individual dancer and sense of community within various class structures (detailed in Chapter 4).

Thus, observations were thought to be central to addressing the research questions and aimed to capture the depth and breadth of experiences across the various offerings in the dance curriculum. Knowing that classrooms are not always the most likely source to gather meaningful insight, additional participant observations were anticipated and decisions were made in the field about the inclusion of performances, concerts, workshops, meetings, and/or informal student gatherings. Refining the plan of observation was therefore directed by gathering data that was pertinent to the research questions. Locations, dates, times, and field notes of all observations were detailed in my research journal (discussed in Chapter 4).

Especially in the context of dance, multiple sensory observations deepened my understanding of what was subtle but significant in the research environment. Moreover, observing dance can sensitize a researcher to the ways in which space, time, energy and relational dynamics are displayed in the research setting (Knowles & Cole, 2008). Conversant with bodily movement, how bodies interact and expressions of physical experiences, the dancer-as-researcher observes that which might escape ordinary notice (Knowles & Cole, 2008). In the research setting, the dance-researcher simultaneously experiences (inside the body) and observes (outside the body), making the process highly
personal (Knowles & Cole, 2008). This intersection between bodily experiences and engaging art/artists brought forth and cultivated a unique sensibility.

Navigating both poles of such complex experience is, for some, what makes dance a distinctive lens for qualitative inquiry (Knowles & Cole, 2008; Hervey, 2000). The researcher is the instrument in qualitative methodology, just as the body is the dancer’s instrument. “The dancer is well aware that the body/being is the expressive dance tool. The body/being is not an instrument that is put on and taken off at will but is, rather, always the lived experience of the dancer” (Fraleigh & Hanstein, 1999, p. 170). In conjunction with paying attention to everyday movement, these observations provide data for understanding human behavior and social interactions (Knowles & Cole, 2008; Hervey, 2000; Barrett & Bolt, 2007). Moreover, because bodies are culturally situated, this type of observational knowledge is crucial for holistically viewing the research setting and exploring the context of experience (Jewett, 2008).

As part of the emergent research design, it was important to observe instruction but I was also open to other types of observations as well. It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand anything about dance curricula and instruction sans observation, and one has to have expertise to understand what is happening in this setting. Observations are therefore intimately connected to the context in which they function (Eisner, 1998) and their primary role is to “work the researcher towards greater understanding of the case” (Stake, 1995, p. 60). Second, observations can serve a fundamental role in raising a researcher’s consciousness and deepening the conversation of the questions under study (Eisner, 1998). Next, observations help give shape to an
interpretation that explains, unwraps and decodes the happenings within the setting in hopes of illuminating the research questions. Moreover, it helps the researcher voice an expressive narrative that crafted the story about what (and who) has been witnessed. Through a researcher’s various notes and sketches, observations elicit detailed information through multi-sensory modalities (Glesne, 2006), which have the potential to inform the researcher’s perceptions (Hervey, 2000).

**Focus Groups**

Case study research is particularly adept at surfacing multiple insiders’ views on what is happening within the bounded culture and context of the research setting (Stake, 2005). For the purpose of this case study I was primarily interested in the exploration of students’ perspectives and experiences. However, for the purpose of comparing and triangulating the data, I also sought the perspectives of the dance faculty. The possibility of using focus groups as a source for obtaining wide and varied perspectives potentially enabled a more thorough explanation of what is happening within the research setting (Angrosino, 2005). Acquiring the depth and breadth necessary to elucidate my primary research questions was central to the purpose of this case study. In addition, focus groups were a venue to further explore the data collected and expressed during individual interviews with participants. This required that decisions regarding specific questions and topics remained flexible and responsive to emergent data and themes as they were encountered in the field.

Each field visit included the conducting of respective focus groups with dancers and the dance faculty (totaling three, thirty minute discussions per group during the
course of this research). Decisions regarding smaller or diverse groupings of participants were made in the field. It was planned to videotape all focus groups for further review and analysis. Preliminary focus group questions for dance faculty were designed in conjunction with the interview questions for dancers (see Appendix D). These questions sought to encourage dialogue among the faculty that potentially contributed to the diversity of voice and perspective for illuminating the research questions. Focus groups with faculty aimed to be scheduled at the end of each field visit. This required that data collected from participant interviews during the field visit be immediately reviewed and emergent themes identified so that these could be followed up and discussed with faculty.

Given the small community at C College, flexibility with the use of focus groups was necessary. Efficiency and the opportunity to observe group thinking and dynamics were important advantages for conducting focus groups. However, planned multiple interviews and observations with participants were viewed to possibly negate the benefits or logistical pros of doing focus groups.

**Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted in the School of Dance at Ohio University with a select group of dancers, who were considered to be equivalent participants to those involved in the current study. This pilot study tested the interview, observation and focus group protocols previously detailed. Pilot study participants were specifically asked to: 1) identify questions or topics that seem unclear, 2) comment on the length and structure of the interviews and focus groups, and 3) suggest possible settings for additional, meaningful observations embedded in the dance major experience. Frequently
problematic questions were omitted and feedback was used to further clarify or develop questions, improve protocols, and surface additional data sources. This technique informed the research study as to whether the research was truly yielding the information that was being sought (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009).

**Document Analysis**

Documents provided valuable information and insight that were unavailable from other sources. Whether archival or current, documents served to add rich contextual depth to the research. In addition, documents add validity and trustworthiness to observations and interviews by “supporting, expanding and challenging portrayals and perceptions” (Glesne, 2006, p. 68). For the case study at C College, document analysis included several dimensions of the dance program: 1) the department’s history, mission and goals, 2) alumni’s careers and/or engagement in the field, 3) drop-out, graduation, and retention rates of the dance program, 4) satisfaction surveys, 5) course evaluations (four years prior to start of research to current), 6) course descriptions and syllabi, 7) data regarding student participation in department concerts, attendance at arts functions, outside performances, 8) website and marketing materials for the department, 9) detailed curricular framework and 10) any other document that illuminated the research questions.

My engagement in the field allowed for regular access and review of various document sources. Questions regarding key documents within the dance program were built into the focus group protocols for the faculty. Careful attention was given to the repeated mention of particular documents from various stakeholders during interviews.
and focus groups. Data saturation was considered when repeated reference to particular documents or departmental frameworks surfaced.

**Audit Trail and Journaling**

I maintained a meticulous record that detailed problems with data collection, challenges with participants or research design, concerns with missing data, and any other issues that arose during fieldwork. The audit trail provided records of what I was doing and with whom, social interactions and events, and major happenings in the research setting. To assist in data collection, I also kept a reflexive journal on the research process to record my own voice, perceptions, observations, and experiences while in the field. Journaling promoted reflexivity, which in turn facilitated search for negative case analysis. Looking back over my reflections provided additional insight and credibility in examining my a priori assumptions and research findings.

As an act of expression and to provide participants with an outlet to reflect their ongoing thoughts, feelings, experiences and impressions of being dance majors at C College, I hoped to facilitate a composition assignment and/or collaboratively choreograph a piece with the participants to be performed as part of the reporting of the data. This may open a creative space for voicing participants’ experiences during the research process. Examining this method of expression, both individually and collectively, provided insight as to the ways in which the data was fitting together within this particular case (Angrosino, 2005). Controlling for reactivity was an essential consideration with either of these reporting possibilities.
In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is to serve as the principal instrument for data collection (Patton, 2002). Understanding subjectivity and the boundaries of research relationships and friendships are important considerations for researchers (Glesne, 2006). Attunement to subjectivity is critical for researchers and can be accomplished by increasing “your awareness of the ways it might distort, but you also increase your awareness of its virtuous capacity” (Glesne, 2006, p. 123). Researchers, by tuning into their own a priori attitudes, beliefs, interests and needs, exert a way of not only monitoring their subjectivity but also develop and strengthen their reflexivity: all of which were important for the duration of the research process (Glesne, 2006).

**Connection of Methods to Research Goals**

Research is not static but rather constantly alive and ever evolving. A primary purpose of research is to define, work towards and accomplish goals that preserve a clear purpose. Accordingly, the methods contained throughout are my reflection on those vital components of case study research that endeavored to maximize participation, elicit thick description, and maintain open-ended responses in a way that revealed the concerns, experiences, challenges and perceptions of dancers that are most salient to the primary goal of the current research: to gain an understanding of what it is like to be a dancer at C College. “We dance to experience ourselves more abundantly, to focus and clarify aesthetic experience-on the skin, in the brain, in every intelligent cell. We turn to the arts to understand what experience is” (Fraleigh & Hanstein, 1999, p. 214). Bases for these choices included the following:
1. The review of the literature presented in Chapter 2 framed the collection of the data and provided a broad foundation for the research questions under consideration.

2. Numerous informal discussions with professionals in the field of dance, as well as dance majors at numerous institutions, helped to identify the kinds of questions that might be explored in this study. Graduate research courses, in various departments at Ohio University, provided opportunities to gain valuable insight on a range of approaches and lenses for conducting original research. This coursework provided the framework used to establish the current research protocols and procedures. Also, this provided a peer debriefing credibility technique.

3. Eisner (1998) advanced his unique approach of connoisseurship as situating the researcher as an expert. The researcher’s knowledge is recognized by being a member of and having experience with the community of practice or research (Eisner, 1998). Situating the connoisseur alongside those being researched, connoisseurship is an art of appreciation (Eisner, 1998). In turn, this appreciation becomes the vehicle for facilitating the sharing of narratives. While looking for emergent themes, there is constant feedback of both the empirical and emotional data that helps the connoisseur give shape to the story. According to the definition of this approach, I brought a level of connoisseurship to the current study. I was a student in a dance major program in higher education from 1992-1999 and earned both Bachelor of Fine Arts and Master of Arts degrees. Since
1999, I have taught dance in a variety of settings and contexts. My educational background and professional experiences provided extensive grounding in the performative, experiential, and theoretical considerations of dance, particularly specific to understanding the aspects of being a dance major.

At no time can I separate myself from being a dancer and interacting with the world around me. My perceptions and experiences have shaped my personal philosophy, teaching style and approach to dance training and curriculum design. This intimate understanding inevitably provided me with a rich context that served to enhance my awareness and sensitivity as researcher. This is arguably a design strength but can also be viewed as a source of researcher bias because of my expertise and positionality. Routine checking for reflexivity, triangulating the data, and conducting a negative case analysis aimed to ensure that I was consciously negating this tension.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis, crucial to framing the data in a meaningful context, systematically occurs alongside data collection in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). My analysis aimed to be well-balanced in what Wolcott (2001) described as “ample evidence of attention to both the methodical results of analysis and the conjectural tasks of interpretation” (p. 34). As an ongoing process throughout, my early analysis included reflexive journaling, methodic organization to define and sort analytic files and a preliminary open-coding of the data (Patton, 2002). These early steps required the discipline to conduct multiple readings and viewings of the material and also affirmed the central role of a researcher’s interpretation in ongoing analysis. “The researcher is
essentially making a construction from the raw materials present, much like a choreographer creates dance from movement material” (Fraleigh & Hanstein, 1999, p. 103). In addition, information obtained from the personal response sheets was used to initially inform a profile of the salient personal, educational, and dance backgrounds of participants.

The primary goal of this research was to understand what it is like to be a dancer at C College. Table 3.2 details the sources of data collection that was used to address and analyze each respective research question. To serve this aim, the details of participants’ experiences must be accurately captured as the central unit of analysis (Glesne, 2006). Analysis required maintaining a holistic perspective as examination was conducted to not only understand and identify patterns of intergroup connectedness and complexity, but to also look for instances of difference in the content of responses, reactions, or other aspects of experience.

Table 3.2

Data Collection and Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question:</th>
<th>Sources of data collection used for analysis:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How (or is) previous dance training</td>
<td>Interviews, observations, focus groups with students and faculty, document analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acknowledged or marginalized?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How (or does) community inform experience?</td>
<td>Interviews, observations, focus groups with students and faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How (or does) the curriculum provide</td>
<td>Interviews, observations, focus groups with students and faculty, document analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>individualized learning experiences?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How (or does) one’s dance identity evolve</td>
<td>Interviews, observations, focus groups with students and faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or change?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First, all transcripts of interviews were reviewed several times to examine both the number and variability of ideas represented in the responses. Key ideas (i.e.: the range and frequency of ideas as interpreted by the researcher) were itemized and categorized to form the basis of determining themes among participants. This is further detailed in the discussion of coding procedures below. Although all of the ideas presented by participants were acknowledged and reported, the recurrence with which an experience was expressed and/or the degree of attention given to a particular idea by any participant(s) revealed patterns in each question regarding thought, experience, and/or delineation of commonality or difference in issues raised by responses.

Next, this data was considered along two lines. First, the data was analyzed individually and within any subgroups that occurred specific to the four primary areas of exploration: a) How (or is) previous dance training acknowledged or marginalized? b) How (or does) community inform experience c) How (or does) the curriculum provide individualized learning experiences? and d) How (or does) one’s dance identity evolve or change? The emergence of subgroups was examined in light of data among dancers. For example, personal dance histories were examined for possible subgroups based on common factors in previous training. And secondly, data pertaining to all dancers was collectively considered.

It was assumed that participants’ experiences most accurately facilitated the exploration of their own knowledge and familiarity with being dancers at C College. As such, each individual experience was juxtaposed with respect to the collective experience and became the fundamental basis for thematic analysis and identification of subgroups.
Thematic analysis is the most common used means for data analysis and is a process that chunks, codes and identifies patterns in the data in order to more fully synthesize, interpret and describe the content of participant’s responses (Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2002). Subgroups were developed in light of this examination of responses and according to the themes that maintained centrality of the relationships between the content of the data and the research questions under study. Intergroup connections were surfaced in terms of repetition of participants’ responses, ideas, and content.

Finally, although the primary data source was interviews, thoughtful analysis of information gained from multiple observations, focus groups, and review of documents was necessary to create a comprehensive and salient picture of the current research setting and participants. Therefore, these data were carefully examined and juxtaposed with information gathered from the interviews to illuminate similarities or different aspects within the dance program. This largely situated my process of analysis in a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory starts with a basic description and then inductively organizes data into categories in order to authentically explain and theorize how meanings, patterns and relationships have emerged across the data (Charmaz, 2006; Patton, 2002). Table 3.3 below presents the key strategies that were utilized to analyze the data (Patton, 2006).
Table 3.3

**Analytic Strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Analysis:</th>
<th>Later Analysis:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Reflexive journaling</td>
<td>o Unique case orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Methodic organization</td>
<td>o Thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Analytic filing (sort</td>
<td>o Inductive analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and define data with</td>
<td>o Holistic perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preliminary open-ended</td>
<td>o Context sensitivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coding of themes)</td>
<td>o Grounded theory approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Reflexivity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The appropriateness of the discussed analytic strategies was supported by the major qualitative research questions under study, which highlighted the nature of the subject matter and participants’ lived experiences in their own words as central to data analysis. Again, it was acknowledged that “it is not uncommon for case study researchers to make assertions on a relatively small database, invoking the privilege and responsibility of interpretation” (Stake, 1995, p. 12). This analysis thus represented some interpretive choices on the part of the researcher and acknowledged that other interpretations might be possible. Development of an a priori code list was a method employed to align the study’s conceptual framework and to ensure that the analysis was directly answering the research questions (Saldana, 2009). In addition, open-coding, also referred to as initial coding, was used to examine, compare, and break down the data into discreet pieces (Charmaz, 2006; Saldana, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open-coding allowed me to remain open to multiple explorations and reflect on the nuances present in
the wide variety of data (Saldana, 2009). This process will become more transparent in
the report of findings presented in later chapters.

**Application of Qualitative Data Analysis Software**

This case study collected multiple types of data. These included: text, photos,
audio, video, course evaluations, syllabi, personal dance history response sheets,
observations, researcher’s notes, an audit trail with field visit schedules, and documents
that described various facets of the dance program. Given the volume of data to be
considered, it was determined that a software program (Atlas.ti) was necessary to help
manage the information. The intent behind using the program was to help the researcher
collect, connect, manage, visualize, and analyze both the types and volume of data
collected.

The analytic approach used a priori codes and inductive codes. Remember that
for the purposes of this discussion, in qualitative research a code is “a word or short
phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or
evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2009, p. 3).
These codes were organized in to code families, which provide ways to both categorize
and conceptualize the data for examination and to sensitize the researcher to possible
linkages (Glaser, 1978; Saldana, 2009). In turn, codes and code families generate
themes. Themes reflect the context of the data and further elaborate its meaning to move
the researcher towards substantive findings or assertions (Saldana, 2009).

The following steps were undertaken in the process to code and analyze the data.
First, study data was uploaded into a hermeneutic unit (HU) in Atlas.ti. In the context of
the software, the HU is essentially like a vessel that contains all the data used in analyses. The HU included 248 primary research documents. There were technical difficulties loading three videos of dance technique classes and some printed materials intended for document analysis into the HU. The data were still included in the analyses and videos were treated like observations. Second, a list of 83 a priori codes was generated based on the review of literature presented in Chapter 2 (see Appendix E).

Next, I spent approximately two months completing line by line coding of the data in Atlas.ti. (i.e., each line of text from an interview transcript or observational note was examined, coded, or identified as an outlier). As previously mentioned, line by line coding was guided by both the a priori codes as well as inductive, open-coding. When the process was complete, a master code list was created to merge a priori codes with inductive approaches (n=66). This master list contained a total of 149 codes (see Appendix F). In addition, in tandem with line by line coding, the researcher made three different types of notes in Atlas.ti: 1) a simple description of the code and any criteria used to assign the given code, 2) comments were written when relationships were detected among similar codes (this is done to recognize higher-order codes and generally support organization of the findings), and 3) analytic memos were written to document the analysis and track the researcher’s thought processes. Atlas.ti provides frequencies per code (i.e., how often it was used), and tracks corresponding comments in the code manager within the HU. The code manager provides the codes, code frequencies and code descriptions which were placed into a table format (see Appendix G).
As a fourth step, the researcher used an inductive approach to search for emerging patterns that were associated with the four primary research questions (see Appendix H). This process involved the generation of code families and themes. A thorough and detailed examination of comparisons and connections across participants and data sources, associations to the research questions under study, and purposeful search for divergent data guided how the data was further grouped and sorted (see Appendix I). The code families were then further analyzed for patterns and organized into common themes. These common themes, identified according to the four research questions, were relevant to all participants and data sources (see Appendix J); that is no theme was dependent on a single source of information.

As an example, the subsequent discussion further elucidates these steps. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Dunham:

Here I think it is really about encouraging dance and encouraging movement and exploration. It is really not about what exactly you look like or being perfect or about having this kind of distinct technique. It is very - again that sense of inclusiveness and everyone is welcome. I think if you had a similar program at another school - it would necessarily look different - you would have different people. The professors here have drawn on their own experiences as movers and all the guest artists who come in will have their own things to contribute. From year to year - it is never exactly the same. Everyone who comes brings their own kind of individual voice and their own individual movement. What I have taken away most from the program here and this may just be my interpretation is that -
movement really comes from an inner place. You have to find that connection to yourself, your physical self in order to then expand outward. Other dance forms I think are more external in the sense that the movement should look a certain way because that is how it’s always done or that’s just how the style is. Maybe this is a commonality in most modern dance - but here I have found that even if you are searching for a specific quality of movement - the impetus has to be internal. I guess that is sort of what has resonated with me most. I think one of the reasons that I have gotten so much joy and support from dance is that - college is chaotic - things are constantly changing. You don’t know who you are going to be or where you are going to be. But - on some level you can always going yourself to your own body; having that sense of your physical body is really helpful. In some ways - I think that is unique to dance. (Dunham)

First, decisions regarding how data was coded were guided by two primary factors: the a priori code list developed from the literature and the research questions. Interpretation on the part of the researcher remained central to this process; however, concrete parameters shaped the thought process. For example, after several rounds of coding, five different codes were assigned to sections of the above passage: 1) reproducibility (emergent code), 2) openness of the program (emergent code), 3) competition not the goal (emergent code), 4) personal growth (emergent code), and 5) body as instrument (a priori code). In addition, on January 17, 2012, I made the following analytic memo about this interview passage:
I turned off the recorder at the conclusion of this interview. As we were packing up our things to leave the interview site, Dunham said, “Somatics- the focus on the body – it allows us to do this forever!” For me, this further suggested the participant’s awareness of the training practices and coursework that emphasize safety of the body and the body as instrument. Because the department's emphasis is on developing awareness and expects that the curriculum will facilitate understanding about the safe, efficient use of one’s unique body and of movement practices - dancers who leave the program anticipate having longevity and expect to have a continued understanding of the functionality of their body.

Second, common themes emerged as patterns in the coding were distinguished and comparisons were made across participants. Not surprisingly, some codes were used with greater frequency; some a priori codes were not used; similar examples were provided by participants; and responses were specific to participants’ experiences with previous training, curriculum, community, or identity. The thought process for what became considered a common theme was, therefore, guided by the research questions (as well as generation of the a priori code list), the researcher’s explanation of this data, and frequency information derived from Atlas.ti. For example, in the above passage, five codes were sorted into the following common themes: 1) openness results in validation of experience and knowledge, 2) competition not the goal, 3) personal growth, 4) body as instrument, and 5) life practice. Reproducibility was an additional code considered within the common theme of small size of the institution, but it did not occur across participants and was not considered a significant factor for how dancers described their
experiences specific to C College. However, the fact that some dancers made comparisons to other programs suggested to the researcher that participants felt the dance program had something that was not reproducible outside of C College. This was the lens through which the code was categorized. This process produced fourteen common themes that were recognized across all data and participants.

Third, the fourteen common themes were then identified in direct relation to the four research questions. Table 3.4 below outlines the common themes per research question. For example, the common themes above were assigned in accordance to the research questions as follows: openness results in validation of experience and knowledge was determined to fit with the question regarding previous training; competition not the goal with previous training; personal growth with dance identity; body as instrument with curriculum; and life practice with dance identity. As common themes were explained according to the research questions, findings became evident. For example, the three common themes of openness results in validation of experience and knowledge, approach to movement preferences and habitual patterns, and competition not the goal were considered with previous training. This research question asked, How (or is) previous training acknowledged or marginalized? The resultant finding was explained and defined by the narratives of all 13 participants who expressed that the openness of the dance program to everyone, regardless of previous training, was the most important factor in feeling acknowledged and accepted. Previous training was insignificant to achievement in the program.
Table 3.4

*Common Themes per Research Question*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1: Previous Training</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme #1: Openness results in validation of experience and knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #2: Approach to movement preferences and habitual patterns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #3: Competition not the goal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ2: Community</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme #1: Culture of basic goodness: Community as a source of appreciative and supportive practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #2: Relationships with faculty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #3: Learning with and from peers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #4: Small size of the institution.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ3: Curriculum</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme #1: Faculty commitment to individual process and curiosity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #2: Fostering ownership and providing voice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #3: Body as instrument</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #4: Feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ4: Identity</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme #1: Life practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #2: Personal growth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #3: Self in relation to a collective practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some steps in this process may appear abstract. However, there was a clear, concrete process that accounted for each step in the decision making for what and how data was coded; determination of common themes; relationships to the research questions; and articulation of the research findings. This intensive 12 week process surfaced a roadmap of the research findings (see Appendix K). This roadmap guides the presentation of the research findings in Chapter 4.

**Validity and Additional Strategies**

Employing rigorous research methods in the field produced data that could be carefully and systematically analyzed. Credible research has a vested interest in inquiry that is honest, meaningful, and empirically supported with data (Patton, 2002). Case
studies are a form of social research and as such, are subject to the four commonly used tests to establish the quality of research (Yin, 2003). The well trained qualitative researcher is committed to these validity strategies and as a result, dependable and trustworthy findings are produced (Patton, 2002).

Construct validity requires a researcher to ponder the validity of the themes that emerge from the analysis of the data thus establishing the means for appropriately measuring the questions under study. There are three primary strategies that were employed. First, I conducted Level I and II member checking to help determine if my findings were accurate (Creswell, 2009). Emergent themes and analysis of the case were presented to participants at which time they had the opportunity to comment on their feelings about the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2009). Second, I identified someone to conduct a peer debriefing. Providing an opportunity for another person to review and raise questions about the study, this added validity to the account of the research process and findings (Creswell, 2009). Lastly, an external auditor who is unfamiliar with the current project was asked to review my entire study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The independent investigator examined numerous aspects of the research to augment the overall validity of this qualitative study (Creswell, 2009). These construct validity strategies and the corresponding plan are presented below in Table 3.5.

For the current case study, the experiences of dancers were considered. The primary objective and purpose was to gain a better understanding of what it is like to be a dancer at C College. There is no standardized measure for capturing an individual’s lived experiences. Thus, participants’ own words and voice were justified as the valid
measures for gaining understanding of the proposed research questions. The dancers themselves were the measure that most accurately reflected their personal experiences.

Unique to qualitative inquiry, the substantive study of people’s lived experiences and the elaboration of responses to meaningful happenings provides saliency and depth to research findings. In this regard, case study data serves an elucidating role (Patton, 2002).

**Table 3.5**

*Construct Validity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Validity</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Phase of Research</th>
<th>Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construct</td>
<td>Engagement in the field, persistent observation, document analysis, interview protocols, and focus groups are part of research design</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Field work spanned seven months with numerous opportunities to follow-up with participants; rigorous fieldwork methods to yield high-quality data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level I and II member checking; peer review; external audit</td>
<td>Data analysis and Reporting</td>
<td>Asked participants to check the accuracy of my interpretations and findings; progress was consistently monitored and feedback provided by my dissertation committee with questions or concerns carefully examined and weighed; sought colleague to check my findings and interpretations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A solid research design must anticipate challenges to inferences. An explicit commitment to the inclusion of alternative explanations, divergent data, and multiple perspectives began to address the concerns of making inferences (Yin, 2003). As a
researcher, I have considered threats to validity based on what I know. I have acknowledged that I am a connoisseur of dance and have a priori assumptions. I began to address these through journaling and triangulation of the data. Triangulation can occur across methods, data, and theory (Creswell, 2009). However, corroboration among participants does not prove accuracy or validity. Divergence is acceptable and strengthens findings when it can be explained. A failure to explain divergence, or an unexpected convergence of the data suggested a discussion of a limitation of the current study or a direction for possible future research.

Triangulation can also set the stage for a negative case analysis. A purposeful examination of the data for a different perspective or contradictory accounts and information was conducted throughout and adds credibility to the research findings (Creswell, 2009). Findings can be hard to explain and might be a function of bias or inferences. Therefore, reflexivity and triangulation informed the examination for a negative case in the data. Threats can arise during the course of case study research and can be hard to plan for. However, I was committed to remaining open, searching through problems, and actively addressing each one as they arose. Table 3.6 details the strategies that were incorporated to combat threats to validity regarding inferences.
Table 3.6

Inferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Validity</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Phase of Research</th>
<th>Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inferences</td>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Triangulation occurred across methods, data, and theory Purposeful search for data that did not fit findings; attempts to explain any divergent data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative Case Analysis; Presentation of differing perspectives and contradictory views</td>
<td>Data analysis and Reporting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The goal of case study research is not to generalize findings. For some, this makes the third test of research quality, external validity, a serious barrier (Yin, 2003). However, this was not the purpose of my research. I wanted to discuss limitations, but externalizing was not a goal of the current research. I was mindful of whether the data within the bounded phenomenon at C College externalized to later time points in this system. This is why, in part, I have included ideas like data saturation, member checking, and document analysis into the research design. If there was any reason to believe that my observations and interviews were also chronologically bound or specific to some phenomenon within the system (i.e.: if a particular student was happy but others were generally miserable) this could be described and potentially viewed as a study limitation.

As previously discussed, analytic generalizations of case study are not analogous to other methods’ statistical generalizations. Instead, case study research attempts to link or contribute research findings to a broader theoretical base. The inherent value of this research thus “lies in the particular description of themes developed in the context of a specific site” (Creswell, 2009, p. 193). Case studies articulate research findings and
allow readers to decide if the findings have valuable applicability or transferability to their specific population. Therefore, case studies can both potentially connect to broader theories and make logical, thoughtful extrapolations (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002).

Reliability is the final test and demonstrates that a study could be repeated; yielding the same results. Data saturation thus served as a form of reliability. The main goal of reliability is “to minimize the errors and biases in a study” (Yin, 2003, p. 37). For the current study, I was worried less about reliability per se, and invoked the use of an external auditor to determine if my research findings could be independently verified. The most effective means for combating concerns with reliability is the operationalizing and documenting of every step in the research process. Striving for transparency and maintaining clear case study protocols were essential to conducting this quality research. Table 3.7 details these strategies for reliability.
Table 3.7

Reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Validity</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Phase of Research</th>
<th>Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Reflexive journal; audit trail; meticulous record keeping; Use of case study protocols</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Maintained reflexivity and sensitivity of a priori biases by journaling and monitoring perceptions; sought out participant feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External Auditor</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Protocols and methodology clearly articulated and followed; all changes communicated and subjected to an approval process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Data analysis and reporting</td>
<td>Colleagues checked my findings and conclusions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chapter detailed the research methodology and data collection procedures for this study. Chapter 4 will provide discussion of the aforementioned plan and procedures and will present the research findings.
Chapter 4: Findings

Reflections on Methodology and Data Collection Procedures

A plan was presented in Chapter 3 for each step of the research process. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to account for these steps in order to make the research process and findings clear and transparent. Changes presented herein are considered part of emergent design. A good researcher acknowledges that not everything can be known beforehand and thus requires ability to react and respond while navigating the inquiry. As a type of disciplined thought, intelligent choices and decisions were made during the course of the study that, in part, remained open to altering methodology. In essence, what follows is a comparative checklist between what I said I was going to do and the manifestation of that effort.

Research Participants

Research participants included all dance majors (n=7) as well as the dance faculty (n=3). As part of emergent design, a discussion regarding the decision to include additional participants in the study is warranted at this juncture. During the initial field visit in May of 2011, dance faculty arranged for the researcher to conduct an extended focus group with four seniors and one junior dance major and attend the spring dance concert. The seniors were graduating and would therefore be unavailable for interviews in the forthcoming fall semester. Their participation in the study was limited by time, however, their experiences of having been in the dance program and completing the culminating senior exercise was considered vital.
During this visit, the dance faculty also identified additional students who would be dance majors in the fall of 2011, dance minors, and students heavily involved in the dance program that took the same coursework and participated in performances alongside the dance majors. The faculty recommended that these students be participants in the study. The researcher was surprised at the willingness of faculty to offer multiple perspectives and it was determined that these dancers’ experiences could be informative to the study and, perhaps, the search for negative case analysis. Initial correspondence was sent electronically to the identified students and each agreed to participate. It is possible that faculty’s willingness to suggest additional participants and the 100% response rate among dancers was due, in part, to the researcher’s connoisseurship. Accordingly, the total participants in this study included all dance majors (n=7) and dance minors (n=3) and the students identified by faculty as heavily involved (n=3). Each participant filled out a personal information response sheet. This information was placed in table format to elucidate and compare relevant personal data (see Appendix L). Due to logistics and scheduling, 7 of the 13 dancers were the core group of participants (3 majors, 3 minors, 1 heavily involved) with whom the series of 3 individual interviews were conducted. However, all participants were part of focus groups and/or interviews during the research and all participants’ voices are included in the report of findings.

By use of thick description, the researcher sought to examine a wide scope of participants’ experiences, and thereby offer the reader entre to this study and opportunities to understand the stories of participants (Patton, 2002). The emphasis in this study is allowing dancers to speak for themselves. To protect confidentiality,
pseudonyms are used. These pseudonyms are the last names of historical dancers and
choreographers (see Appendix M). There was no consideration to match gender, initials,
or movement aesthetics to those of participants. All pseudonyms were randomly
assigned.

Engagement

Primary data collection resulted from approximately four weeks in the field. Four
field visits were scheduled in May, September, October, and November respectively. As
previously discussed, one could reasonably argue that four field visits and data collection
that spanned seven months is not considered prolonged engagement. On a more abstract
level, however, the researcher’s connoisseurship suggests a type of prolonged
engagement that provided knowledge and experience for how to conceive questions and
sustain research relationships. This view of prolonged engagement required heavy
reliance on journaling, negative case analysis, triangulation, and peer debriefing (each
reflected on below) to monitor researcher bias.

The time period provided scope and depth to the data collection and honored
individual and collective voices in the research setting. The length of time in the field,
along with ample time between field visits, allowed the researcher to analyze and follow-
up on data. There were no absences or non-reporting on the part of individual
participants. Two participants were sick during field visits but were able to reschedule
interviews and thus participation was uninterrupted. The fact that participants were
already in the dance program and were given an active role in the research helped to
maintain interest in the research and maximized response and willingness. Table 4.1
details the data collection schedule and what was conducted during each field visit. The schedule for each fall semester field visit was also detailed in the researcher’s audit trail (see Appendices N-P).
Table 4.1

Data Collection Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field Work</th>
<th>Time in the Field</th>
<th>What was conducted</th>
<th>Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pilot Study</td>
<td>1 day May 2011</td>
<td>Piloted interview, observation, and focus group protocols.</td>
<td>Ohio University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Field Visit | 2 days May 2011 | ○ Introduced myself and met dance majors and faculty  
○ Observed presentation of senior projects and performance  
○ Completed Informed Consent Forms  
○ Conducted focus group with seniors  
○ Conducted focus group with faculty  
○ Gathered documents to begin analysis | C College |
| Field Visit | 1 week September 2011 | ○ Introduced myself to additional participants  
○ Completed Informed Consent Forms  
○ Solidified schedules and purpose for each fall semester field visit  
○ Secured additional key documents for analysis  
○ Conducted 1st interview with individual dancers  
○ Conducted 1st focus group with faculty  
○ Conducted observations | C College |
| Field Visit | 1 week October 2011 | ○ Conducted 2nd interview with individual dancers  
○ Conducted 2nd focus group with faculty  
○ Conducted daily observations  
○ Continued document analysis | C College |
| Field Visit | 1 week November 2011 | ○ Conducted 3rd interview with individual dancers  
○ Conducted 3rd focus group with faculty  
○ Conducted daily observations  
○ Continued document analysis | C College |


**Interviews**

Interviews were intended to provide the fundamental narratives and contexts for understanding how dance was personally experienced and knowledge was revealed, acquired, and expressed at C College (Barrett & Bolt, 2007). A series of three interviews was conducted with each participant. Interviews averaged 45 minutes in length with some lasting longer than 90 minutes. Interview questions for dancers were further developed for each respective field visit (see Appendices Q-T). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed word for word by the researcher. The depth and breadth of these responses will be elucidated herein to frame the research questions. It is worth noting that during multiple interviews no additional key informants, college personnel or alumni surfaced as potential resources for this study.

**Understanding Space**

Observations, as discussed below, presented unique problems and limitations specific to the research setting. Therefore, this brief section aims to contextualize the space where all studio and classroom observations took place. The physical space was almost the size of an Olympic swimming pool. As such, the substantial dimensions of this vast space made it impossible to capture the whole of what was happening. In addition, it is expected during a studio class that dancers will use the space in a variety of ways as they locomote. This typically includes changing levels, directions, and facings and also entails movement patterns that travel through space, using various floor patterns in multiple dimensions. Very seldom is there stationary movement that maintains only
one level, one facing, one plane, or gestures along a single axis. Given these considerations, the use of video and sound equipment was rendered unrealistic.

One could reasonably argue that use of video and sound would have been a logical necessity to capture what was occurring during the observations. However, the cons were determined to outweigh the potential benefit of having this additional information. Several cons were identified. First, multiple cameras would have been positioned throughout the studio in different locations and at various levels to capture the movement. This posed the potential for serious bodily harm to dancers in motion. Second, sophisticated sound equipment would have been required to record the types of questions and feedback that took place during classes. However, with the use of live and/or recorded music during class, this made voice capture particularly challenging and could not guarantee that faculty or participant voices could be augmented over the background noise. Third, issues were raised pertaining to what is visibly observable during a dance class. For example, if the teacher asked students to lay supine on the floor, bend their knees so that their feet were flat on the floor, and then pull their belly button to their spine to engage the deep core abdominal muscles in order to tilt the pelvis anterior, that action – while perhaps observable by the researcher on a few dancers nearby - such subtlety is not transmissible via video.

Conversant with bodily movement, how bodies interact and expressions of physical experiences, the dancer-as-researcher observes that which might escape ordinary notice (Knowles & Cole, 2008). As such, the fourth and final con was the researcher’s position as a connoisseur from the standpoint that the researcher knew the expectations
for how to behave in the context of being both a dance teacher and a student; the
importance of staying out the way; could anticipate movement through space; and could
identify potential resource problems in the environment as class unfolded. This situated
the researcher/connoisseur alongside those being researched and thus connoisseurship
was an art of appreciation (Eisner, 1998). In turn, this appreciation was the vehicle for
facilitating and sustaining the sharing of narratives.

The researcher, as the singular, observing entity, could readily respond to such
dynamics and awareness as they emerged. Therefore, it was determined that the
importance of naturalistic observation and connoisseurship were intertwined (Patton,
2002; Eisner, 1998). Even assuming such equipment and personnel were available to the
researcher, the use of video and sound equipment was deemed potentially dangerous,
intrusive, and inappropriate in this setting. Multiple still photos of the space were taken.
In addition, a singular video camera was positioned in a fixed location and operated by
the researcher during three studio dance courses. The photos and video were intended to
provide frames of reference as needed and were considered and analyzed as observation
data. These images will not be specifically described or included within in order to
protect anonymity of the institution.

**Observations**

The researcher was granted full access during each field visit. This included
permission to observe all dance classes. With the exception of a partial time overlap
between a studio and classroom course, dance classes are not scheduled concurrently.
Therefore, it was possible to observe every dance class, every day, during every field
visit. As time allowed, faculty and participants invited the researcher to observe rehearsals and also extended an invitation to attend meetings. As a result, observations during the research totaled 39 dance classes, 4 meetings, and 4 rehearsals/choreography showings. These observations enabled the researcher to collect data on a large range of behaviors and a variety of interactions with participants.

The research questions under study (i.e.: training, community, curriculum, and identity) guided what was addressed and detailed during the observations. In general, the types of explicit and/or implied feedback from faculty and peers, any evidence of curriculum and instruction’s connection to a central narrative, voicing of student questions, perspectives or experiences, and/or the presence of the individual dancer and sense of community within various class structures were themes that were considered informative during class observations. It was therefore determined that the researcher needed to develop an Observation Protocol Template that would provide a consistent format in which this information could be gathered and detailed (see Appendix U). This promoted uniformity which helped to provide some direction and focus for the researcher during class observations and also provided the flexibility to be responsive to the nuances that occurred. The template provided an easy way to keep a detailed record of these observations. Because meetings and rehearsals were fewer in number, involved less people, and a more concentrated use of the physical space, the researcher relied on personal note taking to record happenings in these instances.

The research design anticipated challenges to inferences. Thus, an explicit commitment was made to include alternative explanations, divergent data, and multiple
perspectives to address the concerns of making inferences (Yin, 2003). This included preliminary open coding of observations, examination for themes and patterns, and purposeful search for negative case analysis. As a researcher, threats to validity were considered which also included being a connoisseur of dance and a priori opinions. These were addressed through journaling and triangulation of the data across methods, data sources, and theoretical frameworks (Creswell, 2009).

Observations were weighed more heavily than initially considered primarily due to the unanticipated access to all dance classes. They were central to examining the research questions and aimed to capture the depth and breadth of experiences across the various offerings in the dance curriculum. They provided a surprising and voluminous amount of rich, confirmatory data that was consistent with the interviews and focus groups. However, this case study intended to focus on the lived experiences and voices of the participants as the primary data source. Although the rich data from the observations could easily have become the primary method of data collection in this case, it was necessary to remember in the aggregate that observations were intended to frame and emphasize as a means to triangulate the data between participant interviews and observations.

Focus Groups

A focus group was conducted in May 2011 with 5 senior dance majors. This focus group lasted approximately 70 minutes and was videotaped, audio recorded, and transcribed. This was the only opportunity the researcher had to talk with these participants about their dance experiences before graduation. However, the multiple
interviews and observations that were subsequently conducted with the other 8 participants negated the logistical pros of doing focus groups with these dancers.

As a primary means for comparing and triangulating the data, faculty perspectives were also sought. A total of 4 focus groups were conducted, lasting approximately 60 minutes each, with dance faculty. Each focus group was audio recorded and transcribed word for word by the researcher. Focus groups were purposefully scheduled on the last day of each field visit and questions were developed during each respective field visit (see Appendices V-Y). This allowed the researcher to reflect on participant interviews and observations during the field visit in order to prepare questions and follow-up accordingly with the faculty before leaving campus. These focus groups took place in a dining hall, dance studio, conference room, and campus coffee house respectively. The faculty answered every question asked of them; taking turns with individual responses and often piggybacking off of each other. There was no hesitation in responses and no apparent discomfort with how each chose to frame and communicate their individual experience or opinion.

Their willingness to share information and palpable comfort level with discussing themselves, the students, and the program reflected a logical extension of the openness with which the dance program is governed. In addition, faculty focus groups not only triangulated the research findings (detailed below) but also provided insight as to how central opportunities to learn and grow are to them as individuals and to the ethos of the dance program. While participants and faculty may have used different vocabulary to
explain or express their experiences and feelings, they consistently echoed similar ideas in response to the same questions posed by the researcher.

**Pilot Study**

A faculty member in Ohio University’s School of Dance was contacted via e-mail. As discussed in Chapter 3, these dancers were considered equivalent participants to those in the study. The faculty member generated a list of 8 current dance majors, freshmen through seniors, who might be interested in participating in the pilot study. The researcher sent a series of group e-mails to the 8 identified students in May 2011 that explained the research, purpose of the pilot study, and asked them to participate. A total of 3 dancers responded. Pilot study participants met with the researcher in Putnam Hall for approximately a one hour discussion. They were shown the interview and observation protocols, encouraged to talk to one another, and then asked for feedback. Their only suggestion, which was to include additional questions that pertained to the role of being a student choreographer and how that is facilitated through dance studies, was noted and helped to clarify interview questions. No questions were considered problematic or omitted. No additional suggestions for where to conduct observations were offered.

**Document Analysis**

The researcher was given access to all requested, available documents which included: 1) department’s history, development of the dance major, and renovation of the studio space with before and after photos, 2) departmental list of alumni with careers and graduation dates, 3) dance course descriptions and syllabi, 4) marketing materials for the
department, and 5) dance course evaluations that dated back six years prior to the start of
the research up to the semester before the first field visit. Regular field visits enabled
access and review of additional document sources in real time as they were provided to
students by faculty. These documents specifically included course assignments, hand-
outs, and schedules. Focus groups with faculty did not surface additional key documents.
There was no repeated mention of any particular document from participants.

The department’s history, development of the dance major and renovation of the
studio space with before and after photos added rich contextual understanding of the
logistics and challenges of the dance space. In addition, the historical timeline provided
insight for how the dance program has evolved and grown since its inception in 1982.
The departmental list of alumni with their careers and graduation dates was generated and
provided through the Alumni Office at C College. This list contained the information for
315 students that matriculated through the department from 1990-2010. Of the 315 total
students, there were only 22 dance majors and 10 dance minors. It was determined that
this list was both incomplete and inaccurate as the information was dependent on alumni
who contacted the department with their information and/or updates. As such, this
document source did not provide any valuable or reliable data.

Dance course descriptions and syllabi were provided to the researcher directly by
dance faculty. A total of 13 syllabi were provided to the researcher, from 2007-current,
and included a sampling of each course taught by the dance faculty. The syllabi reflected
assignments and projects that were consistent with student-centered learning and critical
inquiry. Courses revolved around discourse, partner and/or small group activities,
opportunities to work or create in other spaces around campus, student choice in how grading or feedback would be provided or generated in the context of the course, emphasis on unique bodies, safe training, and the process of learning rather than stated learning objectives or outcomes. The syllabi therefore triangulated the research findings.

Marketing materials were provided through the department’s Administrative Assistant who catalogs and archives this information. This material included 17 posters and programs for dance concerts and performances from 2005-2011. Three important consistencies were found in these materials. First, the publicity always stated “Choreography by Faculty and Students.” Second, whenever possible the poster and program cover and layout reflected student voice through either creation of the artwork or choice in the included photo image. Third, inside the programs themselves, faculty names were listed under “Directors” of the concerts and students were cited as Choreographers with their corresponding piece. There was no section that separately listed dance faculty by their title, rank or biography. This triangulates with the research findings that participants felt like there was no hierarchy in the dance program. In every aspect, including what was publically disseminated through marketing materials, faculty and students worked collaboratively to present work with students who were acknowledged as collaborators and not subordinates. It is worth noting that neither the website nor any of these marketing materials explicitly promoted the openness of the dance program, the absence of entrance auditions, the existence of porous class levels, or the fact that dance majors at C College are a highly self-selected group.
Dance course evaluations dated back six years prior to the start of the research (2004) and up to the semester before the first field visit (Spring 2011). The process to have these released to the researcher was quite cumbersome. Ultimately, through a process that entailed each dance faculty member giving written permission, the Provost’s Office had to approve and release the evaluations. No faculty member objected to any course evaluation being released to the researcher. A total of 46 evaluations were provided. These included all course offerings in the dance program, taught by full time faculty members, from 2004-2011. There were 9 statements included on each evaluation:

1. The instructor communicated effectively.
2. The instructor made effective use of class time.
3. The instructor helped to create a positive learning environment.
4. The instructor made the course material interesting.
5. The instructor treated me and my work with respect.
6. The instructor provided helpful and timely feedback on assignments.
7. The instructor was available to students outside of class hours.
8. The instructor was effective in teaching this course.
9. The instructor challenged me to go beyond my previous abilities.

All 46 course evaluations had marks that ranked all 9 statements as either “Strongly Agree” or “Agree.” No course evaluation reported “Strongly Disagree” or “Disagree.” Across all 46 evaluations, there were 3 statements that, regardless of the semester, instructor, or course, consistently received the highest rating of “Strongly Agree” from students. These 3 were that the instructor communicated effectively (1), created a
positive learning environment (3), and treated me and my work with respect (5). Again, this document analysis triangulated the research findings through participants’ narratives of how the openness of the program was precipitated through acceptance of others, relationships based on trust and mutual respect, curricular structures, and emphasis on personal investigation.

Audit Trail and Journaling

The researcher maintained meticulous records of schedules and events during each field visit. However, there were no problems with data collection or research design; no concerns with reporting of the data or missing data; no participant dropped out of the research study. To the contrary, extensive communication before, during, and after each field visit seemed to ensure that everyone remained in the information loop and felt part of the research process. All e-mail communication that was initiated by the researcher received responses from participants within 48 hours.

A reflexive journal was maintained by the researcher and recorded perceptions and experiences while in the field. Admittedly, this was laborious. As a connoisseur of dance, there was a wealth of multi-sensory information acutely present for the researcher. Observing dance and interviewing participants and faculty sensitized the researcher to the ways that space, time, energy, and relational dynamics were embodied in the research setting (Knowles & Cole, 2008). As a dancer-researcher, the simultaneous experience of being inside one’s own body while viewing movement outside the body made this process highly personal (Knowles & Cole, 2008). For the researcher, this intersection between bodily experience and engaging with other dancers cultivated a unique
sensibility which required continuous integration of visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, and spatial information. This made the rote tracking of researcher voice feel particularly mundane and incorporeal to the process.

Due to time and scheduling constraints, it was not possible for the researcher to facilitate a collaborative choreography project with participants. This was originally envisioned as a way to provide participants with a movement element in the research process as an additional outlet to provide voice to their experience. It was obvious, however, that participants would have been enthusiastic to be part of this method of expression.

**Role as Researcher, a Priori Assumptions, and Connoisseurship**

Researchers, by tuning into their own a priori attitudes, beliefs, interests and needs, exert a way of not only monitoring their subjectivity but also develop and strengthen their reflexivity: all of which were important for the duration of this study (Glesne, 2006). Therefore, a priori assumptions, initially identified in Chapters 1 and 3, were acknowledged throughout. The educational background and professional experience of the researcher provided extensive grounding in the performative, experiential, and theoretical considerations of dance. This was specific to considerations of being a dancer trained in a conservatory environment and yet a teacher who has developed a democratic dance pedagogy that is aligned with the tenets of liberal arts education. Therefore, the “type” of dance program that might be considered to predominantly focus on critical inquiry and personal investigation may already run parallel with the researcher’s positionality and personal approach to dance education.
The freedom and opportunity to develop a personal narrative for how students choose to engage and shape their dance experience was assumed to be essential and transformative.

Eisner (1998) advanced his unique approach of connoisseurship as situating the researcher as an expert and recognized as a member of and having experience with the community of practice or research. This approach and positionality has been recognized and discussed throughout. In addition, connoisseurship provided the researcher with constant feedback of both the empirical and emotional data which helped to give shape to the research story; ability to identify emergent things and integrate information more fully; and purposeful guidance for interaction and inquiry. Without question, perceptions and experiences have shaped the researcher’s philosophy, teaching style and approach to dance training and curriculum design. This provided rich context that enhanced sensitivity. This suggests a design strength. While this also can be viewed as a source of researcher bias, the routine checking for reflexivity, triangulation of the data, and purposeful search for negative case analysis aimed to ensure that the researcher consciously and consistently negated these tensions. Stake (1995) wrote:

Qualitative case study is highly personal research. Persons studied are studied in depth. Researcher are encouraged to include their own personal perspectives in the interpretation (…) The quality and utility of the research is not based on its reproducibility, but on whether or not the meanings generated, by the researcher or the reader, are valued. Thus a personal valuing of the work is expected. (p. 135).
Validity and Other Strategies

Recall that coding and analytic processes were explicated at the end of Chapter 3 along with acknowledgment of the use of Atlas.ti qualitative data software to assist in data management. Exhibits were provided in the current chapter of a priori expectations that were not confirmed. These were clear examples that I was not blind to the data but allowed the data to talk in order to draw out understanding of the phenomenon. I reacted to results and did not confirm certain expectations; balancing the confirmatory with the exploratory. In this particular case, I therefore learned something that I was not expecting to find. This is an important notion to consider in the revised discussion of credibility and reliability techniques below.

Construct Validity

In addition to the aforementioned use of engagement and implementation of interview, observation, and focus groups protocols as part of the research design, this study sought to employ three strategies to consider validity of themes that emerged from analysis. First, Level I member checking was conducted throughout the course of the research. Before each interview, participants were given an opportunity to look over transcripts from the previous interview and ask follow-up questions or offer additional comments. The researcher also sought clarification on any data that seemed unclear. As such, participants were given opportunities to discuss and check for accuracy of information. Level II member checking was also conducted. Ideally, this would have been conducted face to face. However, logistics made this impossible. Participants were therefore e-mailed the research findings which included common themes, conclusions,
and recommendations. In the aggregate they were asked if this interpretation was a fair representation, if this made sense, if there were any surprises, and did anything fail to be communicated that participants felt was important. This was thought of as further exploration of the research. Again, connoisseurship was considered whereby sensitivity to the ways questions were asked and participants desire to explain their profession was means to improve response rates and participation. The researcher engaged in different forms of member checking throughout. In addition, as a courtesy to participants, a presentation will be given to include faculty and invited administrators at C College. This is sort of a hybrid presentation/member checking to address the overall trustworthiness of the research. It is a way to help solidify my research thinking and how this manifested throughout this process.

Second, peer debriefing was conducted. A face to face formal interview was conducted with a dance professor (not affiliated with C College) who was asked to review and raise questions regarding the study. They were shown the same aggregate data that participants were, asked to identify concerns, surprises, or anything that seemed controversial or problematic. In addition, there was discussion of the researcher’s a priori expectations. This added validity to the accounting of the research process.

Third, an external auditor was to be utilized to review the entire study. Although this was the intention, given the scope and volume of data, time did not allow for this. This could be considered a limitation but not a particularly dangerous one. Numerous safeguards were built into the study to check the trustworthiness of the conclusions. One
such safeguard was considered to be continuous checking of findings and conclusions with colleagues and the dissertation committee.

Inferences

The researcher was committed to including alternative explanations, divergent data, and multiple perspectives to address this concern. Reflexivity was essential throughout this process. In addition, triangulation occurred across methods, data, participants, and theory. This also helped set the stage for negative case analysis. The purposeful examination for different perspectives or contradictory accounts added credibility to the research findings (Creswell, 2009).

Reliability

The goal of this case study was not to generalize findings but was, instead to examine the bounded phenomenon in the dance program at C College. The strategies of reflexive journaling, audit trail, record keeping, and case study protocols were employed and addressed herein. Reliability demonstrates that a study could be repeated to yield the same results. As such, data saturation and Level II member checking served as forms of reliability. This case study linked the research findings to a broader theoretical base (discussed in Chapter 5) and intends to allow readers to decide if the findings have applicability or transferability to a specific population. In light of the methodology, Chapter 5 will provide analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of the research findings.

Introduction of Research Findings

The purpose of this case study was to explore the following overarching research question: How do dancers describe their experiences of being in the dance program at C
College? This study examined these experiences of dancers in an effort to specifically explore: a) How (or is) previous dance training acknowledged or marginalized? b) How (or does) community inform experience c) How (or does) the curriculum provide individualized learning experiences? and d) How (or does) one’s dance identity evolve or change? The researcher believed that a fuller understanding of these phenomenon would enable dance students and teachers to proceed with a more informed perspective in terms of potential challenges and facilitation of being a in a collegiate dance program. This chapter presents the key findings that were obtained from the series of three in-depth interviews with seven participants. For each research question, the major finding and corresponding themes will be presented. Descriptive quotations from interview transcripts represent multiple perspectives of participants and capture the resonance and complexity of the subject matter. Research methodology required purposeful examination for negative case analysis and use of faculty perspectives to triangulate data. Therefore, this data is woven throughout the chapter to anchor the research questions and solidify the discussion. Four major findings emerged from this study:

1. All 13 participants expressed that the openness of the dance program to everyone, regardless of previous training, was the most important factor in feeling acknowledged and accepted. Previous training was insignificant to achievement in the program.

2. All 13 participants cited that a “culture of basic goodness” presided over the dance program’s community in which a variety of appreciative and supportive practices were instrumental in shaping experience.

3. All 13 participants indicated that the dance faculty encouraged personal investigation which facilitated the ability for students to foster ownership, have voice, and explore their individualized learning interests within the curriculum.
4. All 13 participants voiced that dance identity knowingly evolved through involvement in the dance program and coincided with ability to articulate personal growth. The majority of participants also cited that dance identity was meditated, in part, by factors such as stereotypes and valuing of the field of dance, concerns about career choice pay off, and differing definitions of the dancing body.

**Research Question 1: How (or is) Previous Dance Training Acknowledged or Marginalized?**

Finding: All 13 participants (100%) expressed that the openness of the dance program to everyone, regardless of previous training, was the most important factor in feeling acknowledged and accepted. Previous training was insignificant to achievement in the program.

The primary and overriding finding of this study is that openness of the dance program, regardless of previous training, allowed participants to feel accepted and welcomed. This finding is highly significant because all participants (13 [100%]) found this openness to be important for involvement and inclusion in the program. All participants expressed feelings of acceptance from both dance faculty and peers for a wide variety of dance experiences, abilities, backgrounds, knowledge, and interests. Three themes emerged that informed this finding: 1) openness results in validation of experience and knowledge, 2) approach to movement preferences and habitual patterns, and 3) competition not the goal.

**Theme 1: Openness Results in Validation of Experience and Knowledge**

Based on participants’ descriptions, there was surprisingly no expectation that (any) prior dance training was necessary to participate in the dance program at C College. Any student interested in movement was welcomed to take dance classes and choose the
extent to which they became involved in the program. There was not a definition for what qualified someone to dance based on prior dance training or experience.

In the Absence of Devaluing and Marginalization

Precisely because there was no singular definition for what constituted prerequisite skill and knowledge, emphasis seemed placed on how the dance program could meet students where they were. As a result, participants felt no disjuncture between previous experience and the expectations of the dance program. Halprin discussed the permeable boundary for who was considered an acceptable dancer at C College. They explained it this way:

There aren’t clear lines of what makes an acceptable dance student here at C College at all. I mean there are in the sense that the process and approach to learning are really hyped and there is going to be probably more of a push toward someone being more experiential and sensation-based if they are really afraid of it that energy is certainly present with (faculty) as well. There is a huge amount of why shouldn’t everyone be in the beginning modern class if they really want to be? (...) There is a deep respect for individuated artistic process here and they pick up on that. We pick up on that. I would argue that some students appreciate that more than others. Some students are a little intimated by it. Understandable.

(Halprin)

Similar to Halprin, Ailey also discussed the importance of everyone having the opportunity to dance in the program. Ailey expanded on this viewpoint through discussion of how faculty neither publically discussed nor addressed what might be
considered lacking or technically insufficient in dancers who had previous training. To the contrary, faculty references to this were intangible. This was explained in the following way:

They never brought up past training like “Oh…did you learn that from…..” or if I was doing something. It was never brought up it was just taking you as you are now and working with how they can incorporate the curriculum onto you. I think that’s the vibe and that goes to the dance department - so many types of dancers, so many levels, so many types of interests, focuses. (Ailey)

Students with dance experience not only felt that they were not devalued or marginalized, but perhaps more surprising, participants also discussed how students with no training were equally encouraged and welcomed. Dunham began to give shape to the importance of this context and programmatic emphasis through discussion of the typical aesthetic of dance in higher education: the prevailing focus of what a dancer looks like and the idea of perfection. This appeared incongruent with the dance program at C College which encouraged and was inclusive of all. Dunham expressed this dichotomy in the following way:

The ethos is very nurturing. Everybody who comes to dance is encouraged. No matter what. No matter if you have higher experience or not. And I think that is a strong component of that really supportive character (…) Here I think it is really about encouraging dance and encouraging movement and exploration. It is really not about what exactly you look like or being perfect or about having this kind of distinct technique. It is very - again that sense of inclusiveness and everyone is
welcome (…) The faculty here have always been open to all levels of ability and all levels of training. I feel like they have a lot of respect for everybody’s background and for everybody as they are. (Dunham)

As presented in Chapter 2, these experiences are inconsistent with the literature on how dancers typically feel in the transition to dance study in academe. Similar to other participants, Graham spoke of feeling buttressed as they navigated unfamiliar concepts or movement material in dance classes. Graham stated it like this:

You could come in as a beginner with not anything else and it’s not really going to matter as much. I didn’t really have a lot of dance experiences beforehand and I never really felt like I needed that before jumping into a dance class here. It just felt like if I didn’t have the experience that was ok…I would just learn it. And just everyone is really nice to each other. (Graham)

The potential benefits of an open program appeared to also manifest in participants’ reporting that they did not feel judged in the program. In part, validation promoted feelings of joy and contentment in participants’ dance study rather than self-consciousness or thoughts of lacking technical abilities. Participants expressed that this was a seemingly atypical experience in college dance programs. Fokine expressed it this way:

I think that the biggest difference that I have found and I would like other programs to use is the lack of judgment; the openness of the department here. And accepting all different kinds of people, levels of dancers, body types, everything like that so definitely really accepting and open. (Fokine)
This acceptance encouraged participants to readily recommend dance classes to their friends. This seemed an important means for participants to not only forge their own membership in the professional community of practice but also was a way to communicate their understanding that there can be multiple entry points into the field. One participant described this when they said:

More welcoming. More relaxed. It is always nice when people are trying something new - and if someone I knew had never dance and they came up to me and said “I want to do dance and I am so nervous.” I could genuinely say to take class because I know that they won’t regret it. I really do think they want anyone and everyone to give it a shot at least. They do appreciate different styles, different bodies. (Cunningham)

A studio dance class can be highly stressful, especially when someone does not have foundational vocabulary or a movement repertoire. However, similar to Cunningham, Nikolais reported that not only do participants recommend dance classes to their friends, but the dance program has a reputation for providing a restorative, relaxing experience for students. They explained it this way:

I also found dance really therapeutic and very relaxing. I took photography and it wasn’t that hard of a class and I enjoyed it but I didn’t feel relaxed or rejuvenated like I do after dance class. All of my friends who know I take dance and have heard me talk about dance are like I would take that! So a lot of my friends signed up for contact next semester that have never taken a dance class because I
think it has this reputation for being sort of rejuvenating and welcoming.

(Nikolais)

Faculty also acknowledged that the program intends to celebrate a wide variety of students and dance backgrounds. They recognized its centrality for creating a positive learning environment. Shawn stated, “We give a learning experience that is universal to everybody regardless of their background.” And St. Denis added, “I think it’s really important to us that it’s a very accepting, positive environment.” The third faculty member, while acknowledging that there are challenges, detailed the pros of having an open program. They echoed their colleagues:

I think the unique properties are that it is open - it is not an audition program. So there are pros and cons with that. The pros are that we are very welcoming and we get an influx and there is a real variety of students and we have a lot of surprises. Surprises of people – (X) would be an example- who I am working with a lot - who took my beginning modern class last fall and is really progressing. Not to say that they don’t have a lot to learn - but they have been bitten by the bug of dance - and there have been a number of those cases and that just doesn’t happen in a lot of other places. That is a pro. But on the other hand - I do think that we are modeling some things that are reproducible and would be healthy to model for other places. I am just laughing as I am thinking in terms of just the openness. It is one of those things where there is a lot of unspoken but if we got methodical about it we could probably achieve far more - have a lesson plan - these are some guides of how to have a healthy situation. (Wigman)
The aforementioned responses seem to suggest possible advantages that exist due to the absence of devaluing and marginalization of previous training. This appears directly connected to participants’ reporting of personalization in the dance program. The commitment to value individual experience, coupled with the intimate environment, enabled every student to be in the purview of faculty.

Although the majority of participants appreciated that various dancers and ability levels were readily embraced in the dance program, two participants (15%) expressed that some students feel this translates to an expectation to be heavily involved in both dance classes and performances. Duncan, a participant who was insistent that they would not succumb to perceived pressure to be a dance major, conveyed this view when they said:

But for me, personally, for me I feel really pressured to be more involved in the dance program (lowers voice to almost a whisper and body language changes. I ask her if she would feel more comfortable if I close the door. She says she’s fine). I do feel pressured a lot. And it has paid off. With (faculty member) being my adviser - I do feel pressured into it - I will probably end up being happy about it. What was the original question? (I repeat the question). I mean subtly. They are not…that is part of the whole freedom of choreography - they are not going to limit you. I don’t feel pressured in that way. Sometimes I put so much into the dance program here. Like last year and again this year and it is partially because I do love it. And if I didn’t like it, I wouldn’t be doing it. But, I do feel pressured into it and I feel like I can’t put as much focus on my other studies as much.
But…I don’t know…that is what I am kind of dealing with right now - if I would want to make them (faculty) happy. I don’t know…probably…if it’s something I wasn’t to do as well…I don’t know….but I do not want to major (hits hand on desk as each of these words are emphatically spoken). I am putting my foot down on that. (Duncan)

Halprin felt faculty intended to express genuine interest in students. In part, this was due to faculty getting to know students personally in order to harmonize the multitude of skills in the program rather than compel that such openness is equated to expected levels of involvement. Halprin, while agreeing with Duncan, seemed to frame feelings of pressure in a positive light. They described this as follows:

Generally, people are pretty good about not being like you have to major in this. I have never seen faculty be like ‘You have to be a major!’ There is definitely - there is a guy in advanced modern….and (faculty member) saw him playing basketball during the period and was like, “Son where are you? You should be in this class now.” And he was like you are right. He was someone who had taken dance classes here. We want people to be involved and it’s also something where he is beautiful to have in classes and pieces (…) I think it is a little respectfully evangelical. (Halprin)

Faculty, echoing Halprin, attributed feelings of being pressured to their unwavering commitment to give dancers individual direction and attention. Perhaps such consideration is construed as overbearing or demanding. Their purpose was explained in the following way:
You know - I don’t know if its pressure or that we check in with them more than once. How’s it going this semester? Why do you want to take this class? With certain people that we would just love to have in the program. I hope they find it flattering and not strong armed. (Shawn)

Faculty also communicated that regardless, students would never be (or feel) retaliated against if they did not do what the faculty asked or expected of them. St. Denis adamantly made this point:

My sense is that they don’t feel like we are pushing too hard. But I think definitely there is a sense of encouragement - but without the sense that if you don’t we aren’t going to use you or cast you or take a lesser roll. I don’t think they ever get a sense of that! (St. Denis)

Faculty also considered the pragmatics of course schedules and their related role as advisers. This was seen as a strength of the dance program and reinforced that previous training was not a factor that informed decisions about class placement or inclusion in the program. Instead, faculty took time to personally connect with each dancer to discuss their interests and what advice might be helpful in advancing their goals. One professor commented:

I think part of that is also that the classes rotate….some of them that one would need. So, they need advice – it’s not like it’s always available. So, it really can be a case where they miss like one thing. So part of it is just pragmatic; offering that clarity shall we say if they want it (…) We have had so many that are talented that didn’t major or minor and were really involved. (Wigman)
As detailed above, participants’ reported that there was no singular definition of what was or who could dance, no apparent disjuncture between previous training (or no training) and program expectations, membership into the professional community, and individuated attention from faculty encouraged student involvement. In the absence of feelings that often arise from devaluing or marginalization, it was assumed that other factors might also be significant with regards to how an open program integrates movement histories or preferences.

**Theme 2: Approach to Movement Preferences and Habitual Patters**

Given that participants described the acceptance they felt in the program, it would make sense that they also felt that their individual movement vocabularies were broadly encouraged. Participants spoke favorably about the ways in which their quirks and idiosyncrasies were integrated. Five participants (38%) specifically credited this to faculty’s focus on personal exploration and discovery rather than a break down or marginalization of technique in order to achieve a prescribed aesthetic. These responses highlight how this is encountered based on individual dance histories. Faculty building on what students uniquely brought with them to the program was an important point and was communicated by Ailey when they said:

You come in with what you know and people here just build off of that. It is more of a building up. The program here and I have said this in past interviews -it is about finding you. It starts from this inside out deal and developing yourself while I think my outside program - my teacher had an objective to put on a show
every year. In class we did learn some stuff but it was mostly just choreography and how to do things. (Ailey)

Pavlova had extensive ballet training before coming to C College. The technical emphasis in this highly disciplined, codified from often creates challenges to potentially unlearning movement habits deemed unsafe or anatomically unsupported. However, like Ailey, Pavlova reported that the approach was not to tear her movement patterns down but rather to encourage and build upon the strengths she already had. Pavlova expressed this in the following way:

The faculty suggested - the first class I took here was ballet and after that they suggested that I start taking modern and focusing on letting go and getting rid of inhibition and just dancing - feeling the movement - but never demeaning or put down any of my previous training. I think I had to work on breaking down parts of it but it was never seen as a bad thing (…) They were helpful and supportive and I think it wasn’t about getting rid of anything or changing anything it was more like building on what I have - them reshaping my dancing. (Pavlova)

Hawkins also had previous ballet training. While being encouraged to also explore modern dance at C College, they noted that this was done in a way that did not ask dancers to simply morph into a new mold for dance training. The ways in which movement patterns were addressed, again, seemed to return focus to the individual rather than allot time for ritualistic detraining. Hawkins stated:

I was very you know I had my dance studio back home and I took ballet classes and I was like….not like a ballerina because I wasn’t very good…but it was more
about having fun and being with my friends than it was about getting my foot above my head or doing a big ponche. I came here and it’s very modern. The focus is on modern dance and I was really encouraged to do modern dance because I didn’t like the floor which is very hard if you’re going to be a modern dancer… and I was just encouraged to break away from the mold of ballet and become more comfortable with modern movement. For example, so I came here with ballet and now I’m a modern dancer and I’ve grown in a certain way. My friend came here already having modern experience and so she grew in a different way. It’s not comparable because we’re different people and the department doesn’t try to compare us or make us all become - set us into a mold. (Hawkins)

It seems a logical conclusion that if there are multiple entry points into the program in which detraining is believed to not be happening, then participants would also report that such an approach communicated that there was not a right/wrong binary for dance. Instead, this approach encouraged students to try new things as part of expanding one’s movement vocabulary. Dunham concurred with other participants when they said:

What I see is that they try and suggest a movement quality that they are looking for. It is difficult for some people. For example, if you have a lot of experience with the upright styles - then release into the floor can be challenging. So, since the department here is mostly modern – it’s a lot about groundedness. I see that encouraged. It is not so much that being upright is wrong or being this way is wrong. But in this case, this is what they want. (Dunham)
Halprin talked about experiences with former teachers who tried to break down movement habits that were perceived to be bad or aesthetically undesirable. Echoing Dunham, Halprin suggested that such habits were not only considered useful information in the dance program but were sources of knowledge to be embraced. Halprin communicated the personal significance of this approach when they said:

Faculty got to me at a really great point. They were like no it’s not what you do at all (break down habitual patterns) you use them and you understand them! And I love those habits and I like the things about me that a lot of my former teachers didn’t like. It made me start thinking about these things as less of a right/wrong thing and more of a different thing. And I was like thank you, thank you, thank you! (participant smacked the floor with their hand on each word). I was like - duh! It was received. (Halprin)

Faculty made an explicit connection between students’ previous training, including preferences and patterns, to their agreed upon approach to address those as vital to the learning process. This was a central tenet in the dance program and aligned with participants’ experiences. Moreover, given the diversity of training backgrounds within the program, faculty expressed that students must believe that their skills provide a level of competency and effectiveness that can facilitate new options to learn and explore. St. Denis articulated the importance of this in the following way:

It varies a lot because each student comes into the program in such a different place. Often times, one of the models we see is certainly kids who come in with a lot of ballet or different kind of technical background and you see that
transformation where they first start to experience modern dance and maybe resist that a little bit initially and then they become completely immersed in it - that transformation from being a bun head to a barefoot dancer (…) I think that another thing we all do is work from this model - we recognize that we all have our preferences and our tendencies and background and our physique and our previous training our personalities - are all part of those preferences - but that its about exploring options beyond those preferences. So, I think that is something that is really a through line with all of us so that it becomes you don’t have to deny who you are at this moment or what your background is but encouraging you to go beyond that and give yourself new and other options. I think that is one way that we really specifically address that issue. Habits are a little bit different and I think very difficult to change. But I think, again, the more immersed that they get - if they take the history, the composition, the kinesiology that we are looking at that on many different levels and exploring okay - yes you can rotate out 180 degrees if you’re goal is to be ballerina in the NYC ballet - understanding physically what is happening physically if you make that choice. Understanding what is happening physically if you do make that choice presents it in a little bit different way than just this is the aesthetic that you are going for. So it becomes a more informed. (St. Denis)

Wigman, echoing her colleague, expanded on this through discussion of the concept of unlearning and faculty’s assertions of where that should appropriately come into play when training (or detraining) young dancers. Wigman said:
What do you integrate? What do you let go? What is useful? It is not - I think we all have a lot of respect for our students in terms of where they are coming from. Unless we are talking about really bad habits where they think they are externally rotating and they are faking it and they don’t know where their rotators are whatsoever or they are over rotating in their feet. Those kind of things that are actually kind of damaging - or they are torque-ing - those things - yeah! We are dealing with unlearning. But in terms of who they are - if they come from a place where they can utilize that information and we give them more - some of it will contradict and some of it won’t. But, they can still make their choices and we empower them to an extent to do that. Assumptions if they are not examined - they limit too much. It is not a matter of telling them what to believe it is a matter of examining assumptions. I think that is the part of unlearning more than anything else. It is not this is right and this is wrong. I don’t think any of us have an interest in right or wrong in that way - it is very limited and it is not an approach that we believe in - in a pedagogical way. (Wigman)

Faculty situated their approach within the wide network of influences present in the dance program. To address the very presence of such diverse movement backgrounds and, perhaps, begin to cultivate beliefs that each dancer was capable of exercising control and agency within such a program, they were committed to providing a universal dance experience. Discussion of this goal, as follow-up to Wigman’s above statement, was expressed by Shawn when she said:
And those assumptions come up in a lot of different arenas. What she said with choreography and I also see that a lot in history class in terms of what is beautiful and what is something that is valid as art - once we start looking at post modern. Also, partly because we are a liberal arts college and we have so many mixed abilities in a class - yes we acknowledge their backgrounds - people come in here imprinted - we are not blank slates. However, the way that we can unify them a lot of times is if we are taking a journey of discovery together. We are all learning about labanotation together - regardless of what your past is - or contact improvisation. In one way, we are trying to find a common place where we can all learn so that we are not at odds with the person who has had 15 years of ballet and the person who is entering a class for the first time. We give a learning experience that is universal to everybody regardless of their background. It might be different if we had a different kind of school that had more levels placed on ability and those sorts of those things so that we would really have to examine what their backgrounds are. Our goals are slightly different. (Shawn)

These responses seemed to suggest that the dance program approached dancers’ idiosyncratic movement habits and preferences as things to be investigated and built upon as part of the learning process. Time was not allotted for detraining or unlearning. Dancers did not feel that they were being broken down. However, this seemingly positive aspect of the open program did not alleviate general stressors often reported in the transition to dance study in academe.
**Transitional Stressors**

The structure of the dance program coupled with faculty’s approach to integrating diverse training and backgrounds did not completely negate students feeling stressed about their transition to advanced dance study. Some participants mentioned time management and pressures that are typically associated with entering college. Specific to the dance program, however, three participants (23%) revealed what would have potentially minimized their unease with not knowing what to expect. One participant voiced the need to have better understanding of how other dancers would touch your body and occupy your personal space. Duncan expressed this need when they said:

I know people that just jumped into the higher level classes - which was a little bit more stressful - I don’t know sometimes I think you need that jarring - it gets you right into it - I don’t think it’s a traumatic experience for anyone. I know the thing a lot of people have said was jarring about their first experience was the whole contact improv thing - you want me to touch them? That I know is really weird for a lot of people. But - even if they told you that ahead of time – it’s weird. It is something that you have to get comfortable in your own body. Any verbal preparation isn’t going to do much - you just have to go into it (…) When I was a freshman, there were all these really tall - last year - there was a group of seniors and they were all tall and skinny and beautiful. When you talked to them they were all really nice - and one of them was my - she choreographed a piece that I was in for the spring concert. As a freshman coming in - that’s scary. And then you quickly realize that no one is scary. (Duncan)
While Duncan described body awareness, Ailey focused more on the need for direct verbal communication. Ailey conveyed the need for a “verbal encounter” with faculty in order to quiet self-doubt:

I don’t know - I think it was more me - the first kind if negative experience I had - which isn’t very negative -I am over it now. Fall semester dance concert - I tried out freshman year and was so excited and didn’t get it in anything. It was a buming kind of moment. It was just a matter of - they really just want to see you be yourself – it’s not so much a performance- I think that’s what I always thought that dance was constantly a performance and they just wanted to see how you moved. If you are trying to move the way that it’s being taught - it would look awkward on you b/c that person is doing it the way it fits them. I think the audition was very different in the sense that it was like - okay…improv something at this point and then move into this….I couldn’t deal with that at first! Yeah…..I feel like if I was more comfortable with myself - some kind of way of them (faculty) really emphasizing that at first. It is just nerve-wracking being a freshman and coming to college and dancing with people who have been in this program and all different levels of people - so I think it was more my self-consciousness. I don’t remember - but I am sure people were probably constantly being like relax and just feel something and I couldn’t comprehend that! But I don’t know how they could have made that transition better for me. I can’t recall much; meaning I guess it must not have been that bad. It was pretty seamless but I think just in terms of my self-conscious thought process about it - maybe just not
even through movement - just talking with us - we have technique classes - we
have mid-semester things that you can improve on and all the teachers talk to you.
But maybe at the beginning - if they had something to talk to just freshman or
people who have never taken a technique class before - just a verbal encounter
with these people - just calming those self-conscious and sub-conscious thoughts
down. Because moving is very personal and it’s very hard. It’s like public
speaking with your body. (Ailey)

Duncan and Ailey both spoke of how the program could have done a better job of
meeting their personal needs and addressing their reservations. A third participant,
Dunham, suggested there was a missing piece in the program. Although the program was
admittedly open, Dunham discussed concern with the lack of performance opportunities.
Frustrations with the perceived inability to get noticed as a freshman were voiced in the
following way:

I think there are certain aspects to almost any transition that are going to be
difficult. Because coming into it there were a lot of other people who had dance
experience prior and sometimes I felt a little out of my depth or like I wasn’t good
enough. That was really mostly my own interpretation of things. I have always
found the department here to be so supportive and if you want to dance they want
to make it happen. The one thing is that if you are interested in performing - it
can be little difficult to break into that. Especially coming is as a freshman and if
you are not really, really obviously good it is hard to get noticed as an unknown if
you will just because there are only so many spaces (in a piece). So, a certain
number of them go to upperclassmen and people tend to favor their friends and people they have worked with before. It would be nice if there were more ways for people interested in performing to get their feet wet. When I first got involved in dance here I was a little frustrated. (Dunham)

While faculty did not specifically mention these same three issues raised by participants, they did recognize that students often feel disjointed during the transition. Their observations revealed that students, especially those with previous training, often feel less physically challenged. St. Denis explained it this way:

It varies a lot. Some of the students feel like it’s not physically challenging in the same way. That the technical standards are not the same - and they’re not. It’s a different technique. I think there may be that period of time where you see frustration or students bringing their pointe shoes in to do after class on the side of the room to try and maintain their technical skills. (St. Denis)

Another faculty added that as students change over into the dance program, they often exhibit strong preferences for the genre of dance they previously studied or rely solely on acquired aesthetics. Accordingly, the transition can be more challenging if students are closed off. Shawn voiced this resistant perspective in the following way:

Those tend to not be our majors - the people that come in with those resistant tendencies. You see it also in those ways but also in what classes they constantly take. Our classes can be repeated for credit. So which class do they just want to take - based also on the mid semester self-evaluation and when I teach history you
can really get a sense of where people’s aesthetics and biases lie. So the way that they talk about it - and mine is well - all of that comes out. (Shawn)

As detailed in Chapter 2, as dancers navigate changes in roles, interests, and relationships to dance training, confusion about individuation and conformity are also typical (Erikson, 1968). In addition, because dance is a social practice where comparison to others is inevitable, social influences can be a source of challenge to one’s evolving sense of knowledge and/or ability (Andrzejewski, 2009). Competition can therefore potentially create serious tensions among peers.

**Theme 3: Competition not the Goal**

Perhaps it is not surprising that all participants described the openness of the program and absence of breaking down previous training as factors that produced an environment where competition was not a motivator among dancers. This was appreciated as a foundational principle of the program; encouraging a level of contribution and acceptance often lacking in dance study. Participants evidenced this dearth of antagonism in a variety of ways.

*Absence of a Hierarchy*

Participants spoke about the absence of a hierarchy in the dance program as a contributing factor for why antagonism was not part of the dance experience. They reported no perceptible divisions between faculty to students; freshman to seniors; or perhaps most significantly, with beginning to advanced dancers. This appeared to be a substantial organizer credited with the elimination of competitiveness among peers. Ailey made a comparative analysis to what they considered the more prevalent rank-
filled, talent-based dance program. In the absence of a hierarchy, competition has no place to thrive. Ailey described this in following way:

There isn’t a hierarchy which makes the dance department such a joy to work with because everyone gets to have a positive feel about it and no one feels put down. I think with the arts there’s that tendency to rank the better artists and stuff like that. But that really isn’t the goal here in terms of the dance department. I mean it is a program that focuses mainly on modern and ballet but students who have come back from being abroad or just had interests before they came here in different style of dance…have been able to continue that here because people are willing to learn or share that interest. And the professors are totally willing to enhance the original interests in dance that you had before you came here and cultivate them even more (…) You move this way and I move this way….and then it just starts to fit because you feel each other and you start to realize - they are not going to judge you - you just realize that everyone is really in the same boat - no matter their level and even if you do get paired with someone who is at a completely different level I don’t feel like there is any animosity towards that person when there is partnering work because it’s another opportunity for you to teach or try something else. Partnering work is an opportunity to express your strengths and to learn from other people’s strengths. I feel like why wouldn’t you want that? It’s like a gift. (Ailey)
Hawkins agreed with Ailey. Further, they discussed how observation and reflection were a healthy part of how dancers learned from and compared to one another. Again, the lack of competition was expressed:

Technique classes here are so great because the community here is so welcoming and so accepting and it’s not competitive or judgmental at all. The class I took this semester was huge and majors were taking with other students and we would ask “How do you do this?” “How do you do that?” “What are you thinking about when you do this?” “Can you help me out?” which I think was so great! It was so lovely! (Hawkins)

One participant seemed to hearken back to faculty’s earlier referenced goal of providing a universal dance experience. Graham appeared to correlate this, in part, with lack of a competitive echelon among peers. Graham said:

In my opinion, we are not competitive at all. We are just really supportive and if someone just enjoys dance then that’s - they would be supported with that. I am not sure the faculty do teach some technique but I am not sure if it’s any one specific form they just try to give you a general broad knowledge of this is ballet and this is modern. So, if you were to go out to a specific studio where you were to learn that type of dance - it’s not really like that here. Peers are supportive of each other. We want to encourage each other and just do the best you can. If you are not getting a certain technique down it’s okay! You don’t feel pressured. (Graham)
Duncan responded similarly to Graham and other participants. However, Duncan seemed to explicate this further through discussion of their perceptions of other dance programs. While Duncan seemed to appreciate that C College offered individualized, academic engagement in dance study, the focus was believed to be atypical and would not be for a student who wanted to dance in a competitive, physically strenuous program. If you recall from Chapter 1, this potential “type” of dance program was referred to as one vested in technique/conservatory training. The literature suggested that it is common for emerging adults to reflect on their development through comparison to others as well as the variables that shape their learning (Erikson, 1968; Smith & Pourchet, 1998). For Duncan, the lack of judgment was attributed in part, to awareness of differing philosophical approaches to dance study and the strata of talent levels. Duncan expressed this in the following way:

Yeah I think it’s very individualized and easy going and not that that’s not hard. If you are in the class - you are not in a bullshit class - there are essays - I don’t know - there are assignments and you have to be engaged - and you have to participating - and obviously the classes are difficult but it’s not strenuous in a way. If someone came here and they said “I have been dancing all my life and I love dance competitions. I know I want to be a dance major!” I probably wouldn’t recommend this dance program for them. Because I think they are going to be bored and the philosophy (at C College) wouldn’t work with theirs. Everybody is really nice (laughs). There is absolutely none of that here - no judgment. (Duncan)
Dunham discussed the dance program’s emphasis on self-directed curiosity. Encouragement of personal goals and measures of progress seemed to shift focus away from ascending the ladder to some technically virtuosic benchmark.

One of the underlying features of the dance department that I think is very characteristically defining – (faculty) says this a lot in their class, “Replace ambition with curiosity.” You know in technique class – it’s about you relating to the movement it is really not about how it looks. You could get to the point where you can make stylistic choices and you are exploring nuances and elements of dance - but there isn’t an end goal. (Dunham)

Humphrey, like Dunham, correlated personal goals and interests to lack of competition. Interestingly, if dancers are pursuant of their own path then there seems to be simultaneous recognition that a hierarchy will not enable dancers to arrive at their own end goal. Humphrey surmised this when they said:

So (student) is interested in folklore and I am interested in who knows what…and I am not going to compare my - who knows what to her folklore because we have two different paths so there isn’t room for competition. I don’t think that’s the only reason but I do think it’s an aspect of why that doesn’t come out as much here and I think that (faculty) really do encourage the supportive and nonjudgmental community here. (Humphrey)

**Viewed Through the Lens of Previous Training**

For some participants, sensitivities were heightened precisely because of personal experience with rivalry throughout former dance training. Nijinsky identified
competition as detrimental to dancers’ success in the dance program, “I do think that people who have a competitive nature in dance aren’t as successful here (at C College) as they might be in another dance setting. Negativity is very detectable here and it’s not welcomed.” Similarly, Pavlova referenced relationships with former dance peers that were meditated by competition; reinforcing personal egos, pressures to be cast, and importance of public accolades. This was a stark contrast to the experiences Pavlova has had with fellow dancers at C College and was clear when they said:

The people who I associate with the dance department and who I think are amazing dancers are all just so open. It’s really interesting to think about. And when I think back to high school -everyone who I thought was an amazing dancer was very into themselves and out for themselves. I think being at C College has brought a new perspective to dancing and it has - my dancing has definitely evolved. I think what changed and a big part of it is how I define success. I think before it was all about - I had a very weird relationship with fellow dancers at the school I was in. It was all about getting that one role- there was a lot of competition. I don’t feel that here at all. It is more about dancing for yourself - it’s more like soulful rather than about my ego. I think - that is what has really changed. (Pavlova)

Two other participants discussed a recent guest artist who taught Horton master classes at C College. The juxtaposition of how they responded to the guest artist versus how they typically reported feeling in dance classes with faculty revealed poignant insight to previous training. This was evident in the following exchange:
Nikolais: And also the way (guest artist) gave feedback was like this person is doing it right. Look at her. Versus I think the way that I get feedback from the rest of the professors is more like - it would be a variety of comments: Oh, (student) try doing it this way, or this is something that somebody else is trying, or (student) maybe you could try doing it this way, you did it this way. I think that gives - for some reason- that allows me to think about - the way she sparked something competitive in me. I wanted to be chosen. I wanted that. But the way the C College professors do it it’s much more like oh…I can try it this way. It’s something that might help me. It isn’t like you are better for doing it this way.

Paxton: I have never witnessed any C College professor singling out one person and having them show it to the rest of the class and show them the right way to do it. And I have had that in almost every dance class I have ever taken or any dance program I have ever been involved in. The person that does it right is picked out and made to demonstrate it. When you are that person -you are like yeah! But it makes the rest of the students resent you and it doesn’t foster a good community. It sounds corny to have a community environment in the classroom - but particularly in dance class - especially in our dance class there are only eight of us and I think it’s really important that we are not competing with each other but that we do a floor combo - the people standing on the side were like…yeah good job that looked awesome. Positive feedback is encouraged instead of 1 person given positive feedback and encouraging everyone else to do the same thing.
Nikolais: In this context - I never realized this before - I am amazed that I don’t get competitive in dance classes here because I am an incredibly competitive person. Both in terms of athletics…I have chilled out as I have gotten older but when I was younger I hear stories from my friends - and I think that must have been really difficult and hard to be around sometimes. The fact that I don’t ever notice it! I mean of course I want to do well and I want to improve but it’s never I want to improve relative to (other dancers).

Paxton: Yeah! I feel that way, too! Even in the Horton technique class I felt like I was watching my performance in relation to everyone else’s and I want to be the one she picks or the one picked out by the teacher because she thinks I don’t like it about myself but I do get competitive sometimes. You get positive attention for doing this well or right. This is actually the first time I am actually realizing it - in these classes I have not felt - ever - like I need to put myself up on this one person. I see the way (another student) does this and maybe I could work my body like that - it is so much healthier.

It is worth noting that two participants remarked that regardless of the majority’s ideology, there are individuals who are competitive and cast judgment on peers. Halprin said, “But I feel like everyone has moments that they feel judged.” And Nijinsky echoed, “Not to burst the perfect bubble we have created here but there are definitely people here that are competitive.”

Faculty concurred that they do not see competition as part of dancers’ experiences. St. Denis said, “I don’t feel like there is a lot of competiveness among
students.” Wigman added, “There are also lots of ways of motivating. Competition is a really stock one and I think we are more creative in dealing with that. It is a very overused one. I think I motivate my students to do really well but I don’t do it through competition.”

Summary

The first research finding was that all participants expressed that the openness of the dance program to everyone, regardless of previous training, was the most important factor in feeling acknowledged and accepted. Previous training was considered insignificant to achievement in the program. Three themes were presented to support this finding: 1) openness results in validation of experience and knowledge, 2) approach to movement preferences and habitual patterns, and 3) competition not the goal. I was surprised to discover that dancers did not report feeling that their previous training was devalued or marginalized. Moreover, there was no apparent emphasis placed on dancers unlearning certain movement patterns or habits. To the contrary, the presence of these was a key expectation and it was not confirmed or realized by the data I actually got. I did not confirm my a priori expectation. Therefore, I learned something by being open to exploratory data and reacting to this result. This is an example of being reflective and will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Research Question 2: How (or does) Community Inform Experience?

Finding: All 13 participants (100%) cited that a “culture of basic goodness” presided over the dance program’s community in which a variety of appreciative and supportive practices were instrumental in shaping experience.
This finding is highly significant because all participants (13 [100%]) voiced that an explicit acceptance and appreciation of the unique differences of individual members fostered a community in which dancers’ experiences are strengthened, supported, and challenged. Not surprisingly, this may account for the number of participants who described their awareness of the individual dancer in relation to an accommodating community as what were needed to understand the content and process of learning. Four themes emerged that specifically inform this idea: 1) culture of basic goodness: community as a source of appreciative and supportive practices, 2) relationships with faculty, 3) learning with and from peers, and 4) small size of the institution.

**Theme 1: Culture of Basic Goodness: Community as a Source of Appreciative and Supportive Practices**

Participants felt that the dance community encouraged all students to be open and attentive to each other. One faculty used the phrase “culture of basic goodness” to describe the dance program at C College. Participants further explained this community as one whose people and practices ritualize respect, utilize support systems, and do not require an audition to assess who is most qualified to study dance.

**Ritualizing Respect**

Respect, as an important constitution in this community, was the first way in which the culture of basic goodness was framed. The notion of ritualizing respect was commonly discussed by participants as the expectation that mutual respect should be evident in multiple contexts including: coursework, interactions with teachers and peers, rehearsals, performances, and various student processes of creative discovery. Ailey
reported that this culture enabled dancers to feel validated and empowered. Moreover, this seemed to cultivate confidence because not only did dancers have permission to explore an array of possibilities but they could rely on peers and faculty to value their work or ideas. This notion of respect was conveyed by Ailey in the following response:

I think that they are teaching all levels of dance – it’s important that they give both their insight as well as let the dancers find their own insight. When I was talking about cohesion within the community - they (faculty) initiate those connections I think. They are very good about showing an example of something and having you interpret it in your own movement vocabulary or style. They help find an array of possibilities that we do which I think develops overall - within classes - a larger sense of people can understand that xyz can mean so many things. I think that through those realizations people are able to respect other people’s work more, give feedback on other people’s work, and let everyone kind of collaborate on stuff (…) The fact that the professors take us seriously has helped us. They look at us as dancers and not students and I think that has helped us feel like the empowerment to pursue what we want as dancers and to feel the confidence to say ‘Hey I want to make a solo piece!’ or a duet study or some kind of a study and I want to see how it would look on others. And people here are so accommodating to help others grow that they are willing to be like ‘Yeah I am interested in that!’ Which is great. (Ailey)
Participants, in part, attributed the fact that respect was such an important part of the community to the faculty. Dance faculty modeled that divergent interests and conflicting feedback were significant contributors to better understanding one’s own artistic process. They (faculty) are showing that there are a variety of ways you can run yourself as a dancer - just in the way that they interact with each other and teach classes. There is huge amount of support for us as students not just as dancers. And I have found, as I think that a lot creative people have, it is my vulnerability in that way being concerned with how people are moving and feeling is something that I can use in establishing a community. In a sense, what a lot of contemporary dancers do - especially in improvisation based, nurturing, trust-based stuff it is a stab at a perfect world a little bit (...) I think you definitely get to see that respecting where others are in their process. When you dance with other people in the department because it is tiny and there are times - as there will always be - students whose feedback doesn’t mean a whole lot to me because we look at dance very differently and I don’t think of that as anyone being better things - I just don’t like the way you are framing that feedback - it doesn’t make sense to me - it isn’t really applicable. But even then - there are going to be people in the audience like that. Its nice - you get to this point where it is about respecting where people are at the time. When you let that be what it is you realize you can still do what you are doing. (Halprin)

A seemingly natural pairing, participants often coupled respect with trust. Pavlova articulated this when they said, “I think that there is just more trust here. There is a
connection with trust and respect which starts to break down barriers. I didn’t really have that strong of a connection with teachers or professors before. I think a lot of it is just really being in the present.”

Faculty also discussed respect. They intimated that respect was foundational, perhaps especially in a dance program that intends to embrace diverse experiences and interests. Shawn described this in the following way:

I think one of those unspoken things that unites us is kind of what (faculty member) touched on - respect of everything that we do and that we are seeing dance in as broad a lens as we can. My hope is always that a student gets an experience with dance that is not just in the movement - not that you can’t not get a lot from the movement experience - but I am hoping that we have so much to offer and so that idea of a holistic experience. (Shawn)

Wigman explicated this point. In order for dancers to be willing to delve into the unknown, learning should provide means to individuate and unify, humble and inform. Wigman seemed to suggest that this is possible only when the community has respect as its central axis. This idea was succinctly stated when they said:

What I fell from the get-go is that the bottom line is the same. We all care about the health of the students that they are leaning about their bodies and moving through space and the basics of dance elements and pedagogically sound information. In a functional way with somatic as a big part and a real, mutual respect for both each other but also for all different realms of dance including what we are not experts in. So there is this baseline that is very similar (…) But
how you articulate and the mutual respect that you offer within that so there is diversity and a care from that - is something that we all really nurture (...) It is a lot of who we are and what our backgrounds are and what we care about - which is the baseline of using the body efficiently with openness and curiosity and respecting each person as an individual. (Wigman)

In order to balance respect of the individual dancer with the collective community, discernible customs also appeared to be in place. Simply stated, “It’s a very supportive department!” (Dunham).

**Utilizing Support Systems**

Thus, a second way that a culture of basic goodness was articulated was participants’ discussion of support systems. While not uniformly defined, these were generally described as substantive interactions within the dance community that built confidence, provided collaborative opportunities, and sustained dialogical relationships. Participants seemed able to discern the ways in which communication and context substantiated support for one another.

Ailey discussed the connection between building personal confidence and valuation of others’ contributions. They expressed this in the following way:

Actually we are very different and those differences help support everyone’s qualities and support the cohesion within the group of people. We are doing this site specific piece and we have a whole range of interests - girls that haven’t ever danced before and they are just so excited. I think you wouldn’t find that
confidence without having the support system - which I think C College really
offers. (Ailey)

Similar to Ailey’s reference to the site specific piece, other participants also discussed the
importance of collaboration with peers and faculty. Opportunities to work together
fostered creativity and supported artistic process. This way of working together was
highly esteemed. Pavlova conveyed the importance of collaboration when they said:

The dance community here - there is definitely a mutual sharing and collaboration
between everyone - the members of the dance department the students, the
professors - students who participate in the dance program as majors, minors, or
anyone who takes classes (…) I think it’s because the dance community is very
active - there is a passiveness that you get in other departments I think that’s just
because the backbone of the dance department is the passion that everyone shares.
I think that brings something to this community that is very special. I guess
because it is so not like a self-interest thing but it is about everyone. There is
definitely an exchange of ideas in classes, in rehearsals, whether it’s
choreographing something or just sharing your voice through the movement.
(Pavlova)

Halprin, dovetailing Pavlova, returned to the idea of unity through community. It may
appear commonsensical that people sharing an experience within a bounded space and
time may feel connected to others also involved in that experience. This commonality, in
and of itself, could be perceived as a support system. However, it seemed that
understanding how other bodies move in relations to one’s own provided dancers more
finite attunement; recognizing and seeking out options for collaboration. These positive experiences seemed to cyclically manifest in dance classes, rehearsals, and performances. Halprin expressed this in the following way:

A group of people united by something that can communicate with each other - more or less. I definitely - and most of my dancers would say this after being in pieces with people that they didn’t know before - I have this strange relationship with these people I don’t know outside of this context and I haven’t had as many conversations as I have had with most of my friends but I feel like I know them really well because I know how their body moves in a particular situation and there is that basic kind of…wow…I have just had that experience together with you. I don’t think it necessarily has to be a shared interest - that always helps. Absolutely. I think that definitely it is looked at that way in this context. It feels very much like a community. It seems logical to me because individuals make up communities - so individuals should be content in what they are doing to have a community that works at all. (Halprin)

Perhaps a by-product of respect and learning about each other through intimate movement experiences, participants also evidenced relationships as support systems in the community. Students reported an ability to express themselves more fully through mutually supportive dialogue and relationships. Hawkins said, “I have been trying to think of the definition of community - a group of people that support one another in which you can be yourself or express yourself comfortably.” Humphrey added, “And I would say not only to share yourself but also to listen to others to actually hear them.
There is a conversation.” It would be a mistake to assume such definitions of relationships were inconsequential at C College. To the contrary, they appeared to shape daily life. Graham offered the following example to illustrate the value of authentic support:

Everyone is very supportive of each other here. I remember a really specific incident two years ago. It sticks out in my mind. I had tried out for either the fall or spring dance concert - don’t remember which one and I didn’t get any of the pieces - not sure if it wasn’t what they were looking for or my schedule didn’t match. But I remember one of the girls who was choreographing - and she also knew me from outside. She came up to me and said “Look I know you didn’t make any of the pieces and I know you really wanted to - but she really wanted to express to me not to give up and be sure you try again and she was senior and she was getting really sentimental about it. But it meant a lot that she did come to me and told me that I was a really good dancer and that I need to keep going. And from other people - one of my other friends who she graduated and she was really involved in both dance team and the dance department and we mutually supported each other with dance and keep going and she had been dancing her whole life where I more really got into it at C College - so she was talking about that and was being really supportive of me even though I haven’t been dancing long. It’s really great that I am getting involved with it. (Graham)

It is important to note that one participant (1 of 13 [1%]) contradicted the majority when they spoke about feeling an inadequate amount of support. Specific to faculty, this was
discussed in relation to this participant’s creative process. In the following exchange, the dancer spoke emotionally about the need for help in developing choreography:

Duncan: I am nervous. They kind of throw you into it. I feel a little bit thrown into - hey make a piece. I feel like they don’t give that much support - but we’ll see at the showing today.

Researcher: What kind of support would you like to have?

Duncan: We (faculty) are going to come watch rehearsal. We are going to talk to you - tell you ways to lead improv exercises. But I don’t know anything about that or ways to incorporate my dancers - just some tips.

Researcher: Do you think faculty would be willing to do those things if you went to them and asked for help? Or do you feel less supported because you feel like they haven’t come to you?

Duncan: I asked (faculty member) to come to my rehearsal and she never did. I didn’t really ask about that. They just get so busy. (Participant nervously looked around the coffee shop to see if anyone was close enough to hear what was being said. Participant stated again that they were really nervous. Researcher reassured participant that she would tell them if any faculty or peers entered).

Duncan continued: So, I talked to (faculty member) about that and she gave me really great advice and she really talked to me a lot and was really great. And then - after that - there was really no mention - there was never anything after that - after the performance there was nothing. I was a little but frustrated by that. But at the same time - she did really give me great advice.
Researcher: What would you have wanted her to do differently? Or how would you have liked her to follow-up with you to show support?

Duncan: Maybe after the show - just asking me how I felt about it - or something - because she knew it was bothering me. I think that she knows I respect choreography the most.

Researcher: Do you think (faculty member) would come to your rehearsals if you asked her?

Duncan: Yes, I think she would. But I think the thing with her the difference and this isn’t a bad thing (…) I think she is a lot more interested in her own thing rather than being a teacher. So I think that is part of it. But her own thing has taught people things like various individual styles that other people haven’t seen before.

This response, while one could argue was an outlier, seemed to reinforce other participants’ responses. Dancers are personally invested in the dance community, they value collaboration and interaction, and they are aware when relationships are not as supportive as what they would like or have come to expect. Viewed through this lens, Duncan was able to articulate not only what they needed but also recognized the ways in which faculty are willing to support students.

Faculty seemed to suggest that information-seeking was a central organizer of peer relationships. As such, members of this diverse community of dancers were expected to have some responsibility for scaffolding peers’ processes of discovery. One faculty member explained it this way:
I feel like I know you because I have seen you in class and I have seen how you problem solve or how you move or you had to lay on someone the other day and you were like “Hi!” - that idea of we get a lot of information because we are all making this community and experiencing these things together. I feel like that is information that I know is really valid and it’s interesting to get that information.

It’s a different kind of information. (Shawn)

Another faculty member made a similar point. Respect and support for one another seems a natural occurrence, in part, precisely because there is no expectation to fit a particular mold in the dance program. Wigman said:

There is the thing that we are dealing with mutual respect in a more personable way and looking at the whole person and that is why they feel comfortable - I believe - to have an identity - within the community. Because we are not asking for carbon copies we are asking them not to be carbon copies. It is fairly unusual in dance even now I think - even though there are a lot of unique companies and unique, individuals within companies - there is still this kind of cookie cutter, imitation thing that is real prevalent. (Wigman)

No Audition Required

If a program does not expect a mold for whom or what constitutes dance study, then it seems consistent with that philosophy that entrance auditions are also immaterial. Thus the third way that a culture of basic goodness was articulated through community practices was participants’ opinions on this practice. Although this was not a primary line of inquiry for the research, it is noteworthy that all participants (100%) felt that
requiring auditions for entrance into the dance program at C College would have negative consequences. Auditions were viewed as determinant for who was ‘worthy’ of being included in dance. Because participants reported being grateful for a dance community comprised of different ability levels and dance backgrounds, auditions would admittedly be a stark contrast to this set of ideals. Expressed in terms of how auditions may devalue the art form, Ailey said:

Oh totally! If there was an audition to get in - the sense of community would be totally shifted. It’s awesome because they don’t have audition though because people can just be a senior or whatever level and haven’t danced before or taken technique class before and begin to appreciate this art form. The dance world is so secluded and has this vibe of being elite and only these kinds of people are needed and yada yada. I don’t think people realize that stigma isn’t true with like the real concept of dance and the art form. (Ailey)

Participants also seemed to realize that individual experience would be vastly different if there were benchmarks for admittance. The lack of openness would in turn diminish student participation and potential. Duncan expressed this when they said:

I think they would have a lot less people participating in the dance department. A lot of people who have become dance majors here or become involved in the dance program didn’t come here initially to do dance. C College isn’t known for its dance department. If they had an audition process, some dancers would not have been able to get started. (Duncan)
Faculty also referenced auditions through their acknowledgement that the practice would not align with the purpose of the dance program. Entrance auditions typically denote an expectation of technical ability that advances along a specific course trajectory. Instead, decisions about coursework in the dance program at C College are more utilitarian. Shawn captured faculty’s perspectives when she said, “We don’t have auditions to get into the program. Our leveling is very porous, non-defined. Here you take a class because it fits your schedule not necessarily because it’s the level that you should be in. That has positives and negatives” (Shawn).

Taken together, participants defined a culture of basic goodness as a community that has respect, collaboration, supportive relationships, and does not denote dancers’ worth through entrance auditions. Given the central role that faculty play in directing these practices, it is not surprising that participants gave particular credence to dancer/professor connections.

**Theme 2: Relationships with Faculty**

All participants (100%) frequently referenced how faculty connected with students via a perceived willingness to help, enable, and encourage dancers. The order of magnitude in terms of the number of times participants discussed the importance of these relationships was not only surprising, but may account for subsequent reporting of experience molded by this specific combination of faculty. Relationships were described by participants in four succinct ways: faculty connection to students, relationships among faculty, faculty as collaborators, and personal relationships with students.
**Faculty Connection to Students**

Participants’ described feelings of genuine care and attention from each dance professor. To this general point, students made comments like: “I just really fell in love with the connection that the dance teachers have with their students” (Ailey), and “I would say the faculty here have been really important. As far as my technique and the academic study of dance they have certainly played a huge part in shaping that” (Dunham), and “Can I say love? There is so much love!” (Hawkins) and “They are so, so supportive!” (Nijinsky).

Specifically, more than one third of participants (38%) evidenced faculty connections through specific examples of advising. The importance placed on the advisory role seemed to communicate faculty’s commitment to make dance a logistical possibility for students. Graham provided detailed insight when they spoke about faculty’s responsiveness to the scheduling needs of students. Graham explained:

> And faculty is definitely supportive of the students as well! When I had declared the dance major and it was getting to the point where I wasn’t sure if I could complete it or not. The professors were very supportive. “Ok….here is what you need to do. If you can’t complete it - don’t stress yourself out.” They were really willing to help me. I would first of all say that it is a really good relationship. I have had classes with all of them and I think that really helps get to know them. Specifically, when I declared a dance major and I was really talking to (adviser) and we were trying to figure out how to make this work because I was a double major - preparing to go abroad especially. She really helped me - we were trying
to figure out how to make it work. She was really supportive and like “we can do this!” even though I was declaring really late - you can petition to get certain classes to count. I came back from being abroad - and I thought that I would be able to take dance abroad to help with those credits. And then when I got back it was really too stressful to maintain the double major because of how many classes I would have to double up and petition and so I ended up dropping it back down to a minor. She - as well as the rest of the faculty - were really supportive - you are not giving up on us completely - that was really helpful. And also with (adviser) again when I was talking to her about the class I am in now - which is Choreographer - I haven’t taken the first choreography class so I was a little nervous about jumping into what seemed like a more advanced class. Just talking to her - she was like “No you can do it! A bunch of students take classes out of sequence. It’s no big deal. We will help you through it if you think you need it.” She just talked to me about how the class was structured and what it would be based on and that was really helpful. Friendly and approachable definitely! I think more to me just the fact that especially because I know them and I have had class with them. If I have a question on anything I could just go to them and say “Hey I really didn’t get this.” (Graham)

Cunningham expressed similar sentiment. Faculty appeared to make dance study seem possible, even to beginners, through encouragement of personal interests. Cunningham said:
I don’t think it is explicitly stated but if you got to know the dance department really well they are the kind of the people that try to work around you and they want to help you. And you get that feeling about C or any small school. But I definitely got that sense here. I came to school not thinking I was going to be a major but I had a sense that if I talked to them maybe we could work something out that it wasn’t set in stone and no one had ever said that to me explicitly (…) As people and as a group just being very supportive and open and wanting to bring you in and have you be a part of it. I talked to them and that is the great thing of having such a small department because they work with you and worked it out for me so I could do it as easily as possible. And they really wanted me to do it. (Cunningham)

Similar to both Graham and Cunningham, Pavlova also mentioned the logistics of schedules. However, this participant seemed to distinguish the personal investment in students afforded through the advisory role. Pavlova explained:

They are willing to help figure out schedules - so more of the friend area- I mean you get that from an adviser but they are really interested in you and what you are going through I think. The 1st time that I met all the faculty they were extremely nice and welcoming. Even though I took a year off and didn’t dance my 1st year here - they were so willing to help me and get me into the dept and get me on track so that I could go towards the major or minor. It is definitely positive. For me personally and most everyone it is positive. They definitely - I can tell they have taken an interest in me and everyone else. They take an interest, a focus,
and are interested in what I am doing and they really truly want to help me grow as a dancer, as a performer, as a person and how I feel like this relates to my life so they are definitely interested. They care. (Pavlova)

One participant further explored this idea of personal investment. Halprin felt the advising process pushed students to make broader connections in learning and to think in terms of possibilities rather than a definitive. As such, advising seemed to include everything and everyone as part of dance process. Halprin, seemingly making connections back to the openness of the program, described this in the following way:

I came in being like I don’t know what my major is going to be. And maybe just personality-wise they matched me with (adviser). And it was always like whenever I was picking classes she was like alright, cool, that was generally her approach. Pick what you want to pick. And I danced 1st semester freshman year and (faculty member) was visibly upset when I was not dancing 2nd semester. And not in the ‘you are doing the wrong thing with your life thing’ - but in like ‘hey are you dancing this semester?’ It was like hmmm….alright. I think the sorts of connections that you make with creative teachers are different with the sorts of connections that you make with teachers when you are not making your own work-just because there is the overlap with rehearsals and wanting to do something similar. With (faculty member) there is just a huge amount of everything is dance approach. That would be one of the non-aggressive, respectfully evangelical things - where in my intermediate modern class once - there were 10 people over the limit and she was like - I generally think that if you
want to be dancing then you should be dancing - so I’m going to order some more books and you all need to get them. (Halrpin)

Given that numerous participants described the guidance and direction they received from faculty in positive terms, it is not surprising that quality, access, and availability of professors would be described by the majority of participants as significant to their sense of progress and belonging.

Faculty affirmed that their approach to advising intentionally presents opportunities, rather than course mandates, in order to responsively connect with student interests. Responses provided insight to the facilitation of helping students to become part of dance program. St. Denis said:

Of our senior majors - none of them were planning on majoring in dance. They just wanted to take some classes and were interested. Also, the process at C College - the advising role is pretty huge and if a student expresses interest in a subject they try to give them to a faculty advisor that teaches in that area or has connections. So - I had (names 2 students) as freshman advisees. They had no intention of majoring in dance but I knew they were interested in dance. (St. Denis)

Shawn echoed St. Denis. Faculty seemed aware that students are often not aware of their options or how to forge a connection. Shawn explained how faculty can help fill in the gaps:

And the same with (names another student). They came in, took a class, took another class because it was interesting, and realized oh! I have the class part for
the minor. The only thing I am missing is some big project to do. So they came in this time last year and tried to declare the major. And we said ok - let’s see what classes you’re missing and develop a project over the summer. July was their deadline we extended it. And they have come in and done fantastic projects! I think what we are finding and it takes us a long time to figure this out - students really respond if you target them or show interest in them or tell them that this is really something that you can do if you are interested and you are doing a great job. Why don’t you try taking this class? Talking to other colleagues about their departments - the smaller departments- maybe students don’t think they are going to major in - that when the faculty members make the overtures and express interest - then the students suddenly consider that as a possibility. Oh - a double major! Or a minor maybe? (Shawn)

**Relationships among Faculty**

The second way participants discussed relationships was through observations of faculty dynamics. Specific to behaviors and interactions, the modeling of these relationships appeared to provide valuable insight to participants. Graham described how they worked together:

I think it would be really difficult to reproduce (the program) especially because of who the faculty are. I think it would be really difficult to have that dynamic of relationships between them - to just implement that somewhere else. The 3 of them work really well together but they have been working really well together for however many years. I think that is a part of it! This baseline of whatever it is
- I think the personalities are similar but different - maybe they establish a baseline “x” amount of years ago and they have been working on that ever since. I think it might be possible if you have a group of dance faculty members who want to implement is somewhere else and are planning on working together…if they have a relationship - a dynamic that is similar to the ones they have here I think it would make it easier to implement it somewhere else. But I don’t think it would ever be the same. (Graham)

Graham spoke about the relational dynamics in the context of the work setting. However, Halprin highlighted how participants have also seen this manifest in personal interactions. Halprin described this as follows:

It’s also seeing the way that these women live their lives! It has been reasonably inspirational for me. Well, more than reasonably. Just the way - I don’t know - this whole like you can’t have it all - no one has it all. Everyone thinks that if you are a performer you can only be a performer and you are going to have to go crazy or only obey the Cunningham technique. I am feeling a little sentimental now (…) The modeling thing is really big because seeing just how they conduct themselves - both interpersonally and with students and seeing that that isn’t much different. Totally about the combination of personalities here. They are terpsichories. They all have such specific - yet open artistic personalities and also as people they are way different. (Halprin)

Faculty explained their relationships as positive, essential, and healthy. More directly, they expressed the importance of such modeling for students. Faculty saw
collegial and personal relationships as an extension of how they expect people to be treated and treat others in the dance community. Wigman expressed it this way:

For me, dance is a life practice and we have talked about that. I just say it because I think it is actually helpful for them to realize - we are always talking about how it can affect your daily life - and not in a therapeutic, la, la way - but just in pragmatic ways. Partially it is exemplifying that to a degree - and part of that is that we are not - we are variable people we are not one-liners - they see us in different guises with different strengths. There is an honesty there. None of us are looking for a product that doesn’t have process or a picture that doesn’t have substance or a body that doesn’t have health. All of those things come in to play. (Wigman)

This was also evident in the following humorous exchange between two professors:

Researcher: How would you describe your relationship with one another?

St. Denis: Nourishing. Love.

Shawn: Warm.

Researcher: How do you think students would describe it?

Shawn: The same as we did.

St. Denis: Yes.

(They laugh hysterically as they start saying about each other…)

St. Denis: Competitive!


St. Denis: I have never had a better working relationship with anybody.
Shawn: Me either! We feel really, really fortunate.

St. Denis: There is no sense of students going to one or another of us.

Shawn: We try to be consistent.

**Faculty as Collaborators**

Participants responded that faculty readily posited themselves as not being a source of authority and instead emphasized collaborative meaning as a way to inform experience. Thus, the third relationship detailed in community contexts was participant views of faculty as collaborators and/or equals.

This correlates with the aforementioned research themes and findings, but is a bit of an anomaly especially in light of the literature on contexts typically found in dance classrooms. Three participants (23%) specifically cited the absence of a hierarchy. Hawkins said, “For me, it’s really lucky because the students and the faculty are pretty much on the same plane but we all have an immense respect for each other.” Nijinsky agreed, “I think that we have an unusual relationship with our professors that is atypical of the rest of the department at C College.” These responses seem to suggest that democratic classrooms and practices are in place whereby faculty and students learn alongside each other. The third student stated it this way:

Like (a faculty member) comes and takes the ballet class with us - so like we are all on the same level - they are not above us - we are not below them - everything is mutual. They have a great understanding of dance and knowledge but that doesn’t make them superior. They really want to share that with us and to teach us. They want to learn from us and what we have to say. They are really
interested in that. I think there is collaboration and I think it stems from everyone is on the same level: we are all on the same page. That makes this department really special. (Pavlova)

Another student referenced the manner in which critique is offered and received as specific evidence of equality in faculty/student relationships. Speaking favorably about this, the participant said:

During dance concerts and projects - we all work together. The site specific performance - there were pieces by both students and faculty. The faculty would have input on the pieces we were doing and we could talk to them about how overall how everything fit together. In the concert, we have pieces that we can work on. We can go to the faculty for feedback. They can watch the movement or the costumes and give feedback. There is always the option that you don’t have to take that. They are not saying you have to change this. Your costumes need to be blue instead of black. It is more on an equal level and it’s your piece too and you can say that you want things a certain way and its equal input.

(Graham)

Another participant agreed that the consistent willingness to collaborate, rather than dictate, was an effective way for faculty to both prepare dancers and give them permission to develop their own understanding and ways of working. The participant offered the following detailed response:

And another example of that is - I don’t know if this is common at other undergraduate programs but the way we do our main stage concert and I think this
is partially because we’re a small department but faculty work and student work go up together. Throughout that process, all of the people who are choreographing and there is a bit of a hierarchy because you have to have taken choreography classes in order to choreograph for the shows. But professors, students, anyone who is choreographing for the show is sitting in a circle calling each other by their first names and giving each other notes. And I think that process for me is oh! Thank you! This seems like a really healthy, human way to be communicating. Obviously I realize that the faculty has been doing this a whole lot longer than I have and they know a lot more than I do just because of time. But it’s just this sort of environment where you are given a lot of choice and also I think probably in a lot of dance classes - the common conception that a lot of people have- is that if I am not matching the aesthetic of the class - my teacher is going to come over and fix it and change it (…) I was talking to (faculty member) about my concerns at the beginning of the semester. I remembered her piece and she cast people that were of way different movement experiences - and I remembered it being beautiful. Another piece with me and others and we were all reasonably trained - how your process differed (comparing the level of dancers involved in the piece) and she said not at all. And just this thing where she just had this little smile like okay this is fine you want different movers and they are going to give you different stuff. And then she went through some of the different ways that she interacted with her dancers - when I am dealing with people with this issue - actually it was reasonably the same - I give
them these lists of word associations and have them do movements with them and then they all turn into phrases - it was just that modeling - where oh I am allowed to make that choice too. Where it wasn’t like I am the professor and I can make these choices because I have had the experiences. It was - yeah I made that choice. You might see how that works for you. That is creatively interesting to me and she was like that’s cool because that is how they (the faculty) deal too. It is quite inspiring! (Halprin)

However, it is worth noting that one participant (1 of 13 [1%]) disagreed with faculty’s approach to collaboration. For this participant, faculty’s willingness to work with students became problematic when they did not sufficiently address a perceived sexist theme in student choreography. While this participant’s impression could again be seen as an outlier, it could simultaneously be seen as converging evidence that faculty provides space for students to form their own understanding and flexibility to engage: even when controversial themes and content in the choreographic process are present.

Duncan expressed frustration in the following way:

One thing I thought was interesting and in a way I respect this. The student’s piece - I did find it very sexist - faculty didn’t even really tell the student that in the talk afterward. They were kind of helping the student with their idea. It is pretty like - sexist. But it is the student’s idea. So they are helping make the idea the best it can be. Right? The way the student described it - what the piece is about. So – it’s like - I don’t know - I’m just a little turned off by it. I understand where the faculty is coming from and it’s not going to be overtly sexist. But they
were helping the student with that idea! I just have to disagree with the idea. (Duncan)

Faculty evidenced a conscious choice to align themselves as collaborators and work in tandem with students. They concurred with participants that producing dance concerts that feature both student and faculty pieces was a primary method of establishing equity and partnership. This was illustrated when one faculty member said:

And I think part of that is because the concerts are both faculty and student choreographed. There is a big emphasis on students getting into those leadership roles early on. And when you are in a conservatory environment, I remember feeling at the mercy of the faculty choosing people and there were definitely the favorites that they wanted to work with. We really try to cast broadly and encourage the students to do that. And because it is not just us making pieces I think that there is a sense of it being more cohesive. (St. Denis)

Another faculty member spoke at the aforementioned choreographer’s meeting. This faculty member, who appeared to consistently use language such as “our” “we” and “us,” detailed students’ responsibilities in co-producing the collaborative concert. Offering some insight on what to expect in the process, Shawn communicated the following to student choreographers:

Lets’ talk because there are several first timers here. It is a scary thing to go into a first rehearsal with an ensemble and to plan those rehearsals and so forth. Like (faculty member) said, we are here to support you and you guys support each other and you know from being performers in the past that we have these
showings. And you get feedback at those showings. Choreographers are also involved in terms of the production meetings. There is a production scheduled - and I will bring an updated one to the audition with your names at the bottom. You are also required to be at the production meetings. As you look at the schedule - our 1\textsuperscript{st} production meeting is in October. And then at the showing is when you will you get feedback from us and your fellow choreographers. After the showing we stay for a meeting. And then you guys as choreographers…we plan the order, what the stage should look like, should we have the legs should we use a scrim. All those sorts of things - those are choreographer things that we all work together to make the look of the concert. And then you have expectations of how many times you should meet a week so you enter a contract. The lighting designers - which will depend who is teaching lighting design. So - you will meet with the lighting designer to help with the lighting, at spacing and lighting rehearsals. We all plan the auditions. So after this - we decide who is giving a warm-up, who feels like they need to see certain things- if you are using improvisation if you are using an improve score or text - those sorts of things. And then choreographers - you are the conduit with what happens with the stage manager and the cast. Getting there to lay the floor - the strike - you are responsible for getting your dancers there for those things. The laying of the floor, strike, hanging of the lights, and etcetera. Be very regular in terms of talking to them all along the way in terms of your vision for your piece. (Shawn)
**Personal Relationships with Faculty**

The fourth and final way relationships were noted was the personal relationships that faculty cultivated with particular students. The perception of how certain students’ develop closer relationships with faculty more than others was viewed as a program strength by one participant:

At the same time – (faculty member) was very no bones about it. When she made her cast she said “I don’t know about you but I like working with who I like” and I don’t see anything wrong with that (…) And just in general as you become really immersed it the dance process and you have your own meanings for why you do what you do you notice people who you can relate to in that sense and (faculty member) was someone who saw that - not at all like a doppelganger - but you have a life process or a desire for a life process that relates to mine. And I think that’s pretty big. (Halprin)

However, two participants (2 of 13 [15%]) voiced that these relationships were potentially problematic and could be perceived by some as favoritism. Cunningham described what these more personal relationships with a faculty member look like:

I know some of the dancers will go to (faculty member’s) house and hang out with her. Again, I know (faculty member) has her favorites. They text each other. (Student) goes over to her house. Stuff like that. It is - again- picking these same sort of people for her pieces. Again - no one ever talks about it – (the student) is like (faculty member’s) pet - just certain people develop relationships and certain people don’t. I just look at it as a friendship - but maybe - it sounds so
dramatic - maybe it does have benefits like getting cast. But again this isn’t like a performing arts school where - oh no they got cast in that piece and I didn’t - my life is ruined! But it is what it is - it is never really irked me. It can be brought up casually but it is never the subject of a discussion. (Student) will just be like oh (faculty member) just texted me - ha ha ha- or I was really stressed out last night - so I talked to (faculty member) freaking out. And it’s just whatever. (Cunningham)

Duncan agreed with Cunningham and more cogently articulated this view of potential favoritism. This seemed obvious in the following exchange:

Duncan: Faculty. I find them most catty and I find the students less.
Researcher: What does catty mean to you?
Duncan: Gossiping. Whispering. They have their favorites. It is kind of funny - I don’t mind it because I can imagine somebody like you can tell when they don’t like somebody.
Researcher: How so?
Duncan: They don’t let them in on things and they don’t give them special attention. Researcher: Do you feel comfortable giving me a specific example or telling me something you have observed?
Duncan: The person who is most like this - and I love them to death - is (faculty member). She is a great choreographer. She whispers. I think that she chooses her favorites. Casts her favorites. She is constantly whispering to them all the time - private side jokes. Even during showing - she will giggle or whisper
something. Which I mean that hasn’t happened directly to me so I haven’t really been affected by it - but I know that other people have been affected by it. That is where the cattiness comes from. It really shows that it is the C College community that makes it not widespread. It might be just that we are all a bunch of self-confident kids. That is one possibility. But (student) has the confidence and they are still definitely not as asshole.

Researcher: Do you think that is ever addressed with the faculty member you mentioned?

Duncan: No. I mean I don’t really think it affects people to the extent that they would stop doing something. It is just something that you notice.

Researcher: Do you think other faculty notices it?

Duncan: I think so. I can’t imagine that they don’t.

There was no indication from any faculty member that they detected favoritism in any relationships with students. Although not suggestive of preferential treatment, one faculty member mentioned stylistic differences in the ways professors personally engage with individual dancers. Wigman said:

And I think we all vary a little bit on that. I think they are very personable - I think I tend to muck that up a little bit more sometimes (laughs). I just think they (other faculty) have a little more - they are very personable and very open with the students and they also use humor and all those things that I mentioned. I think they just have a little more formalism in their style - like “professor” - just a little but I think it’s a little different. Neither here nor there or that I should have more
of that. In general all of us care about them as humans not as forms or objects.

(Wigman)

As detailed, participants were aware of the overwhelmingly positive ways that faculty shaped the dance community. It was no conundrum then that participants also felt favorably about relationships with peers.

**Theme 3: Learning with and from Peers**

All participants (100%) spoke about peers as ever-present resources for knowledge construction in the community. More than three quarters of participants (75%) attributed positive interactions with peers to an increase in learning. Pavlova explained, “I would say for my peers they are also teachers, which is weird because I did not say that for the faculty. Obviously they are teachers but my peers are my teachers.” Not only were peers regarded as teachers, but their feedback was sincerely appreciated and contributed to student improvement. Moreover, Paxton expressed this as unique to the dance community at C College when they said, “If one of my peers says to me this looks interesting, I never resent that and I know that two years ago (before C College) I would have!” Participants seemed to value the ability to help each other figure things out. Ailey talked about the synchronism among peers and its meaning in class contexts:

But since it’s a peer, it’s someone who you are learning alongside with - learning the same things that they are and at the same time. It is kind of cool. It’s a lot more collaborative I feel like with a student. When a student is teaching - in a rehearsal context or if they have to present something in class - like a phrase or something. It seems to be a lot more….in terms of rehearsal - a lot more
collaborative because they are like I said learning along side of you and they are very open - they don’t have all the answers yet. In ballet class (faculty member) will do something really fast or she’s in the front of the room and you can’t see her very well – it’s nice having that barre there to watch other students when you get to the point where you are like - what am I supposed to do here? What I do is mime what I think I’m supposed to be doing and observe. And then when we switch to the other side - so I observe whoever is in front of me and how they did it or (faculty member) if she’s in front of me or in the front of the room. I do it correctly on the 2nd side. I observe. I think learning from your peers in that sense – it’s not quite like they are teaching you - but just observing how other people do it or move. Sometime in class - you will always hear people saying, “Wait - what was that thing she just did?” That’s a common question. Or sometimes I will ask a student after class - can we just do this phrase together so I can see how you are doing it? I feel like they have a better - not better understanding - but since they are learning it for the first time we are on a level playing field and they understand oh yeah that was hard the first time too. They have a better understanding of it clicking in your mind. (Ailey)

It wouldn’t be unreasonable to assume that personal improvement coincides with group progress. From this perspective, some participants acknowledged that movement palettes and proficiencies were expanded through observation of peers. Cunningham suggested that, while an individual choice, such collaborative learning is reflective in the ethos of the open dance community. Cunningham explained it this way:
Well - I guess it is kind of an individual choice. But I do feel like if you want to improve and I hope that everyone wants to improve then you shouldn’t stay stuck in your own bubble and your own way of doing things because it is so limiting. So, for me I want to watch other people because even if they are a higher or lower level than me there are still little elements that I can draw out - stylistic things - technical things - there are so many tiny details that you can pull out and watch. It just opens you up in general. A lot of the classes involve a lot of group work and giving each other feedback and touching each other a lot. That is something I feel like how I have grown most since freshman year. I remember getting here and being like Oh my God - these other people - they want me to touch them - you get comfortable with that and with other people. Sometimes you are just not getting the physics, the technique of something. And you watch and see that they are stepping on that foot and that’s what I am doing wrong…..so basic things like that - I think it’s really helpful to watch someone. I actually am very visual. The 1st time (faculty member) does a phrase - I usually don’t even do it - I just watch it. So that is going to be different for other people but I find watching very helpful. And then there are stylistic things - I was doing it very staccato but look how beautiful it is when she does it very flowy - I should try that! And it’s like taking little bits of….Oh I like that! And I like that! But I didn’t like that so much. The dance department is so cooperative and you don’t get rewarded for being a star. There is no point. You learn from everyone. I don’t think there is as much room for growth if it’s homogenous. You see someone moving in a way you
have never considered before and you think - I am going to give that a try!

(Cunningham)

Similar to Cunningham, two participants spoke about how learning is augmented by peers. Again, it seems that the different strengths and backgrounds within the dance program provided an array of options to integrate nuanced movement qualities. Graham added, “I would definitely see what they are doing in movement or ideas and just learn from them. If I see something I like - I would try to incorporate that into my style or movement.” Duncan described this in the following way:

Everyone - like in our dance class - everyone has a lot of different movement qualities - and I think about how I can change the qualities a lot with my movement. My movement tends to be really quick, really harsh, really sharp. It’s nice to see other people and their movement qualities and try to learn from them too. (Duncan)

It appeared that working in this way also afforded a level of intimacy that rendered humility a personal strength. A willingness to learn from peers revealed a somewhat surprising quality that was valued in the community: dancers posed questions and sought clarification from peers first and foremost. They expressed enormous capacity to admit struggles and challenges. Dunham used the following example to evidence the prevailing modesty:

My roommate also does a lot of dance here. She has a more extensive dance background. So frequently (faculty member) will be explaining something - she will be like “(names roommate) show me that one more time!” She has been
dancing she was three and usually if there is somebody in class who I know is really getting it. I will be like “Ok…run that by me one more time.” Or somebody will ask me. I feel like I learn as much from my peers as I do from my professors. Within the dance community - people involved with dance here - it is very close knit you know all the people in the department. You have classes with the same people. When you are dancing and performing together - that is a very tight bond. (Dunham)

Nikolais expressed that faculty readily encouraged peer learning. Nikolais expressed this in terms of the genuine desire to help each other improve:

And the faculty encourages that! We have time when we okay pair up with someone, watch them do that and then give them feedback. It is kind of counterintuitive. I feel like most of the things you hear back in dance class - is like you really didn’t fully extend yourself here or why don’t you take a little bit more of a risk here. So they aren’t necessarily always positive things but they never - I am always grateful to hear them because they are said in a way that genuinely wants me to do better -and I have the potential to do this better.

(Nikolais)

One participant (1 of 13 [1%]) conceded that peers can be particularly difficult to work with. Precisely because of the closeness that exists in the department, the participant appeared to directly relate the challenge back to respect:

I think what I also learned in a lot of ways is that it is harder working with people that you know really well. I don’t think they respect you enough and don’t follow
what you are saying. In some sections my dancers might be really relaxed. Or when I make a decision they will be fine questioning me about it because we are friends. But I am not really comfortable with that. It slows down the pace of everything. (Duncan)

Faculty perspectives equated peer learning to the importance of leadership roles and responsibilities within the dance department. This social influence to enlist peers in accomplishing similar goals was deemed essential to learning. Shawn described this in the following way:

I think that peers have a lot more responsibility and leadership opportunities especially if they are a higher level student if they are in a class that has a less experienced student. They are learning from each other and you know I often wonder if that’s frustrating for students to have so many different levels in there but I tend to hear that it’s a good thing. (Shawn)

St. Denis, building on Shawn’s comment, also acknowledged the real challenges that come with a large class size. If a teacher is working with an individual dancer, then students have to be both motivated and willing to work with one another to answer questions, learn material, and seek feedback. St. Denis used the following example to make this point:

Yeah like intermediate modern this semester was enormous - like 35 kids and the levels are all over the place. So I was really concerned that it might not work very well. The upper level students have been taking the other students that are struggling - when I am working with one student - and they will be teaching
somebody something else. And I think part of that is because there is a big emphasis on students getting into those leadership roles early on. (St. Denis)

Faculty also discussed the ways that they directly witness peer learning taking place. This was apparent in the following exchange:

Wigman: We see them help each other even just in terms of showing each other things. You see them talking.

St. Denis: In the feedback session you will really hear it that’s really concrete. You won’t get this sense but if you can listen to them from one semester to the next or one year to the next - they really grow in their ability to see and articulate and give each other feedback. I think that is probably one of the easiest most concrete places that we can see that.

Shawn: And we will have some very green people in this showing - giving and receiving feedback. But they are going to be giving it just as equally as the people who are seniors and doing comps. So - they really learn from each other.

Wigman: It is an evolution through that is interesting to witness. We do actively nurture students learning from one another and that is part of the liberal arts base. If being curious and being open - you can analyze -you can be intellectual about it - you can be all different ways about something. But how you articulate and the mutual respect that you offer within that so there is diversity and a care from that - is something that we all really nurture.
St. Denis: I think this idea of taking ownership for your own learning and the learning environment is something that is really created and stressed through the college.

Shawn: One thing that has happened in the past - but maybe it could happen more frequently is students asking each other to come to a rehearsal to give feedback. It happened sometimes with certain leaders or students who choreographed a lot and earned a lot of respect from their peers - I think that is a really wonderful resource. And you know what! We come and peek into each others’ classes all the time…and I am always like…oh I’ll try that next time or maybe I will say it that way next time! I absolutely absorb and learn from my colleagues.

Faculty and peers seeking opportunities to learn alongside one another may have been further precipitated by the small size of the program. This factor did not go unnoticed by participants. The perceived benefits of the small size were acknowledged and considered an important consideration for community contexts.

**Theme 4: Small size**

All participants (100%) referenced the small size of C College and/or its geographical location as an important organizing factor of student experience. In this quaint environment, students are afforded opportunities that, perhaps, they may not receive or be able to similarly benefit from at a large, public institution. Cunningham, like most participants, realized how prominently this factored into their choice to attend this type of institution. Cunningham said, “Part of the reason that I chose C College is it is so small and I would get individual attention and a community and things like that.
The dance department is so small - the closeness- all the attention you get - the level of involvement.” Participants seemed to overwhelmingly frame these as advantages.

**Individual Attention**

Four participants (31%) specifically referenced the extensive amount of individual attention they receive due to the size. Thus, student progress was perceived to be advanced through one-on-one attention from faculty, high levels of involvement, opportunities to apply learning, and occasions to connect outside of C College. Dunham described the immense consideration dancers receive from faculty:

> Part of the benefit of it being a small program and a small school is that dance majors that are also seniors - so they have all of the dance faculty devoted to making sure that they can do what they want to do. In that sense if you do have a project you are really interested in - that is encouraged and there is going to be support for that. (Dunham)

Graham described this in a more pragmatic way. Size inevitably warrants certain types of interactions. However, for Graham, this translated to an approach that made them feel more like a person and not just a number which is often associated with being at a large institution. This also seemed to offer more ways to demonstrate personal knowledge. Graham summarized this viewpoint when they said:

> I think the fact that our department is so small - is the biggest part of that. Neither the students nor the faculty really have to put a huge effort into the fact that there are so few of us. It could be that the classes in other departments are larger and dance classes are smaller and you are going to have more of a voice. The
professors ask you personally what do you think about this and you sort of have to put your opinion out there and then see how that is taken. I guess maybe the approach is more relatable? Because it is not dealing with numbers it is not dealing with - it is more tangible. It is something that I can see and feel for myself - I find that easier to learn with and it sticks a lot better because it is something that I can see and it is something that it tangible. I can apply it to other things. (Graham)

A small institution, set in a rural location, may create feelings of isolation. However, it appeared that the dance professors were sensitized to this possibility and provided ways for students to connect with the broader dance collective. Opportunities to work with guest artists and attend workshops and performances outside the immediate area were a regular occurrence. Pavlova described this in the following way:

What I love about - just from being at a small school - you get so close to all the teachers/professor - they are a teacher to you but they are also like a best friend, mentor, advisor, which is really nice. You kind of get that in every department at C College but I think it is really highlighted in the dance department just because you spend so much time with them and you are dancing with them it is definitely focused on modern dance but there are opportunities to do everything. They bring in different guest choreographers and teachers for different classes. I think they do a really good job of taking us places and giving us opportunities because we are so isolated they have made the best with what they have. I think the dance department here is excellent even though it’s very, very small. (Pavlova)
Admittedly, a small institution can present challenges. One participant voiced frustration with perceived lack of access to a broad base of interests and talents. Duncan expressed that dancers at C College tend to become homogenous because they are isolated. They explained this in the following way:

Access! There are definitely drawbacks to being at a small, isolated school. It is hard because there are so few people that are dance majors here - so it is hard to get that - I don’t know you were at the choreographers meeting and there were like 5 people there…..and 2 of the girls are from Dance Team which is very different from the dance concerts - not that I am judging! So I understand that it is difficult. But I think that people use the same vocabulary of movement a lot in the concerts. (Duncan)

Dance as a High Art

For participants, there was a seriousness in which the program imparted the study of dance. To dancers in the program, or to those who knew the dancers, these studies were validated as meaningful work. Numerous lines of scholarly inquiry into academic, aesthetic, and artistic considerations of the field were explored. Participants communicated that dance was a “high art” and, in part, saw this as a benefit of being at a small, liberal arts college. Dunham illustrated dancers’ regard about the serious work being done when they said:

The dance department here is very serious - they take dance very seriously. If you are involved in the dance department it’s not fluffy and I am a little ambivalent about this because I do think that other forms of dance can be very serious and
can be very artistic and part of it is just limited resources. I think a lot of dancers here make a real conscious effort - like if you want to make a real concerted effort to present themselves as serious artists (...) Very much so dance as a high art. It is not decorative. Not entertainment. It’s meant to be provocative in the same way that there is a difference between a painting that is wall decoration and one that would be in a museum. I think there is a difference between back up dancers in a music video and something that you would see on stage in New York. Part of it is intention. I think there is a blurry line. I’m not sure I can give you a better definition than that. (Dunham)

Halprin, like Dunham, spoke about differences in the way art is appreciated and consumed. However, Halprin seemed to draw more a distinct line with the knowledge perceived to be more valued at this type of institution. They describe it this way:

People come in here and liberal arts is such a big huge intellectual, let me try anything space but usually it tends to - at this prestigious left brained environment have more of a payoff that is valued more. But others - does that make sense? I find that it’s very frustrating. And partially it’s a humility and compassion things because people it’s very difficult to understand the amount of work that goes into it (the dance major) unless you are in it. (Halprin)

**Dance at C College: Defining Academic Rigor**

Although the dance program takes dance seriously, the above comments suggested that others might not value the discipline with the same esteem. A majority of participants (8 of 13 [62%] ) voiced feeling that dance was not as respected as other
majors at C College, not taken seriously, and/or was de-valued throughout the campus community. Ailey said, “I feel that surprisingly enough people are shocked by how much homework I have and the requirements we have to fulfill. It is rigorous.” Humphrey summed up how many participants felt when they verbalized, “It’s so frustrating when you hear someone say, oh you’re going to a dance exam? So you are going to dance? (rolls their eyes). Yeah…we’re just gonna dance around.”

In addition to lack of respect, perceived lack of rigor or academic merit, and stereotypes about dancers, participants also voiced feeling that dance was relegated to the periphery of the campus community. Dunham generally attributed this to dance being a fine art. They intimated this when they said:

It is not frequently perceived as rigorous. I know that a dance minor is kind of sees as more of a fluffy minor. If somebody says “oh I’m a dance minor” - people are less likely to take them as seriously then as say someone who is in chemistry. But to actually study dance and really do well at it requires a skill that I don’t think is quite as valued within the wider community here. You really do have to have that artistic sense and I think in some ways the dance dept is removed from the wider student body and the school as a whole because the fine arts - it requires a different skill set than most academic subjects and what most associate with the liberal arts. I think it’s rigorous. I think you have to know a lot about dance. You have to know a lot about movement. And it requires a specific type of intelligence to be able to do all that. Unfortunately, I don’t think it’s always recognized or valued by the wider sort of school. The dance department is
integrated in the wider community in the sense that they do have a presence on campus. We do have these biannual shows. But I do feel like there is a disconnect there. I think part of it is that the faculty in the dance department here - they view dance as a serious art form. Unfortunately most people don’t have experience with dance as high art. (Dunham)

While Dunham described the perception of the dance major as fluffy, Graham dispelled the assumption that dancers just dance with trees. Graham said, “I have heard that dance is viewed as one of the easier majors because it’s not biology – it’s not one of the sciences. You are just a dance major - your comps (comprehensive exams) won’t be that difficult. So - there is a certain level of misunderstanding that there is more that goes into that and we don’t just go dance with trees.” While somewhat humorous, these responses capture a perceived difficulty of being involved in a creative major at a predominantly science-based institution. The smallness of the community may actually magnify the sensed cognitive dissonance. Cunningham explained it this way:

I don’t think we get a lot of attention honestly. Because it is a small dept and there is a little bit of snobbery sometimes because its not an academic dept you know. “They are just dancers” - the other students would say that. There is this idea that if you are a dance major it’s on top of another major. You could never just be a dance major because that would be ridiculous (laughs). it is certainly appreciated on an artistic level and we get really good turn-out for all the shows. But at that higher academic level it is kind of overlooked I think. I know they try to do something, they will (faculty member) said she is trying to have Kinesiology
be a Natural Sciences class - and have that crossover. But the school hasn’t been open to it - the administration. Which is actually ridiculous that Kines. is not a natural sciences class but my psych classes have been - which I don’t think we talk about science at all. Its little things like that that I think don’t give it the academic merit that it deserves. I don’t know I feel like if they offered a hip-hop class it would actually increase the misconception that it is just a silly dance class - and that does not rigorous or academic or high minded. I do feel like there would be more involvement. But again I feel like it would be just an extra, fun class that they would want to take - which isn’t necessarily a bad thing it’s good to get everyone dancing and some exercise. But I don’t think it would change the perception of the department. (Cunningham)

Two participants appeared to shrug off perceptions of dancers being devalued on campus. Instead, they attributed this to a lack of maturity and awareness among peers. Admittedly, modern dance can be difficult for the general public to appreciate or understand given its absence in popular culture. This was suggested by Pavlova when they said:

I think other people - I think the dance department is respected but I feel that there is that sort of thing that I don’t think the department is striving to be really different. But I think there is kind of a - to some people in the overall C College community that it might seem that’s really different. The department is trying to be too unique. The feedback I have gotten from other people if from people who really don’t understand modern dance. They are like I don’t get it…..that can
happen in any community or anywhere. If people don’t understand it - those people - I don’t know if their opinion counts - but I definitely still think the department is respected from other faculty. With age there is more of a chance that people have seen, experiences, and have the knowledge of what modern dance is. But I think when people are younger - they are more judgmental and they kind of don’t get it. (Pavlova)

Halprin thought that more dance performances might alleviate some disconnects. However, they were quick to decide this was not a viable solution. What seemed, perhaps, a more relevant means to garner support was acknowledgement from top administrators of the academic merit of dance classes. This, in Halprin’s view, would start to level the playing field with peers in other majors. This problematic issue was expressed in the following way:

I would love more dance shows, more performances because there is one big concert per semester and that tends to dominate and I don’t find that a fault of the curriculum but everyone is really busy here and dance is not the most valued thing at the college. Unfortunately there is that and the certainly is that - and I will bitch about this forever - that I couldn’t get a natural sciences coded for dance kinesiology - and why because they (faculty) have MFAs and they are rolling on the floor? Are we not smart because of that? She doesn’t have a PhD but you don’t need one to teach that. I don’t know I think that also its just foreign to people and I have to be compassionate to that in the sense that - and even with my own family - even though they love me and they support the choice I have made
to be a dance major - I don’t think they understand that sometimes I am working my ass off and its that sort of thing...like Oh you are not writing seven papers this week...and I am like but you weren’t in eight rehearsals this week. That sort of thing...and you also haven’t been preparing for one of those and practicing and choreographing! (Halprin)

Faculty was asked for their perceptions of dance in the campus community. Echoing participants’ earlier responses, Wigman first discussed the rigor that the dance program expects. “And we are thinking people that are moving and we don’t negate options in that way. So it is pretty rigorous in terms of processing and how one dialogues and what we expect back” (Wigman). Faculty also seemed to mirror participants’ sense that administrative decisions do not always seem to support the rigor of the dance major. In turn, this may read a particular way to peers. St. Denis articulated it this way:

I hear dancers sometimes. They love taking their Kinesiology book to the (dining hall) and studying. Because people are like, wow what science class are you taking? And they are like this is my dance major. Because I do think maybe the uneducated or the less educated student might not realize that we offer more than just technique classes or dance classes and it’s a body of study that goes beyond just the physical. (St. Denis)

However, dance faculty also communicated that their colleagues in academic departments are typically supportive of dancers. This was evidenced in the following recent example:
In our first classes when we first got here (meaning the dance major on campus) - some of our classes met after the regularly scheduled C College classes - which made it seem - it was a message that it was an extra-curricular. And because this is now so integrated into their chemistry lab, and their psych class, and their English class - but it’s only one part of their entire educational learning. I think that integration also has pluses and minuses. There is give and take across the disciplines (...) We have a new major that just declared this week. She submitted the paperwork and she is pretty excited. I think her commitment and her relationship is really going to change. It’s very cool and she is really excited. She is anxious in a way and she feels validated that her advisor - who is a Classics professor - said absolutely you should do it - why wouldn’t you do this instead of religion. (Shawn)

**Dance Made Visible in Community Contexts**

Opportunities to make dance a visible part of C College and the surrounding locale was described as another benefit of attending a small institution. Placing aside the aforementioned concerns regarding the respect for dance studies, participants felt it was common practice for dancers to be visible in public spaces creating and performing work. Duncan explained, “It’s like giving back to the community and the concerts help the dance department be part of the C College community. It’s nice to be told once in a while that was really awesome or that really spoke to me- those people in the audience or whoever sees and says something - people who acknowledge what you do.” Participants also conceded that visibility was more than a way to give back: it also generated an
audience base for concerts. Thus, the practicality of producing art for consumption was realized. Cunningham surmised:

I mean first of all - in a practical sense - they want pieces in the show - they need to be able to showcase students’ abilities and a wide array of dance abilities. It is certainly appreciated on an artistic level and we get really good turn-out for all the shows. (Cunningham)

Ailey agreed with Duncan and Cunningham. However, Ailey also seemed to make the connection that the audience, as the consumer of dance art, is part of what gives relevance to a dance community. Critique is part of making art visible and therefore sets up a form of dialogue. Maybe magnified at this small institution where peers typically comprise a large portion of the audience, Ailey communicated the importance of their opinion:

You can dance for many reasons but I feel that the kind of dance that reaches an end point as a production - it can be dancing to obtain something for yourself - but the beauty of dance is that it’s viewed and it’s fleeting. I feel like the audience’s opinion and the viewers’ opinion - really are big to me and I think define a lot about what my movement is. (Ailey)

Another visible context was the movement work generated outside the archetypal stage space. The dance program actively seeks ways to bring dance to the community through a variety of venues and projects. For example, rehearsals and performances for a site specific piece occurred during this research. A faculty member cultivated this collaborative partnership with a local agency. Work for this project was multi-
dimensional: incorporated assignments for dancers in Choreography class; used numerous students as performers; included a faculty choreographed duet for colleagues; and took place in an outdoor space where numerous pedestrians were present. A river runs near the C College campus. There are paved paths alongside the river and wood-planked bridges that pedestrians readily cross as they travel. Participants and faculty choreographed work that took place on and below the bridge, in the water, along the paths, and on small grassy “islands” in the river. Pedestrians viewed dance as they passed by and got vastly different experiences of the performance as they changed their vantage point. It was not possible to pass by this site specific performance space without seeing dance.

Because this experience was part of participants’ daily work, all of them referenced this in individual interviews and also offered other examples of how the dance program wants to perform in spaces outside the theatre. Cunningham notes, “(Faculty member) has done a site specific piece in the art gallery and there are always things like that. And this year we are doing the thing over at the bridge which is unlike anything we have ever done before!” According to Graham, dancers’ visibility outside the classroom seemed a way to warrant merit on campus:

We are the department that created a site specific dance performance at the (names specific place). No one else did that. Just the fact that we weren’t in a classroom was really surprising and interesting for a lot of people. We dance. We put on performance. We collaborate. (Graham)
For dancers, visibility seemed to strengthen community in this intimate setting. Therefore, Pavlova felt the dance program made a conscious choice to be active in this way. Pavlova explained when they said:

I think a great example of - before how I said I think the dance department where I feel like my history department is very passive - for the Choreography class - we did a site specific piece at the bridge. Each individual in the class had to choreograph something. Everyone used the beginning modern class, or the advanced modern class, they used different classes in the pieces so it really built like this community. It helped strengthen it. Someone who might not be a major or minor in the beginning modern class - got to go and work and walk along the river which is pretty and learn and be a part of something. I have always felt this ongoing motion…and I have always felt a part of that. I am just getting knowledge from it. I have learned a lot about movement, about dance, about myself. I love dance. I love expressing myself and letting things out. It is a great for me to get everything out through movement. I think the relationships and the friendships - that is something I definitely get out of dance department here.

(Pavlova)

Faculty encouraged students to think about how and where dance can happen. Their view was that dance does not have to be confined to a studio or a theatre, but rather is interactive and part of daily life. Shawn evidenced recent submissions for senior project proposals, “And even our performance people -we are getting some project proposals for next year and they are interested in envisioning performance either in a
community setting or in a non-proscenium theatre or something that interacts with the environment they live in or as artists!”

**Dance in Other Forms**

In addition to the ways the dance program was made visible, participants also spoke of other dance opportunities on campus. Neither the dance program nor its dancers appeared to have elitist attitudes towards other genres or venues for dance. Participants, some involved in dance teams or clubs themselves, appreciated that these dance outlets were supported by dance faculty and peers. There seemed to be no vying for what dancers were better or a denigration of a style considered inferior. This seems to correlate with the previous discussion of competition not being the goal. Graham conveyed their experience of being both a dancer in the program and on the dance team:

The dance team is totally hip-hop based and we do eight counts and it’s structured. It’s a completely different world. But the faculty is totally supportive. People do see a divide in between the two. I have also gotten compliments from students, which is nice or just comments on the program. With the dance faculty - they promote - we had a concert last year in the spring and they promoted us - like (faculty member) sent out an e-mail to all the technique classes and was like make sure you go to the dance team concert this week as well as a couple of other things that were going on. They are very positive with promoting all kinds of dance. The faculty always shows up to the concerts which is nice and other students too. Just yesterday - people are interested - asked my when the 1st performance if for dance team? Are you guys in rehearsals? People show an
interest. It’s not like they are like, oh that’s hip-hop so whatever. It’s nice to see the integrated process of the dance program and a club team. (Graham)

Dunham, who is in the Ballroom Club, also expressed acceptance for participating in a variety of dance forms:

So the dance department here is a way for me to dance actually. It is one of the few venues on campus where I can do that. I am also in the Ballroom Club - well I was - I haven’t been doing it as much this semester. Like that was another way - in a different way - that I can dance and have that space. And obviously as you take more classes in the department you get to know the professors. So a lot of my friends are dancers. It has sort of progressively felt like I became part of it (…) It is sort of like a Vin diagram. There is quite a bit of overlap in terms of - like there are a lot of people who are on the dance team who are also involved in the dance department who also take classes. Likewise, there are quite a few people in ballroom who have taken classes with the department. Some of them also see themselves as part of the dance department community but then there are others who don’t. There are also those just in ballroom for example - who are involved in that club but don’t really take classes or view themselves as part of those other dance communities. (Dunham)

Coinciding with a program that espouses to not harbor judgment or foster competition, faculty also acknowledged support of other dance opportunities on campus. However, they cautioned that they are not responsible for the content or quality of these teams or clubs. This was expressed during the following exchange among faculty:
Wigman: There is overlap. We have people on the dance team that are involved. We have people in the ballroom club that are involved.

Shawn: But I would say - a few years ago we probably made an effort to distance ourselves from some of the student-run groups. Because there is not a lot of oversight in terms of what kind of things - if it’s adjudicated or juried - or how inclusive it is and sometimes if it feels like it is coming from our dept than we feel we are responsible in some ways.

St. Denis: For the quality.

Shawn: Student bodies turn over every 4 years - there is so much mobility in those kinds of student groups that is unaccountable for in terms of quality control - so we are happy to support them. In terms of whether there is a dance community? I think there is - like slightly overlapping circles. We have these overlapping students who participate in both but I don’t think we are unified and I don’t think we offer everything that every student wants in terms of dance.

It is worth noting that dancers also spoke of their positionality as students in other coursework and departments. They often compared their learning experiences in the dance program to other departments on campus. For the researcher, this revealed ways that participants indirectly experienced their (in)visibility as dancers in community contexts. Comparisons to economics, creative writing, sociology, and visual arts exposed subjective contexts in which dancers often felt stuck in knowledge-specific assumptions. Halprin described the disconnect they experienced of being a dancer in another form:
The creative writing program is interesting here in that you have to apply to do Intro to Creative Writing. And I was like what would the world be like if we made people apply to do beginning modern dance. I really don’t like that world. I would way rather it be where someone would say why wouldn’t I do that? Instead of someone saying that they could never do that - I know I can write and that I would have to apply to do intro to writing here - like I have words. And I speak. That’s wrong. That offends me creatively in my mind. I would way rather - way rather - air on the side of inclusion (...) Sociology drove me nuts because it was like now I have a theoretical language to describe something I already lived. What’s that? What do you want me to do? I got here and was like anthropology, sociology, these are all beautiful. I love them. It was great but it also then got frustrating because I had poured myself into them and then I was like creatively pouring your soul into theory is a bad idea - and theory is helpful and its good. I hadn’t thought through a lot. (Haplrin)

A comparison to other arts departments was also discussed. Given the earlier reference that de-valuation of dance might be linked to its fine art status, it was interesting that participants reported some negative experiences with other art classes on campus. An assumption could logically be that artists would band together and be more likely to create positive encounters or less likely to report bad happenings. As such, the following exchange was insightful:
Nikolais: I feel like visual arts classes are very intimidating. They are tough to get in. It is difficult to grade subjectively in a studio or class and in a lot of artistic things.

Paxton: There is really tough grading there is a huge time commitment.

Nikolais: They take over your life.

Paxton: They take over your life. There is this huge whole like bubble around the studio arts majors and they have this and that and something they have in common with dance department is that they are in this very interesting arts discipline. Their comps are on display for everyone to see. That is similar to the dance department BUT the dance department is smaller than the studio art department and I feel like it’s more accessible. People from all different majors take different dance classes.

Nikolais: I took photography. It wasn’t that hard of a class and I enjoyed it but I didn’t feel relaxed or rejuvenated like I do after dance class.

Paxton: I feel that way after certain things - I am taking a drawing class next semester which I am really excited about. It is a requirement for my major but I also feel like I draw something - I feel (exaggerated exhale and pause) - I feel good and that’s how I feel after dance class. But to be able to take classes and get credit for the way you communicate with yourself. I feel so good after doing that and dance is one way to do that and I feel that more people can access through dance than through other things.
There may be discomfort in learning new things or having one’s thinking challenged outside the chosen discipline. Faculty seemed to acknowledge this not only as an expectation of liberal arts studies but also as an essential component to authentic integration of new knowledge. Shawn succinctly articulated this viewpoint when they said, “Right! And because we are a liberal arts school there are multiple points of view and points of entry into information. I feel like movement is the same thing as in philosophy or chemistry class - when you embrace the discomfort - Oh!”

Summary

The second research finding was that all participants cited that a “culture of basic goodness” presided over the dance program’s community in which a variety of appreciative and supportive practices were instrumental in shaping experience. Four themes were presented to support this finding: 1) culture of basic goodness: community as a source of appreciative and supportive practices, 2) relationships with faculty, 3) learning with and from peers, and 4) small size of the institution. I was somewhat surprised to discover the number of things in the community that participants identified as significant factors of dance experience. In part, it appears that the community, specific to the liberal arts institution, may warrant additional consideration. A priori expectations included that there would be use of auditions to some degree, leveling of technique classes based on ability with a corresponding hierarchy among students, feelings of competition, and report of not wanting or treating peers as equals. These were not confirmed. Once again, I learned something by being open to exploratory data and
reacting to this result. This is an example of being reflective and will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

**Research Question 3: How (or does) the Curriculum Provide Individualized Learning Experiences?**

Finding: All 13 participants (100%) indicated that the dance faculty encouraged personal investigation which facilitated the ability for students to foster ownership, have voice, and explore their individualized learning interests within the curriculum.

This finding is highly significant because all participants (13 [100%]) voiced that faculty promoted individual investigation within the program and the larger dance collective. Participants described faculty support, lack of rigidity in processes such as effective, student-centered teaching, and flexibility to pursue personal interests in coursework as factors that promoted individualized learning. There were four themes that emerged: 1) faculty commitment to individual process and curiosity, 2) fostering ownership and providing voice, 3) body as instrument, and 4) feedback.

**Theme 1: Faculty Commitment to Individual Process and Curiosity**

Perhaps further reflective of the earlier theme of relationships with faculty, all participants emphasized faculty’s commitment to honor and facilitate students’ unique interests. This perceived commitment was the most prevalent factor reported among participants for how they engaged curricula. Because the focus was on the individual, it was not surprising that each participant’s response conveyed unique insight. In line with earlier responses that there was no singular definition of who or what was dance, Ailey described the curriculum as offering tools rather than directives. Ailey said:
I think that they give you technique but they give you other tools to appreciate the art as a whole. I feel like that’s the point of the dance program here is the tools to appreciate it both in your body and as a viewing spectacle to see what you individually can take away from it. (Ailey)

Similarly, Pavlova intimated earlier references to a sense of unity. Without focus on a codified technique that is subjectively graded with authority from the teacher, learning dance from one’s own vantage point became the bottom line. Pavlova explained:

I think they really focus on what brings everyone together - dancing - everyone has a passion for that. I think they understand that and they play to that - they make that the most important thing. It’s not about the technique or your grade or anything like that. It’s really about that passion. It’s about how to further your personal understanding. (Pavlova)

Like Pavlova, Graham also discussed the emphasis on self-discovery. This seemed to negate tensions that could arise from comparison to others during coursework.

They are challenging you to push yourself to actively creative - as opposed to more of passively receiving someone else’s choreography. I am not saying that one is better than the other. But - they are pushing you and they want you to explore something new I think at the beginning of every dance class - the professor kind of prefaces it to the class - this class is not comparing you to your friends - to your other peers - your grade is not based on how well you can perform this sequence of pirouettes or whatever. But, your performance in the class is based on how much you put into it and your own personal progress. So, I
think just with the preface - that already takes off a lot of stress and a lot of pressure. (Graham)

Faculty provided opportunities to create and explore throughout the curriculum. This was perceived as being tuned-in to students’ interests and strengths. In the following response, Cunningham also mentioned trust as a key part of what makes students willing to try new things:

My adviser has really been seeking out opportunities for me. She asked me to set one of the sections for the piece because I am in her Laban class. She sought me out to do that. She put that trust in me. That meant a lot to me. Just before that - the bridge piece – the faculty came to me and asked if I wanted my piece to be in the fall dance concert - just little things like that…which are actually big things - mean a lot to me and they are really putting a lot of trust in me. I actually have a lot of examples from this year. (Cunningham)

Other participants also reported that faculty sought ways to scaffold interest through academic inquiry. Fokine explained:

For example, I am interested in Folklorico dancing. I have always been pushed in that direction not that I am told - it comes naturally from me. But the dance professors they demonstrate, they show interest to me about my own interests - to further them. I went to India and did this Folklorico training. They were interested in talking to me about my learning and they encouraged me to have this little show here to show the community what I had learned. That’s the way you are encouraged. (Fokine)
Humphrey followed-up on Fokine’s comment. They added that such curricular choice enabled students to develop their own voices. Humphrey said:

Faculty does this in a great way. They saw that Fokine was really interested in Folklorico and they took interest in that; encouraging them in that even though it’s not their interest. But it is because it’s our interests. What do you think about that? Let’s ask you more questions to get you to think about that and really push you in that way so that you start to develop, beautifully, your own voice! I think each of us has developed and I think each of us will keep developing. I haven’t developed my voice fully. We have so much more to do but we each definitely have a style our own thing yet we can still dance together and appreciate one another. (Humphrey)

Hawkins spoke of how excited and expeditious faculty tended to be when responding to a student’s request for additional materials or an expressed interest in a particular subject. They explained:

Another thing with faculty, I am an English literature major as well and I’m in a Canadian literature class and I wanted to do my paper on Canadian dance and I almost said it in passing to (specific faculty member) ‘Hey! If you can find anything about dance in Canada you let me know!’ and the next thing I know she is like scurrying down here with all these companies and names written on a piece of paper that same day! (Hawkins)
The Senior Exercise

As a required part of the dance curriculum, and in partial fulfillment of a graduation requirement, each dance major is required to complete the senior exercise. There are three parts to the project: a creative project (usually choreography), an oral defense, and a comprehensive exam. Nijinsky said, “We had so much freedom and support which was really intimidating to see how we were going to narrow that down.”

The seniors involved in this research all completed the senior exercise. These projects included the following explorations: producing a collaborative student-run show, creating a piece that explored text and social commentary, working with live musicians and an ethnomusicologist, and reconstruction of a piece from a Laban score. Due to the specificity of these projects, responses could not be detailed without risk of revealing participants’ identities. However, it is informative to at least share how three participants summarized the process related to the support and encouragement they received from faculty even though they each had vastly different projects. Humphrey said, “It was such a cool experience and it is so cool that we even get this opportunity.” Nijinski added, “It was a very emotional experience and I am in love with my piece and we all got really great feedback.” And Fokine added, “I was so encouraged by this great experience.”

Faculty discussed the senior exercise in two ways. First, they explained the structure of the process and how its design aimed to be fair and unbiased. And second, faculty shared their hope of what dancers gain from the experience, given the immense latitude provided to pursue and merge personal interests. Shawn described the process:
They take their exams anonymously. They are given pseudonyms so we are grading them blindly. So usually if we end of putting one of the essay questions in with regards to one of their projects we sort of figure it out - but we try to grade that at the end and all of the exams have at least two readers whether they are drama or dance students (...) They have a huge amount of leeway in terms of what kind of project that they structure. We don’t want them to feel like they have to do a certain kind of project even though the majority of them tend to be a choreography project. I want them to pursue a project that interests them - but it’s not the be all, end all project. Hopefully, it is something interesting that they have gleaned from their studies here. (Shawn)

St. Denis, adding on to her colleague’s statement, further explained the exercise and also provided examples of projects dancers have previously pursued:

They get a grade for the creative project and the oral together. Each senior after they do their exercise - whatever it is - they do orals where the dance faculty and one outside faculty come in and we ask them questions about their project. And then they do not get a grade for the written exam just pass/fail. If they do a fabulous job on all three components, then they may get Distinction (...) And it’s a way of integrating the things that they are interested in. The ones that have not done choreography are generally double majors and they find some way of combining their interests in other areas. So one year, we had an international studies and dance double major and she did a lecture demo - she had been in Japan and Spain studying Flamenco and she compared the use of Flamenco in
those 2 different cultures - how it differed and then she actually did a performance component where she and a Japanese student here demonstrated Flamenco stuff. So it was a way for her to put together her interests in international studies and dance. I was just talking to (names 3 students) and if they do declare a major they want to do a similar thing. (Names student) is thinking she is a psychology major now and she wants to double major and she is thinking she would do something with eating disorders in dance. And maybe do some kind of public presentation because they can’t double dip on the senior exercise. She could extend it for her dance senior project. Although most of them do a choreographic thing - the ones that don’t are usually the ones that are finding ways to bring together their common interests. (St. Denis)

Because the senior exercise is the culminating curricular event, it makes sense that dance majors and faculty spent time detailing this process. Generally, however, faculty addressed their role in encouraging personal investigation. They communicated to students that they had confidence in their abilities to do the work: any work the student was pursuant. Such steadfastness was believed to help minimize feelings of self-doubt and buoy exploration. Faculty member, Shawn, spoke of the power this gives students:

There is space when they are here where they start re-envisioning themselves and many of them see themselves as dancers. And that doesn’t mean that they are going to continue to dance outside of C College as we have found with many of our students but I think for this period of their lives it is such a time of discovery in all of the areas - emotional, physical, discovering that they are excited by
putting on that title of being able to be dancer. I hope that that is partly because they have a lot of power in our department and they choreograph and they contribute a lot. (Shawn)

With curricular emphasis placed on individual curiosity, this freedom also comes with autonomy and responsibility. Wigman detailed this when they said:

I think we all, depending on who the student is, take a very general approach in some ways in what we care about and what we’re teaching and pedagogical smarts but we also really look at students as individuals. Depending on how committed they become and how in depth they want to go - we are always there for individual meetings and processing. Because we are teaching as an alive practice it is applicable and we are demanding some independent responsibility for their actions. (Wigman)

Participants' spoke about being challenged in positive ways to break from their sense of normal or comfortable, to try new things, and take risks. The highly individualized approach to acquire movement vocabulary and knowledge seemed to simultaneously convey there was no one way or right way to experience dance. Participants acknowledged that within the dance curriculum they are expected to push themselves as part of the learning process.

**Taking Risks**

The idea of taking risks was specifically discussed by one third of participants (4 of 13 [31%]). Interestingly, participants discussed a readiness to do this because they were not afraid of failure. Some participants, like Hawkins, offered specific movement
examples that initially felt scary or unfamiliar, “And they do push us! I came here and I hated the floor and I hated inversions and now I love them both. I was heavily encouraged to explore the floor and explore my feet going above my head.” Ailey also referenced specific skills that were personally meaningful to accomplish precisely because this broke down fear of unfamiliar skills and concepts:

They are constantly challenging me to break the norm for myself to see what it’s like to find a new style. I think that is something really special since it is such a unique and individualized program here that they are able to know my style and what I like to do and tell me ways to grow from it. Maybe I guess challenging this is sort of an example of it. I was always so scared to do inversions and going upside down stuff. I always thought of dance as upright - just this is top and this is bottom and not the other way around. I can’t do a cartwheel. I can’t do any of those things. I just have this fear. I think that was one of my first like mastering the inversion stuff was really exciting that’s not my biggest success doing inversions but pushing myself just continuously pushing myself no matter how challenging or scary or hard it is. Even if I don’t get the movement it’s just that drive I have for this! That is a good success for me. (Ailey)

Pavlova, who also felt pushed in positive ways, drew a parallel between taking risks and personal expression. Hence, this pairing was perceived to be the beginning of exploration of artistic voice:
It is all about expressing yourself. Being more than. It’s more than just doing the moves it’s about creating new ideas and bringing something and pushing yourself.

It’s about growth and really being an artist rather than just dancing. (Pavlova)

Halprin seemed to agree with Pavlova in a way that suggested value for not just becoming an artist but being well-rounded. Again, the focus here was not on specific courses or course content to achieve this, the narratives instead clustered around perceptions of being challenged. Halprin explained:

I feel like I have mentors that gave me a creative space but still a lot of challenges. I think you are pushed individually. I think there is a whole lot of - competitive would not be my word - but I also would not say that it is completely without ambition and drives and things like that because with creativity I think that will inevitably be there. I would say that the environment is very allowing would be one word I would say and the philosophy behind that - which would lead to that. I have really been encouraged - you know with nudges (laughs) to make sure I am a well rounded performer and to pursue what interests me.

(Halprin)

Participants communicated that faculty fostered this environment where taking risks happened without fear of penalty for perceived failure or incompetence. Students were encouraged to push themselves and treat everything as good information to have: no right or wrong. This was repeatedly substantiated by faculty and was evidenced as Shawn spoke to a group of dancers. Shawn reminded them, “So I would say embrace
those uncomfortable places that feel unfamiliar. And the unfamiliar becomes familiar and then suddenly you have more range of motion and more options open to you.”

**Theme 2: Fostering Ownership and Providing Voice**

This theme appeared to be related to previous discussion that participants felt personal investigation was encouraged. So, when specifically asked about curriculum, it was not surprising that almost half of participants [6 of 13 (46%)], spoke of the interrelatedness of these two things in distinct negotiation of the dance curriculum. In turn, this translated to expectations defined by individual goals rather than program mandates. Hawkins humorously responded:

We are never told to do anything (laughs). So much freedom! If I felt like I wanted to write a paper. I could have written a paper. We have total freedom to do anything as long as we can defend why we wanted to do it. (Hawkins)

Another participant returned to the idea of not comparing self to others. In order to maximize learning, courses were viewed as a safe place to grow and try new things out. Dunham described this further in the following detailed narrative:

I think the only expectation is that you show up. You are with it. You are trying to get something out of the experience. You don’t have to be great. You really don’t have to be anything except really putting yourself into the movement. It is not about being really a great choreographer - but really finding something important within dance. So it is a very individual thing. I don’t know if you can really compare yourself to others. Because the focus is on your relationship to the movement and on your growth as a dancer rather than on what you look like or
what the final product is. Wow (laughs). I have found that studying dance here has really impacted how I have looked at almost everything. It is sort of interesting - I was telling somebody this earlier in the semester. Right now, I feel like my academic study has sort of created this circle ‘cause I am a psych. major and I am also concentrating in neuroscience - so you have neuroscience and you get into these physical systems - your neurological processes - and then you get in to the physical mechanics of dance and the sense of the body as this sort of collection of interacting systems. With dance you also get to this qualitative expressive side - this very unique way of relating to your own psyche I have found and then that sort of takes you back around though psychology. And I would say probably the biggest change I have noticed is how I relate to my own body. My own work with dance has always been much more self-based and sort of individual rather than quite so performative. It is just - I feel so much more aware of myself and aware in different ways than I did when I first came. Almost everything: use of weight, orientation to space, the way I think about movement itself. One of the things we do a lot of in the modern classes here - at least Steve Paxton calls it the small dance - I see a lot of variations of this when you are just standing being still and feeling the tiny movements of your body because your muscles are always working to keep you upright. That process of just being completely aware of your own body and your own sort of internal self - that is one of those things that I have found has most impacted the ways that I relate to my own body. (Dunham)
The focus on ownership through learning about one’s own body and movement preferences was further explored by Ailey. It was suggested that no specific program of study may be able to impart an intrinsic approach. Ailey did, however, speak about curriculum design and how this cultivated reliance on self in many ways:

The main goal for all the dancers that pass through the program here is to learn. Hopefully I have learned this inside-out appeal of dance: it’s integrated in every body, in every style, in every thought. I think that as long as you are able to take away and learn the structure of your body; how you move; what your style is; how you enhance - all that for yourself will make you stronger in the long run. I think that is the expectation to teach people about themselves so they are able to go out and interact with others through dance. You need to have those building blocks within yourself and I think that’s the expectation of the dance department because once you have those for yourself you don’t really need a teacher to tell you how. (Ailey)

Another participant discussed the importance of having the freedom to question the faculty, each other, and what dance is to them. Humphrey discussed how this enabled students to develop their voices:

The faculty gives us the academic side too which is interesting. How do you define dance then? So, what is dance to you? So, to us dance and what they have given us is our idea and it is not focused as much on the technical virtuosity as much although that is important and we all want to improve in what we’re doing and we are improving in classes. I think they encourage us to question what
dance is and in doing so they give us the kind of - you know you have to have the box to be able to step outside of the box so they give us the box. Then you have the ability to use that. (Humphrey)

Another participant did speak about specific course requirements. Again, this narrative seemed to illuminate possibilities provided by the curriculum rather than prescribed mandates. Halprin provided the following detailed response:

I really loved getting to take kinesiology that was something that really paired beautifully with modern dance for me. I really like that the curriculum that the core classes are your kinesiology, labanotation, composition, two levels of choreography and history. To me, I guess there are a 1,000 different ways to balance a curriculum, but that seems smart in that it comes at it from a historical, qualitative, quantitative, a lot of different perspectives. I feel like it puts me in the position that I can say I am passionate about dance and here are all of the potential things I can be focusing on later. It’s more experiential I think. Perhaps that’s what I like or part of what makes me happy being a dance major. I don’t think an analysis is necessarily a bad thing and that’s not what I mean. Cerebral might be a better word just a space where I felt –in the pre-dance major time- it felt like a lot of cerebral, left brain theories that I couldn’t be involved in. If that makes sense? Whereas with being a dance major, my right brain is happy because I get to have my own work that comes out of a practice. I feel much less cerebral and I don’t think that’s a pejorative thing anymore - which is a huge thing for me in that I realize I am intelligent and I don’t need to wax poetic on six different
philosophers with some people in order to feel that way. And I realize that I am excited by the fact that dance is a form of research and exploring things is new and there is a lot to be understood and figure out. A lot of us are glad that it is a bit ephemeral because it is a part of why we do it. (Halprin)

One participant (1 of 13 [1%]) did convey frustration. Dance studies were viewed as the convergence of cerebral, analytical, and kinesthetic practices. However, this participant encountered what they considered to be over-thinking. Those feelings prompted this honest response:

I have to say what I first thought (laughs). I am trying to avoid the word bullshit but there are certain things that I find bull-shitty about dance. Sometimes trying to get too cerebral about it in a technique class, homework with these books and I never knew what the point was or what they were trying to say and I would be like scratch it out five minutes before class because I didn’t see the point of it and I always found that really frustrating. Again - the study of dance and thinking about it is not bull-shitty - but some of these books I can’t even describe them. I just didn’t see how they contributed at all. That is definitely a big frustration!

(Cunningham)

As previously noted, participants’ discussed disconnects between dance knowledge and knowledge imparted in other disciplines. They saw a distinct difference (and indicated strong preference) in how the dance curriculum allowed for multiple entry points into content. Participants felt this was generally missing in other academic programs and more specifically, not considered consequential to student learning. Dance
faculty, however, expressed that students’ ownership of learning was not unique to the
dance experience but rather was an expectation throughout the college. St. Denis said, “I
think this idea of taking ownership for your own learning and the learning environment is
something that is really created and stressed through the college.” Another faculty
member framed this issue specific to dance:

> Just by how we teach and what we ask. Those things keep people aware that
> there are different ways of thinking and processing dance. We pull in the things
> that are interesting to us and we reference them verbally and through movement
> (...) I think it prepares them to be adaptable to have a really strong base of both a
> healthy body and a base of technique. I think they are generally well accustomed
to the normative basics in terms of plies, tendus, battements, pirouettes, but we all
deal with the floor and inversions, and things that are very much prevalent from
ballet through modern at this point. So they are well versed in those ranges. I
think they are able to make choices of what they care about because they have
worked for four years on articulating what they care about; focusing, making
decisions, aligning with who they are. (Wigman)

**Being a Choreographer**

Another important aspect associated with the theme of fostering ownership and
providing voice emerged during the research: the importance of being a choreographer.
A majority of participants mentioned the respect and support that student choreographers
typically receive and how esteemed they are by peers. The choreographic process
permitted experimentation with movement invention, provided insight into one’s identity
and the challenges of finding an artistic voice, and also established opportunities to research and interact in collaborative ways.

Four participants (31%) specifically articulated this point. First of all, dancers seemed to realize that being a choreographer posed a different set of challenges. Creativity was therefore perceived as a separate skill set that could be developed. Graham described that faculty encouraged students to be a choreographer at least once, perhaps as part of a commitment to taking risks:

I think there is the challenge of it especially. They are challenging you to push yourself into actively create - as opposed to more of passively receiving someone else’s choreography. I am not saying that one is better than the other. But they are pushing you and they want you to explore something new. (Graham)

Dunham described how being a choreographer can change the relationship to oneself as a dancer. This is a particularly important exploration for this age group as they continue to consider future roles and career paths. Dunham articulated this in the following way:

I think it goes a long way towards cementing someone’s public identity as a dancer. I think it is one of those things that can really take you from a person who dancers to being a dancer. Because it is one thing to take classes. It is one thing to dance with your friends on the weekend. But when you are on stage or when you have created a piece and set it on other dancers - that is putting a piece of yourself out there to the public scrutiny. I think that we talked a little bit about this before. I feel like there are two different goals of the department. So, for the people who are just interested in exploring and taking classes - I feel like that
faculty is really pushing for that personal exploration and connection to dance. But for those that are a little more serious - I think the process of performing and the process of choreographing is a way to really take your study of the subject to the next level. That is something that I have found personally. You relate to it in a different way. (Dunham)

Being a choreographer necessitates seeing movement from an entirely different vantage point. As such, participants considered this an important means to increase critical thinking, apply course content, and integrate critique. Ailey provided rich description when they explained the nuances of creating movement for performance:

I think it’s viewed as very important because it’s an external process of viewing dance. I mean people know that when doing something and seeing something it can be very different: the feel of doing it versus the feel of seeing it. So I think that the department really urges people to do this so that they can create movement with their dancers and see and say okay learn to manipulate, learn to take the stuff that we have learned in our choreographer classes, and put it into action. It’s a very external kind of viewpoint of dance that is very helpful when you go back to internally experiencing movement. You learn that while this may read it may read differently. There are so many ways to do one kind of movement - but it’s just a matter of finding that right way for you. That experimentation in finding how you want that to read is very important and that is why the dance program views it very importantly. Also, you experience your creative design and artistic ability and exercise it. It’s a production at the end - not just something
you are performing for the class. You think of props and costumes. It really enhances the movement. But what will enhance my movement even more? It’s all those detail things. You don’t think about that when you are just dancing on your own. (Ailey)

Halprin, similar to Ailey, discovered how much they enjoyed being a choreographer. Some form of choreography or composition class is often present in college dance programs. Choreographic emphasis could be considered a type of dance program while others just give it a cursory nod in the curriculum. However, the option for dancers to explore this in personally relevant ways at C College seemed to deepen their study even though numerous course options were unavailable. Halprin reported that this aspect of dance study provided numerous ways to learn about the field of dance, personal preference, and ways of working with others. They offered this detailed narrative about being a choreographer:

Well I think they really want you to be able to see what you want. That is a vague way of putting it. In the sense that you really don’t know how you are going to interact with your dancers until you do. For me, there are always surprises there you don’t know. I think that it’s really important because you get to interact with dancers in ways you don’t get to in class. There is of course the advising and they can come to rehearsals and they try to, want to, we want them there, the choreographers’ circles but it’s not supervised and it’s something where we are one of the few departments here where something that is extra-curricular is so curricular. If that makes any sense? My experience here without choreographing
would be really sad to think about. Actually, I would have been very sad. I think I am not more creative but that style of working that style of creativity is really good for me and calms me down and I really enjoy doing that. But it’s also that you get to talk with all these different choreographers who may or may not agree with you. The more I have been in these contexts I understand how to not take some things personally even though sometimes I am like did you really just say that? Because you know there is that deal - but it was educational because I got to learn to deal with people who would give me criticism. If I were not editing myself I would be like that is completely off and I have no idea what you are saying. Whether or not I am right - it is about productive conversation. And then choreography also gives you the space, I think, because you have the great dance history, research opportunities but also a different kind of research that is more grounded in working with other dancers and I think that that is really huge and I think that by gearing any curriculum towards composition you are also freeing up what movement styles you allow and what aesthetics you allow because this person’s composition is important not this person’s technique is important. It is important if it’s important for the composition - but if it’s not - then why are we talking about it? It’s really helpful in that way. I think that focus is big. And a space to individuate if you are doing the dance major to try to choreograph. That mentality I don’t mind. Faculty is here to support you and I think it’s a really important part of the education. But I am also biased towards to because I like choreographing (laughs). (Halprin)
Faculty once again expressed responses similar to those of participants. However, faculty seemed to correlate the importance of being a choreographer with the significance of having a leadership role. They readily communicated to students that being a choreographer, having that leadership role, is something that is strongly valued. Shawn conveyed this when they responded:

That peer leadership role, whether it’s in class because it’s a higher level or you’re a choreographer who is casting your peers and leading rehearsals, I think that that identity is HUGE! Directing your peers - it is the biggest difference I see when people have that idea of okay I’m in a leadership role, I have to be organized, and people see me as having something to share. It’s a big leadership position for them and it comes with a lot of anxiety. It’s not our best dancers who are our best choreographers. But it’s really those who have organization, leadership skills and again, how they lead that process. Also, I think that is one message that we really get across it’s a position that we value. When we give feedback on a piece, we give it to the choreographer and the choreographer disseminates it in the ways that they feel it’s useful for them. They are expected to come to those meetings. They really take a leadership role in how they put together our productions. I think it is an honor and I think that we encourage people to take that leadership role and I think that really changes their relationship to the department whenever they start to choreograph. (Shawn)
St. Denis seemed to echo participant Halprin’s earlier response about being a student choreographer and the many things gleaned from that role. This faculty member explained:

And what’s interesting here is how multi-dimensional that role is. They have to go to the design meeting and think about lighting and when they think a dance maybe was just steps and music at one point- but it’s also that idea of revision. It’s really multidimensional. It’s their voice as well as their leadership skills, organization, and leading this process. We value the process more than the product and they get all of that information once they start choreographing. But it also is a chance for them to develop their own voice and it is their expression and not just them as dancers fulfilling the role that we are asking them to fulfill. (St. Denis)

**Theme 3: Body as Instrument**

All participants (100%) referenced curricular emphasis on learning about the body. This took place in both formal and informal ways covering topics including: the dancing body, physical limitations, function, anatomy, safe and efficient use of the body, and development of movement vocabulary. Presentation of these topics in both course content and class structures emphasized students learning about self. Graham said, “It’s kind of like learning a language. If you learned it before it’s easier to go back to it. It’s like that foundation of learning how to move and how to manipulate your own body as a dancer.” Another participant talked about the exploratory nature of developing body awareness, “It’s more about what can my leg do? Instead of how high can it go? It’s very
exploratory both in terms of internal and what is my body doing” (Hawkins). Another participant shared a similar experience:

When we get notes in class or in performance, the notes aren’t that your leg should be at this degree or angle. It’s not about how it looks. It’s about how it feels and they understand that in doing this motion it’s different for her or her. And if I am trying to look like something I’m not, they see that and they know. Use your weight and momentum – it’s not nitpicky details. It’s about understanding your own body. (Nijinsky)

The reporting that curricular focus was on individual body knowledge seemed to support earlier claims that there was no right or wrong; no aesthetic or technical mold to fit; and no singular way to learn dance. Accordingly, Halprin concurred with Nijinsky that no expectations were communicated about dancers being asked to reproduce movement; making it look a particular way. What was considered significant was dancers’ ability to approach learning as a process and see the body as a prolific source of information.

Halprin explained:

There is so much on how your individual body works. For me, that was essentially why I was a dance major. I found that to be a point of research that is infinite. That was something that linked the analysis and the more right brained allowing stuff. I think it’s more of an approach to moving than it is a particular way of moving. If that makes sense? It is more of an approach to process than an approach to how you are supposed to look is what I would say. (Halprin)
This focus also seemed to enable participants to consciously realize how bodies navigate and communicate in space and time. Participants spoke about how this knowledge transcends the dance classroom. Pavlova seemed to discuss a stream of awareness that mediated not just physical awareness of the body but also interactions and relationships. Pavlova said it this way:

It is kind if just a part of my essence. Just something as simple as how I walk. Dance affects that or how I stand or how I think in my body. How I think and then it applies to relationships just being able to support one another. It allows me to connect with other students who like to be artists who are also expressing themselves who also understand that about performing. I think I have always - I don’t think it has changed the way I think. I think it has the ability to but I don’t think it has yet. There is potential. It really is about learning about your body and it is always about placement and position and how to be healthy and using your body to inspire movement. (Pavlova)

Multiple influences shape body practices. If you recall from the literature on body as instrument presented in Chapter 2, Marcel Mauss (1973) posited that skills develop alongside a familiarity of the body’s usefulness which cannot be separated from its connection to the unconscious state of being and development. Participants seemed to be aware of developing a bodily skill set (specific to dance) and understanding of the body as an instrument: subject to malleability over time. Curriculum steeped in opportunities to explore the body and its usefulness spawned discussion of awareness. Ailey seemed to invoke Mauss’s theory when they said:
It is something that you grow from every class. You just learn something very exciting every single class about yourself about the human body which is what you live with. It is amazing - you will have your own body for the rest of your life. To learn about it as much as you can is such a gift that the dance department really provides I think. From what I have experienced, they start broad with beginning technique classes. They start broad with general movements just so that people can feel for it because they don’t know what it feels like in their bodies per se. How to experience a certain movement or feeling. They start with the broad sense of it and begin to tweak into an individual aspect - instead of building up to a group something - it kind of goes the other way - starts at a broad base - and kind of pyramids down to a more individual - with more advanced classes you start to get a sense of individualized feelings and then by that time I feel like people are able to have picked up on the notion that it is different for everyone. They make it clear that movement is just unique to everyone’s individual body type. I feel more aware of myself - especially having taken kinesiology. I just feel more aware of the problem areas in my body and myself in space. So, I feel much more of an attachment to myself, more fitted in myself. With labanotation, analyzing steps in such a formulaic way is also another great way to analyze my movement now as I am doing it - really differentiating between highs and lows and the space around me. And it’s not a matter of I am not trying to go to class and just do some awesome jete - it’s about the inner working I think. So, I think I have grown to view dance from an inside-out point
of view instead of an outside-in point of view. If that makes any sense? And that’s the beauty of it too. Instead of just looking at the beautiful aspects - instead of looking at the internal aspects - I have learned how to view the internal aspects and everyone has too. I have learned it for myself and because of that I can see it on others. That’s the beauty of it! That’s the beauty of dance! (Ailey)

Similar to the inside-out point of view described by Ailey, Dunham also referenced an internal impetus. Dunham referenced themes in the dance curriculum that were considered particularly adept at providing bodily skills to access and experience the world differently. Dunham provided the following descriptive narrative:

For me, dance is a sort of spiritual thing, very freeing. I had done yoga previously and it’s very much like that. It’s a chance to be in my body and to let go of all the kind of mental problems and worries and processes that most of us live with. Everything about it. Almost everything: use of weight, orientation to space, the way I think about movement itself. One of the things we do a lot of in the modern classes here - at least Steve Paxton calls it the small dance - I see a lot of variations of this when you are just standing being still and feeling the tiny movements of your body because your muscles are always working to keep you upright. That process of just being completely aware of your own body and your own sort of internal self - that is one of those things that I have found has most impacted the ways that I relate to my own body. Maybe this is a commonality in most modern dance but here I have found that even if you are searching for a specific quality of movement- the impetus has to be internal. I guess that is sort
of what has resonated with me most. I think one of the reasons that I have gotten so much joy and support from dance is that - college is chaotic - things are constantly changing. You don’t know who you are going to be or where you are going to be. But on some level you can always go into yourself, to your own body; having that sense of your physical body is really helpful. In some ways - I think that is unique to dance. (Dunham)

Faculty concurred with participants. To understand one’s body is to have the starting point from which environmental and sensory information can be unified. Some would argue that this is not only fundamental to dance training, but has application beyond the confines of a dance studio. Given this line of thinking, it seemed logical that faculty described how the curriculum provided the anatomical, postural, functional, and skill knowledge needed to understand the body as the instrument of dance. But, perhaps, equally significant were opportunities to understand the form and function of the living body. St. Denis described this the following way:

I mean it is funny because this just came up in a conference I had with a student who feels very strongly that she has and she does - she has a preference for very strong, bounded and direct movement and she is very aware of that. In modern, I have been doing all the movement analysis stuff and for the first time - I think she has always had a little bit of resentment feeling like she just doesn’t fit into the aesthetic of our department and that’s why she hasn’t been cast as much – and I think she is starting to honor her own preferences a little bit. At the same time, honoring them is letting her in a way explore more openly. I think that’s what is
pretty cool. Habits are a little bit different and I think very difficult to change. But I think, again, the more immersed that they get if they take the history, the composition, the kinesiology that we are looking at that on many different levels and exploring okay yes you can rotate out 180 degrees if you’re goal is to be ballerina in the NYC ballet, understanding physically what is happening physically if you make that choice. Understanding what is happening physically if you do make that choice presents it in a little bit different way than just this is the aesthetic that you are going for. So it becomes a more informed. For me, it’s very important that they get an understanding of their bodies and how their bodies work. On one level, there is this creative approach but also an understanding of the body that they live in and hopefully honoring that. They understand how to train for something whether it’s running a marathon or doing a dance class and to do it right. (St. Denis)

Shawn, continuing the dialogue of possible implications for dancers, also mentioned the mind/body connection. A principle of somatic study, this connection realizes autonomy and self-regulation as guides for changing one’s capabilities through body awareness and experience. Shawn articulated the goal of advancing this awareness in dancers:

You have to put it into practice by looking into the toolbox and seeing what all is in there and then applying it in the body. Hopefully by thinking about points of initiation - that’s my hand - that’s my foot - you are thinking less in terms of this step and then that step. Finding that sense of flow and the logic that connects you one thing to the next (…) An amazing thing to me is the integration of mind and
body in what we do here. It is not just our minds and it’s not just our bodies. But they really have to inform each other. We don’t just live in our heads. We try to be integrated with mind and body and valuing the information when something feels a certain way. (Shawn)

**Safety of the Body**

In tandem with body knowledge, faculty underscored safe dance practices. Faculty wanted dancers to understand strengths, weaknesses, and range of motion to minimize injury. “Technically, I think it’s very important to us that they are pushed to expand their movement abilities but also that they are really moving safely and efficiently whether its ballet or modern” (St. Denis). Wigman seemed to more specifically examine this pedagogical approach in light of a network of influences previously discussed. The open program encourages respect, individualized learning, and welcomes a broad range of movers and interests. Using safety of the body to link these things to the mission of the dance program, Wigman explained:

A dance major could become who knows what. There is a bleed through and part of that is hopefully being healthier in their bodies which I view as pretty gigantic. It is a lot of who we are and what our backgrounds are and what we care about - which is the baseline of using the body efficiently with openness and curiosity and respecting each person as an individual. And not a fight for territory and not a fight for idiom (...) In terms of mission, I think we all care bottom line about the health of the body, somatic principles matter to all of us, efficiency, with qualitative differences and range matter to all of us. So, there is kind of - even
though we are different in our approaches—which is great—there is a lot of common ground about what we are trying to teach so that when someone comes from one class to another class it is just not a huge shift. It might be a shift of different quirks we have but not in terms of the base principles. (Wigman)

It is worth mentioning that faculty not only appeared to interact with students according to these principles but also seemed to work with each other in this manner. This was evidenced while faculty rehearsed together for a performance. The piece was very physical with lots of partnering, non-stop contact, lifting, rolling on the ground, rolling over each other, and weight sharing. They posed questions to each other such as: “What works for you?” and “Is this too much for you?” and “Not working? Okay let’s figure that out.” They appeared supportive and responsive to each other. There was expressed willingness to make movement work for the safety of their bodies rather than an unwavering commitment to choreographed movement. Participants were simultaneously rehearsing pieces for the same performance. At one point, a student choreographer said to dancers, “If anyone is feeling uncomfortable, do what you need to do” (Cunningham). Faculty modeled the importance of body awareness and safe practices both in and out of the studio. As such, there were implications for dancers in various contexts—perhaps especially when they were not conscious of how they reproduced forging body connections and knowledge.

**Theme 4: Feedback**

It was not surprising that, in the absence of critical focus and because ownership of learning was valued and individual curiosity significant, a majority of participants
welcomed feedback from faculty and peers. Feedback was perceived to facilitate progress. In large part, this was because of the spirit in which it was delivered. Graham captured the feelings of most participants when they said, “If they were really negative and criticizing without being constructive about it. That would definitely make things harder.” More specifically, Dunham mentioned the methods employed by faculty to provide feedback. Using a studio course as an example, Dunham suggested that feedback was ongoing, positive and promoted self-reflection. This was evidenced as follows:

They are really good about balancing praise and encouragement with constructive criticism. In a technique class, usually you will have a midterm conference - we usually have final evaluations. But usually along the way they are telling you what they are seeing that’s good, what progress you are making, and then also what areas they would like to see certain things. (Dunham)

Feedback also seemed a way to encourage dancers to take risks. As previously discussed, participants viewed this as an important aspect of curriculum. Interestingly, Pavlova observed that feedback from faculty was delivered multi-modal. Commentary was verbal, visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Pavlova seemed to sharpen this connection:

I think most of the feedback that I have gotten what faculty say to me is about feeling like letting myself get into the movement and letting my emotions out and really dancing and experiencing something. And I definitely see them doing that and I see them when they are teaching: they use the floor, use people, use their body to initiate movement. I can see them do that. I can see them teaching other
people that. That is my personal experience. There is definitely a connection.

(Pavlova)

Given that the openness of the program was the central organizing factor for dance experience, it seemed fitting that participants would view feedback as an organic manifestation. Feedback validated experience. Moreover, the presence of diverse movers in the program gave students permission to choose what or whose feedback made sense to them. Haplrin provided a rich description of this:

You know how a director or choreographer talks to you before you go on stage is particularly telling I think. (Faculty choreographer) is there and has cards for us, which is sweet, but they say things like embody and enjoy- like I (choreographer) am not on stage this is yours now. I would say this is a similar attitude in class. The faculty has their points of research and their interests and their aesthetics. I do not hit every bit of the combination every time. And they like that I don’t worry about that and that I am like, oh I have the shape of that and I will get it the 2\textsuperscript{nd} or 3\textsuperscript{rd} time. They see that. It is the sort of thing - there could be the teacher reactions of, oh you are not hitting the details. You are not paying attention. You are not successful with this. You have feedback sessions in all of the technique classes that I have had. You have a midterm. Feedback sessions with midterms it’s the sort of feedback from faculty like, you know I see you and you are doing a phrase and you kind of know it maybe you don’t, but you are getting it, and your eyes are everywhere and you are looking at people trying to get every detail and it’s not working. And it was feedback like that. It doesn’t even feel right to say
criticism but you are not necessarily getting a compliment. But it’s like, Yeah! I
do have my own rhythm and way of processing things and if I don’t hit all the
details the 1st time I get a combination. The 1st time I ever see a phrase of
movement and that’s okay (…) That whole dialogue has been huge for me and it’s
been really informative and a lot of the anger, not anger, defensiveness leaves
because it is just something where that person doesn’t think the same way that I
do and it’s so hard for me. I get self-conscious because I am trying to give just
the description thing – it’s not necessarily that opinions are implicit but the way I
saw it was implicit - not being good or bad - but it was an hour glass, spiral thing -
no I have to deconstruct a little more - or should I deconstruct as much? I am
laban analyzing your movement - do people really want to hear that I saw a lot of
flicks and slashes. That might not be helpful. It’s that sort of thing where those
little learning opportunities of how to collaborate and communicate with people
that you are not making work with but you are in the same performance with or
class. Opportunities being what they are, I want to be able to do that. It’s also
great to see people. And the professors are like that too. (Halprin)

Faculty also spoke of the importance of feedback while acknowledging that
professors do not have all the answers. As an aside, this approach also seemed to foster
peer learning. Faculty intended feedback to provide provocations; generating thought
and choice in what works for dancers. Therefore, feedback was intended to cultivate
dialogue. Above, participants referred to mid-term conferences. The following is a
compilation of questions posed to a group of students during this conference. This
example is illustrative of how faculty typically posited questions in order to elicit
dialogue and self-reflection. Shawn asked:

   How are you doing? Who wants to go next and just tell us what you are thinking?
   So I want to start out talking about the difference between the last two sets of
classes. How did they work on your body? Was it a purposeful or dramatic
contrast? Did the floor stuff have a logic for you? Was it just so challenging?
   Did you find out that you hate floor? You were disoriented? What information
did you get? In terms of talking about modern dance concepts breath, weight -
this week it has been a lot of floor work, points of initiation, what’s leading you?
   How has that informed you as movers? Those concepts? Is it new every class?
   Do you feel the weight of your arm now when you brush your teeth? How have
those concepts informed you? I want to hear your input on contrasts - what do
you think you are learning about yourselves? (Shawn)

In a faculty focus group, Shawn also acknowledged that the tone was very influential in
how students received feedback:

   I just had a student demonstrate this floor thing and you could just see the really
clear initiations in his body. So I didn’t say everyone has to look like this person
but just that the clarity in which he is feeling this. But yes, again, it is how it’s
framed and the tone and it is interesting that we do those things but they are
perceived differently by students. (Shawn)

Another faculty member provided poignant insight on the intention of feedback:
Students also get the thing that we give feedback but they are filtering. We may suggest something that may be provocative and may lead them to something else but they may choose to do something very different. We let that be understood. We are not giving directives. We are giving provocations this is one way and this is another way and they have to sort through that. Again, that is part of the pedagogy that we believe in. That is tricky and it does sometimes put us in a tricky position sometimes because we are doing that line of trying to give information and feedback but letting them have that latitude and responsibility. It is a dialogue. So there is information being sought but it is not for the most part - I mean obviously if I am giving a kinesiology test - there is a lot of specificity that we may have depending on what we are teaching - a femur bone is a femur bone - you can’t call it something else. But in terms of in class, in say technique or choreography or feedback things I think the framing is different than a spoon-feeding, regurgitate it back way. (Wigman)

**The Creative Process**

A few participants (3 of 13 [23%]) reflected on feedback as a way to better understand creative choices and process. As previously detailed, participants felt that judgment and harsh criticism or comparison were not part of the dance experience at C College. This may explain, in part, why participants reflected on how or why feedback may encourage creativity. Humphrey framed the discussion as follows:

In the dance community here- and in other communities but not all - there are other communities nowadays that are saying don’t have that judgment of peers
and others. And we are lucky here to have that open. But I would say that maybe part of that what we have been saying to you so far that faculty don’t push the technical aspect and they do push us in ways to be creative and create our own personal style. (Humphrey)

Halprin offered additional insight. The creative process, perhaps evidenced in an environment where this work is valued and encouraged, provides dancers with new insight about themselves. Halprin discussed how ongoing opportunities to dialogue about choreography and creativity, which were perceived to be unique to dance, have been informative:

- Few majors allow you to so quickly get to make your own work - your own creative work. I also feel less guilt about being irreverent about what I think about things because I realize that everyone thinks things and I am allowed to articulate them if I so choose but I also don’t have to articulate those. Interactions that happen within creative process have been really educational for me in that way and it also helps me individuate in the sense that I am a dancer - and that gives me pride, gratitude, calm. Other things start to be - the things that are important start to seem less important but other things seem like things I can deal with. That is analogous to a lot of people who start a creative practice that works for them- they are like I have this for me and now I feel more comfortable with interacting with other people. It’s not like I was unable of doing it before because I was - but it has changed. (Halprin)
Faculty observed a distinct relationship between creativity and collaborative meaning making. As such, interactions with students, including conveyance of feedback, focused on being partners in discovery. For Wigman, this was acutely done through the creative process:

In terms of what really keeps me going - aside from the physical interests and need in a way - is the improvisational and choreographic elements. I love teaching and it’s a huge motor for me as well - but keeping a creative process which I find part of teaching as well - they all go hand in hand. (Wigman)

In reflecting on how they teach and create, Shawn seemed to return to the idea of collaboration. Exploration of the curriculum cannot be done in a vacuum void of personal or community contexts. This overlap was indicated in the following way:

I think that dancers tend to be community oriented, happy people in general that like to be with each other and dance together, create their art together so we try to nourish that. That idea of we get a lot of information precisely because we are all making this community; experiencing these things together. (Shawn)

Summary

The third research finding was that all participants indicated that the dance faculty encouraged personal investigation which facilitated the ability for students to foster ownership, have voice, and explore their individualized learning interests within the curriculum. Four themes were presented to support this finding: 1) faculty commitment to individual process and curiosity, 2) fostering ownership and providing voice, 3) body as instrument, and 4) feedback. What appeared significant in this finding was that
specific course offerings were not a significant organizer of dance experience. Quite the opposite, dancers reported being pushed to pursue their own interests. They had opportunity to explore and challenge themselves through acquisition of intellectual and bodily knowledge. Participants reported that the discovery process was sustained in a variety of ways by both faculty and peers. Taken together, these personal factors, rather than content considerations, were described as what provided individualized learning experiences.

**Research Question 4: How (or does) One’s Dance Identity Evolve or Change?**

Finding: All 13 participants (100%) voiced that dance identity knowingly evolved through involvement in the dance program and coincided with the ability to articulate personal growth. The majority of participants also cited that dance identity was mediated, in part, by factors such as stereotypes and valuing of the field of dance, concerns about career choice pay off, and differing definitions of the dancing body.

The overriding finding that the openness of the dance program, regardless of previous training, allowed participants to feel accepted and welcomed was further reflected by the informal, rather than formal, ways by which participants went about trying to find their sense of self as young dancers. This finding is highly significant because all participants (13 of 13 [100%]) voiced a personal consciousness for how they came to see or know themselves more fully through dance study. Participants understood now, which they did not understand when they entered the program, that finding one’s dance identity is an ongoing process whose value resides in not only creative expression and the revelation of new knowledge, but also approval of talent in accordance with a particular set of social and discipline-specific norms. Thus, three themes emerged with
this finding: 1) life practice, 2) personal growth, and 3) self in relation to a collective practice.

Theme 1: Life Practice

Half of all participants (50%) spoke of the importance of dance in their lives. As students, they were aware that dance was interwoven through numerous aspects of their daily existence. Moreover, their body was the sole vessel through which sensory, spatial, and social information was being filtered. There are complexities with simultaneously being in and of one’s artistic practice which required participants to explore multi-faceted aspects of being a dancer. At the forefront of current interactions and career decisions, some participants reconciled this pursuit, in part, through recognition that regardless of outcome they could not envision life without dance. Cunningham realized that a sense of self emerged, in part, due to the unexpected choice to pursue a dance major. Discovery of this path was significant and made the participant feel a sense of responsibility to declare and define who they were. Cunningham explained it this way:

Well no it’s so different because I can say I am a choreographer and a dancer and a dance major - which adds a whole other level to it. My first couple of years I took dance classes and I was in the show but it was just something extra. Fully committing to the dance major really brought that into more of a part of my identity. It was something that was already there but it was more like fully committing and fully acknowledging and embracing all the different facets of it. I think this isn’t actually surprising the fact that even though I set out saying that I wasn’t going to do the dance major - I will do the minor - dance somehow forced
but just being that important in my life that it manifested on its own which I guess it was surprising. I guess it did surprise me at the time that at a certain point - the idea of not doing the dance major bummed me out. It became such a big part of my life without me trying for it to be. I guess that is a big surprise - but when I think about it - maybe not that surprising. I mean I see that as any aspect of identity - you define it for yourself. Not just as dancer or as an athlete or whatever - the department has certainly helped me to figure it out and encouraged me to make it a bigger part of myself just by giving me more responsibility. But in the end - it is how I define myself. I can’t imagine not dancing - it just seems really foreign. (Cunningham)

Dunham also discovered a passion for dance once at C College. Like Cunningham, Dunham spoke about the importance of learning to define dance for one’s self and yet also indicated the presence of external evaluation that often assigns value to dancers and/or the art form. The participant expressed this in the following response:

For me, dance is a joyous experiences and it has become very enmeshed in my identity. I love to do it. It is something I can’t imagine not doing. I think it depends on what - in what context you choose to dance. I think we all have a personal sense of ourselves and I think that is up to us to define. But once you start taking your dancing into a more public venue then you leave yourself open to interpretation. If you decide to perform or you decide to choreograph - there will always be an element that you alone define - but at that point - your audience also will have their opinions and their own interpretations. They will sort of assign
values or concepts to you. I think that it will feed into your identity as well. This
is the 1st time I have ever had a chance to dance in structured setting and it’s just
become so much a part of my life here and at this point it has become very - I
would say integral to my identity and its one of those things that I think I would
be miserable if I had to stop dancing. (Dunham)

Another participant did not speak about a life practice solely in terms of dance. As a
dancer, they wanted to remain connected to the practice of being an artist. The
participant’s response seemed to evidence a desire to create, view, support and learn from
other artists as part of how they defined self. Duncan explained:

I mean it has definitely given me another label to call myself and how other
people view me here. I guess I come from a pretty artsy background and having
dance helps. Good way for me to be expressive and show my general artistic
awareness. I will always love dance. And I love choreographing. When I go see
shows - I am always aware of it and I am always jotting down ideas from it. I
can’t imagine that will ever stop. (Duncan)

Halprin also seemed to consider multiple aspects of one’s identity as a dancer. Moreover,
they reported that freedom to explore and personalize a dance approach altered the
definition of “practice.” Halprin explained the connection between life practice and
dance identity this way:

As far as dancer identity with that it’s a lot about ritual for me and a lot about
practice. And I hear practice and I think practice your trumpet or practice you
piano and it’s not like that for me with dance! It’s this thing where I don’t come
in - there is guiding structures and influences and things like that - but it’s not that laborious feeling of practice like oh I have to run this. But oh! I get to come back to this! And that’s what I have been trying to go for because that’s where I feel happy. It’s interesting dancer identity, choreographer identity. (Halprin)

Above all else, faculty desired a life practice for students. The program did not communicate an expected outcome, career choice, or definition of success. Instead, dance identity was a sustainable, relatable, and alive practice. Faculty focused on how to support dancers in keeping this a core part of who they are. Shawn’s response reflected the centrality of this goal when they said:

You know whether they are trained for careers in dance or not is not as much of a concern as that they have a long term relationship with the arts in whatever way. Whether that’s going to be in marketing or as audience members, fundraiser, whatever - that they have an appreciation that this is part of their life that they can’t ignore. And for me that would be just the greatest! Whether they go off and do Teach for America or join the Peace Corps that art is part of their life and a lot of times when they initially come here it’s an extracurricular hobby and then hopefully the goal would be that as they leave they feel like a more realized person that that’s a way for them to become - to know more about (…) I think that we can’t control what they do beyond here and many of them don’t continue to dance beyond here. But, these are formative years in their lives. For many of them - regardless of the specifics - whether they take something from an economics class and it applies to their life in the future is kind of irrelevant
because it’s just one piece of the puzzle that goes into this whole formative experience they have had here. So, the last part of your question about how does it define their self. I think it really does at least the self in these four years - that then informs who they become as adults. I just read in the student paper yesterday about a student who is in the Peace Corps - they asked him - does any of your experience at C College apply to what you are doing in (country). He said no. I am not writing analytic papers. However, the self that was defined and grew while I was at C College informs here and my love for reading and those sorts of those things. It was irrelevant what his major was. I think that’s applicable. Absolutely! (Shawn)

In their response, St. Denis seemed to highlight many of the program’s tenets previously discussed herein. It coalesced that faculty would structure a dance program around the philosophy they believe central to training dancers and would also describe this as the means to sustain engagement with the arts long after C College. St. Denis seemed to bring themes together in the following way:

I guess I have always felt that one of my aspirations as a teacher is that no matter what they go onto do that they will have this passion and love for dance and movement. They might not continue dancing - but they will see dance. They will continue to value taking care of their bodies, using their bodies, being expressive. Collaborative, the creative, in some way that this passion for dance carries on into their experiences in the future. That may not be that they are taking dance classes every day and I don’t care about that. They value the experience of working with
other people. Going to an art museum. I feel like it does carry on hopefully in many different ways. (St. Denis)

_Dance as a Job/Title_

It is noteworthy that participants’ struggle to reconcile a love of dance with perceived realities of the job market was evident. Thus, options to make dance a part of one’s life did not negate tensions related to financial pay off. Duncan said, “I just don’t think I can do anything with that.” And Cunningham deduced, “Dance doesn’t necessarily translate to my job title - it is something a little more esoteric - it is a feeling.” The majority of participants expressed concerns regarding career choice, finding a job, and lingering doubts of how to make dance a marketable enterprise. They spoke candidly of the perceived need for graduate school, going abroad, and/or training for a specialized job in the field to secure a dance job. Halprin, however, attributed this anxiety to an age appropriate part of maturation:

And among students - inevitably - especially with people at our age - if you are going to make a decision to major in this creative art then it is not going to have the same pay off as my econ major friends who are at this prestigious school. That’s kind of a big deal. Generally I think there is a whole lot of anxiety about that just because you are setting yourself apart in the sense. With dance - everyone has their anxieties - like you were a dance major in college - so I think people need reassurance that there are plenty of things that you can research and be involved in. (Halprin)
Faculty did not have a jaded view about participants’ concerns. Moreover, they did not think participants’ struggles were indicative of conflicting messages or incongruent with the mission of the dance program. Faculty acknowledged that such anxieties were often associated with being a dance major. “We are talking about some different options because if you do major in dance there is always that fear that if you major in dance you will never work” (St. Denis). Faculty also realized that with programmatic emphasis on the individual, there was no one way to forge one’s place in the dance world. This was made evident when Wigman said, “Students have to discern what they are interested in, what aspect, what communities they want to go to. I can think of very different students and they are looking for different things. We try to give them options.” In addition, they explicitly connected this to the reasons why participants chose to attend a liberal arts institution. This was expressed in the following comment:

We are not preparing students usually for a specific career. They are not at a vocational school or at a school where they have to - well we do have premed students and things like that - but a liberal arts education is not launching you into any career except for maybe graduate school. So, I would say that most of our students do not go into dance if you are talking about that career. It is another way of learning, curiosity about subject matter, and like you said integrating many areas of interests and strengths that our students have. They are attracted to a place like this because their interests are very broad. (Shawn)
**Theme 2: Personal Growth**

A second theme of this finding was participants’ awareness of personal growth. It seems obvious that growth is not related to, and not discreetly separate from, any singular thing. However, what was intriguing about this theme was participants’ telling that ability to articulate growth was part of an authentic dance process. Participants wanted to be able to delve into frustrations, issues, skill progression, and things that blocked or helped them overcome challenges. These investigations enabled dancers to grow identity through embodied self-understanding (Nakkula, 2008). For one participant, this growth was related to improved technical abilities, “I am more versatile in the realm of modern dance. But my body has become better at picking up movement. I feel more like a dancer” (Duncan). Another participant explained this understanding as an everyday examination of self when they said:

> It is something that you can grow from every class. You just learn something very exciting every single class about yourself about other about the human body which is what you live with. I feel more aware of myself - especially having taken kinesiology. I just feel more aware of the problem areas in my body and myself in space - so I feel much more of an attachment to myself - more fitted in myself. With labanotation, analyzing steps in such a formulaic way is also another great way to analyze my movement now as I am doing it - really differentiating between highs and lows and the space around me. I think those have helped in that sense. I feel like I let myself down sometimes. I compare myself to something else or not fitting into a certain norm. It isn’t good for me.
It’s good to observe other people but I think sometimes what I have done is fit their categories into me and that’s always frustrating. But the fact that I have realized that is good on its own - and still something I am still working on. (Ailey)

Participants cultivated the capacity to broadly apply dance knowledge. They tested connections for how dance fit into other aspects of their life. An ability to express identities that are in flux is a benchmark of this age group (Raible & Nieto, 2008). Thus, it seemed consequential that participants sought ways to articulate their development.

One participant explained:

I see connections. It is lots of little things. Now it has gotten to the point - where if I am trying to fall asleep I am thinking about choreographing in my mind - which never happened before. And in classes like kinesiology it really affected me: gave me a really interesting insight into my body which I never had before. I didn’t think I would get as much from such a science-y class. I am constantly annoying my friends, ahhh - calcaneous. It is always on my mind. My boyfriend has abstract art in his room and I am like that looks like labanotation. Obviously using your mind in any sort of creative ways expands out into other areas. So, I imagine choreographing will translate into creative problem solving in other aspects of my life. (Cunningham)

Participants gave the impression that they were aware of differences in themselves before and after involvement in the dance program. Attentive to these experiences, participants did a type of comparative analysis between the perspectives. Dunham offered:
It is just - I feel so much more aware of myself and aware in different ways than I did when I first came. I guess the fact that I have kept going with it. I remember I think it was intermediate modern the first couple of weeks just feeling like I would never get it. There was too much, too many steps I was never going to get it. At some point like a year later I was in an advanced class and I felt very comfortable and it was kind of a shock to see where I was all of a sudden. What I have taken away most from the department here and this may just be my interpretation is that movement really comes from an inner place. You have to find that connection to yourself, your physical self in order to then expand outward. (Dunham)

Graham also provided insight of this comparison:

Now I would definitely consider myself a dancer which, for me is really exciting. I think just the fact that I have taken dance and I have really stuck with it now so it has had a lot more structure. I am still taking a bunch of different styles of dance but I am sticking to it and I am a lot more - it is something that I want to do now. I am really striving to do this as opposed to before college when it was just something fun to do. (Graham)

Halprin’s response meandered through the discovery of confidence and control. The ability to make different, albeit more informed, choices surfaced as meaningful. This was communicated in the following way:

I notice more and am able to be more empathetic. I don’t choose people. At this point, it’s not interesting to find the people that move just like me to do my
movement. It is something where I don’t even think that an inhumane thing to do at all. For me, it’s especially intriguing to see how I can use people that are different in the sense of space. Let their resources shine. Let what have be what they are offering (…) I know I want to be involved in the creation of dances pieces. But then I also realize how much choreography, improvisation happens as a dancer in that process. I am still so invested in that because there is still so much I want to learn about my body in addition to getting to know everyone else. After that performance last night, I was like I need to choreograph solos for awhile. I was feeling like that because I could just worry about how my body works and just worry about the through lines of text I might want to say. I feel much more grounded is a good word- as a choreographer. I have described it before as an exercise in being okay with not being in control which is something that everyone kind of struggles with. I think that’s been a positive change in that I take a lot of comfort in ritual knowing that I am still going to have freedom within my rehearsal space to have all kind of unexpected things happen. I feel a whole lot more comfortable than I use to because I realize that I always have the right to say that I might feel injured in this class or I might get injured in this class. I don’t have to do this. You don’t have to keep taking classes with people I don’t like. I feel very blessed to be a part of this generation of dance in that way. (Halprin)
Theme 3: Self in Relation to a Collective Practice

This theme was revealed by participants in distinct yet interconnected ways. They recognized that dance identity is shaped, in part, by the larger dance collective and social practices. Participants talked about notions of bodies, aesthetics, dance forms, and the social valuing of dance. The majority of participants (8 of 13 [62%]) struggled with how these notions often typecast and potentially contribute to lack of confidence in one’s abilities and sense of self. Two participants discussed this in terms of an elite mold that dancers cannot or do not desire to fit. Ailey spoke about the “vibe” of the dance world:

The dance world is so secluded and has this vibe of being elite and only “these kinds” of people are needed and yada yada. I don’t think people realize that that stigma isn’t true with like the real concept of dance and the art form. Having said that, I think I still had a very narrow-minded viewpoint of dance. It was all about the aesthetics and the grandeur of performance and production: all about flexibility and strength and this stuff. (Ailey)

Cunningham also referenced the elite mold. This was perceived through rank order of technical virtuosity and the value placed on certain aspects of dance:

There is obvious value in technical skill. And at this point in any sort of creative endeavor, so much has been already - that I feel you really have to do something that stands out or is really creative or is really out there - there are so many artists out there and everything has already been done or is sort of a derivative at this point. So I feel like you really have to make something stand out - and again - there is certain aspects of dance that are considered higher. I am a choreographer
sounds slightly more impressive than dance therapist - I don’t think people would put them on the same level. (Cunningham)

In a related context, another participant about what is typically considered technical virtuosity in the public eye. They expressed aggravation in this way:

I also think technique wise and I have gotten into this stuff with people sometimes - when people are like don’t you think the department should be doing more diverse stuff and have more classic dance? And I am like - can you explain what that is to me please and no one ever has anything there except for ballet. And I am like we do have ballet. And they are like - but it is ballet from a modern perspective. And then I am like - so you mean we don’t teach people to hate their bodies? There is little thing like - I am confused. But it is ballet. This ties into the whole issue of outward respect and not like everyone seems like they are coming together - the stereotype would be everyone who dances comes together and is crazy and has fun together. I see the rest of the outer world as geared only towards shape, line, technique, break you down, all that stuff. (Halprin)

The Social Construction of Dance

Especially for this generation, dance is uniquely positioned in public media. Media seems to capitalize on the portrayal of dance as a competitive, codified form that should be open to scrutiny and social judgment. Not surprisingly, participants reported being aware of the socially driven construction of dance for arts and entertainment purposes which did not align with the philosophy of the dance program. The impact of
these prescribed aesthetics was readily discussed. Duncan tried to decipher what could be considered art:

I am really impressed with the people on So you Think you can Dance and America’s Next Dance Crew what they do is really cool and they do really cool movement. You know? But I don’t think it is art. But then skateboarding has an art form too. There are different levels for what is considered art. (Duncan)

Before immersion into the dance program, Dunham admitted it was difficult to understand modern dance as art. Dunham was able to laugh when they spoke of the following exchange with a friend:

One of my friends was at the dance concert a couple of years ago. After the concert he turned to me - like his experience with dance was mostly the social, the hip-hop - and he turns to me and says “You know I hear White people can’t dance but did they give up?” And I feel like that kind of encapsulates what other people kind of see. They go in and they kind of don’t understand what they are seeing. They are crawling on the floor. Is this dance? Or they are just standing there. Is that dance? Honestly, I didn’t really get it either until I studied post-modern dance and I could see what was going on in a historical context. I don’t know - I feel like there is a piece missing between what we in the dance department are trying to do and what the basis of everyone else has for viewing that. (Dunham)

Dance was perceived to be misrepresented in the media with a misinformed audience believing this portrayal as high art. Pavlova addressed the apparent disparity in how dance is viewed and valued. Pavlova described it this way:
It’s interesting because most of the kind of dance that most people are exposed to is usually entertainment dance. So I think a lot of times when you ask the average person when they think of a dancer. It is somebody up on stage at a concert or *Dancing with the Stars* - that kind of dance. I think that kind of dance can be really valuable but it is different. I do think there is a tendency to trivialize it. I remember one time a faculty member said she was a dancer and some little kid said a pole dancer? So, I do think there is that too. I think a lot of dancers here make a real conscious effort - like if you want to make a real concerted effort to present themselves as serious artists. In order to have the public not make those kind of associations - not just see you as some sort of frivolous, decorative thing or a kind of tawdry association. (Pavlova)

Another participant intimated that the social commoditization and value of certain types of dance may challenge one’s dance identity. This was revealed through an attempt to convey frustration:

I don’t know…I feel like…I sound like….well it’s not that…..I don’t have very good technique and I haven’t been dancing a very long time. I am not saying that I am the best dancer in the world by any means. But I have worked with and been around a lot of art and performance art my whole life. I am really grateful that I have experienced a lot of that. It is hard because you see people coming in from a lot of different places and people that have seen dance as a sport or something secondary to music or they don’t see or understand how dance can really be an art form and I think that is something that really bothers me and that it is something
that needs to change. I mean in America - but I have realized that by coming to C College and not being in a big city where you have a lot of different people. So yeah I just talked about the freedom but maybe I don’t know there is something – like the importance of dance maybe could be elevated - just so people don’t think it’s a joke like ‘I’m taking Intro to Dance because it’s funny!’ I don’t know (is flustered) but I do think there is a sophistication level that could be more pronounced. I don’t know it is too abstract for me to pin down. (Duncan)

Politics of the body, as a set of dynamic social structures that regulate identity, were directly addressed by one participant. In particular, implications for the ways dancers may view themselves in relation to ascribed aesthetics of beauty, power and vulnerability of the body. This thinking was revealed in the following way:

Well, I was always very, very interested - even before I necessarily had these words for it - the body and politics of the body and what that insinuated to people - doing basic realities of our culture and stuff like that. It was always something apparent to me that there was a lot of body hatred going on in particular dance circles. I have mentioned previously how ballet has ruined certain people. Even things like political issues that affect the body, reproductive rights, just really important to me. I was really offended by things like that. (Halprin)

Dancer? Or Someone who Dances?

As participants troubled the notion of their dance identity being socially constructed, almost half of participants (46%) voiced that there appeared to be a difference in their own perceptions and expectations between ‘a dancer’ versus ‘someone
who dances.’ This was an intriguing dichotomy. Also fascinating was that participants’
voiced slightly different rationale for why this chasm exists. One participant struggled to
sort through the stereotypes they felt were associated with each label. They voiced that
‘being someone who dances’ allowed for more flexibility which perhaps protected part of
an artistic sense of self:

I consider myself – well it’s hard for me to separate I am a dancer and dance. I
think that they are - they live - they are like ying and yang stuff - they go together.
But - I guess it’s all about the conception of the outer world. When you say I am
a dancer, the viewpoint the outsider’s viewpoint is that - I don’t know - but it’s
not the same as if you say I dance - I don’t know - to say I am a dancer - I don’t
know what I am trying to say. But there is something about being a dancer - me
personally I would preferably say I dance versus I am a dancer. I think it sets you
up to something that people perceive you as something where dance - there is a
little more ambiguity and flexibility with that term as opposed to saying I am a
dancer versus I dance - because I dance refers to a lot of different concepts.
While I am a dancer makes people think of just movement? Or…I don’t know
that just my personal opinion but that’s how I see it. I would rather say I dance. I
guess going back and describing myself as a dancer. I try not to fit into a certain
form. (Ailey)

Two students spoke of being dancers at C College. This protected, intimate space
allowed dancers to explore their strengths and interests. However, social norms defined
the required aesthetic to be considered ‘a dancer’ and were not as welcoming to those that did not visually or technically fit this type. Graham described this conundrum:

I feel partially - it would be society or your peers in general that decide. Because if you don’t dance and yet you still call yourself a dancer and yet - because everyone else really doesn’t see you as a dancer - I am not sure how well that would translate - so I think part of it is the way that other people see you. But, the other part is how you would define it for yourself. I would actually say that although I view myself as a dancer, I don't think I would call myself a trained dancer because most of my experience has come from C College and because of the way classes are set up here and in such a non-competitive way, I don't think that facilitates actual dance technique training. It's more dance experience I would say. (Graham)

Duncan discussed discomfort in thinking about oneself as a dancer juxtaposed with how others might identity this:

I probably have said I was more of a dance appreciator. Someone who has danced a lot - but I have become a much better dancer here. I think. I dance a lot more here. I am more versatile - in the realm of modern dance. But my body has become better at picking up movement. I feel more like a dancer. Not - I would never really call myself - my friends might call me a dancer - but I would never really call myself a dancer. I don’t know. It’s the difference between a writer and someone who writes. I also write but I don’t call myself a writer. I just don’t think I am good enough. I don’t want to go into it professionally. I think that I
am a dance person. I like to dance. I like to perform. I am confident in those realms. Just not outside C College. (Duncan)

A common difference that is perceived between a dancer and someone who dances is disparity in commitment level. This connotation was evidenced by Dunham when they said the following:

I guess I would describe myself as someone who dances. I don’t know- if somebody were to ask me if I would describe myself as dancer - I would hesitate to say yes - because I don’t feel like that is my main focus. But it has definitely become sort of a big part of myself and what I do here. It might be a little bit arbitrary - but I guess when someone tells me that they are a dancer, I take that to mean that they are either studying it or they have put a lot of time and effort into, they do it professionally maybe - whereas someone who dances suggests a slightly more casual relationship to it. Confidence. Again, I have kind of wanted to take my dancing to what you might say is the next level. At this point - I still see myself as someone who dances and not a dancer. At some point, I would like to see myself as a dancer but just believing and pushing towards that is a challenge to me. (Dunham)

Faculty briefly discussed the deep seeded assumptions about what dance and dancing bodies are typically expected to look like in some social and cultural practices. From a teaching perspective, there was a conscious effort to lessen the potential effects on students while also acknowledging this as reality. Shawn viewed this through a historically relevant lens for dance:
In reality - it’s a post-modern word - we are all eclectic - we are not living in pure techniques anymore - our information is out there from all different sources. That is basically how we teach. It’s artificial to separate them at this point. (Shawn).

Wigman returned to the idea that the dance program does not want dancers to fit a mold. Even though other programs or entities may espouse the benefits of this, it is not conducive to one’s investigation of who they can uniquely be through dance. Wigman believed:

Dance has such an imitative like - this is what we are going to do and this is the aesthetic and don’t ask why and here you go and look like this. Because we are not asking for carbon copies we are asking them not to be carbon copies. It is fairly unusual in dance even now I think - even though there are a lot of unique companies and unique, individuals within companies - there is still this kind of cookie cutter, imitation thing that is real prevalent. (Wigman)

Summary

The fourth research finding was that all participants voiced that dance identity knowingly evolved through involvement in the dance program and coincided with the ability to articulate personal growth. The majority of participants also cited that dance identity was meditated, in part, by factors such as stereotypes and valuing of the field of dance, concerns about career choice pay off, and differing definitions of the dancing body. Three themes were presented to support this finding: 1) life practice, 2) personal growth, and 3) self in relation to a collective practice. What appeared significant in this finding was dancers’ navigation of complex and often competing images and
expectations. Participants’ identities evolved in ways that enabled them to envision a life practice through dance. Ample opportunity to explore and articulate personal growth gave insight to how dance identity changes over time. What was somewhat surprising, however, was that challenges to identity seemed solely external to the dance program. Thus, the positionality of self in relation to collective, social practices seemed most daunting for participants in understanding how dance identity can move beyond a delineated caricature, classification, or bounded space and time.

**Summary of Chapter Findings**

This chapter presented four findings uncovered by this study. Findings were presented according to the research questions. Data from individual interviews revealed participants’ perceptions vis-à-vis their experiences of being in the dance program at C College. In addition, information from faculty focus groups was provided as insight and triangulation of the research findings. As is characteristic of qualitative research, extensive examples of quotations from participants were included in the report of findings. The researcher sought to assure readers that lived experiences of participants were accurately represented by sharing participants’ own words. Findings from document analysis, faculty focus groups, and observations corroborated the findings from the interviews.

The primary finding of this study is that the openness of the dance program to everyone, regardless of previous training, was the most important factor in feeling acknowledged and accepted. This openness encapsulated and mediated student experience for the duration of their involvement in the dance program. This finding
stemmed from the descriptions of 100% of the participants as they discussed perceptions of how training and development are validated. In discussing why they felt previous training was irrelevant, several participants talked about lack of judgment and competition, everyone being encouraged to dance, and faculty’s approach to movement habits and preferences as informative to the learning process. Participants revealed that this focus on personal exploration and discovery, rather than a break down or marginalization in order to achieve a prescribed aesthetic, enabled each dancer to uniquely enter their dance studies without expectations of preparation or previous training. Although the majority of participants appreciated the welcoming environment this created, a couple expressed that this resulted in feeling pressured to be more involved. A few said they knew they would have liked more assistance in making the transition into the dance program, but were not sure how to carry this out or if this would make a difference for all dancers.

The second finding was that all 13 participants expressed that a “culture of basic goodness” presided over the dance program’s community in which a variety of appreciative and supportive practices were instrumental in shaping experience. Participants spoke about respect, support systems, and the absence of auditions for admittance. The majority of participants were grateful that these factors contributed to a dance community made-up of different ability levels and dance backgrounds that did not mandate who was worthy of being included. In addition, participants discussed a variety of relationships. These connections were highly significant and provided help and encouragement. Participants also reported that peer learning was essential to knowledge
construction; reaching out in dialogue with colleagues and others within the community. Such supportive and collaborative interactions fostered confidence and promoted progress. A few talked about advantages of the small size. Many talked about the juxtaposition of the seriousness of the dance program, with the simultaneous de-valuing and visibility of dance on campus. Participants overwhelmingly conveyed the ways in which a “culture of basic goodness” positively shaped experience through these community practices. However, a few did report that some relationships were potentially problematic and perceived as favoritism; peers could be particularly difficult to work with; the isolated location and size of the institution could impede dancers’ abilities to learn from a wider base of interests and talents; and dancers’ frustrations were manifest through perceived lack of broad-based support for the merit of dance studies.

The third finding was that all participants (100%) indicated that the dance faculty encouraged personal investigation which facilitated the ability for students to foster ownership, have voice, and explore their individualized learning interests within the curriculum. Faculty’s commitment to facilitate students’ unique interests was the most prevalent theme that shaped curricular engagement. Dance studies welcomed a variety of cerebral, analytical and kinesthetic practices. However, one participant expressed frustration with over-thinking and being too cerebral in the dance curriculum. Some participants exampled the senior exercise process. One third of participants discussed the ability to take risks without fear of penalty for perceived failure. The majority of participants also expressed the importance of being a choreographer and the emphasis on creativity. All participants referenced a curricular emphasis on learning about the human
body which took place in both formal and informal ways. It was not surprising that, in
the absence of a critical focus and because ownership of learning was valued and
individual curiosity significant, a majority of participants welcomed feedback from dance
faculty and their peers to help facilitate their progress.

The fourth finding was that all 13 participants (100%) voiced that dance identity
knowingly evolved through involvement in the dance program and coincided with an
ability to articulate personal growth. The majority of participants also cited that dance
identity was meditated, in part, by factors such as stereotypes and valuing of the field of
dance, concerns about career choice pay off, and differing definitions of the dancing
body. An articulation of personal growth was viewed as part of the authentic
development of a life practice as an artist. Participants needed to be able to understand
and verbalize their frustrations, issues, skill progression, and things that blocked or
helped them overcome challenges as part of their identity development. The majority of
participants struggled with how typecasts of dancers potentially contributed to lack of
confidence in one’s abilities and sense of self. They acknowledged that dance is uniquely
positioned in public media which capitalizes on the portrayal of dance as a competitive,
codified form that should be open to scrutiny and social judgment. Not surprisingly, the
majority of participants reported being aware of the socially driven construction of dance
for arts and entertainment purposes. More than half additionally reported ways this
impacted their perceptions and expectations of ‘a dancer’ versus ‘someone who dances.’
Dance identity developed, in part, in accordance with a particular set of social and
discipline-specific norms.
Throughout these findings, participants discussed the equity (previous training), discourse (community), collaboration (curriculum), and critical reflection (identity) that supported their learning and progress in the dance program. These transformative experiences were explained through autonomous exploration of meaning, aesthetics, assumptions, and responsibilities. In addition, group learning, educational and social influences, and discipline normative values were informative frames of reference for participants. Chapter 5 will provide analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of these findings.
Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this case study was to explore how dancers at C College described their experiences of being in the dance program. It was considered problematic that research specifically focused on better understanding of the possible convergence or existence of the complexities under study and if or how these translate to dancers within a dance program was noticeably absent from the literature. Therefore, it was hoped that the significance of this research would be to offer a better understanding of the perceptions of students navigating various stages of their previous dance training, community, curriculum, and dance identity and would provide insight about how to better support current and future dance students - and possibly teachers - to proceed with a more informed perspective on how to successfully address challenges and facilitate participation in and/or progression through a college dance program.

This research employed naturalistic inquiry to collect data by conducting a series of three in-depth interviews with individual participants and collecting supportive data via observations, focus groups, and document analysis. The study included a total of 13 dancers and 3 dance faculty. As detailed in Chapter 3, the data were extensively coded line by line and organized using Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software. Categories and subcategories were first developed according to the research questions and then further analyzed by the conceptual framework, as depicted in Chapter 2. This study was based on the following 4 research questions:

1. How (or is) previous dance training acknowledged or marginalized?
2. How (or does) community inform experience?
3. How (or does) the curriculum provide individualized learning experiences?

4. How (or does) one’s dance identity evolve or change?

These four research questions were largely satisfied by the findings presented in Chapter 4. The overriding finding in this study revealed that dancers perceived that the openness of the dance program allowed participants to feel accepted and welcomed and therefore was the essential organizing factor of dance experience. This perceived connection between the program’s equity and facilitation of learning was compounded by the fact that participants felt the dance program’s community revolved around a variety of appreciative and supportive practices that provided extensive discourse with and reliance on both faculty and peers. As a result, students depended on collaborative engagement with the curriculum to carry out ownership, voice, and self-directed interests. Consequentially, dance identity evolved through involvement in the dance program and coincided with participants’ development of the ability to critically reflect on their personal growth and progress and in consideration of external factors.

This chapter analyzes, interprets and synthesizes these findings. The chapter is organized by the following analytic categories:

1. The relationship between participants’ previous dance training and perceptions of how that training was received in the dance program. (Research Question 1)

2. Perceptions of practices within the dance community and how those practices facilitated the community participants needed. (Research Question 2)

3. Curricular supports and barriers influencing students’ learning. (Research Question 3)

4. The connection between identity development and critical reflection on one’s growth and progress. (Research Question 4)
These four categories are aligned with the four research questions and provide the organizational framework for discussion of each analysis. In the analysis, the researcher looks primarily for connections and/or patterns within the categories, as well as examines possible themes that may become apparent among the categories. In addition, pertinent theory and research are incorporated as themes are compared and contrasted to topics presented in the literature.

The previous chapter presented the research findings by organizing data primarily from participant interviews into categories to construct a readable narrative. Accordingly, the findings were separated into meaningful chunks of data to convey a broad story of the research. The purpose of the current chapter is to provide interpretive insight into these findings. As such, this chapter will attempt to reassemble the data in order to construct a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon that has been studied. Analysis intends to produce a more integrated picture. Throughout this process, several building blocks continued to structure the analysis. These included: 1) connective congruities among the experiences of the research participants, 2) ways that the participants voiced and explained these connections, 3) anticipated as well as unexpected associations and relationships, 4) consistency with the literature, and 5) ways in which the data go beyond the current literature with regards to dance study in academe.

The review of the literature that provided context for this study was broadly framed and presented in Chapter 2. For the discussion of findings, this literature will be expanded to include additional theoretical frameworks that emerged during the course of
the research and analysis. As such, literature streams will be presented to augment generative and interpretive contexts.

At the end of this chapter, there will also be a discussion of the following: interesting incongruities discovered in the research; limitations; conclusions; recommendations; and researcher’s final reflections on this study.

**Analytic Category 1: The Relationship Between Participants’ Previous Dance Training and Perceptions of how that Training was Received in the Dance Program**

The first research question sought to determine how dance training may have been acknowledged or marginalized. The openness of the dance program at C College had broad impact and dominated the research findings. In the context of this study, openness allowed for unobstructed participation in the dance program. Acceptance of all students, without restrictions or expectations for technical proficiencies, was also a critical component. Entrance auditions were not required. Competition was not perceived to be a prominent factor in the dance program. Thus, the perception of all participants in this study was that previous dance training was not a determining factor for involvement in the dance program and was therefore not a source of anxiety or concern. Participants felt that prior dance experience was insignificant, neither explicitly acknowledged nor marginalized in program contexts. This recurrent finding revealed that the openness of the program rendered previous training irrelevant for participation. This enabled a multitude of movement preferences to be explored and produced in an environment where the typical comparison, rivalry, and the systematic breaking down of dancers’ former experiences were noticeably absent.
Openness not Marginalization

The openness enabled students to focus on ways to be involved and feel confident as they integrated experience and background. Participants perceived that previous training did not matter and was not explicitly addressed in the dance program. Moreover, participants felt this carried no weight for how their abilities were currently defined in the dance program. This may be, in part, due to the fact that dancers were encouraged to focus on multiple ways to be involved in the program. They were not asked to deconstruct previous training (or lack thereof) in order to be involved. Time was not allocated at C College for the explicit detraining of dancers, although it is often standard practice in the field (Bales, 2010).

Thus, the openness of the program appeared critical in constructing a responsive rather than reactive disposition for forging connections between previous experience and the dance program. Participants reported having the confidence to immediately experiment and interact in ways that were individually meaningful and educative at the outset of participation. This felt both possible and realistic to participants because the openness of the dance program reflected that students were not blank slates. A multitude of interests were welcomed. Technical ability was not a decisive factor. The addition of new knowledge to an already existing base of experience was an understood starting point.

Marginalization of experience does not provide a supportive environment. The literature suggested that because entrance into academe is often scripted as the beginning of professional study, dancers’ previous training is often devalued, marginalized and/or
viewed as having “nothing to offer in the way of their (professional) training” (Buckroyd, 2000, p. 60). Dancers can struggle to reconcile different expectations in the program with their previously acquired dance knowledge and skills (McCarthy-Brown, 2009). As a result, dancers attempt to integrate diverse training backgrounds into dance major study. However, marginalization was not reported by participants. This may mean that they were actually unaware of the ways in which the level of acceptance did acknowledge previous dance training through dialogical and insightful encounters rather than through humiliation and critique. Participants reported this as momentous to them. In the words of Halprin, “The fact that they didn’t tear down my former sense of self was huge!” Therefore, students’ maintaining a sense of self was significant. This seems congruent with the type of dance program that focuses on critical inquiry and personal investigation whereby students’ previous experiences are viewed as a motor for future learning.

One could debate the relevance of former training at C College and, perhaps, on a larger scale the myriad of ways former dance training is readily addressed throughout higher education. What seems less debatable, however, is the significance of openness in this study and its direct correlation to participants’ levels of involvement and satisfaction. Participants were less self-conscious; willing to give and receive feedback; able to approach dance coursework as information rather than absolutes; adept at advocating for their interests and needs; open to try new things; and comfortable with uncertainty. Langer (2005) suggested that this is a level of mindfulness that cultivates artists. This level of maturity is typically not recognizable, let alone articulated, until dancers are upperclassmen in collegiate dance programs.
Understanding the Context of the Institution

An important factor to consider is the institution. There are realistic expectations on the part of a liberal arts institution vis-à-vis how students should be accepted and educated. Reinharz (1979) described the goals of a liberal arts education as “the development of students’ intellectual, moral, and aesthetic sensibilities, usually in contradistinction to the development of practical skills involved in jobs and professions” (p. 45). One would expect that the learners who attend this type of institution are predisposed to “the role of educational programs in fostering lifelong learning and the integration of disparate learning modes to foster individual growth and development” (Fry & Kolb, 1979, p. 91). Participants in this study expressed contextual understanding of how the dance program paralleled their liberal arts studies.

However, there may be realistic and unrealistic expectations on the part of students who study dance at this type of institution. It is understood that the dance program at C College is not a conservatory and thus objectives and approaches to dance training have admittedly different foci. It cannot be assumed, however, that students who dance in a liberal arts institution and not a conservatory would expect the program to only advance the tenets consistent with a more holistic approach to dance training. One participant commented:

We are just looking at dance in a different light. We are not a conservatory and we are looking at how dance can connect. Just like the feature of dance and how it can connect to other aspects of life and studies here because it is liberal arts.
It’s very collaborative in that sense which is what life is all about: it is collaborating a lot with your goals, and focus, and interests. (Ailey)

Precisely because of the liberal arts setting, some dancers commented that their dance studies were able to encompass many abilities and interests. Pavlova said, “If you are coming to a small liberal arts school you are coming to discuss things and learn. That’s what it’s all about it.” Thus, the whole of this learning environment cannot be taken for granted in terms of dancers’ levels of participation and their subsequent successes.

Faculty also corroborated the guiding influence and structure that the liberal arts have on the dance program. Shawn indicated this in the following comment:

Well C College is a true liberal arts institution. We are not preparing students usually for a specific career - they are not at a vocational school or at a school where they have to - well…we do have premed students and things like that - but a liberal arts education is not launching you into any career except for maybe graduate school. So, I would say that most of our students do not go into dance if you are talking about that career. It is another way of learning, curiosity about subject matter, and like you said integrating many areas of interests and strengths that our students have. They are attracted to a place like this because their interests are very broad. (Shawn)

In light of the contexts of their liberal arts studies, and also perhaps related to the perceived lack of value for the performing arts at C College, as mentioned earlier, participants acquired knowledge precisely through their reliance on the multitude of dance abilities and backgrounds welcomed in the open dance program. Thus, awareness
and acceptance of fellow dancers comes into play. Participants emphasized dealing with people, sensitivity to others’ values and feelings, being personally invested, and working collaboratively as important competencies in the program. The research found that such concrete acceptance was a significant support factor for students in the dance program. Therefore, learning situations facilitated understanding of students for not only integrating their own previous training but also interactions with others who were “in the same boat.”

You move this way and I move this way….and then it just starts to fit because you feel each other and you start to realize - they are not going to judge you - you just realize that everyone is really in the same boat - no matter their level and even if you do get paired with someone who is at a completely different level. I don’t feel like there is any animosity towards that person when there is partnering work because it’s another opportunity for you to teach or try something else. Partnering work is an opportunity to express your strengths and to learn from other people’s strengths. (Ailey)

Moreover, in this case, a perceived lack of appreciation for artistic sensibilities at the institutional level may indeed have fostered a sense of determination for dancers to appreciate and accept others who shared similar aims and momentum for creative contributions to the learning environment. One participant explained:

You really do have to have that artistic sense and I think in some ways the dance department is removed from the wider student body and the school as a whole
because the fine arts - it requires a different skill set than most academic subjects
and what most associate with the liberal arts. (Dunham)

Another participant describes the analytical weightiness that most dancers in this study
felt was preferred at the institution:

It can be frustrating because I did definitely want the liberal arts side. Yes let’s
intellectualize the hell out of everything! I have some mixed feelings - highly
ambivalent - lots of positive things. Let’s go intellectual about everything
especially here when you are so removed and it’s pretty easy to spot if someone
wants to be performing or creating and they are surrounded by very analytical
things without a whole lot application a lot of the time. (Halprin)

**Understanding the Learning Environment in the Dance Program**

Participants felt previous dance training was insignificant to inclusion and
success. To work and cooperate with others is a primary tenet of liberal arts education.
However, in the context of learning dance and appreciating these specific skills, this may
also require that dancers view each other as informed experts. Prior dance training and
experiences were believed to serve as building blocks for acquisition of new skills. A
critical model for the type of dance knowledge that was more valued was noticeably
absent. There was no structured guidance for class placement based on incoming
technical ability. There was no identification of a codified approach. Taken together,
the learning environment was supportive of an abundance of backgrounds and interests
which may explain why dancers valued one another.
**Affective Orientation**

Therefore, a further explanation as to why participants did not find that the dance program was concerned with previous training may be due to the fact that the dance program itself has an affective orientation, a slightly different compass perhaps than the broader college. The learning environment may have helped minimize feelings of competition and judgment through valuation of an array of competencies. Fry and Kolb (1979) described an affectively oriented environment in this way:

This is characterized by activities or tasks aimed at helping learners to realize and develop their personal attitudes toward the field or profession; information generated from the “here and now” feelings, opinions, and values of learners; procedures and guidelines oriented to facilitate the free expression of personal needs, wants and feelings, teachers functioning as friendly listeners and counselors; and personalized, immediate feedback to the learner (p. 82).

**Role of Auditions**

Absence of placement auditions provided greater entre. For dance major study, entrance auditions typically denote talent related to technical abilities deciding which young dancers either have it or don’t. Auditions serve a gate keeping function for who would, should, could dance at this level. Participants felt that there was no singular definition of talent or level of preparedness to gain admittance at C College. The open approach cast aside the entrenched model for gaining entre to study dance in academe and instead placed emphasis on the development of imaginative artists, inquisitive scholars and autonomous thinkers. This coincides with the intrapersonal dimension of
development, whereby dancers at C College were not viewed as blank slates or void of
dance and life experiences. To the contrary, they were encouraged to “choose their own
values and identity in crafting an internally generated sense of self that regulates
interpretation of experience and choice” (Baxter Magolda, 2004, p. 8).

Transformation even in Transition

An intrapersonal approach may be important when integrating former and current
experiences to deploy an array of assets. This approach may be warranted and further
understood in light of transformative learning theory. Transformative learning is a
process in which the learner ponders their own assumptions, arrives at insights, and
substantiates new perspectives through discourse with imagination playing a key role in
investigation of alternative explanations of experience (Mezirow, 1991; Cranton, 2000).
Moreover, Cranton (2000) wrote, “Transformative learning involves reconstructing a
frame of reference so that it is more dependable and better justified. People with
different learning styles, cognitive styles, and personality traits assimilate and reconstruct
frames of reference in distinct ways” (p. 181). This was demonstrated through
participants’ descriptions of how they transitioned into their dance studies and how that
generated dialogue and engendered emotional support. One participant described it this
way:

And that’s the creative people supporting each other piece - no - I can’t
necessarily give you a defense of this right now but I know I am interested in this
and it’s important to me right now and I would like to research it and I think that
those sorts of scenarios where you get a back and forth like that and it’s like of
course you are interested in that! (Halprin)

Also evident were the situational spaces that participants navigated. The openness of the program appeared to scaffold the frames of reference that dancers employed to examine the space between self and environmental constructs. Pavlova said, “I think being at C College has brought a new perspective to dancing and it has - my dancing has definitely evolved. I think what changed and a big part of it is how I define success.” As a direct result, students were able to deploy an array of assets including self-motivation, directed points of initiation and advocacy, creative partnerships, and ambivalence for others who wanted to explore seemingly opposing paths of dance knowledge. One participant described the coexistence this way:

I think it strengthens it. You learn from everyone. I don’t think there is as much room for growth if it’s homogenous. You see someone moving in a way you have never considered before and you think - I am going to give that a try!

(Cunningham)

For the majority of participants in this study, previous dance training was not a factor in their choice to pursue dance in college. Although initial entry into dance study can be a time of profound tension, faculty approached dance as an interaction with students as individuals and not as forms or objects. Self-efficacy beliefs were thus cultivated through recognition of the unique reasons why a student may choose to pursue dance at C College and unconditional acceptance of personal goal setting and attainment. Unconditional acceptance, therefore, yielded high self-efficacy and personal agency.
Participants expressed ability to exercise control over evolving roles and responsibilities. In turn, this allowed for increased sense of personal competency and construction of dance knowledge (Bandura, 1997). In addition, the choice to pursue dance at C College was predominantly mediated via encouragement and appraisal from faculty once in the dance program. Participants willingly engaged in dance activities not only because they felt they were capable, but also because they experienced success. In this context, success was multi-dimensional and viewed more as skills to ready participants for a lifetime of learning rather than a specific job in the field (Bandura, 1997). “Among the mechanisms for personal agency, none is more central or pervasive than people’s beliefs in their capabilities to exercise control over their level of functioning and environmental demands. Unless people believe that they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act” (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996, p. 1206). Therefore, self-efficacy beliefs played a powerful regulative function at C College in merging dancer’s previous training (or lack thereof) with the broad structural network of influences that were present in the dance program (Bandura, 1986). The openness of the program provided interactions for participants to better know themselves and individualize experience. This finds general support in the literature on transformative learning; placing emphasis on dialogue and reflection as vehicles for learning (Mezirow, 2000).

As students transition to dance study in academe, they typically begin to self-regulate the ways in which they take dance classes based on the monitoring and regulation of their bodies and dance practices. Even when not under the explicit gaze of
faculty, young dancers often conform according to the expectations of artistic evaluation. The pressure to change one’s dance practices, even in the absence of overt authority, warrants consideration. Michael Foucault (1977) argued the concept of the Panopticon in his theory of surveillance whereby those under surveillance begin to alter their behaviors and internalize rules and regulations forcibly imposed on them by those in power. His argument is interesting in the context of this finding. Participants reported feeling that there was no absoluteness of authority: previous training was not being deconstructed; bodies were not being analyzed; and individuals were not under a corrective, imposing gaze. This suggests that being under observation by peers and faculty did not propagate feelings of incompetence or submission at C College but rather positively shaped the way dancers felt about the transition. In this regard, dancers in this study did not feel that there was a singular or right way to morph themselves in order to study dance. These feelings can also be attributed to faculty who had deep respect for students’ contributions to learning and also recognized students’ needs to actively cultivate ways to trust the processes of internal discovery rather than external evaluation.

**Personal Expression**

Focus on personal expression often negated participants feeling tension to meet program expectations which subsequently eased their navigation of the dance program regardless of previous training (Erickson, 1968). Moreover, the presence of idiosyncratic dance histories contributed to students’ willingness to explore new knowledge. Langer (2005) reflected on how changing the way one feels about an experience is important when she said, “There wouldn’t be any choices for me to make, and no reason to “be
there” as the outcome unfolds. I’m not worried about what anyone else will think of it, about making mistakes, or about how someone else might do it better, I’m just going to do it” (pp.17-18). The openness of the program did not encourage or allow conformity and homogeneity. In part, this negated fear of making mistakes and allowed dancers to embrace uncertainty and differences as part of an expression of learning. Participants did not feel belittled, incompetent, or tethered to a singular definition of talent or success.

These factors may prove essential in the transition to dance study whereby immediate engagement and acceptance was deemed critical by participants. The implication is that finding ways to facilitate more openness within collegiate dance programs could be highly beneficial for students. Langer (2005) wrote:

What we’re doing is creating transitions for ourselves, and transitions are another form of disengagement. They are difficult for us because in transitions we are no longer engaged in what we are leaving and don’t yet know enough about what we are approaching to engage it. There is a void. If we attribute our negative feelings to the move we are making, rather than the transition itself, we may think we made the wrong decision, and that brings its own set of problems. Waiting is a form of transition and thus another form of disengagement. If we didn’t feel the last activity was over and the new one has not yet begun, we would not experience ourselves waiting to be engaged (p.209).

Participants in this study, each an emerging adult, experienced potential challenges that led to an increased capacity to know themselves (Erikson, 1968). Although some amount of time was necessary to conform to requirements, such as completion of coursework and
demonstration of engagement in the learning process, time expended was primarily on individuation. As such, participants gained knowledge related to self-directed inquiry and personal expression.

**Summary**

In summary, this analytic category discussed the relationship between participants’ previous dance training and perceptions of how that training was received in the dance program. The research neither suggested that entrance auditions should be suspended nor that placement auditions for leveled technique classes are invalid. To the contrary, these serve important functions and contribute to the growth and depth of the dance field particularly when considering the goals of a conservatory. This research finding did suggest, however, that there is valuable work to be done with how the field tends to couch absoluteness and authority for ‘who’ should be studying dance in academe. Most notably, this would seem to suggest that dance programs attend to opportunities for involvement in absentia of auditions or a departmental hierarchy primarily based on technical virtuosity or perceived proficiencies developed through former training. Although a fair amount of struggle is to be expected as dancers navigate the relationship between previous experience and how that is received in any dance program, the overwhelming significance of openness revealed in this study espouses that time and energy expended should be directed by individual talents and interests; that is, searching out means to integrate diverse training backgrounds rather than marginalize talent that may not appear to fit the valued, established mold for dance study in higher education.
Analytic Category 2: Perceptions of Practices Within the Dance Community and how Those Practices Facilitated the Community Participants Needed

The second research question sought to examine how community informs dance experience. The perceptions of participants was that – in the absence of formal guidelines for either admittance or involvement in the dance program – community practices unconditionally supported and respected individuals to help carry out their learning. In light of this perception, it is not surprising that participants would cite their own contributions to the community at this intimate institution and relationships among peers and faculty as significant. There may be several reasons why participants held these perspectives.

Baseline of Trust and Respect

Participants were grateful that the dance community was made up of diverse ability levels and dance backgrounds and valued this as an essential component to learning (Thompson, 1994; Woerner, 2010). A baseline of trust and support was essential in order for these individual differences to be valued and educative for the dance community. Langer (2005) wrote that, “the opportunity for creating new choices for ourselves comes only when we are open to noticing the very differences that work against this tendency” (p. 175). Thus, it is conceivable that since dancers at C College appeared to be both aware and sensitive to the fact that they were unique individuals contributing to the collective, trust and respect were an agreed upon baseline that mediated interactions.
Another explanation to consider is that dance in academe was new territory for these participants and one for which they had little or no prior experience to draw upon. As such, these students might lack bad habits and have a level of motivation and the confidence to support, encourage and direct those who are exploring this territory together. Therefore, participants were co-producers of beneficial results for self and the dancing collective (Amans, 2008; Bartlett. 2008). Moreover, in many narratives the workload or challenges for dancers were not considered daunting precisely because respect within the community allowed students to confront complexities through mutual sharing and guidance.

Consider as well the purposeful approach of the dance faculty. Faculty assumed a regulatory rather than authoritative role which encouraged autonomy and collaboration. If students are to become more autonomous thinkers then “weaning students away from authority dependence must begin at the outset of college” (Baxter Magolda, 2004, p.29). Thus the job of faculty was not to provide answers, but rather to serve as a catalyst and partner in the process. They provided questions to challenge dancers’ thinking. They offered options for interpretation of dancers’ ideas (Taylor, 2000). Ladson-Billings (1994) shed light on how responsive teaching influences community practices steeped in trust and respect. She said:

They demonstrate a connectedness with all of their students and encourage the same connectedness between the students. They encourage a community of learners; they encourage their students to learn collaboratively. Finally, such teachers are identified by their notions of knowledge: They believe that
knowledge is continuously re-created, recycled, and shared by teachers and students alike. They view the content of the curriculum critically and are passionate about it. Rather than expecting students to demonstrate prior knowledge and skills they help students develop that knowledge by building bridges and scaffolding for learning (p.25).

Therefore, it was not surprising that having support from the dance faculty, who built community throughout programmatic contexts, was significant in shaping the practices that advanced progress.

**Nurturing Relationships**

A further explanation as to why participants found relationships with faculty to be important factors may be due to the fact that these were often described as nurturing, caring, and mutually beneficial. Thus, it cannot be dismissed that the dance faculty at C College are all women. Participants in this study deeply valued interactions with faculty and the ways these women modeled a life practice. This finds general support in the literature from those who write from a feminist perspective which reflects women’s ways of knowing as different (Gilligan, 1982) and the development of dance pedagogy from a feminist viewpoint (Green, 1995; Shapiro, 1998, 1996; Stinson, 1993; 1998). Faculty learning with and from students also finds support in the work of Middleton (1994) who spoke of the necessity of teachers to explore events, relationships, and knowledge in tandem with students in order to connect with their lived experiences and their own bodies. These researchers found that such a “web of relationships” (Gilligan, 1982) is a strong support factor for students. Thus, participants in this study might have reported
different lived experiences if this particular combination of faculty were not present. Given the number of participant responses attributed to faculty relationships, it is not surprising that access to and guidance from these women was seen as significant to not only a sense of participatory knowledge construction but to the art of dancing itself.

**Lack of Hierarchical Model**

Dancers learned in the absence of a hierarchical model whereby mutual dialogue and collaborative learning promoted success. Dance in the context of higher education espouses formation of relationships that promote mutually creative approaches to engage and learn. Schupp (2010) expressed that this is fundamental for growth regardless of students’ dance backgrounds. However, the typical model for delivery of dance studio instruction is a group of students positioned in relation to the overt authority of the teacher rather than an individual dancer being invited to relate with that teacher. Social comparisons often produce negative results due to the fact that dance is often governed by these predictable, authoritative structures. As such, the public defining of success or failure, especially when witnessed in terms of peers’ performance and success, sets up a competition in which most dancers may feel defeated (Ormrod, 2006). Set objectives and prescribed benchmarks for progress may further squash momentum for student contributions. Therefore, dancers’ experiences with these hierarchical class structures, teacher/dancer relationships, and perceived failures often make it difficult to establish meaningful models for succeeding in the dance classroom (Buckroyd, 2000).

In stark contrast, perceptions of participants in this study were that teacher/dancer relationships do not merely exist, but they lacked hierarchical roles, were consistently
positive, and affirmed student successes. This structure may have promoted commitment and allowed students unspoken permission to do the real work of learning dance. Although students in any dance program could conceivably argue that they also form relationships with dance faculty and have opportunities to contextualize understanding of movement material, the benefits of the explicit didactic approach utilized at C College suggests the need to do this in more formalized ways, vis-à-vis the non-sentimentalized sustainment of relationships that support trust and risk in collaborative learning processes. Given these considerations, it may have been easier for participants to realize their successes and be more at ease with their own competencies and vulnerabilities.

As is the case in most dance programs, participants in this study had to manage the demands of individual goals and community expectations being intertwined. However, because participants perceived that they were getting the support they needed from faculty and peers, it is reasonable that participants would describe their community with terms such as ritualizing respect, collaborative, culture of basic goodness, and active exchange of ideas as characteristics that uphold the sense of openness and acceptance. The equity within the community incited them to challenge their individual conventions and assumptions through dialectical processes (Freire, 1970; Greene, 1995).

The community held individuals accountable for their learning which may have factored into the high rate of participant reference to relationships and their correlation with a sense of belonging. It is likely that these community characteristics are elements that ultimately contributed to dancers’ ability to pursue uniquely meaningful goals and experiences. Most importantly, perhaps, participants felt able to do this in a safe space
that was free of authoritative judgment and harsh criticism. This insight brings up an important point that merits examination, especially given the pivotal roles that peers play for this age group.

**Size and Culture of the Community: Visibility and Dissonance**

Participants recognized the intersectionality between the individual and the institution. Dancers were aware that the small size of the institution was a contributing factor to the dance community. However, they were also mindful of an apparent cultural dissonance between the seriousness with which the dance community approached dance study and the broader academic culture that was quick to minimize. This dichotomy was a challenge that was stressful and anxiety producing which can threaten functioning in one domain over the other. The level of anxiety appeared to be compounded by concern over the ways in which peers, other academic departments, and the C College community generally viewed dance studies and dancers on campus. However, these tensions are not uncommon among social groups. According to Young (2010):

> A collective of persons (is) differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or way of life. Members of a group have a specific affinity with one another because of their similar experience (or way of life), which prompts them to associate with one another more than with those not identified with the group. Groups are an expression of social relations; a group exists only in relation to at least one other group (p.36).

Interestingly, participants’ anxieties seemed to be simultaneously mediated by the very presence of dancers and their personal expression on campus and throughout the
local community. It was not uncommon for dancers to be visible in venues throughout the community as they rehearsed, improvised, or performed movement. Moreover, dance concerts were well attended and often produced insightful feedback from the audience. The struggle for academic legitimacy and place within the broader community therefore seemed to provide tenacity, and even artistic perseverance, in participants’ willingness to find ways that their dance sensibilities and interests could ultimately contribute.

Another interesting consideration in the context of this small community is the openness of the dance program compared to other academic programs. The discussion specific to Dance in Other Forms, as presented in Chapter 4, revealed participants’ positionality as students in other departments at C College. Dancers suggested contrasts with learning experiences and knowledge-specific assumptions. What seems a relevant point here is that other programs at C College were not open; other programs were not perceived to have the same level of acceptance; other programs typically required some previous experience with the subject matter; and other programs often had place-based assessments to gauge participation in coursework. Taken together, this seems to suggest that the dance program made different choices and openness was not an institutional norm. While this consideration does not necessarily support greater generalizability, it does indicate that some collegiate dance programs might have greater flexibility to frame acceptance and support for young dancers.

*Harmony Within*

Competition is almost inevitably intertwined with evaluation. Relations among dancers are frequently arbitrated by attempts to get noticed by teachers, to align with
upper classmen or technically advanced dancers perceived to have status or advantages, and to compete for a limited number of spots in pieces or performances. Such relations are typical in conservatory contexts. This is not to say that meaningful or supportive peer relationships do not exist in such environments, however, these tensions are usually not conducive to viewing peers as equals in the learning community.

College is not a conservatory but is instead a liberal arts program whose guiding premise is being open to all ability levels. As previously discussed, there is no entrance audition, class levels are porous, and participants reported the absence of a hierarchy and competition. However, one could be rightfully skeptical that such positions could completely negate the natural competitiveness often present among peers in any situation where perceived preference may determine advancement. In her discussion specific to artistic evaluation, Langer (2005) wrote:

The realization that all behavior makes sense from the actor’s perspective or else the actor wouldn’t do it makes all negative evaluations of people suspect, and all action based on these evaluations about people questionable. If we are trying to predict what others will do in the future and we believe the past is the best predictor, then it would behoove us to know better what the past action meant to the actor (pp. 48-49).

Therefore, a decisive dynamic that indeed did create a “culture of basic goodness” in the dance program was peer interactions. In this regard, participants, like Dunham, spoke often about the benefits of learning “as much from my peers as I do from my professors.” Course contexts facilitated ways for the ‘actors’ to know each other. Small groups,
partnering, peer feedback, course assignments, and encouragement to observe and learn from fellow dancers were all strategies regularly employed by dance faculty to promote peer learning. Participants reported that these strategies magnified respect for individual fortes and negated feelings of being evaluated. Resultantly, this inspired a willing reliance on classmates’ skills and more informal means of learning. The diverse knowledge that each dancer brought to the program, as cited earlier, appeared to afford both closeness and humbleness among peers. Once again, the commitment to embrace idiosyncrasies and understand each other was a genuine part of the learning customs. These dispositions were highly valued for membership in the dance community at C College and as such, guided entre into the peer community.

**Observation, Critique, and Interdependence**

Learning was mediated through observation of peers. This is not an anomaly at C College but is consistent with literature on social and transformative learning theories. As discussed, dancers’ observations of each other took a variety of forms and served a number of purposes. Bandura (1986) posited that the majority of learned behavior is the result of direct or causal observations through modeling. Modeling (not merely mimicry or imitation) provides a valuable source for social reward, dealing with the physical environment, and making judgments about future behaviors (Bandura, 1986). Social learning is cultivated not only through observation of the actual performance but its effectual consequences as well. As maturation and development increase, so do the range and complexity of factors that ultimately leads to acquisition of knowledge. As such, participants reported awareness of observational learning as beneficial.
Participants also examined development through interrelated structures. As knowledge was refined and focused, participants pragmatically encouraged, rather than critiqued, each other in order to maintain realistic expectations to acquire new skills and accomplish goals. Constructivists assert that learners actively construct their knowledge, rather than merely absorb it based on their experiences and interactions. Experiences are essential for cognitive development. In addition, fostering appropriate levels of independence, individuality and responsibility are especially important for the emerging adult. Because the daily embodiment of emotional and physical limitations for young dancers can increase vulnerability to feelings of being incapable, dance can become about survival instead of a creative endeavor (Buckroyd, 2000; Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010). However, the interconnectedness among dancers at C College, as encouraged through ongoing opportunities to learn with and from each other, established structures for surmounting these doubts and challenges. This serves as yet another example of how skill acquisition was not the sole focus of learning in this dance program. Instead, the holistic focus was on learning through transformation in order to serve students well beyond graduation and involvement in dance at C College (Baxter Magolda, 2004).

How participants viewed themselves in relation to peers can be further understood in light of the interpersonal dimension of development. This dimension, perhaps, is circuitous with the aforementioned affective orientation of the dance program. Interdependence is possible because both self-approval and valuing of others exists in the community. Baxter Magolda (2004) stated, “mature relationships are characterized by respect for both one’s own and others’ particular identities and cultures as well as by
productive collaboration to negotiate and integrate multiple perspectives and needs” (pp.9-10) and further described this interpersonal foundation as the “capacity to engage in authentic, interdependent relationships with diverse others in which self is not overshadowed by a need for others’ approval, mutually negotiating needs, and genuinely taking others’ perspectives into account without being consumed by them” (p. 8).

In light of the lack of formal evaluative processes and the potential deleterious impacts of competitiveness among peers, it is logical that positive relationships were regarded as essential to participants’ learning. As such, this learning was integral to their daily life and, further, its value appeared correlated to the fact that this occurred across settings, without prompting, and in the face of unanticipated challenges and differences. Taken together, it was therefore not surprising that participants sought to learn primarily through engagement with their community of peers, rather than through solitary means, for the kinds of information they needed to advance their learning. This is a striking and profound consistency found in this study that reasonably seems to validate the multi-faceted implications related to openness of a dance program.

At the same time, it should be noted that one participant in this study did comment unfavorably on three aspects of community as discussed above. First, Duncan spoke about feeling an inadequate amount of support from faculty specifically with regard to the creative process. Duncan wanted more individualized attention as they choreographed and expressed frustration when feedback or direction was not received from faculty. Further, Duncan took issue with faculty for not asserting control in order to stop a perceived sexist theme in a fellow choreographer’s piece. Faculty’s relationships
with students were perceived to be detrimental in this scenario. The third way that this participant spoke unflatteringly about the community was when they acknowledged that peers can be difficult to work with. When discussing how peers interact while in rehearsals for their piece, Duncan said, in part, “I don’t think they respect you enough and don’t follow what you are saying. In some sections my dancers might be really relaxed. Or when I make a decision they will be fine questioning me about it because we are friends.”

Duncan was explicitly considered as a potential negative case or an outlier. Two things were weighed in this process. First, Duncan was not consistently negative or displeased with their dance experience. Often, Duncan offered positive reflections and provided specific examples of how peers and/or faculty were supportive or evidenced how they would be responsive if Duncan sought their help. Second, no other participant mentioned similar experiences. This may suggest that other personal or overriding issues – whether occurring before or during involvement in dance at C College - may be escalating levels of frustration, impeding Duncan’s progress or ability to feel part of the community and form relationships. After due consideration, Duncan was not believed to be a negative case in this study.

**Summary**

In summary, this analytic category sought to discuss perceptions within the dance community and how those practices facilitated the community participants needed. There was an unwavering commitment to respect fellow artists at this small institution even though dance appeared to not always be recognized as important. Such an accepting
dance environment may well be the reason why participants commonly described their community by evidencing a multitude of supportive and appreciative practices. It was also important to have empathetic faculty who, in the absence of hierarchical structures and homogenized expectations, offered guidance and partnered in students’ learning. Further, working and learning with peers was a primary way that participants experienced community especially in contexts of being able to consider them potential collaborators and experts rather than adversaries. All of these factors appear as a direct result of the dance program’s open culture in which attunement to each other was applauded and community was cultivated through understanding that each individual had a responsibility to shape its collective and creative well-being.

**Analytic Category 3: Curricular Supports and Barriers Influencing Students’ Learning**

The third research question sought to determine if or in what ways the curriculum provided individualized learning experiences. There was recognition that previous experiences (viewed as assets) intersected with a dance community that didn’t expect (or want) a mold. Participants indicated that dance faculty’s attunement to this intersectionality facilitated opportunities for them to shape, adapt, and build personal meaning throughout the curriculum (Dewey, 1934). Therefore, it was not surprising that all 13 participants (100%) signified that the dance faculty encouraged such inquiry, which in turn was catalyst for participants to foster ownership, have voice, and explore individualized learning interests within the curriculum. Further, participants communicated that, in part, this also contributed to a lack of rigidity in matriculating
through the program; promoting intimate interaction with course content and development of body knowledge.

Curiosity Dictates Curricular Engagement

It is important to be reminded that the dance program is not a conservatory and therefore does not have entrance auditions to participate. One cannot make the generalization that all liberal arts institutions that have dance programs also forego an audition requirement. However, such auditions usually intimate two immediate consequences with regard to a dance curriculum. First, auditions typically coincide with declaration of a dance major or minor as an incoming freshman. At C College, however, it is normal for students to not declare their major(s) until junior or even senior year. Encouragement to explore broad interests and multiple disciplines does not merely get a tacit endorsement. Instead, this is a revered educational approach at C College. Second, auditions set dancers on a trajectory for coursework that often unfolds in a prescribed order and with minimal choice and/or flexibility for the duration of their undergraduate dance studies. However, if a student at C College does not declare a dance major or minor until their junior year, then that precludes the ability of the program to have a clearly delineated progression of dance coursework from the outset.

Any student at C College is welcomed to take dance classes as their schedule and curiosity dictates. Therefore, this process inevitably means that there cannot be uncompromising and rigid content requirements that constitute dance study. Cunningham described the benefit that such flexibility provided when they said, “Well the great thing about the major or the minor is that there are a certain number of
technique classes that you have to take - but they aren’t specified. I could take beginning modern class six times and do that for a dance major.”

**Alignment of Program Mission and Personal Goals**

Moreover, participants acknowledged the stark differences between curricular emphases and values in a B.F.A. dance program and the goals at C College. One participant articulated this view in the following way:

I guess the very positive response - I would say that it is very holistic - in that it is very different than a B.F.A. Very much! This is way not a Bachelor of the Fine Arts Program! In a B.F.A. you have lots and lots and lots of technique classes and at an undergraduate level that would be your focus. And to get into a lot of B.F.A. programs you need a particular physical background and usually a lot of ballet training. And - I think the curriculum here - what is interesting to me - is that a lot of people participate in the department but not a lot of people make the big jump from just taking the dance classes to taking the theory classes and those classes like with Choreography - which are smaller and you get to see people who are heavier into the department. I really loved getting to take kinesiology - that was something that really paired beautifully with modern dance for me. I really like that the curriculum here - that the core classes are kinesiology, labanotation, composition, 2 levels of choreography and history. To me, that seems - I guess there are a 1,000 different ways to balance a curriculum, but that seems smart in that it comes at it from a historical, qualitative, quantitative, and a lot of different
perspectives. I feel like it puts me in the position that I can say I am passionate about dance and here are all of the potential things I can be focusing on. (Halprin)

Thus, one could rightfully contend that the very openness of the dance program is what necessitated a curriculum that offered porous class levels, space to explore a plethora of options for self-directed study, and culminating senior projects directed solely by the investigations of graduating dancers. At the same time, casting causality solely to this design and structure may be misplaced.

**Importance of Personal Investigation**

Faculty emphasized the importance of personal investigation in dance studies. Participants accredited this encouragement to how they perceived the presence of individualized learning in the curriculum rather than the curricular offerings themselves. Participants’ interests generated involvement and dance faculty appeared critical in helping students to be self-directed in their choices and how those may propel students forward. In turn, having choice both strengthened and clarified the values, purpose, and goals that students’ identified as relevant (Peddiwell, 2004). Involvement was not simply a choice for what was included in dance studies, but instead was an authentic means for continuous questioning and exploration (Freedman, 2003). One of the faculty members discussed this in the following way:

There is space when they are here where they start re-envisioning themselves and many of them see themselves as dancers. And that doesn’t mean that they are going to continue to dance outside of C College as we have found with many of our students but I think for this period of their lives it is such a time of discovery
in all of the areas - emotional, physical, discovering that they are excited by
putting on that title of being able to be dancer. I hope that that is partly because
they have a lot of power in our department and they choreograph and they
contribute a lot. (Shawn)

In addition, participants reported that dance faculty played a pivotal role in
adviseement that met students’ needs for involvement and self-directed choice. In order to
take risks and be excited about this discovery process, participants' voiced that faculty
challenged them in positive ways to break from their sense of normal or comfortable.
Although a lack of experience can lead to defensiveness and fear of making mistakes, and
although coursework cannot espouse to adequately prepare every dancer, this impasse
was not reported by participants as they readily learned by doing. Authors Shipton and
Steltenpohl (1980) described the obstacles typically present as students navigate college
curriculum:

Assisting in the development of self-direction requires not only skill but
conviction that it is an appropriate goal. Students who are uncertain and
uncomfortable in their uncertainty often make hasty and poorly considered
decisions. These premature choices bring closure too soon and this eliminates the
exploration of alternatives and the opportunity for more appropriate better-
considered choices. At the same time, there may be a poor fit between student’s
interests, values and abilities and the choice made. This mismatch may result in
the student’s merely getting through, without commitment or involvement. (p. 15)
Moreover, making choices based on what others expect or from external formulas to construct learning can be risky and magnify dependence on authority figures. Baxter Magolda (2004) explained the complex process by which cognitive engagement must include awareness that knowledge is contextual. Magolda (2004) noted this epistemological foundation:

Cognitive maturity requires viewing knowledge as contextual, or as constructed using relevant evidence in a particular context. A contextual view of knowledge recognizes that multiple perspectives exist, depending on how people structure knowledge claims. It further requires the capacity to participate in constructing, evaluating, and interpreting judgments in light of available evidence and frames of reference. Contextual knowers construct knowledge claims internally, critically analyzing external perspectives rather than adopting them uncritically. Increasing maturity in knowledge construction yields an internal belief system that guides thinking and behaviors yet is open to reconstruction given relevant evidence. Cognitive outcomes such as intellectual power, reflective judgment, mature decision making, and problem solving depend on these epistemological capacities (p. 9).

Thus, faculty’s approach to assure that participants had the responsibility to direct their learning and find quality in their studies appeared critical to negate a mismatch and a debate focused on curricular offerings or progression. In light of the literature, perhaps more vital was faculty’s aim to build internal belief systems in order for participants to gain cognitive maturity and contextual knowledge through their dance studies. This was
also a through line communicated by participants in their narratives of the importance of being a choreographer and having leadership roles and voice in the program. One faculty member, Wigman, stated in part, “I think they are able to make choices of what they care about because they have worked for four years on articulating what they care about; focusing, making decisions, aligning with who they are.”

Participants had realistic expectations for directing their learning. Let us again consider the contexts of a liberal arts institution. It can be argued that the primary purpose of these institutions is indeed to foster critical thinking by exposing undergraduates to philosophical and theoretical possibilities to inform life options. Therefore, the expected focus of the dance program at C College should not be on career preparation or creating technicians, but rather to expand and build around the applications of a curriculum in order to address students’ self-directed learning interests. And as detailed in Chapter 4, this was evident from students’ initial contact with the program to a dance major’s senior exercise. Langer (1997) lent support to dancers being expected to mindfully engage the curriculum via investigation of multiple perspectives and contexts. New information is necessarily processed from different points of view and observations (Langer 1989).

Through the curriculum, increased control of learning was partnered with process-based outcomes. Halprin explained, “For me that was essentially why I was a dance major. I found that (allowed for) point of research that is infinite.” The assumption that this approach is happening in all dance programs in liberal arts institutions would be absurd. One could sensibly argue, however, that individualized ways of acquiring
unique movement vocabularies and knowing self are perhaps more underscored by dance in liberal arts settings. One could equally contend that the broader field continues to re ing influence over the knowledge base that defines dance study in academe. Similarly, the students that typically attend this type of institution tend to be highly motivated and successful students. This may suggest that there are intrinsic or idiosyncratic student characteristics that enable these students to succeed despite the fact that the dance curriculum at these institutions may be assumed to not prepare dancers as well as specialized conservatory training might.

**Learning Dance as an Embodied Art Form**

The dance curriculum provided ways for students to learn to value and see dance as an art form with broad, multi-dimensional contexts for applying that knowledge. Participants communicated that the curriculum enabled them to explore the interconnectedness of their dance studies; recognizing the cerebral, analytical and kinesthetic ways of learning. Specific to dance, this aligns with authors who write about the necessary shifts in dance training practices to give students voice in the curriculum. In this case, participants reported that they created their own curricular path to serve their own identity and interests (Dittman, 2008). They were provided ongoing opportunities for self-directed study and were validated by faculty who consistently encouraged exploration of interests (Calabro, 1969; Weldy, 1970). As previously mentioned, participants viewed the faculty as collaborators and equals rather than authoritative figures. Thus, the absence of the traditional hierarchical model was evident not only in communal relationships but also in dance classroom contexts (Stinson, 1994). Consistent
with the research findings related to previous training and community, participants felt that the curriculum also honored them as subjects rather than as objects of learning and relied on their personal knowledge in order to cultivate meaning and artistry (Batson, 2008; Fortin, 1998; Fraleigh, 2004; Greene, 2001).

Indeed, unlike most other coursework, dance study itself is an embodied, multi-sensory, and expressive means to construct knowledge. As such, no dance curriculum can fully prepare students for the experiences of doing it; that is learning to move in one’s own unique body. To understand the body and its movement processes intimates awareness that there cannot be a singular, codified way to learn about or sense one’s unique body as instrument.

**The Body: Awareness, Aesthetics and Process**

Participants’ expressed understanding the dancing body as central to dance experience. Consistent with changing contemporary dance practices, participants reported the absence of a homogenized approach and discussed curricular and pedagogical emphases on learning about the body (Dittman, 2008). This may be further understood through consideration of the literature on dance education. Participants reported being readily encouraged to develop their own aesthetics via examination of multiple connections to personal expression and permission to make decision about one’s bodies and its relationships to art (Crawford, 1991; Eisner, 2002; Simpson, 1991). Participants were not expected (or encouraged) to memorize, reproduce, or give rote attention solely to the physical mechanics of the body.
As previously detailed, the openness of the dance program negated focus on assumptions of technical virtuosity. As a result, the curricular focus appeared to be firmly located in the expressive and aesthetic components of one’s body. Participants were instead expected to integrate numerous movement possibilities and attune to the holistic processes of movement acquisition and refinement (Fortin, 1998; Freedman, 2003). The body, along with its limitations, function, anatomy, safe and efficient use, and development of movement vocabulary, was central to this narrative.

The value that participants in this study placed on learning about the body finds support generally in the literature on somatic study, which places emphasis on embodiment and intentionality. Exploration of the mind/body connection and autonomous self-guiding serve as vehicles for learning and transforming bodily experiences (Batson 2008, 2010; Bolles & Chatfield, 2009; Dowd, 1995; Fortin, 1998; Franklin, 1996; Fraleigh, 2004; Knaster, 1996; Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010; Olsen & McHose, 1991). The importance of facilitating the awareness of one’s body sensations in order to safely and meaningfully explore anatomy and function specifically finds support from these authors. These authors contend that focus on one’s unique body knowledge is particularly essential for dancers in the current training paradigm, are a strong support factor for a dancer’s development of a personal approach to their training, and generate thought-provoking awareness of movement practices. Thus, the incorporation of somatic study approaches in dance curriculum, according to these authors, can craft new understanding of the body and provide opportunities for dialogue and reflection that supports the learning process.
This responsibility may indeed promote a sense of self-awareness that gives students the permission to focus on individual dance experience and avoid comparisons to what other dancers look like. In contrast, having students commit to reproducing specific technical benchmarks and aesthetics within a given course structure would, perhaps, create barriers for student success. In this regard, this type of responsibility may well have contributed to the high rate of participant reporting of the presence of personal investigation throughout curricular frameworks and classroom contexts.

A further explanation as to why participants found this holistic approach to be helpful and reinforce learning may be due to the fact that they were involved in curricular discourse that routinely troubled the notions of dance and the dancing body through historical, contemporary, and social constructions of the art form. Indeed, one of the distinguishing characteristics of dance is that the body, as the instrument of the art, is continuously ascribed with and mediated by social and political forces, typologies, power, and performative practices (Bakran, 1975; Casper & Moore, 2009; Foucault, 1990; Husserl, 1999; Mauss, 1973; Merleau-Ponty, 1999). Even when learning about the body is at the core of the dance curriculum, and to a large extent un-prescribed, examining external factors that potentially exert regulatory control over the body are believed to make learning dance more effective.

To engage students as collaborative partners to investigate bodies in relation to the world experienced may well satisfy need to understand larger social forces and frames of reference as well as appeal to self-concept as both dancers and learners. Van Dyke (2009) explained that curricular foci of dance in academe need to have a broader
Students seldom learn dance with adequate opportunity to gain critical insight on how to utilize the material across settings and to incorporate those skill sets in different contexts. Another author noted it this way, “dancers typically learn to reproduce what they receive, not to critique or create” (Stinson, 1998, p. 28). In terms of cultivating such analysis, McCarthy-Brown (2009) found that developing the ability to critique also must maintain cultural relevance for young dancers. Therefore, being able to broadly apply dance knowledge obtained via the curriculum may mean, in part, that students are socialized to the scope and meaning of their dance studies and are presented with multiple perspectives (Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010).

**Feedback Offered as Provocation Rather than Mandate**

This notion brings into play the idea of feedback as a means for cultivating critical reflection. Participants, as stated previously, reported the lack of judgmental focus, the importance of learning with and from peers, and the absence of a hierarchy in student/student and teacher/student relationships. These factors may well contribute to the ways in which participants felt feedback was positively given and received. More specifically, however, feedback was viewed as supportive of self-reflection and growth. Feedback was framed as means to offer suggestions, encourage creativity, and help participants serve as partners in discovery even though working with peers, who may have differing or sometimes opposing interests, may give rise to conflict. Feedback was intended to cultivate dialogue about learning. Although participants in this study might not always have a clear grasp of the more subtle ways in which questions or comments
are posed, the spirit in which feedback is provided is familiar to them – hence the general feeling that it facilitates progress. This was evident throughout curricular contexts and was encouraged and modeled by the faculty. Thus, the ways in which feedback is offered is not in the traditional right/wrong model, with perceived punitive measures, or a non-debatable aesthetic of the dance teacher. Instead, faculty frames feedback in accordance to students’ unique experiences and body knowledge and raises awareness of possibilities rather than exactness. One faculty stated this by saying:

Students also get the thing that we give feedback but they are filtering. We may suggest something that may be provocative and may lead them to something else but they may choose to do something very different. We let that be understood. We are not giving directives. We are giving provocations this is one way and this is another way and they have to sort through that. (Wigman)

Langer’s (1989, 1997) theory of mindfulness lends support to the potential relationship between creativity and the ways feedback or constructive criticism is presented at C College. The primary ingredient may be sensitivity to experiential understanding in which exploration and understanding of bodily sensation and experience are more important than outcomes. This may provide insight to what participants may believe they need in order to navigate potential obstacles or habitual patterns in their learning. Langer (1989) described it this way:

Those who can free themselves of old mindsets, who can open themselves to new information and surprise, play with perspective and context, focus on process
rather than outcome are likely to be creative, whether they are scientists, artists, or cooks (p. 115).

Thus, the design of feedback for guiding student process, as dialogically delivered throughout the dance curriculum, supports the emotional and social feelings of dancers at C College. Moreover, feedback could speak to a through line of intentionality in the program: continued emphasis on the construction of self (Harter, 1999). In other words, dance programs in academe do not always provide a supportive environment in which students give and receive critique in ways that advance success or model artistic practice (Hagood, 2000; Stinson, 1994).

Summary

In summary, this analytic category discussed the curricular supports and barriers that influence students’ learning. Participants felt that not only did the curriculum offer options for self-directed study but that they also had the confidence to undertake such personal investigations precisely because of the encouragement from faculty and peers to create their own learning (Freire, 1970). Students were motivated and open-minded. They welcomed different perspectives on how others individualized their dance experiences. They did not struggle with the often routine frustrations of trying to understand complex movement patterns taught without connection to a personal movement vocabulary. They did not report barriers of feeling unsafe, judged or disconnected from their bodily experiences of learning to dance. They did not feel defensive when giving or receiving critique. Therefore, it was not surprising that participants in this study expressed a clear preference for a dance curriculum that was not
only content-specific, but also one that provided the space to explore and have dialogical encounters and decision making power to individually map the dance experience. When the curriculum doesn’t expect a mold, and is instead a further expression of the openness of the dance program, students display enormous capacity to bring forth their own learning and discover their own strengths and interests.

**Analytic Category 4: The Connection Between Identity Development and Critical Reflection on One’s Growth and Progress**

The fourth and final research question sought to explore how (or does) one’s dance identity evolve or change through their participation in the dance program at C College. All participants voiced that their dance identity knowingly evolved through involvement in the dance program and coincided with the ability to articulate personal growth. The majority of participants also expressed that dance identity was meditated, in part, by factors such as stereotypes and valuing of the field of dance, concerns about career choice pay off, and differing definitions of the dancing body. Thus, linkages were made to social and media influences.

The overriding finding of this research that the openness of the dance program, regardless of previous training, allowed participants to feel accepted and welcomed was further reflected by the informal, rather than formal, ways by which participants went about trying to find their sense of self as young dancers. All participants voiced a personal consciousness for how they came to see or know themselves more fully through their dance studies. Participants understood now, which they did not understand at the beginning of their dance studies, that finding one’s dance identity is an ongoing process
whose value resides in not only creative expression and the revelation of new knowledge, but also approval of talent in accordance with a particular set of social and discipline-specific norms.

**Personal Growth and Affirmation: The Influence of Social Dynamics**

Participants placed importance on personal development. Progression was viewed as being inseparably intertwined with the particular community and curricular practices at C College. Therefore, it is not surprising that social norms within the dance program were cited as contributors to one’s identity. Participants reported the experiences at C College that enabled their identity to continue to expand through self-understanding. This entails a complex set of factors in which the preceding discussion has set up the vital, cohesive pieces. First, dance identities formed prior to C College did not pose challenges for any participant because the program offered multiple entry points to dance study that validated a range of student experience and ability (Buckroyd, 2000; McCarty-Brown, 2009). Second, although collaboration with and comparison to others is inevitable, the dance program at C College fostered this in ways that did not compromise students’ sense of belonging to the collective of their peers and teachers (Andrzejewski, 2009; Tatum, 2000). The public defining of failure was not present in the dance program and therefore participants did not report that their evolving abilities were assessed in light of competition (Ormrod, 2006). Next, corrections and feedback from teachers and peers were illuminative of dancers’ strengths which enhanced learning, development, and belief in self. Such regular encounters with success yielded high self-efficacy that perpetuated feelings of being capable and attaining positive results as
cognitive and physical demands in the dance program increased. Moreover, collaborative and dialogical relationships supported participants’ expression of their fluctuating identities in ways that were both personally and socially acceptable (Raible & Nieto, 2008). Finally, the daily embodiment of emotional and physical discoveries or limitations was viewed as important information rather than weaknesses or illuminative of inadequacies. Thus, dance was not about survival as is typical in college dance programs but was instead an intermediary to facilitate meaningfully personal, creative endeavors (Buckroyd, 2000).

Given these considerations, one explanation may well be the social dynamics present in the dance program made it easier or perhaps more comfortable for students to articulate personal growth and their evolving competencies and sense of self. Because identity formation cannot be separated from communal culture and participants in this study perceived this to support their identity development, social group dynamics may have unambiguously influenced individual identity. Young (2010) sheds light on the importance of these dynamics in this way:

Groups constitute individuals. A person's particular sense of history, affinity, and separateness - even the person’s mode of reasoning, evaluating, and expressing feelings - are constituted partly by her or his group affinities. This does not mean that persons have no individual styles, or are unable to transcend or reject a group identity. Nor does it preclude persons from having many aspects that are independent of these group identities. (p.37)
As such, it was possible for dancers to be affirmed in their ability to carry-out both large and small scale explorations of the construction of their identity with the support, encouragement, and direction of faculty and peers traversing the terrain together (Erikson, 1968). Participants reported the significance of self-directed learning and decision making. There was awareness of autonomy, cognitive dissonance, consciousness of attitudes and expectations, and acute awareness of membership to the collective. These are important factors that facilitate opportunities to gain competence and explore who they are through behavioral, social and cognitive influences (Bandura, 1986; Erikson, 1968; Sadowski, 2008). As previously detailed, this appeared especially relevant to participants as they experimented with relationships, responsibilities and roles within the department, and notions of establishing a life practice in dance. In the presence of an active exchange of ideas, there was something about the motion, passion, and energy within the department that had its own rhythm and pulse. Although participants expressed that this shaped and directed dancing, they were not yet able to fully articulate this and why it enabled awareness of a widening range of identity.

**The Juxtaposition of Personal Practice and Social Misfit**

Part of identity formation for emerging adults is related to career choice exploration. While participants described life practice as finding ways to keep dance as a core part of who they are, this did not repudiate concerns about career choice, finding a job, and (lack of) financial pay off. Participants appeared to struggle to reconcile love of dance with perceived realities of the job market. As is the case with most students in college dance programs, participants in this study confronted the dwindling resources,
options, and viability of a dance career as sole sustenance for one’s financial obligations. Faculty acknowledged these anxieties and realized that the programmatic emphasis was on the individual and communication that there was no singular formula to forge one’s place in the dance world.

However, through socialization and cultural traditions that exist within the dance program at C College, participants appeared able to acquire a wealth of embodied cultural capital (Bordieu, 1986). Over time, sense of self and expanded reasoning made dancers more attentive to familiar influences and open to contradictions. This may serve as a protective factor as it has made possible the means to communicate and present their sense of self which reflects one’s surrounding dance culture (Bordieu, 1986). Thus, consider as well the role that uncertainty may play in personal agency and autonomy. Langer (2005) wrote of the possibilities that may emerge when she wrote, “For some, such uncertainty represents an absence of personal control. From a mindful perspective, however, uncertainty creates the freedom to discover meaning” (p. 87).

Thus, it is likely that the very dependence on the breadth of preparation to be self-directed ultimately helped participants to realize that they know how to be self-reliant, resourceful, and reach out to others to create community and possibilities. In part, this enabled disparities to be lessened as participants reflected simultaneous examination of sense of self and cultural capital in relation to who the world says they can or cannot be as a dancer (Tatum, 2000).

Moreover, the commoditization and social typing of the art form was perceived to be problematic. Because part of an individual’s dance identity is influenced by the larger
dance and social collective, it was understandable that participants talked about media’s apparent representation of a particular typecast of dancer and their aesthetically pleasing body and the portrayal of more socially valued genres of dance. Accordingly, the majority of participants struggled with how these stereotypes may potentially contribute to a lack of confidence in their own abilities and sense of self. The levels of individual stress that this potentially placed on participants, as is typical with the emerging adult, is often compounded by concern and worry that encompasses personally held and socially constructed aspects of one’s identity.

**Self-Authorship**

There was a connection between participants’ identity development and critical reflection on their growth and progress. This may be further understood in light of the theory of self-authorship. Self-authorship is the “capacity to internally define a coherent belief system and identity that coordinates mutual relations with others” (Baxter Magolda, 2004, p. 8). Participants in this study, although clearly still in the process of developing this capacity, appeared to be maturing in ways that not only acknowledged their uncertainty of self and craft but also revealed processes of self-reflection that enabled them to explore relationships and held beliefs (Kegan, 1994).

Participants encountered increasingly complex decisions about their career choice, constitution of their identity, and social realities. These seemed more possible to navigate due to construction of an internal belief system that integrated a sense of self in relation to a variety of perspectives (Baxter Magolda, 2004; Taylor, 2000). According to Baxter Magolda (2001) self-authorship is most effectively promoted when three key
things are present in the learning environment: 1) knowledge is conveyed as both multifaceted and socially constructed, 2) a sense of self remains vital to the construction of new knowledge, and 3) power and expertise are equally distributed through shared construction of knowledge among one’s peers.

No participant or faculty member in this study explicitly used the language or stated an awareness of self-authorship. However, these practices were present and made possible by the openness of the dance program and the holistic approaches used by both educators and students. Therefore, it may be that immersion into dance studies where emphasis was placed on critical reflection and inquiry may have been the germinating seeds that grew the capacity for students to move towards self-authorship. For the participants in this study, there appeared to be an increase in cognitive maturity, purposeful exploration of multiple perspectives, balance of relationships, and the building of an internalized belief system. These elements ultimately make possible the potential for transformative growth and an integrated sense of self and identity (Baxter-Magolda, 2004; Taylor, 2000).

**Summary**

In summary, this analytic category discussed the connection between identity development and critical reflection on one’s growth and progress. The prior comments illustrate that identity development continues to evolve over time for participants. Research suggests that the more students are informed and included in processes, the more they are integrated into the community and curriculum by being able to critically question multiple perspectives, relationships, and social realities, and the more they feel
like partners in the construction of their learning, the less likely it is that they will feel disconnected from their sense of place or self. Specific to dancers at C College, maybe their identity evolved because they learned by doing or sensing or creating or collaborating and/or learning through belonging. Regardless, this appears to suggest that mechanisms are already in place to facilitate the multi-dimensional development of students so they can explore and meaningfully integrate and reflect on their dance identity both during and after involvement in the dance program at C College. In large part, this is additional evidence that the openness of the program is weaved throughout every narrative of participant experience: previous training is a non-issue as the program provides equitable acceptance of all students. In turn, the dance community provides a plethora of supports that encourage discourse and peer learning. As a result, the dance curriculum encourages both personal investigation and collaboration and as students experience these structures, identity development is reflected through experimentations and social interactions that promote critical reflection for the integration of a sense of self.

**Summary of Discussion of Findings**

This chapter represented the experiences of dancers at C College. In summary, the prior discussion illustrated the multi-faceted and complex nature of the dance experience. The discussion revealed various reasons why dancers might feel that previous training was insignificant due to the openness of the program. It offered an explanation for the ways in which the dance community provided support structures that dancers felt they needed. It provided insight to how learning is shaped more through
encouragement of personal inquiry and the collaborative construction of knowledge rather than curricular structures and what factors mediate exploration of or challenges to an evolving dance identity.

The analysis of the research findings produced a nuanced yet integrated synthesis of the research. The overriding challenge throughout data collection and analysis, as simultaneous processes, was to make sense of vast amounts of data, condense the volume of information, identity significant themes and patterns, and construct a readable narrative that provided a context for conveying the essence of what the data revealed given the guiding purpose of this study. The researcher did extensive within and across comparisons among participants and did not find any personal dance history or demographic factors that further explained findings.

This analysis of findings is specific to the research participants and setting. This included 13 dancers and all dance faculty. This study was focused on the lived experiences of these dancers who are considered to be in the type of dance program focused on personal investigation and critical inquiry. Thus, dancers in different types of programs may not be represented or find familiarity. For these reasons, it is important to stress that potential implications are unique to the experiences of the participants in this bounded case study.

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is to serve as the principal instrument for data collection (Patton, 2002). Thus, the human factor is both a great strength and primary flaw of qualitative research. To understand this subjectivity and the boundaries of research relationships are important considerations (Glesne, 2006). The
researcher tuned into her own a priori attitudes, beliefs, interests and needs, to exert a way of not only monitoring subjectivity but also develop and strengthen her reflexivity: all of which are important for the duration of the research process (Glesne, 2006). The potential for research bias and how this was checked throughout the process is explicated below. This chapter is ultimately the presentation of how the researcher understood, made sense, and expressed the meaning of the narratives shared by participants and the connections she discovered among their stories. It is acknowledged that another researcher might have crafted a different story.

Interesting Incongruities

There are three contrasts to note. First, it was interesting that participants perceived dance to be both a visible part of communal life and yet simultaneously de-valued on campus. It felt normal that dancers were in their gear and bare feet; moving and creating work at various venues. However, the regular presence of student dancers outside their studio or performance settings on college campuses is, for the most part, uncommon. And yet, participants simultaneously reported negative perceptions from peers and the C College community that dancers were too artsy and not academic enough.

A second interesting incongruity in the data related to community was peer related. Learning with and from their peers was considered highly important and mostly void of conflicts. However, even among this close knit group of peers and friends, favoritism appeared to manifest through choreographer’s casting choices. This viewpoint was summarized by one participant when they said the following:
One thing that sort of irritated me in years past - the choreographers are obviously allowed to choose their own casts. Many of the student choreographers would choose their friends. It felt like other dancers who were just as qualified weren’t getting a chance to experience that process or performance because people wanted to hang out with their friends. As I have gotten more involved with the dance department - now the choreographers are my friends (laughs) and I am a senior dance minor. There is not the same kind of problem. But it’s criticism that I have heard from others as well who maybe aren’t as involved in the dance department but would still like a chance to perform. (Dunham)

Faculty seemed to suggest that casting choices were more indicative of the openness of the program and focused on inclusion rather than technical ability or a choreographer’s personal preferences. St. Denis said, “We sit there in the casting process and we say this person has not been cast and they are a really interesting and involved person. They deserve to dance.” Another faculty described casting this way:

And I think you might see this tonight in the concert. One of our dance students really cast (their) piece from a very broad range of people. I think (they) made a very conscious choice to give the less experienced dancers the leads. I’m curious - did that cause frustration for the more experienced dancers? I think it’s a real vote of confidence that (they) got the less experienced people in the dance concert. Our casting is really integrated in terms of levels and that we aren’t picking the most technically accomplished students. We do have auditions for each of our dance
concerts. But we say this and we mean it - that a lot of the casting is based on schedule availability. (Shawn)

A third point that appeared somewhat incongruent in the data related to curriculum was the touting of a highly individualized curriculum, which was enthusiastically appreciated for not having B.F.A. undercurrents, and yet participants perceived that this equated to lack of technical rigor. Perceptions of how technique or technical rigor was defined in the dance program seemed to translate to how participants assessed their own level of dance knowledge and competence (i.e.: dancer versus someone who dances). It was as if participants felt they had chosen a program in which they had to sacrifice technique for creativity, as if one was mutually exclusive of the other. This was articulated by the majority of participants and evidenced in the following two responses:

C College is not known for its technical work as much as…it allows you to do a lot of things….it is open to give students opportunities to try different things. This is kind of what I said earlier. This is not a technique oriented department. Of course we are taught technique and of course we try to improve ourselves. Of course! But it is NOT about how high your leg comes in a battement! (Pavlova) It’s not as rigorous in technique or like structure. But they give you a lot of freedoms to do what you want. I really like that. I just love dance and I love choreography. I would say that it is not the most rigorous program and if you are looking for that I would say (names 3 colleges they perceive to be rigorous) they are really competitive ……but also they are not the most creative environments
for dance. A rigorous dance program is where they focus a lot on technique, it’s a lot of competition to get parts in shows and it’s not very inclusive. That all sounds negative but you also probably get a lot of really great choreographers and people coming in. Obviously, it’s hard to say - because I am really grateful for the individual focus in a lot of ways so I would rather have it that way than super standardized which stays away from raising technique level - I am mostly grateful for it. (Duncan)

At the same time, participants seemed to correlate lack of technical rigor to the ability of an open program and sense of community to exist. One participant attempted to describe this connection when they said following:

I guess if you did make it more rigorous you might also be introducing more competition and that might …if it is more rigorous if it’s more competitive then fewer people might want to participate in that or feel like they are able to participate in that. I think the way we have things now where it is more general and a little less rigorous - it leaves it open for more people. Classes are set up here and in such a non-competitive way, I don't think that facilitates actual dance technique training. It's more dance experience I would say. (Graham)

Another participant tried to cast the perceived lack of technical rigor in a positive light through expressed understanding of the program’s focus on development of personal aesthetics and dance identity. This was voiced as follows:

The program here is not as technique based but I think that that’s not their point. This isn’t a conservatory. I think that they give you technique but they give you
other tools to appreciate the art as a whole. I feel like that’s the point of the dance program here is the tools to appreciate it both in your body and as a viewing spectacle - to see what you can take away from it. I don’t think that just because the technique program isn’t rigorous weakens the program. But I think that is where rigor is perceived. That is the common idea of rigor. (Ailey)

Faculty bristled when they heard these perceptions. They adamantly communicated that such perceptions only serve to advance stereotypes about dance and minimize other possibilities that, perhaps, well rounded dance training makes available. This was evident in the following exchange among faculty:

Researcher: Does the fact that the dance program is really open and accepting of everyone, does that equate with not having a technical focus? Or not being a rigorous program?

Shawn: For me, I think all our little hairs went up when you said not technical because our goal is to get people to learn and to improve.

St. Denis: And we are working very technically but….

Wigman: …we are making choices.

St. Denis: And we don’t have the luxury of having 3 ballet classes at different levels and 3 modern classes every semester. So there has to be adjustments but within that we are all really interested in seeing the technical, artistic, physical growth of our students.

Wigman: And we do.
St. Denis: In some ways I think because there is not a push to a technique that I think they have a healthier understanding of what that means.

Wigman: From my point of view, I question that word – technical - and I think that word is problematic. I could teach a semester of improv and that’s a technique - it’s a skill - it’s a hard ass skill. So, it’s a matter of technique is not just pique, balance, whatever - we all value that whole continuum. In terms of rigor I think we demand a lot and yes we are limited - we have 2 technique classes - they are not taking 4 a day like going from ballet in the morning to modern to African dance class - to whatever. But, with what we do offer - we are rigorous but not in a stereotypical way.

These incongruities do not suggest discrepancies in the data but rather confirm the complexity of lived experiences. Furthermore, these shed light on a strength of the research design. Careful attention was given to the repeated mention of data that suggested corroboration among various data sources and participant interviews. Divergence is acceptable and strengthens findings when it can be explained. As is the case with these incongruities, they reflect emerging adults’ natural navigation of their complex, social world where being liked and accepted by peers remains central and trying on one’s fit with various roles, responsibilities, and typecasts in the field of dance is expected.

**Limitations**

All limitations must be understood in the context of this institution. This means that what was observed here does not necessarily translate to other types of dance
programs, institutions, or settings. This was not considered problematic because the goal of this research was to explain the bounded phenomenon within the context of the dance program at C College.

As presented in Chapter 1, three limitations were initially identified in the design of the current study. First, it was acknowledged that C College does not provide a balanced cross-section that is reflective of undergraduate dance programs across the entire United States. The purpose of this case study however, was not to generalize findings from this context to any other undergraduate dance population. The purpose was instead to gain an in depth understanding of the considerations unique to C College. A second potential limitation was the inherent make-up of the general student body at C College since it is comprised of individuals that can both afford a private education and have already proven themselves to be motivated and academically successful students. Thus the work was limited by the fact I could only focus on this particular group. A third limitation that was acknowledged from the outset was that the whole of what is happening during an undergraduate dance experience will not be detailed given the length and scope of the current case study. However, it was also acknowledged that this research did not espouse to be able to capture and convey all of the content and processes that are potentially meaningful and/or educative of dancers. Instead, the current case study was limited, preliminary, and conceptualized as the beginning of a research trajectory.

Other limitations emerged during the course of the research. A fourth limitation emerged during the reporting of findings and was not initially anticipated. Due to the
small size and the presence of such intimate, personal relationships within the dance department, it was determined that responses could become identifiable especially to those directly involved in the case study or research setting. This risk was principally weighed by the researcher when choosing to report or withhold some of the data which might have been further considered for negative case analysis but could have threatened to reveal a participant’s identity. However, this limitation neither compromised the totality with which the data was reported nor excluded the lived experiences of any participant. Finally, a fifth limitation was that although multiple observations were conducted, it was not possible to observe everything that occurred during class that might inform the research. Therefore, it was an acceptable limitation that some information may have been lost.

Conclusions

The purpose of this case study was to explore how dancers at C College describe their experiences of being in the dance program. The conclusions from this study follow the research questions, findings, and interpretations and therefore address four areas: 1) perceptions that the openness of the dance program did not require previous training and was a central organizing factor for experience; 2) participants’ certainty that the dance community supported them and what practices were in place that made them feel substantiated; 3) encouraging personal investigation, fostering ownership, and exploring individualized interests as necessities to navigate dance curriculum; and 4) what helps or hinders dancers’ evolving identities and integrated sense of self (see Appendix Z). A
Discussion of these conclusions will be followed by the researcher’s recommendations and final reflection on this study.

**Conclusion 1: Perceptions That the Openness of the Dance Program did not Require Previous Training and was a Central Organizing Factor for Experience**

The first major finding of this research was that all participants felt that the openness of the dance program to everyone at C College, regardless of previous training, was the most important factor in feeling acknowledged and accepted. Previous training was insignificant to achievement in the program. This was the most striking finding of the research and may have implications for other dance programs generally and raise questions about how to address issues of comparisons and competitiveness among dancers more specifically. A conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that students who dance in open college programs should neither expect that their previous dance training and experience will be required for participation nor that it can fully prepare them for a more academic approach to dance study. Students undertake a highly creative, self-selected journey through an environment that emphasizes both collaborative exploration and personal autonomy. Although the breaking down of dancers that is often so embedded in the culture may be absent, it may also be difficult for students to appreciate how this approach relates to their not-yet-identified place in the field. In this regard, it can also be concluded that the primary purpose of the openness of a dance program is to provide entry to a holistic way to approach dance for an intellectually rigorous examination of multiple contexts of dance study and not to provide definitive
applications or career paths. A further and related conclusion that can be drawn is that, to advance self-expression and the construction of knowledge based on the broadest spectrum of what it means to dance or be a dancer, a different understanding of what and who can constitute dance study must be valued as well as the approach used to carry out that aim.

**Conclusion 2: Participants’ Certainty That the Dance Community Supported Them and What Practices Were in Place That Made Them Feel Substantiated**

The second major finding was that all participants felt that a “culture of basic goodness” presided over the dance program’s community in which a variety of appreciative and supportive practices were instrumental in shaping experience. A conclusion that can be drawn is that feeling trusted and supported alone is insufficient. Dancers also need to be able to dialogue with faculty and peers in order to form relationships that provide opportunities for reflection and action and develop competencies through more informal means. A related conclusion is that, with the potential for competing cultures or academic priorities within the institution that can make goals and expectations feel dichotomous, dancers need to remain open to learning through observation and collaboration in order to develop new learning and new understanding about their craft with and from others.
Conclusion 3: Encouraging Personal Investigation, Fostering Ownership,
and Exploring Individualized Interests as Necessities to Navigate Dance Curriculum

This study’s third major finding was that all participants indicated that the dance faculty encouraged personal investigation which facilitated the ability for students to foster ownership, have voice, and explore their individualized learning interests within the curriculum. In the absence of a more formal, codified approach to dance study, process and content are intertwined. Faculty is a catalyst for reflection and action, and at the very least, provides ways to ameliorate feelings of isolation or misaligned expectations in curricular investigations. Students may desire autonomy and be able to articulate their learning goals, but may not have the skills to conduct such investigations. Through personal investigations, dancers have the opportunity to share information, challenge assumptions, test their creative ideas, sense their bodies, and serve as advocates for one another. All of these opportunities hold potential for the development of new learning, construction of body knowledge, and the ability to give and receive constructive criticism as part of learning about and advocating for the art form.

Conclusion 4: What Helps or Hinders Dancers’ Evolving Identities and Integrated Sense of Self

The fourth major finding of this study was that all participants voiced that dance identity knowingly evolved through involvement in the dance program and coincided with the ability to articulate personal growth. The majority of participants also cited that dance identity was mediated, in part, by factors such as stereotypes and valuing of the
field of dance, concerns about career choice pay off, and differing definitions of the
dancing body. Through their dance studies, participants found factors that may advance
or challenge their sense of dance identity. There are two conclusions that can be drawn
from this finding. First, dancers want to be in charge of their learning and self-directed in
their decision making, and most find that their sense of personal growth comes in part,
from encounters with others precisely because dance is a social, collective practice. These
opportunities enable dancers to expand and explore multiple aspects of their evolving
identity and find their sense of self through a life practice in dance – rather than a specific
career. A second conclusion is that whether students identify themselves as dancers
within the larger collective is largely a function of the social stereotypes and public
consumerism of the field. A dance program that provides ways to move dancers more
towards self-authorship may offset these concerns by helping them to rely on their
personal characteristics and strengths, form a more integrated sense of self, and cultivate
the desire to continue to grow and transform their dance identity over a lifetime.

Recommendations

The researcher offers recommendations based on the findings, analysis, and
conclusions of this study. An overall conclusion to be drawn from this study is that C
College is ultimately about crafting the unique dance experience whereby a purposeful
match is made between goals of the program and the goals of individual dancers.
Therefore, the recommendations that follow are for: 1) current or prospective dance
students, 2) dance faculty and college dance programs, and 3) recommendations for
further research.
Recommendations for Current or Prospective Dance Students

Individuals contemplating enrolling in a dance major program or participating in college dance classes should:

1. Take ample time to study marketing materials and any criteria for acceptance, course requirements, and the degree of freedom or restraint you can expect in constructing your dance experience. Equally important is familiarizing yourself with the support, direction, and guidance available to you during the entire time you are involved in the program. This includes academic, aesthetic, creative, and technical pursuits.

2. For those students already involved in some type of dance or arts training, become knowledgeable about how your experiences may be received. It is legitimate and appropriate to expect feedback and direction on the implications of previous training.

3. Further, students should be aware that there should not be penalty or political implications for advocating for the direction of one’s learning or the safety of one’s body.

4. Have realistic expectations about the investment of your time and talents and how those may or may not translate to a future career path or a lifetime connection to the arts.

Recommendations for Dance Faculty and College Dance Programs

Given that there are numerous factors that affect program offerings, faculty composition, and student populations and recognizing that these vary widely across
higher education, the recommendations put forth should be considered for their appropriateness and saliency on an individual basis. It should also be noted that excellent, innovative, and student-centered teaching and dance programs exist at many institutions of higher learning. Each reflect the field’s ongoing responsiveness to changing practices for how to more fully educate, engage, and support young dancers. As such, these offered recommendations may already be in place. Dance faculty and programs should consider:

1. A closer examination of how to communicate the types of experiences that might better prepare dancers for study in academic programs. Currently, the necessary precursors to study dance in academe are neither clearly defined nor widely understood because there is vast disparity in what constitutes dance training prior to college. Clarifying the essential components of the preparation process could facilitate communication with dance teachers in the public and private sector, prospective dance majors, and provide opportunities to support their progress at targeted points on the P-16 continuum. This may provide a reference point to more explicitly acknowledge students’ previous training and experience in order to look at the possibilities offered by different people and different dance traditions and to match the goals of students with dance programs.

2. Revisit the audition system for how dancers gain entre to dance study by bringing forward suggestions for how the system could create alternatives or incentives for more broad participation per program goals.
3. Use the auditions to create a dialogue between students and faculty to advance the training and development of dancers who may not be admitted to the program as well as to provide individualized feedback to inform young dancers who are admitted of the gaps in their current knowledge base and/or technical proficiencies in order to generate suggestions on how to fill in missing pieces, target identified areas of weakness or investigate unfamiliar topics to better prepare for the expectations of academic study.

4. Review ways that the dance faculty and programs could invite students into the professional dance community, equip them with a solid foundation and create an explicit space for addressing and aligning expectations prior to launching them into majors’ coursework by implementing a pre-college type program specifically designed for young dancers.

5. Create dialogical and ongoing interactions and assessment of dancers and their work that address problems, issues, interests, and/or challenges by positioning dancers as vital resources to direct their own learning, bodies and outcomes.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

1. Based on the limitations of the current study and to account for researcher bias, a survey of a large sample of current and former dancers should be conducted to determine the extent to which similar or equivalent findings might be discovered.

2. An additional study that utilizes the same criteria should be conducted to compare and contrast the experiences of dancers at liberal arts institutions and those at
conservatories or to examine the experiences of dancers in the different “types” of dance programs discussed in Chapter 1.

**Researcher’s Final Reflections**

“I exist in the present, where I prepare myself for the possible.”  ~Paulo Freire

This study was greatly enhanced by the insight and feedback of the research participants who willingly committed their time in order to give voice to their dance experience. Through seven months of data collection, the researcher heard the telling of stories in ways that honored lived experience, captured navigation of the present, and gave insight to the possibilities of tomorrow. There is much work to be done to continue to demystify and legitimatize the processes for young dancers that have been illuminated by this work. In large part, this work must maintain focus on how dancers themselves report and describe their experiences. At the same time, by reflecting all that has been gratefully learned, I will continue to grow as a researcher, artist, and teacher.

A palpable pulse reverberated throughout the dance program at C College. A joyous commitment and openness to the work of both being and creating art was present. In many ways and in many moments, the honoring of unique dance stories cultivated a collective essence, whose invariable nature enabled dancers and dance study to flourish in UN-tethered dwellings.

"Let the beauty of what you love be what you do. There are a thousand ways to kneel and kiss the ground.”  ~Rumi
References


Dance Magazine College Guide 2010-2011. DanceMedia, LLC.


Torres (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (pp. 567-478). New York; NY: Routledge.


Appendix A: Initial Request to C College

December 28, 2010

Dear Dance Faculty:

I do not want to overburden you with a lot of detailed information in this initial e-mail. However, I do want to provide you with a framework for my proposed study. I am a dancer and am working towards my Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction at Ohio University. In focusing my dissertation research, I have been investigating various collegiate dance programs across the U.S., their curricular offerings and programmatic structures, and the overall goals/missions of individual departments. I am interested in conducting a single case study at your institution based on the following proposed purpose and research questions:

Working Title:
(Un) tethered dwellings: A case study exploring one program’s dancers and their experiences with choice, community, curriculum, and transition

Preliminary Research Questions:
The purpose of this qualitative, single case study is to explore the following primary research question: How do dancers describe their experiences of being dancers at ‘X’ College? This study examines the experiences of dancers in an effort to specifically explore: (a) to what degree and how are dancers given choices in personalizing their curriculum? (b) to what degree and how do community, social routine, and/or embodied practice emerge? (c) to what degree and how does the curriculum shape learning about one’s dance identity? and (d) to what degree and how is previous dance training acknowledged or marginalized in college-level dance.

Time Span:
I anticipate the study lasting several months with minimal burden placed on dance faculty. I would possibly need your help in scheduling observations, gathering documents for analysis and participating in focus groups. I am primarily focused on the experiences of dancers. As such, I would be conducting a series of individual interviews with dancers. I would appreciate an opportunity to chat with you about this research, provide you with specifics for proposed data collection methods, time frame for the study, reporting, and etcetera to see if you would be willing to participate.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you!

All Best,

Christi
Appendix B: Personal Information Response Sheet

Age:________

Circle current year of study at C College: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

How many years of dance training did you receive prior to coming to C College?_______

What type(s) of school(s) did you study dance in prior to coming to C College? (performing arts or arts magnet school, private dance studio, community arts organization, summer program, dance workshops, and/or etc.)

Please describe your dance training prior to coming to C College. (i.e.: styles of dance, length/structure of your dance classes, feedback you received from your teachers, etc.). Does anything in particular stand out to you about your previous training?

Please describe your experiences with dance performance prior to coming to C College (i.e.: annual dance recitals, competitions, community performances and events, musical theatre, etc.)
Appendix C: Preliminary Interview Questions for Dancers

Curriculum:

1. What made you decide to major in dance at C College?
2. How would you describe the dance curriculum?
3. How are dancers provided individualized learning opportunities? What kind of choices have you had in structuring your study of dance?
4. How are these choices made?
5. What (if anything) do these choices have to do with your experiences thus far as a dance major? How has this affected your overall learning?
6. How are the program’s expectations communicated to you via the curriculum?
7. Do you feel these expectations are aligned with your actual experiences?
8. What feedback do you receive from faculty about your progress and/or coursework? Grades?

Community:

1. What is your relationship to the dance faculty? Access? Dynamics?
2. How would you describe being a dance major? Interactions? Contexts of community in different settings?
3. What is your understanding of the dance department’s philosophy on dance training and creation of community?

Previous Training and Identity:

1. How would you describe yourself as a dancer before coming to C College? How (or has) this changed?
2. Can you tell me about the meaning and development of those changes?
3. How do you feel your previous dance training/background is perceived in C College’s dance program? Has your previous training been helpful to you?
4. What role do you think these experiences play in your current study of dance?
5. Describe your experiences of beginning the dance major program? What was helpful to you in transitioning or progressing through the program?
6. What has been the biggest challenge? Frustration? Surprise? Success?
7. How do you feel these experiences relate to your dancing? In what ways? Specific examples? How do you feel you and/or your dancing has changed since you began at C College?
Appendix D: Preliminary Focus Group Questions for Dance Faculty

Background and history:

1. How would you describe the development of the dance program?
2. What would you say are the defining characteristics of your dept/program? Goals? Mission?
3. How have these developments or changing contexts affected shaped the current program?
4. What is/are the role/roles of the dance faculty? Administration? Students?
5. What is the role of the dance department within the college context? Local community?
6. How would you describe the characteristics of the students who choose to major in dance at C College?

Previous training:

1. How does the faculty/department approach differences in dancers’ previous training and dance backgrounds? What elements of their previous backgrounds are helpful in accomplishing your objectives? Which ones create obstacles?
2. Do you think dancers’ expectations beginning the dance major are aligned with their actual experiences? Can you give some examples?
3. What approach do you take to developing individual dancer’s identity? Personal aesthetic? Can you give some examples?
4. Could you describe a “highly successful” dancer? Could you describe someone who” not succeeding” in the dance program?
5. What is your understanding of the significance of these things for dancers?
6. What is the department’s philosophy on technical training?
7. How are courses/classes approached?
8. What do you feel you prepare dancers to do after C College? What can dancers do after they leave C College?

Community:

1. How would you describe the relationships/dynamics between the faculty and dance majors?
2. What types of interactions occur on a regular/ongoing basis?
3. What role does community have at C College? How (or do) you define this?
4. How do these relate to the hope or vision you (the faculty) have for the dance majors?

Curriculum:

1. How are dancers provided choice in the dance major?
2. How are these decisions/choices made?
3. What is the purpose/intention of providing choice and opportunity for individualized study?
4. How would you describe the dance curriculum as a whole at C College?
5. How are program expectations communicated to dance majors?
6. What are the pedagogical approaches of the faculty? Department?
7. What kind of feedback (grades) does faculty provide for dance majors?
Appendix E: A Priori Code List

Previous Training:

1. Self-efficacy
2. Feelings of being capable
3. Feelings of being successful
4. Personal agency
5. Autonomy
6. Learning process that challenges prior knowledge
7. Social influence that challenges prior knowledge
8. Process of individuation
9. Valuation
10. Role
11. Responsibility
12. Self in relation to __________.
13. Choice
14. Exercising control (or Personal Control)
15. Managing transitional stressors
16. Relationship
17. Personal goal setting and/or attainment
18. Personal Expressions
19. Inner conflict
20. Outer conflict

Community:

1. Collective practice
2. Appreciating others’ experience/knowledge
3. Self as part of group
4. Ritualize respect
5. Democratic classroom contexts
6. Cultivate dialogue
7. Validate experience
8. Examine self
9. Open to others
10. Critical reflection
11. Critique
12. Sustaining responsiveness
13. Exploring possibilities rather than what is
14. Challenge convention
15. Examine assumptions
16. Sense of self
17. Sense of belonging
18. Public defining
19. Expectation
20. Classroom dynamic
21. Classroom structure
22. Individual voice
23. Personal accomplishment/improvement
24. Social comparison
25. Embodiment

Curriculum:

1. Student as subject of learning
2. Collaborative meaning making
3. Foster ownership
4. Question/explore how art and culture are viewed or produced
5. Curriculum exploration
6. Providing voice
7. Shape education experience
8. Self-directed study
9. Aesthetic experience
10. Participatory engagement
11. Personal value
12. Communicating multiple connections
13. Movement processes
14. Taking risks
15. Habitual patterns
16. Body organization
17. Connection between dancers’ experience and curriculum as a whole
18. Mind/Body
19. Integration of new body knowledge
20. Use of imagery
21. Unique body response and knowledge
22. Experiential anatomy
23. Teachers’ pedagogical approach
24. Performative practice
25. Familiarity with body’s usefulness
26. Body as instrument
27. World experienced
28. Consciousness of meaning
29. Analysis of power (types of bodies/bodies made “visible”)
30. Image of physical body
31. Multi-dimensional definition of the dancing body
32. Cultural relevance
Identity: (anticipate lots of in vivo coding here)

1. Self-understanding
2. Moment of potential crisis
3. Affirmed and accepted by peers
4. Sense of being in charge
5. Critical inquiry
6. Personal investigation
Appendix F: Master List of Codes

1. "Culture of basic goodness"
2. "That is really good information to have."
3. "They have a lot of power in our department."
4. “Not to burst the perfect bubble we have created here….but…there are definitely people here that are competitive.”
5. “A group of people whose differences support others”
6. Acknowledging different technical approach
7. Active exchange of ideas within the community
8. Aesthetics as an approach to process
9. Age
10. Alumni
11. Appreciating dance as an art form
12. Appreciating former training
13. Belonging
14. Body as instrument
15. Breaking down habitual patterns
16. Building on what I have
17. Career path
18. Casting for concerts
19. Classroom dynamics
20. Closeness within the community of dancers
21. Collaboration
22. Collaborative meaning making
23. Commitment
24. Communicating multiple connections
25. Community as a source of appreciative and supportive practices
26. Comparison of dance department to other departments on campus
27. Competition not the goal
28. Confidence
29. Connoisseurship
30. Constructive feedback
31. Course offerings
32. “Creative people need to take care of each other”
33. Creativity
34. Cultivating dialogue
35. Dance - anxieties about pay off
36. Dance as a kinesthetic, embodied way of learning
37. Dance as part of one's identity
38. Dance department goals
39. Dance made visible to the community
40. Dance Team
41. Dancer versus someone who dances
42. De-valuing of dance on campus
43. Defining Success
44. Democratic contexts
45. Department sees dance as serious work
46. Description of Training
47. Differences and challenges in working with beginners
48. Disagreeing with faculty
49. Early experiences/influences
50. Embodied Practice
51. “Embracing moments of discomfort as ways of getting information.”
52. “Everyone has moments that they feel judged”
53. Examining assumptions
54. Examining self in relation to others
55. Experience with Performance
56. Faculty- relationships among them
57. Faculty - personal relationships with students
58. Faculty - why they came to C College
59. Faculty as collaborators and/or equals
60. Faculty connection to students
61. Faculty encouraging personal investigation
62. Faculty identified "short coming"
63. Feedback
64. Feeling connected to program
65. Feeling pressured to dance
66. Feelings about C College community applied to dance program
67. Fostering ownership
68. Fun
69. Grade Level
70. Grading processes
71. Guest artists
72. Healthy
73. Healthy situation
74. Holistic, personal approach
75. “I have always felt this ongoing motion.”
76. “I think he is also reflecting an ethos of what he has been a part of here.”
77. Impact of auditions on sense of community
78. Importance of being a Choreographer
79. Individual attention
80. Individual body response
81. Individuated artistic process
82. Injuries
83. Interdisciplinary
84. “It is certainly appreciated on an artistic level and we get really good turnout for
all the shows.”
85. “It’s not comparable because we’re different people and the dept doesn’t try to compare us or make us all become…set us into a mold.”
86. Learning with/from peers
87. Liberal arts environment
88. Life Practice
89. “Negativity is very detectable here and it’s not welcomed.”
90. No ego - no judgment
91. Not a conservatory - comparison
92. Offering suggestions
93. Open to possibilities and process
94. Openness of program
95. Pedagogical approach
96. Perceived lack of support
97. Perceived lack of technical rigor
98. Personal growth
99. Personhood
100. Physical baggage
101. Politics of the body
102. Program strength
103. Providing voice
104. Public acknowledgement
105. Pushing self as important part of developmental process
106. Relationships
107. Replace ambition with curiosity
108. Reproducibility
109. Resistant tendencies
110. Respect
111. Respectfully evangelical
112. Responsive planning and teaching
113. Ritualizing respect
114. Safety of the body
115. Seeing the way that these women live their lives
116. Self in relation to collective practice
117. Senior Exercise
118. Similar to C College
119. Small size
120. Social comparison/Public defining of ability
121. Stereotypes about dance
122. Student identified curricular deficiency
123. Students as individuals
124. Subtly technically based
125. Support system
126. Supporting other dance opportunities on campus
127. “Tactile nature of the dept. really strong”
128. Taking risks
129. “Taking you as you are now and working with how they can incorporate their curriculum onto you.”
130. Teaching as an alive practice
131. Technique and/or technical
132. “There isn’t a mold they have to fit.”
133. “They look at us as dancers and not students.”
134. “They work with you as opposed to just breaking down.”
135. Transforming through dance training
136. Transitional stressors
137. Trust and Respect
138. Types of Schools
139. Validating dancers’ experiences and knowledge
140. Valuing by others
141. Valuing dance and different dancing bodies/abilities
142. Verbal Encounter
143. Visiting Professor
144. Ways of working
145. “We are not giving directives. We are giving provocations.”
146. “We value the process more than the product.”
147. Years of Previous Training
148. “You don’t get rewarded for being a star.”
149. “You know you have to have the box to be able to step outside of the box…..they give us the box.”
## Appendix G: Master Code List with Frequencies and Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Code Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>&quot;Culture of basic goodness&quot;</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Includes an element of direct communication rather than avoidance of issues, feelings, concerns. Willing vulnerability to be open and attentive to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“That is really good information to have.&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In vivo code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>&quot;They have a lot of power in our department.&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In vivo code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Not to burst the perfect bubble we have created here….but…there are definitely people here that are competitive.”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In vivo code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>“A group of people whose differences support others”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In vivo code for definition of a community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Acknowledging different technical approach</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Faculty description of the dance program having a different technical approach to dance training. Could be related to code: not a conservatory - comparison.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Active exchange of ideas within the community</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>&quot;Exchange of ideas&quot; could be used as in vivo code. Words or phrases that participants use to describe an important aspect of what creates the dance community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Aesthetics as an approach to process</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Understanding of the body and movement as a process - not as a singular, codified way of learning or sensing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Attribute code for each participant for reference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>How current students connect or contact alumni.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Appreciating dance as an art form</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Reference to the dance program providing ways for students to learn to value and see dance as an art form: broader, multi-dimensional contexts for applying dance knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Appreciating former training</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Helpfulness/positives of previous training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sense of belonging and having a place within dance community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Body as instrument</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Code used to identify data that references learning about the human body in the dance program. Participants’ expressed understanding of the dancing body, its limitations, function, anatomy, safe/efficient use, and/or development of a unique movement vocabulary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Breaking down habitual patterns</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Building on what I have</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Career path</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Plans after graduating from C College - where/how they see themselves fitting into the dance community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Casting for concerts</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Reference to issues with casting for concerts: process, feelings, challenges, etc. Possible favoritism?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Classroom dynamics</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Participants’ description of classroom expectations and environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Closeness within the community of dancers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Articulation that there is a closeness and/or bond among dancers in the department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Collaborative meaning making</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Participants' descriptions of faculty working with students to discover meaning (in curriculum, experience, etc) or students working with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Connection to the profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Communicating multiple connections</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Descriptions of the dance curriculum and its connection to related things: various dance styles or forms, exploration of related interests, integration of various viewpoints and interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Community as a source of appreciative and supportive practices</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Participants' voicing that the acceptance and appreciation of the differences that individual members bring strengthens/supports/promotes a sense of community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Comparison of dance department to other departments on campus</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Competition not the goal</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Articulation by participant that competition is not the goal or part of the philosophy of the dance program at C College.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Connoisseurship</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Direct exchange with participant(s) about my role as researcher and also being a connoisseur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Constructive feedback</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reference to how receiving (or not receiving) constructive input impacts participant. Possible relation to through line of positive, supportive feedback in department and how that validates experience and knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Course offerings</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Faculty perspective. Could be related and/or used to triangulate with code: Student identified curricular deficiency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>“Creative people need to take care of each other”</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>In vivo code: artists, creative people sharing responsibility in and for others' growth and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Voiced by participant(s) as an important part of the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Cultivating dialogue</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Faculty encouraging dancers to talk/share their process and perspective. Could also be seen as ritualizing respect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Dance - anxieties about pay off</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dance as not having the same pay off (financially) as a science-based major and/or anxieties about not finding ways to be involved in the field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Dance as a kinesthetic, embodied way of learning</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Reference to the recognition that dance is both cerebral/analytical and kinesthetic (mind and body).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Dance as part of one's identity</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Participant describes dance as part of who they are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Dance department goals</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>Dance made visible to the community</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Dance made visible in the C College community or local community contexts. Viewed as common practice for dancers to be visible in public spaces and places creating and performing work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>Dance Team</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>Dancer versus someone who dances</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Participants' voicing that there might be a difference between these 2 things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.</td>
<td>De-valuing of dance on campus</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Participant's voiced feeling that dance is not as respected as other majors on the C College campus, not taken seriously, or valued throughout the campus community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43.</td>
<td>Defining Success</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44.</td>
<td>Democratic contexts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>As part of a community of dancers - faculty with students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>Department sees dance as serious work</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Within the dance department, or those who know the dancers, dance studies are validated as meaningful, serious work and lines of inquiry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46.</td>
<td>Description of Training</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Attribute code for each participant for reference. In addition, this is important background information to triangulate with interview data on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.</td>
<td>Differences and challenges in working with beginners</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.</td>
<td>Disagreeing with faculty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant does not agree with an approach used or feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>given by the faculty.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.</td>
<td>Early experiences and influences</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>References to dance experiences or influences before coming to</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>C College. Suggests issues surrounding confidence?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>50.</td>
<td>Embodied Practice</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Physical, emotional, mental, spiritual practices that have</td>
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<td></td>
<td>developed in and through participants ‘dance studies.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.</td>
<td>“Embracing moments of discomfort as ways of getting information.”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In vivo code</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52.</td>
<td>“Everyone has moments that they feel judged”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In vivo code</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53.</td>
<td>Examining assumptions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54.</td>
<td>Examining self in relation to others</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The development and examination of the individual self/dancer</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>in relation to collaborating and working with others in the community.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>students</td>
<td>perceived as potentially problematic and/or unfair)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>58.</td>
<td>Faculty - why they came to C College</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59.</td>
<td>Faculty as collaborators and/or equals</td>
<td>26 Participants’ response that the faculty seem to readily place themselves on students' level: no hierarchy, willing to collaborate, offer/receive critique, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60.</td>
<td>Faculty connection to students</td>
<td>55 Code specific to participant references on how faculty members connect to students through their perceived willingness to help, enable, and encourage dancers. Suggests importance of personal relationships.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61.</td>
<td>Faculty encouraging personal investigation</td>
<td>45 Reference to how faculty is perceived to promote individual investigation within the dance collective or community.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62.</td>
<td>Faculty identified &quot;short coming&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63.</td>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>27 How participant(s) feel the faculty or their peers provide feedback to students - positive, negative, constructive criticism, contexts, etc. How faculty feel they frame their feedback. This code could speak to intentionality: feedback designed for &quot;construction of self.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64.</td>
<td>Feeling connected to program</td>
<td>13 Expressed reason for why participant chose to major/minor/or be involved in the dance program.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65.</td>
<td>Feeling pressured to dance</td>
<td>5 Perceived pressure from faculty and/or peers to be more involved in the dance dept.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66.</td>
<td>Feelings about C College community applied to dance program</td>
<td>18 Reference to how participants views C College as a whole (i.e. - the environment, expectations for interacting with peers, faculty, etc) and how that translates to or has implications for the dance program.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67.</td>
<td>Fostering ownership</td>
<td>35 Dancers feeling encouraged to take ownership of their own learning and experience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68.</td>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Attribute code for each participant for reference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70.</td>
<td>Grading processes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71.</td>
<td>Guest artists</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72.</td>
<td>Healthy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73.</td>
<td>Healthy situation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74.</td>
<td>Holistic, personal approach</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>How faculty approach teaching dance - interact with students &quot;as humans not as forms or objects.&quot; Might relate to code: Pedagogical approach (which is more from students' perspectives)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75.</td>
<td>“I have always felt this ongoing motion.”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In vivo code. This code might also relate to the code - active exchange of ideas. There is something about the motion, passion, energy, exchange that has its own rhythm and pulse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76.</td>
<td>“I think he is also reflecting an ethos of what he has been a part of here.”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In vivo code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77.</td>
<td>Impact of auditions on sense of community</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Auditions viewed as negative. Perceptions that they would create a more elitist environment, impact the sense of a community in negative and non-inclusive ways, and minimize the view of dance as an art form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78.</td>
<td>Importance of being a Choreographer</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Reference to how student choreographers are received or perceived by their peers and dance community and voicing of the choreographic process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79.</td>
<td>Individual attention</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Provided by the dance faculty and voiced as important by participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80.</td>
<td>Individual body response</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Body knowledge as individual and unique.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81.</td>
<td>Individuated artistic process</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>82.</strong></td>
<td>Injuries</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>83.</strong></td>
<td>Interdisciplinary</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>84.</strong></td>
<td>“It is certainly appreciated on an artistic level and we get really good turnout for all the shows.”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In vivo code. Perception of dancers on campus as artsy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>85.</strong></td>
<td>“It’s not comparable because we’re different people and the dept doesn’t try to compare us or make us all become…set us into a mold.”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In vivo code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>86.</strong></td>
<td>Learning with/from peers</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Reference to learning with peers - classroom and/or rehearsal contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>87.</strong></td>
<td>Liberal arts environment</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Specific reference to C College as a liberal arts institution - connections, tenets of liberal arts education, reason for attending, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>88.</strong></td>
<td>Life Practice</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>In part, an in vivo code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>89.</strong></td>
<td>“Negativity is very detectable here and it’s not welcomed.”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In vivo code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>90.</strong></td>
<td>No ego - no judgment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>91.</strong></td>
<td>Not a conservatory - comparison</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>92.</strong></td>
<td>Offering suggestions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>93.</strong></td>
<td>Open to possibilities and process</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Faculty acknowledging that ideas, structures, processes evolve over time and that is a normal part of development and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>Openness of program</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Dance department is open to everyone. &quot;Less technical&quot; viewed as many people are encouraged and welcomed to be a part of the dance dept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>Pedagogical approach</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Articulation of how participants or faculty feel material/courses are taught.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>Perceived lack of support</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Participants' voicing that they do not feel supported - or wish they were more supported - by the faculty in their creative process and/or dance coursework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>Perceived lack of technical rigor</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Perception of how technique or technical rigor is defined in the dance program and its translation to how students' perceive their level of dance knowledge and competence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>Personal growth</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Awareness of personal development through dance studies. In categorizing and further analyzing the data - this code might be directly related to codes: Cultivating Dialogue, Fostering Ownership, and/or Faculty Encouraging Personal Investigation. Personal Growth might happen, in part, as a result of faculty continuously providing feedback and opportunities for students to articulate their experience and discuss how they feel about their learning process development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>Personhood</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Learning about self through dance and/or the creative process. This code could be closely related to Personal Growth. However, this code seems to better describe the development of self directly related to the process of discovering becoming a whole person - without labels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Physical baggage</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>Politics of the body</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Political, social, cultural, regulatory practices that impact the body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>Program strength</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Providing voice</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Presence of student voice in processes (performances, choreography, and/or coursework).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Want or need to have choreographic work or individual process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acknowledgement</td>
<td>validated by the public - whether the public is a live audience at a concert or one's peers, faculty.</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105. Pushing self as important part of developmental process</td>
<td>3 How participants define relationships with previous teachers or important influences before C College. Started using this code with an interview (11.02). However, this code could apply to other data and interviews.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106. Relationships</td>
<td>2 How participants define relationships with previous teachers or important influences before C College. Started using this code with an interview (11.02). However, this code could apply to other data and interviews.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107. Replace ambition with curiosity</td>
<td>1 In vivo code.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108. Reproducibility</td>
<td>10 Participants' references to dance program having something that they feel is not reproducible outside of C College.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109. Resistant tendencies</td>
<td>1 In vivo code. Description used by faculty to discuss students who come in with a pre-conceived notion of what dance is (constructed through their previous training) and who are frustrated with being open/available to other approaches. &quot;Those tend to not be our majors.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>110. Respect</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111. Respectfully evangelical</td>
<td>3 In part, an in vivo code for wanting/inviting others to be involved in the dance program.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>112. Responsive planning and teaching</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113. Ritualizing respect</td>
<td>24 Respect in peer/peer, faculty/peer, and faculty/faculty learning and interacting.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114. Safety of the body</td>
<td>16 An emphasis placed on safe dance practices - awareness of one's own unique body and understanding its strengths, weaknesses, and range as to not get hurt. This includes honoring and knowing self and</td>
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<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
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<tr>
<td>115</td>
<td>Seeing the way that these women live their lives</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>116</td>
<td>Self in relation to collective practice</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>117</td>
<td>Senior Exercise</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>118</td>
<td>Similar to C College</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>119</td>
<td>Small size</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120</td>
<td>Social comparison/Public defining of ability</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>121</td>
<td>Stereotypes about dance</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>122</td>
<td>Student identified curricular deficiency</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>123</td>
<td>Students as individuals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td>Subtly technically based</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125</td>
<td>Support system</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 115 awareness.
- 116 In vivo code.
- 117 Individual dancer's connectedness to the larger dancing collective.
- 118 Reference to dance programs that "are similar to C College" - as having a community that sets the standards. - no "one overall identity." This code suggests that similar programs that also invite personal investigation are perceived to have no standard, right way of "doing dance."
- 119 Any reference to the small size of the dance program at C College and/or the geographical location of the college.
- 120 Feelings that result from the public feedback and/or comparison to other dancers by the faculty.
- 121 Reference to the perceived stereotypes of dance including: bodies, aesthetics, forms, and social construction of "dance."
- 122 Participants' expression of what is lacking or missing in the dance curriculum.
- 123 Faculty communicating that they take a generalist approach; focusing the curriculum, their teaching, pedagogical choices on the fact that each student is an individual.
- 124 In vivo code. Participant is referencing their perception that the dance department lacks technical rigor.
- 125 In vivo code.
<p>| | | | |</p>
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<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>126.</td>
<td>Supporting other dance opportunities on campus</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Reference to the ways in which dance outside the dance dept is perceived by dance faculty and peers. Explanation of involvement in these other dance opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>127.</td>
<td>“Tactile nature of the dept. really strong”</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>In vivo code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>128.</td>
<td>Taking risks</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Participants' feelings that they are being challenged in positive ways to break from their sense of normal or comfortable and try new things, take risks. Note: This code also suggests to me that faculty are not communicating that there is one way or right way to experience dance and movement in dance classes: highly individualized way of acquiring a unique movement vocabulary and knowing self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>129.</td>
<td>“Taking you as you are now and working with how they can incorporate their curriculum onto you.”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In vivo code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>130.</td>
<td>Teaching as an alive practice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In vivo code - faculty. Application to student ownership and independent responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131.</td>
<td>Technique and/or technical</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>132.</td>
<td>“There isn’t a mold they have to fit.”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In vivo code - faculty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>133.</td>
<td>“They look at us as dancers and not students.”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In vivo code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>134.</td>
<td>“They work with you as opposed to just breaking down.”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In vivo code.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>135.</td>
<td>Transforming through dance training</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Faculty discussing this process or these observations in dancers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>136.</td>
<td>Transitional stressors</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Participant identified challenge when first beginning and transitioning into the dance program at C College. In analysis, this code will probably suggest ideas for program improvement and/or development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>137.</td>
<td>Trust and Respect</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>138.</td>
<td>Types of Schools</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Attribute code for each participant for reference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>139.</td>
<td>Validating dancers' experiences and knowledge</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Explicit expression of feeling accepted by faculty and/or peers for a wide variety of experiences, abilities, backgrounds, knowledge, and interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140.</td>
<td>Valuing by others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ways in which an audience or the public define your sense of having a personal dance identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>141.</td>
<td>Valuing dance and different dancing bodies/abilities</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Faculty models that technical virtuosity of often not a heavily considered aspect of casting or working with dancers. Encourage students to look at the whole person and the strengths they have to offer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>142.</td>
<td>Verbal Encounter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In vivo code. Phrase used by participant to frame what she thought was needed to ease transitional stressors when beginning involvement in the dance dept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>143.</td>
<td>Visiting Professor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144.</td>
<td>Ways of working</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>How dancers work together, govern their rehearsals, approach problem solving among their peers, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>145.</td>
<td>“We are not giving directives. We are giving provocations.”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In vivo code - faculty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>146.</td>
<td>“We value the process more than the product.”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In vivo code - faculty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>147.</td>
<td>Years of Previous</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Attribute code for each participant for reference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>148. “You don’t get rewarded for being a star.”</td>
<td>In vivo code.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>149. “You know you have to have the box to be able to step outside of the box…..they give us the box.”</td>
<td>In vivo code.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H: Initial Code Sorting by Research Question

Attribute Codes:

Age
Grade Level
Years of Previous Training
Types of Schools
Description of Training
Experience with Performance

RQ 1: How (or is) previous dance training acknowledged or marginalized?

Appreciating former training
Acknowledging different technical approach
Breaking down habitual patterns
Building on what I have
Early experiences/influences
“Everyone has moments that they feel judged”
“It’s not comparable because we’re different people and the dept doesn’t try to compare us or make us all become…set us into a mold.”
Openness of program
No ego - no judgment
Physical baggage
Resistant tendencies
Social comparison/Public defining of ability
“Taking you as you are now and working with how they can incorporate their curriculum onto you.”

RQ 2: How (or does) community inform experience?

“A group of people whose differences support others”
Active exchange of ideas within the community
Belonging
Closeness within the community of dancers
Community as a source of appreciative and supportive practices
Comparison of dance department to other departments on campus
Connoisseurship
“Creative people need to take care of each other”
"Culture of basic goodness"
Dance made visible to the community
Dance Team
De-valuing of dance on campus
Democratic contexts
Disagreeing with faculty
Examining self in relation to others
Faculty as collaborators and/or equals
Faculty connection to students
Faculty - personal relationships with students
Faculty- relationships among them
Faculty - why they came to C College
Feelings about C College community applied to dance program
Feeling pressured to dance
“I have always felt this ongoing motion.”
Impact of auditions on sense of community
“It is certainly appreciated on an artistic level and we get really good turnout for all the shows.”
Learning with/from peers
Liberal arts environment
“Negativity is very detectable here and it’s not welcomed.”
Perceived lack of support
Public acknowledgement
Relationships
Respect
Ritualizing respect
Seeing the way that these women live their lives
Similar to C College
Small size
Support system
Supporting other dance opportunities on campus
“There isn’t a mold they have to fit.”
“They look at us as dancers and not students.”
“They work with you as opposed to just breaking down.”
Transitional stressors
Trust and Respect
Validating dancers’ experiences and knowledge
Valuing dance and different dancing bodies/abilities
Verbal Encounter
Visiting Professor
Ways of working
“You don’t get rewarded for being a star.”

RQ 3: How (or does) the curriculum provide individualized learning experiences?

Aesthetics as an approach to process
Appreciating dance as an art form
Body as instrument
Casting for concerts
Classroom dynamics
Collaboration
Collaborative meaning making
Communicating multiple connections
Competition not the goal
Constructive feedback
Course offerings
Creativity
Cultivating dialogue
Dance as a kinesthetic, embodied way of learning
Dance department goals
Defining Success
Department sees dance as serious work
Differences and challenges in working with beginners
“Embracing moments of discomfort as ways of getting information.”
Examining assumptions
Faculty encouraging personal investigation
Faculty identified "short coming"
Feedback
Feeling connected to program
Fostering ownership
Fun
Grading processes
Guest artists
Healthy
Healthy situation
Holistic, personal approach
Importance of being a Choreographer
Individual attention
Individual body response
Individuated artistic process
Injuries
Interdisciplinary
Not a conservatory – comparison
“Not to burst the perfect bubble we have created here….but…there are definitely people here that are competitive.”
Offering suggestions
Open to possibilities and process
Pedagogical approach
Perceived lack of technical rigor
Program strength
Providing voice
Pushing self as important part of developmental process
“Replace ambition with curiosity”
Responsive planning and teaching
Reproducibility
Respectfully evangelical
Safety of the body
Senior Exercise
Student identified curricular deficiency
Students as individuals
Subtly technically based
Teaching as an alive practice
“Tactile nature of the dept. really strong”
Taking risks
Technique and/or technical
"That is really good information to have."
"They have a lot of power in our department."
Transforming through dance training
“We are not giving directives. We are giving provocations.”
“We value the process more than the product.”
“You know you have to have the box to be able to step outside of the box…..they give us the box.”

RQ 4: How (or does) one’s dance identity evolve or change?

Alumni
Career path
Confidence
Commitment
Dance - anxieties about pay off
Dance as part of one's identity
Embodied Practice
Fostering Ownership
“I think he is also reflecting an ethos of what he has been a part of here.”
Life Practice
Personal growth
Personhood
Politics of the body
Self in relation to collective practice
Stereotypes about dance
Valuing by others
Appendix I: Initial Sorting of Code Families and Themes

RQ1
Themes:
1. Openness of Program  
   a. Taking you as you are now  
   b. Feeling Pressured to dance  
2. Respectfully evangelical  
3. Breaking Down Habitual Patters  
   a. Building on what I have  
   b. No ego; no judgment  
   c. It’s not comparable  
   d. Transitional stressors  
4. Resistant tendencies  
5. Competition not the Goal  
   a. Replace ambition with curiosity  
   b. Not to burst the perfect bubble  
6. Validating dancers’ experiences and knowledge

RQ2
Themes:
1. Culture of Basic Goodness – Community as a source of appreciative and supportive practices  
   a. Ritualizing respect  
   b. Support system  
   c. Negative impact of auditions  
2. Relationships with Faculty  
   a. Faculty connection to students  
      i. Perceived lack of support  
   b. Relationships among faculty  
   c. Faculty as collaborators and/or equals  
      i. Disagreeing with faculty  
   d. Personal relationships with students  
3. Learning with and from peers  
4. Small size  
   a. “Short comings”  
   b. Department sees dance as serious work  
   c. De-valuing of dance on campus  
5. Dance made visible in community contexts  
   a. Supporting other dance opportunities on campus
b. Comparison of dance department to other departments on campus

**RQ3**

**Themes:**
1. Faculty encouraging personal investigation
   a. Senior Exercise
   b. Pedagogical approaches
   c. Taking risks
2. Fostering Ownership
   a. Providing voice
   b. Importance of being a choreographer
   c. Feeling connected to the program
3. Body as instrument
   a. Safety of the body
4. Feedback
   a. Cultivating Dialogue
   b. Collaborative Meaning Making and Collaboration
      i. Casting for Concerts
      ii. Creativity
5. Perceived lack of technical rigor
   i. Student identified curricular deficiency

**RQ4:**

**Themes:**
1. Dance as part of one’s identity
   a. Life practice
2. Personal Growth
3. Self in relation to a collective practice
   a. Stereotypes about dance – valuing by others
      i. Pay off
      ii. Politics of the body
      iii. Career path
   b. Dancer versus someone who dances
Appendix J: Common Themes by Research Question

**RQ1: Previous Training**
Theme #1: Openness results in validation of experience and knowledge
Theme #2: Approach to movement preferences and habitual patterns
Theme #3: Competition not the goal.

**RQ2: Community**
Theme #1: Culture of basic goodness: community as a source of appreciative and supportive practices
Theme #2: Relationships with faculty
Theme #3: Learning with and from peers
Theme #4: Small size of the institution.

**RQ3: Curriculum**
Theme #1: Faculty commitment to individual process and curiosity
Theme #2: Fostering ownership and providing voice
Theme #3: Body as instrument
Theme #4: Feedback

**RQ4: Identity**
Theme #1: Life practice
Theme #2: Personal growth
Theme #3: Self in relation to a collective practice.
Appendix K: Roadmap of Findings

**RQ1:** How (or is) previous dance training acknowledged or marginalized?

**Finding:** All 13 participants (100%) expressed that the openness of the dance program to everyone, regardless of previous training, was the most important factor in feeling acknowledged and accepted. Previous training was insignificant to achievement in the program.

- **Theme #1:** Openness results in validation of experience and knowledge
  - Absence of devaluing and marginalization

- **Theme #2:** Approach to movement preferences and habitual patterns
  - Transitional stressors

- **Theme #3:** Competition not the goal
  - Absence of Hierarchy
  - Previous training

**RQ2:** How (or does) community inform experience?

**Finding:** All 13 participants (100%) cited that a “culture of basic goodness” presided over the dance program’s community in which a variety of appreciative and supportive practices were instrumental in shaping experience.

- **Theme #1:** Culture of basic goodness: Community as a source of appreciative and supportive practices
  - Ritualizing respect
  - Utilizing support systems
  - No audition required

- **Theme #2:** Relationships with Faculty
  - Faculty connection to students
  - Relationships among faculty
  - Faculty as collaborators
  - Personal relationships with faculty

- **Theme #3:** Learning with and from peers

- **Theme #4:** Small Size
  - Individual attention
  - Dance as a high art
  - Dance at C College – academic rigor
  - Dance made visible in community contexts
RQ3: How (or does) the curriculum provide individualized learning experiences?

Finding: All 13 participants (100%) indicated that the dance faculty encouraged personal investigation which facilitated the ability for students to foster ownership, have voice, and explore their individualized learning interests within the curriculum.

Theme #1: Faculty commitment to individual process and curiosity
   - Senior exercise
   - Taking risks

Theme #2: Fostering ownership and providing voice
   - Being a choreographer

Theme #3: Body as instrument
   - Safety of the body

Theme #4: Feedback
   - Creative Process

RQ4: How (or does) one’s dance identity evolve or change?

Finding: All 13 participants (100%) voiced that dance identity knowingly evolved through involvement in the dance program and coincided with an ability to articulate personal growth. The majority of participants also cited that dance identity was meditated, in part, by factors such as stereotypes and valuing of the field of dance, concerns about career choice pay off, and differing definitions of the dancing body.

Theme #1: Life Practice
   - Dance as a Job and Title

Theme #2: Personal Growth

Theme #3: Self in relation to a collective practice
   - Social construction of dance
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response #</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Years of Previous Training</th>
<th>Type of School(s)</th>
<th>Description of Training</th>
<th>Summary of Experience with Performance</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>Private dance studios; private high school with dance program</td>
<td>Modern; hip-hop, &quot;positive feedback&quot;; &quot;stylistic elements&quot;; &quot;basic technique&quot;</td>
<td>2 concerts per year in high school; musical theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Private dance studio</td>
<td>Modern; jazz, ballet, tap for school PE; non-competitive</td>
<td>Recitals; musical theatre; community service group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Private dance studio; private high school; summer programs</td>
<td>Ballet and Lyrical</td>
<td>1 recital per year in high school; 2 recitals per year in private studio</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Private high school; summer programs</td>
<td>Modern; &quot;technique is not my strong suit&quot;</td>
<td>No competitions; choreographer</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Private dance studio; summer programs (ballet)</td>
<td>ballet, tap, jazz; fun and relaxed; &quot;more about fun and the experience NOT technical&quot;</td>
<td>Recital with studio; annual concert at high school; musical theatre through school</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Schools outside U.S.</td>
<td>Cheerleading; jazz; Latin American dancing</td>
<td>Cheerleading competitions; recitals (at school)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Activity Type</td>
<td>Activity Details</td>
<td>Participation Type</td>
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<tr>
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<td>---------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Private dance studio</td>
<td>Yoga, African, ballet; &quot;never any intensive training&quot;</td>
<td>School-related performances</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>Private dance studios; Community organization; summer program</td>
<td>Jazz, tap, ballet, mostly hip-hop, &quot;not much feedback&quot;; &quot;more recreational&quot;</td>
<td>Musical theatre; few recitals</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Performing arts high school</td>
<td>Acting; &quot;not really understood my options as to creative movement possibilities&quot;</td>
<td>Musical theatre; assorted projects</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>None</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Private dance studio</td>
<td>Ballet and Irish dance</td>
<td>Nutcracker when young &quot;pretty costumes and shoes&quot;; &quot;non competitive events were much more fun&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Jazz, hip-hop</td>
<td>Musical Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None but involved in sports</td>
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**Appendix M: Master List of Pseudonyms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Dancers:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ailey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Cunningham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Duncan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Dunham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Graham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Fokine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Halprin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Humphrey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Hawkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Nijinski</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Nikolais</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Pavlova</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Paxton</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Faculty:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Shawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. St. Denis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Wigman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix N: September Field Visit Schedule

**Monday, September 5th:**
10:10-11:30 Observation
12:10-1:00 Observation
12:10-1:30 Observation
2:10-3:30 Observation

**Tuesday, September 6th:**
9:40-11:00 Observation
1:10-2:30 Observation
2:40-4:00 Observation
4:00-5:00 Halprin’s rehearsal

**Wednesday, September 7th:**
10:10-11:30 Observation
11:30 Interview with Ailey
12:10-1:30 Observation
2:10-3:30 Observation
3:30 Interview with Graham

**Thursday, September 8th:**
9:40-11:00 Observation
11:10-noon Choreographers Meeting
12:30 Interview with Cunningham
1:10-2:30 Observation
2:40-4:00 Observation
4:00 Interview with Dunham
5:00 Interview with Halprin
6:00 Interview with Wigman
7:00 Interview with Pavlova

**Friday, September 9th:**
10:10 Faculty rehearsal
11:30 Interview with Duncan
12:10-1:00 Observation
1:00-2:00 Focus Group with Faculty
Appendix O: October Field Visit Schedule

**Monday, October 10th:**
10:10-11:30  Observation
12:10-1:30  Observation
2:10-3:30  Observation

**Tuesday, October 11th:**
9:40-11:00  Observation (midterms)
11:10-noon  Production Meeting
1:10-2:30  Observation
2:40-4:00  Observation
4:15  Interview with Graham

**Wednesday, October 12th:**
10:10-11:30  Observation
12:10-1:00  Observation
1:30  Interview with Dunham
2:10-3:30  Observation
3:30  Interview with Cunningham
4:00  Focus Group with Faculty
5:00  Interview with Halprin
6:30  Interview with Pavlova
7:30  Ailey’s rehearsal

**Thursday, October 13th:**
9:40-11:00  Observation
11:15  Interview with Ailey
12:15  Interview with Duncan
1:10-2:30  Observation
2:40-4:00  Observation
4:10  1st Showing
Appendix P: November Field Visit Schedule

**Monday, October 31st:**
10:10-11:30 Observation
12:10-1:30 Observation (alternate location for class)
2:10-3:30 Observation

**Tuesday November 1st:**
9:30-10:40 Observation
11:10 University wide ceremony
1:10-2:30 Observation
2:40-4:00 Observation

**Wednesday, November 2nd:**
10:10-11:30 Observation (conferences)
12:10-1:00 Observation
1:00-1:30 Observation
1:30 Interview - follow-up with Wigman
2:10-3:30 Observation
3:30 Interview with Nikolais & Paxton
5:00 Interview with Halprin

**Thursday, November 3rd:**
9:40-11:00 Observation
11:10-11:50 Design meeting
12:00 Interview with Ailey
1:10-2:30 Observation
2:40-4:00 Observation
4:00 Interview with Graham
5:00 Interview with Dunham
7:00 Dance group on campus - practice

**Friday, November 4th:**
10:30-11:30 Faculty Focus Group
11:30 Interview with Duncan
12:15 Interview with Pavlova
1:15 Interview with Cunningham
Appendix Q: Focus Group Questions for Senior Dancers - May

1. What made you decide to get involved with the dance program at C College?

2. How would you define the community at C College?

3. Do you consider fellow dancers to be part of your community?

4. How would you define yourself as a dancer before you came to C College? How or has that changed?

5. How would you describe the relationships you observe among faculty?

6. How would you describe the relationships between faculty and the dancers?

7. How would you describe the relationship between/among peers?

8. How would you describe the experience and process of your senior exercise?
Appendix R: Interview Questions for Dancers – September

1. What made you decide to be part of the dance program at C College?

2. How would you describe the dance program?

3. How would you describe the philosophy of the dance program with regards to dance training? Previous training and/or experience?

4. How would you describe the dance curriculum?

5. Do you think there are opportunities to individualize your learning? In what ways? What or who does or does not facilitate those opportunities? Can you provide specific examples?

6. What choices have you had in structuring your study of dance beyond dance classes?

7. How has the type of environment in the dance program shaped your experience – especially as you began dancing at C College?

8. Do you think that the dance program has expectations of you as an individual or of all dancers in the program? How would you describe these?

9. How would you describe the general feedback the dance faculty provides? Do you think this relates to your previous training?

10. How are you graded?

11. What type of performance opportunities do you have?

12. Do you feel anything is missing from the program?
Appendix S: Interview Questions for Dancers – October

1. How would you describe a community?

2. Who do you think are members of the dance community at C College?

3. How or does a focus on individuals influence the sense of community for dancers?

4. Does creativity play a role in the dance community?

5. How do you think the dance community is viewed or perceived at C College?

6. What do you think the dance faculty does or does not do to create a sense of community for dancers?

7. In the context of your dance classes, do you feel comfortable learning from your peers? Why or why not? Describe.

8. How would you describe your interactions or relationships with other dancers?

9. Do you feel a sense of belonging to the community of dancers at C College?

   What gives you a sense of being connected? What is/are barrier(s) to feeling connected?
Appendix T: Interview Questions for Dancers – November

1. How would you describe yourself as a dancer before you came to C College?
2. Would you have called yourself a dancer before coming to C College? Why or why not?
3. How would you describe yourself as a dancer now? How has this view of yourself changed? Influences?
4. If somebody asked you who or what you are as a dancer – what would be your answer?
5. How or do you think your sense of who you are and your dance identity has evolved here?
6. Do you think your former sense of self has been helpful to you? Why or why not? In what ways?
7. Do you feel like there has been a breaking down process? If so, describe.
8. In terms of dance identity, has any event, class, role, etc. specifically shaped your sense of being a dancer?
9. How has dancing – the sense of who you are now as a dancer – how has that allowed you to develop personal qualities or changed your ways of thinking?
10. When you first transitioned to studying at C College here…what would have made the transition better or smoother for you?
11. What has been your biggest challenge? Frustration? Surprise? Success?
12. Who gets to define who you are as a dancer? Do you think there are social influences or pressures from the field? If so, explain.
13. What are your career plans?

14. Has C College given you the sense of identity as a dancer to be able to pursue those plans?
### Appendix U: Observation Protocol Template

**OBSERVATION:**
**DATE:**
**TIME:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEEDBACK: Faculty to individual student(s)</th>
<th>FEEDBACK: Faculty to class</th>
<th>FEEDBACK: Peer to Peer</th>
<th>Student Questions to Faculty</th>
<th>Student Questions to Peer(s)</th>
<th>Voicing of Student Perspective and/or Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection to Central Narrative (Curriculum and Instruction)</th>
<th>Presence of Individual Dancer and community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*NOTES & Additional Observations:
Appendix V: Faculty Focus Group Questions – May

1. Can you talk to me about the process of the Senior Exercise?
2. What is the written exam component? How is that developed?
3. Do you see the senior exercise as the culmination of students’ work and interests as well as a potential spring board to launch them into a career?
   What do you see as being on either side of the project for students?
4. Do you think that the process of being involved in the senior exercise helps dancers to better identify or narrow their interests?
5. What kind of feedback do the dance majors get during the process?
6. Can you tell me about the grading process?
7. Do the seniors receive any feedback or input during the process from their peers?
8. Could you talk to me about the sense of community here? How or do you think you, as faculty and/or as a program, are creating community with your dancers?
9. What types of dance training backgrounds do dancers have who are coming to C College?
10. Is there ever a circumstance or situation where someone wants to be a dance major and you would say no? Or not this class level?
11. When each dancer first enters the program, how do you see them evolving through the course of the program?
12. If I asked the students if their experiences coming into the program were aligned with their actual experiences – do you think they would feel that they were? Why or why not?

13. What are the dance program’s goals and/or mission? Goals for students?

14. How would you describe your relationship with the students?

15. How would you describe your relationship with one another (as faculty)?

16. How do you think students would describe it?

17. What brought each of you here to C College?

18. Since those points of entry – how do you feel like you have grown as artists?
Appendix W: Faculty Focus Group Questions – September

1. How would you define your role as dance faculty here?

2. Do you think there is a type of student that decides to major in dance here? Or a list of characteristics you typically observe?

3. How would you describe the dance curriculum here at C College?

4. How or do you think the program provides opportunities for dancers to individualize their learning?

5. What type of performance opportunities do dancers have?

6. Do you think the department has expectations of dancers? Describe.

7. How do you think dancers would describe the feedback they receive?

8. How are dancers graded? Examples? Connection to the curriculum?

9. How would you describe the dynamics are between the dance faculty and the students?

10. Do you think there anything missing from the dance curriculum or is there a potentially missing link among faculty?

11. What do you think the dance program prepares dancers to do after graduation?
Appendix X: Faculty Focus Group Questions – October

1. Can you talk to me about the process of how someone becomes a major or minor here? How can other students be involved in the dance program?

2. Do you feel like you are ever recruiting students or putting pressure on them to major in dance?

3. What if anything you do as faculty try and do to connect students with the central narrative of the dance program?

4. How or do you see students learning from each other in dance classes? What do you observe as the evidence that this is or is not happening?

5. Does the fact that the dance program is open to everyone equate with not having a technical focus? Or not being a rigorous program?

6. Do you feel any pressure as a program to offer other genres of dance to connect with the broader college community? If so, from whom or what sources?

7. Do you think there is a sense of having a dance community here? Describe. Examples?

8. How do you think dancers are perceived in the larger C College community?

9. How do you decide who teaches what classes and when? How do you individually prepare to teach or design an approach to class?
Appendix Y: Faculty Focus Group Questions – November

1. How would you describe yourselves as dancers or your sense of self within the field of dance?

2. Do you think there is a difference for yourselves – or do you see students thinking through – a difference between being a dancer versus someone who dances?

3. How or do you use students’ previous training, experiences and/or sense of who they are as dancers to transition them or include them throughout their time in the program?

4. The academy typically allots time for the detraining of dancers to get rid of habitual patterning. Traditionally, that comes with some deep seeded assumptions about what dance has to look like – a right/wrong. There are different ways by which faculty can choose to unlearn students. Do you think unlearning happens here? What does it look like? How do you do that? What is the purpose?

5. Do you track dancers’ backgrounds or have a transitional process for students, outside of advising, to familiarize them with the program and related processes?

6. Why do you think having students be choreographers – or that creative process- is so important to you as faculty and to the dance program here at C College?

7. How or do you think that the choices you have made with the curriculum and the ways you are open to various dance identities contribute to dancers’ ways of thinking or examining their sense of self?

8. Do you think this impacts how dancers think/define themselves beyond C College?
9. Do you think our profession supports that same kind of mindful, open, life practice, multiple entry points, ways of knowing self that you have previously described? Why or why not? Examples?

10. In terms of feedback, are you, as a faculty, making conscious choices about the ways you are presenting and/or asking questions to students in dance classes? How do you make those choices?

11. Do you think there is something unique about what is happening in the dance program here? If so, specific examples? What differentiates the program?
## Appendix Z: Consistency Chart of Findings, Interpretations and Conclusions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1</th>
<th>Finding 1</th>
<th>Interpretations</th>
<th>Conclusions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| How (or is) previous training acknowledged or marginalized? | All 13 participants expressed that the openness of the dance program to everyone, regardless of previous training, was the most important factor in feeling acknowledged and accepted. Previous training was insignificant to achievement in the program. | - The openness enabled students to focus on ways to be involved and feel confident as they integrated their experience and background.  
- Marginalization of experience does not provide a supportive environment and therefore helping students maintain their sense of self was significant.  
- There are realistic expectations on the part of a liberal arts institution vis-à-vis how students should be accepted and educated.  
- There may be realistic and unrealistic expectations on the part of students who study dance at this type of institution.  
- Awareness and acceptance of fellow dancers comes into play.  
- Affective learning environments may help minimize feelings of competition and judgment.  
- Absence of placement auditions provides greater | Perceptions that the openness of the dance program did not require previous training and was a central organizing factor for experience:  
Students who dance in open college programs should neither expect that their previous dance training or experience will be required for participation nor that it can fully prepare them for a more academic approach to dance study. Students undertake a highly creative, self-selected journey through an environment that emphasizes both collaborative exploration and personal autonomy. The primary purpose of the openness of a dance program is to provide entre to a holistic way to approach dance. That is to advance self-expression and the construction of knowledge |

Common Themes:  
1. Openness results in validation of experience and knowledge.  
2. Approach to movement preferences and habitual patterns.  
3. Competition not the goal.
| entre. | • Intrapersonal dimension is important when integrating former and current experiences to deploy an array of assets.  
• Unconditional acceptance yields high self-efficacy and personal agency.  
• Presence of idiosyncratic approaches is important for self-expression. | based on the broadest spectrum of what it means to dance or be a dancer. |
<table>
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<th>Research Question 2</th>
<th>Finding 2</th>
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<th>Conclusions</th>
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| How (or does) community inform experience? | All 13 participants cited that a “culture of basic goodness” presided over the dance program’s community in which a variety of appreciative and supportive practices were instrumental in shaping experience. | • A baseline of trust and support is important if individual differences are to be valued and educative in the community.  
• Faculty, by assuming a regulatory rather than authoritative role, encourages autonomy and collaboration.  
• Nurturing relationships with faculty are valued.  
• Dancers learn best in the absence of a hierarchical model whereby mutual dialogue and collaborative learning promote success.  
• Individual goals and community expectations are intertwined.  
• The size and culture of the institution can influence the dance community and its visibility and/or acceptance.  
• Learning with peers helps | Participants were certain that the dance community supported them and articulated practices that were in place that made them feel substantiated.  
Feeling trusted and supported alone is insufficient. Dancers also need dialogue with faculty and peers to form relationships that provide opportunities for reflection and action through more informal means. Sensitivity to competing cultures or academic priorities within the institution is also important as goals and expectations can feel dichotomous. Dancers need to be open to learning through observation and collaboration in order to develop new learning and understanding. |

Common Themes:  
1. Culture of basic goodness: Community as source of appreciative and supportive practices.  
2. Relationships with faculty  
3. Learning with and from peers.  
4. Small size of the institution.
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<th>negate competition and facilitates entre to the dance community.</th>
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<td>Development occurs due to interrelated structural supports including observational learning and interpersonal relationships.</td>
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<td>Research Question 3</td>
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| How (or does) the curriculum provide individualized learning experiences? | All 13 participants indicated that the dance faculty encouraged personal investigation which facilitated the ability for students to foster ownership, have voice, and explore their individualized learning interests within the curriculum. | - Process and content are interconnected.  
- There are differences in the expectations and values between dance at C College and an institution with a B.F.A. emphasis.  
- Faculty plays a pivotal role in advisement that meets students’ needs for involvement and self-directed choices in the discovery process.  
- Knowledge as contextual was stressed.  
- Students had realistic expectations for directing their own learning.  
- Learning to see and value dance as an art form is important.  
- Dancers generally want to be in charge of their own bodies and its attunement to skills and sensations.  
- Examining external factors | Encouraging personal investigation, fostering ownership, and exploring individualized interests as necessities to navigate dance curriculum. |
| **Common Themes:** | | | In the absence of a more formal, codified approach to dance study, process and content are intertwined. Faculty is a catalyst for reflection and action, and at the very least, provides ways to ameliorate feelings of isolation or misaligned expectations in curricular investigations. Students may desire autonomy and be able to articulate their learning goals, but may not have the skills to conduct such investigations. Through personal investigations, dancers have the opportunity to share information, challenge assumptions, test their creative |
that potentially exert regulatory control over the body are believed to make learning dance more effective.
- Feedback, as constructive criticism, is a means to cultivate critical reflection. All of these opportunities hold potential for the development of new learning, construction of new body knowledge, and the ability to give and receive constructive criticism as part of the learning about and advocating for the art form.
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<th>Research Question 4</th>
<th>Finding 4</th>
<th>Interpretations</th>
<th>Conclusions</th>
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| How (or does) one’s dance identity evolve or change? | All 13 participants voiced that dance identity knowingly evolved through involvement in the dance program and coincided with ability to articulate personal growth. The majority of participants also cited that dance identity was mediated, in part, by factors such as stereotypes and valuing of the field of dance, concerns about career choice pay off, and differing definitions of the dancing body. | • Awareness of personal growth is central to identity development.  
• Social dynamics and dialogical encounters within a dance program can contribute to one’s identity because dance is a collective practice.  
• Students generally want to be in charge of their learning and self-directed in their decision making, and most find that their sense of personal growth comes in part, from encounters with others precisely because dance is a social, collective practice. These opportunities enable dancers to expand and explore multiple aspects of their evolving identity and find sense of self through a life practice in dance – rather than a specific career. A second conclusion is that whether students identify themselves as dancers within the larger collective is largely a function of the social stereotypes and public consumerism of the field. An open college dance | What helps or hinders dancers’ evolving identities and integrated sense of self.  
In the process of dance studies, participants found factors that may advance or challenge their sense of dance identity. There are two conclusions that can be drawn from this finding. First, dancers want to be in charge of their learning and self-directed in their decision making, and most find that their sense of personal growth comes in part, from encounters with others precisely because dance is a social, collective practice. These opportunities enable dancers to expand and explore multiple aspects of their evolving identity and find sense of self through a life practice in dance – rather than a specific career. A second conclusion is that whether students identify themselves as dancers within the larger collective is largely a function of the social stereotypes and public consumerism of the field. An open college dance |

Common Themes:  
1. Life practice  
2. Personal growth  
3. Self in relation to a collective practice
is problematic and influences dance identity.

- Moving towards self-authorship and an integrated sense of self is important!

| Program that provides ways to move dancers towards self-authorship may offset these concerns by helping them to rely on their own personal characteristics, form a more integrated sense of self, and cultivate the desire to continue to grow and transform their dance identity for a lifetime. |