Choreographer as Coach: Facilitating Engagement During the Dance Making Process

Emily D. Bryan

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalrepository.unm.edu/thea_etds

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theatre & Dance ETDs by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact kevco@unm.edu.
Emily D. Bryan
Candidate
Theatre and Dance
Department

This dissertation is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

Approved by the Dissertation Committee:

Donna Jewell, Chairperson

Dr. Mary Anne Santos Newhall

Vladimir Conde Reche

Zoë Knights
CHOREOGRAPHER AS COACH:
FACILITATING ENGAGEMENT DURING THE DANCE MAKING PROCESS

by

EMILY D. BRYAN

B.A., Dance and English, Gustavus Adolphus College, 2009

DISSERTATION
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts
Dance
The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

May 2014
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank and acknowledge the members of my Dissertation committee, Donna Jewell, Mary Anne Newhall, Vladimir Conde Reche and Zoë Knights. Your support and guidance has been greatly appreciated throughout the completion of my degree and the creation of my MFA in Dance final concert, Players of the Ring. You have encouraged me to push boundaries as an artist and a scholar, and I am grateful for everything I have learned and become during my time here at UNM.

I would also like to thank and acknowledge Eva Encinias Sandoval and Visiting Faculty/Artist Erika Pujic for their feedback during the creation of Players of the Ring. Thank you for sharing your insights and ideas while I was making this work.

Outside of UNM I am thankful for the support and encouragement of two of my undergraduate teachers at Gustavus Adolphus College, Michele Rusinko and Melissa Rolnick. You have supported me as an artist beyond my time at Gustavus and I am grateful to have such wonderful dance mentors.

Thank you to the dancers who were essential to creating Players of the Ring: Dalila Baied, Chelsea Whitney Costello, Sonia Orlofsky Engman, Sarah Rae Hogland, Kaitlin Innis, Shelby Eileen Livingston, Elysia Ana Pope and Dalton Alexander Valerio. Your commitment and artistry brought the show to life, and I am so thankful to have gone through the process of creation with you.

Thank you to my family for your endless love and support in all that I do. I would especially like to thank my parents who instilled in me a love of learning and a passion for education. Watching both of you pursue the highest level of education in your field inspired me to do the same, and I can’t thank you enough for encouraging me to be the best I can be at doing what I love.

Finally, thank you to my husband Austen Bryan. There are not enough words to express my gratitude for your love and support throughout graduate school. Thank you.
CHOREOGRAPHER AS COACH:
FACILITATING ENGAGEMENT DURING THE DANCE MAKING PROCESS

by

Emily D. Bryan
B.A., Dance and English, Gustavus Adolphus College, 2009
M.F.A., Dance, University of New Mexico, 2014

ABSTRACT

Dance is formed from the interactions between the choreographer and the dancers that occur during the workshop and rehearsal phase of the dance making process. The choreographer’s art is brought to life not solely through the creation of the choreography, but through the interpretation of the choreography in the bodies of the dancers. Thus, the time spent coaching dancers is an important piece of the choreographer’s work. Artists have written about the value of dancers in their work, and educators provide theories about training dancers in the classroom, but little has been written about practical methods for the professional choreographer to engage their dancers throughout the creative process. The importance of facilitating engagement during the dance making process is illustrated in this dissertation by the author’s application of methods used in sports psychology with dancers in the choreographic project, Players of the Ring. When choreographers make engagement in the work a priority for dancers by building a community, fostering a positive team environment and encouraging motivation they make possible a more successful performance of their work by invested dancers.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER ONE: Perspectives on Process ...................................................................... 4

CHAPTER TWO: Applying Principles of Sport Psychology to the Creative Process .......... 17

CHAPTER THREE: Players of the Ring: The Choreographic Process ............................... 33

CONCLUSION ................................................................................................................ 57

REFERENCES
References Cited .......................................................................................................... 60
References Consulted ..................................................................................................... 62

APPENDIX
Appendix 1: Players of the Ring CONCERT VIDEO – FEBRUARY 14, 2014 PERFORMANCE, Submitted as a supplementary file to LoboVault Repository .................................................................................................................. 64
INTRODUCTION

Richard Schechner writes that although many artists focus on the end product of theatrical art making (the show), the performance actually consists of a seven step performance sequence: “training, workshop, rehearsal, warm-ups, the performance itself, cool-down, and aftermath” (Schechner 16). Schechner notes that different cultures focus on different aspects of the performance sequence, sometimes belittling or overlooking certain steps depending on what is important to them. In my own dance making, I value the workshop and rehearsal stages of the performance sequence and the interactions between the choreographer and the dancers that occur during this phase of the process. It is in these interactions that the dance is formed, for the choreographer’s art is brought to life not solely through the creation of the choreography, but through the interpretation of the choreography in the bodies of the dancers. Thus, the time spent mentoring and coaching the dancers is an important piece of the choreographer’s work.

In the creation of my final MFA Choreographic Project, Players of the Ring, I sought to focus my attention on the importance of the performance sequence as a whole rather than focusing entirely on the end product. In previous choreographic pursuits, I concluded that the performance of my work was more successful when my dancers were emotionally and mentally engaged during the creation of the dance, felt a sense of ownership in the process, and developed a community amongst one another. Thus, the subject of my research during my final MFA Choreographic Project and for this dissertation became how choreographers function as coaches during the workshop and rehearsal stages to foster an environment in which this can be achieved. An environment where dancers are motivated and engaged allows a dance to reach its full potential in performance. A dance reaches its full potential
when it is performed with physical accuracy and artistry, and the dancers communicate the content of the work through their performance. In this paper, I will show that in order to achieve the full potential of a dance, it is critical for a choreographer to develop a sense of engagement, ownership and community amongst the dancers throughout the rehearsal process.

My research into this topic led me into several different fields of study including education, dance pedagogy, sports psychology and performance studies. There is little existing research in the field of dance studies on the way choreographers engage and motivate their dancers. It is written about in an educational context for dance teachers, but there seems to be little concern in academia for practical methods used by professional choreographers to engage dancers in their work. In pulling together research from various fields, this paper offers evidence to support the importance of the choreographer’s role as a coach and facilitator of engagement during the performance sequence in producing successful performance of their work.

Definitions

Throughout this paper I use the terms engagement, commitment and investment as desirable attributes among dancers with the following definitions:

- **Engage**: To pledge oneself; to do or take part in something; to give attention to something. **Synonyms**: absorb, engross, enthrall, fascinate, grip, immerse, interest, involve, occupy (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

- **Engagement**: The state of being engaged; emotional involvement or commitment (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).
• *Commit*: Obligate, bind; to pledge or assign to a particular course or use.

*Synonyms*: Carry out, perform, do, execute, follow through, fulfill, accomplish (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

• *Commitment*: the state or an instance of being obligated or emotionally impelled (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

• *Invest*: to use, give, or devote (time, talent, etc) as for a purpose or to achieve something (Dictionary.com).

• *Investment*: An act of devoting time, effort, or energy to a particular undertaking with the expectation of a worthwhile result (Oxford English Dictionary).
CHAPTER ONE
Perspectives on Process

Artist Perspectives

In her book, *The Creative Habit*, Twyla Tharp writes:

“The first steps of a creative act are like groping in the dark: random and chaotic, feverish and fearful, a lot of busy-ness with no apparent or definable end in sight…You can’t just dance or paint or write or sculpt. Those are just verbs. You need a tangible idea to get you going. The idea, however miniscule, is what turns the verb into a noun- paint into a painting, sculpt into sculpture, write into writing, dance into a dance” (Tharp 94).

Tharp calls the experience of turning the verb into a noun “scratching”, which she determines is like “clawing at the side of a mountain to get a toehold, a grip, some sort of traction to keep moving upward and onward” (95). The creative process is daunting and at times can feel like all you are doing is scratching for a brilliant idea. You continue scratching and working until suddenly it makes sense. You discover what it is you are actually trying to create or have been in the process of creating all along. The difficult part is that the final product would not be what it has become without all of that scratching. Art does not just come into existence in an hour, or a day, or a week. It takes time to grow and blossom.

The content of Tharp’s *Creative Habit* is entirely focused on the process of creativity and making art. After a lifetime building a successful career as a choreographer, Tharp outlines the rituals of preparation required to begin being creative, the need to recognize one’s own artistic tendencies, tools for crafting a piece of art, how to deal with being stuck,
and offers wide-ranging advice for how to go about the process of art making. She sheds light on how creative people work, and makes it clear that it is indeed a process. She believes creativity is something you can practice and improve upon the longer you work at it. She writes, “Happily, this ideal creative state is not a random event, not a stroke of luck or coincidence. It is within your grasp. You can construct it and control it” (Tharp 237). Once you understand that great creative work does not come into being with the strike of a lightning bolt, you can let yourself engage in the process. In doing so, your work will not only become more fruitful, but the practice will become more enjoyable as you focus on the act of making art rather than focusing solely on the end product.

There are those who believe that the process of exploration, or scratching, involved in the beginning stages of art making in and of itself can be rewarding. Choreographer Anna Halprin’s work has re-defined the dance making process. The unifying thread of her work is “an attempt to find a process that unites personal growth with artistic growth, life and art, one aspect feeding off of the other and continuously coming together in new ways” (Halprin, “Community Art” 64). Rather than sticking to the traditional structure of choreographer creating movement and teaching it to dancers, Halprin developed the San Francisco Dancer’s Workshop in 1955 where students came to simply explore movement themselves through exercises that made them simultaneously choreographer and dancer. Halprin sought to give dancers the freedom to perform as themselves rather than acting out a role in performance. The exercises led to greater awareness of their own bodies in space and time. “The Struggle” is an example of one such exercise given to dancers by Halprin:
The Struggle

Objective: Release energy in the arms and chest, check out response to struggle, aggression, applying resistance to another person.

Description:

Person I: Lie on back with fingers laced and behind back of head, elbows on floor. Let out a sound as you bring your elbows together.

Questions: What image was evoked as you listened to your sound? How did you feel doing that movement?

Person II: Straddle your partner, and place your hands on his/ her elbows and apply strong resistance as your partner struggles to bring elbows together.

Questions: What did you feel forcing your partner to struggle? What images were evoked by your partner's sound? (Halprin, “Community Art” 66)

Halprin writes that these types of exercises led them to create movement with the body that was bold, effective, and direct (Halprin, “Community Art” 70). Halprin valued the emotions that arose during exercises like this and encouraged dancers to acknowledge them and use them as a means to create something. Exercises like this would often generate material used in performance, but other times did not lead to anything except the immediate experience. The experience of the mover was of prime importance and whether or not it lead to performance did not matter. For Halprin, the experience of moving and discovering oneself in the movement was more interesting and valuable than being concerned with a final product.
This is not to say that Halprin did not create performances. In fact, her performances were quite spectacular. There are many aspects of Halprin’s choreography that make it unique and important in the history of dance and theatre. For the purposes of this discussion of process, I would like to focus on one unifying aspect of her work: the focus on community through the experience of the performer. Many of her works were linked to achieving social change. One of these pieces was City Dance (1976-78). City Dance invited people to cooperatively find their own path through an urban environment (Ross, Anna Halprin 314). It involved hundreds of people in San Francisco, both dancers and non-dancers. Halprin writes that the intention of the piece was to “…unify performance, environment, and people to achieve a sense of ‘community’” (Halprin, “Planetary Dance” 56). She goes on to say that the chief intention of this work was to “…understand how the process of creation and performance could be used to accomplish concrete results: social change, personal growth, physical alignment, and spiritual attunement” (56). In other words, Halprin sought to develop an “integrated life/art process” (56).

In creating pieces like this, Halprin did not worry about the perspective of the spectator. Instead of creating the work to satisfy the aesthetic desires of someone watching, she wanted to create the work as an experience for both performers and spectators. When asked about the gap between the actual experience of the performer doing her work and how it feels for the spectator, Halprin responds that “I want witnesses who realize that we are dancing for a purpose- to accomplish something in ourselves and in the world…The role of the witness is to understand the dance and support the dancers who have undertaken the challenge of performing” (Schechner and Halprin 71). Essentially, Halprin wanted her spectators to witness and understand the experience of the performers. In a sense, pieces like
City Dance are rituals. People moved together “as if they were parts of a single body, not in uniform motion, but in deeply interrelated ways” (Halprin, “Planetary Dance” 57). Halprin re-discovered what ancient cultures knew so well: that large groups moving together in community creates a unique energy, one that taps into a deep body-mind connection. By giving the participants a score, Halprin directed that energy to create a ritual experience centered on the topic in which she was interested. If the participants were truly involved in the ritual, spectators would feel the energy. The aesthetics did not matter, but the experience of the group generated an experience for everyone who saw it. By focusing on the process of creating the sense of community and ritual, and not focusing on the end product itself, Halprin’s work was successful in communicating the intent of each piece.

Community, ritual and experimentation in process were integral to Halprin’s work. Can the sense of community be applied and effective in works with more technical elements? Do other choreographers place the same value as Halprin on personal growth resulting from the scratching process? Can the tribal feel of community and ritual exist in a work presented on a proscenium stage? I believe the answer to these questions is yes; but other artists do not talk about it in the same way that Halprin discusses her exploration of process and community.

Whether intentional or not, community is always developed among artists working on a project together. Working towards a mutual goal, spending hours in the studio together, and sharing ideas inevitably builds community. Some communities are stronger than others, based on the importance placed on its development by the choreographer. For Halprin, it was clearly important based on the outcome of her works and the way she speaks and writes about her process. Other choreographers have their own ways of speaking about the way they
work with their dancers throughout the process of creation. Trisha Brown was among the first dancers to study with Halprin at the San Francisco Dancers Workshop. Halprin’s methods of improvisation influenced Brown, and upon returning to New York she became an integral part of the Postmodern choreographic movement of the 1960s and 70s. Focusing on dance for the sake of dance, structure, improvisation, and everyday actions as movement, the Postmoderns often put the process of dance making on display. They sought to turn choreographic convention on its head and make new rules for what was considered dance. A frequently used tool for Postmodern choreographers was creating a task for the dancers to complete onstage. For example, Brown used seven lines of tape that the dancers must travel through while descending levels (Rulegame 5, 1964); or, a cargo net hanging above the floor with articles of clothing attached to it that dancers had to traverse over while putting on and taking off the clothes (Floor of the Forest, 1970). These tasks forced the dancers to be alert and intellectual as they made decisions during performance.

Brown continued to recognize the importance of process and the role of the dancers in the progression of a piece throughout her career. Even as she created work with set choreography, the dancers’ responsibility remained important. She says:

I’ve a lot of feelings about the reciprocity of creation in the making of a dance. I don’t ask my dancers to go make the phrases for me; but what they’re capable of doing, what their excellences are, disparate and arising unpredictably from moment to moment, that’s what the audience is going to see. Because I’m making it on them and for them, their very beings are in trade. And that’s reciprocity. That’s how deeply they are in it (qtd in Morgenroth 65).
From this quote we can infer that the experience of the dancers is important to Brown in her work. She values the process and recognizes the importance of the dancers within the development of the work. Even when the piece is not improvisational or hinged on the dancers making decisions in the moment, the ability of the dancers to make choices in the artistic performance of set choreography is essential.

Another choreographer who values his dancers in the process of creation is Bill T. Jones. Both his dancers and their personal engagement with his work are central to his methods of creation:

I want my dancers to be in a place of engagement with themselves and their dancing. I wish to put into young people early on a sense of discipline and the sense that they are involved in something that is a spiritual pursuit. You must approach it like any serious spiritual pursuit with a form that we call a practice. Respect your body, which is your instrument. Understand it. Understand its boundaries, its history, how it fits into the world. Make sure you’re equipped with intellectual curiosity so that you can answer questions about what you do (qtd in Morgenroth 142).

Jones not only values the dancers’ experiences, but he values the dancers’ intellectual engagement in his work. While some choreographers only write about their own process of generating material or structuring a dance, Jones has a lot to say about how he works with his dancers through the process. In Joyce Morgenroth’s Speaking of Dance, Jones gives an example of how he pushes his dancers to invest in the work and make it personal:
The work I was doing was very personal. Then I’d give it to the company. There are places where I’d give them an image of some sentimental thing my mother had said to me. ‘Okay, if that image is not going to work for you, what is going to work for you? There must be an urgency in it. What are you feeling at any moment in this abstract work?’ And then I’d say to them, ‘I can tell you’re lying.’ And I’m constantly in their faces. ‘You’re being lazy. You’re hiding. You’re not putting anything in here. I can tell. I can tell.’

They’d ask, ‘But what do you want from us? We’re doing the movement!’

‘Well, what do you want from the movement? Why are you doing something that’s meaningless?’

‘Well, I don’t know, tell me what it means.’

‘No,’ I’d say, ‘it has to be in you. Give it meaning’ (qtd in Morgenroth 142).

For Jones, the work would not be successful if his dancers were not personally emotionally invested in the piece. Through the process of creation Jones pushes the dancers to discover meaning in the movement. It is clear in this example that Jones does not believe the presentation of his work would be as successful if his dancers were not able to make it personal and have their own experience with the choreography.

Though they use different approaches and have different outcomes, Jones, Brown and Halprin all suggest that the investment of the dancers is key to the success of the performance.
of their work. It is through the experience of the dancers that the dance is brought to life, and they recognize the importance of working in community with their dancers through the process. However, aside from the scores given to dancers in Halprin’s work, we do not know the specific methods and tools for fostering engagement used by choreographers.

As Tharp said, creativity is not a random event. You can grasp and control it. Recognizing that dancers, and their experiences in process and performance, are important is one step toward controlling and generating creativity. All art is made through a process of creation, and dance is unique in that it is born through the body. Harnessing the power of community and personal experience opens up possibilities in dance making, for it is through the transmission of experience that ideas are communicated. Awareness of the tools that are available to create community and motivation is necessary for choreographers to begin the process of engagement with their dancers. I will discuss tools and methods for choreographers to use to foster engagement in Chapter Two.

Margaret H’Doubler and the Value of Teaching the Process

“The purpose of education is to give the body and soul all the beauty and all the perfection of which they are capable.” –Plato

Choreographers are not only creators, they are also teachers. They are constantly teaching movement and shaping, forming and re-shaping the way the dancers perform that movement through corrections and critiques. The goals and theories of dance education can
be applied to the dance making process to inform the way choreographers approach working with a group of dancers even if they are not students.

There are examples in literature of educators with specific philosophies about how to motivate students. For this paper, I have chosen to focus on one educator whose methodology and theories on dance education are extremely applicable to the dance making process. Margaret H’Doubler, founder of the first dance program in higher education at the University of Wisconsin, was a trailblazer in developing a dance pedagogy that integrated the body and mind. A biology major in her undergraduate career at The University of Wisconsin, she became a women’s basketball coach at the University after graduating. H’Doubler later attended teachers college at Columbia University in 1916. Her supervisor, Blanche Trilling, approved her leave of absence from coaching with the caveat that while in New York H’Doubler find a “dance worthy of a college woman’s time” (Ross 102). In her book, Moving Lessons, Janet Ross points out that while at Columbia, H’Doubler took class with John Dewey who that year had published his philosophy on education in Democracy and Education. In it he writes:

It would be impossible to state adequately the evil results which have flowed from this dualism of mind and body, much less to exaggerate them. Some of the more striking effects may, however, be enumerated. In part bodily activity becomes an intruder. Having nothing, so it is thought, to do with mental activity, it becomes a distraction, an evil to be contended with. For the pupil has a body and brings it to school along with his mind. And the body is, of necessity, a wellspring of energy; it has to do something. But its activities, not being utilized in occupation with things which yield significant results, have
to be frowned upon. They lead the pupil away from the lesson with which his “mind” ought to be occupied; they are sources of mischief. (Dewey 165)

Dewey’s philosophy regarding experience and education in part led H’Doubler to the new kind of dance she brought back to Wisconsin. She was interested in finding a dance that connected the mind with the body, discovering this connection in a class for children taught by Alys Bentley.

In the class, H’Doubler followed Bentley’s instructions to work with flexion, extension and rotation of various joints while lying on the floor. It became clear to her that this model of exploring the structural changes in the body that occur in movement without the pull of gravity was different than what she had ever seen before. H’Doubler believed that through understanding the anatomy of the human body and having a conscious experience of it through movement she could foster a molding together of mind and body and begin to develop a “dance that was worthy of a college woman’s time” (Ross 102):

In order to work toward this end, our theory must be built on a mastery of the structure and natural movements of the body, and a knowledge of the principles of aesthetics, and a thorough understanding of the psychology of the emotions. This carries us over into what is the science of dance, the systematized knowledge of cause and effect, which tells us how to adjust our efforts to attain the desired ends. (H’Doubler, “Dance and Its Place in Education” 7)

What H’Doubler brought back to Wisconsin is important because she focused her classes not on performance, but rather on development of knowledge about human anatomy and how to
express through the body. She introduced a way of learning dance that emphasized the process of learning how to perform a movement and what performing that movement did to the body physically and emotionally. H’Doubler did not want her students to simply dance a movement; she wanted them to think broadly about movement, dance, and life. The experience of learning about dance was of more importance than a performance.

H’Doubler’s central goal was the development of the creative capacities of the individual. She wanted her students to do more than just imitate movement; she aimed to develop expressive, thinking dancers that made individual artistic choices:

In the end, everything depends upon the individual. The instructor can give reasons for, can show how; but, when it comes to the act itself, the results will depend upon the student’s advancement in control and artistic integrity and his potentialities as an artist. It is best, as well as inevitable, that such should be the case; for, when the body moves according to its structural principles, it moves like all other bodies and suggests the same forms. But, when movement is submitted to the dictates of an individual intellect and emotion, it ceases to be mechanically determined and becomes a manifestation of a unique and individual being. (H’Doubler, “Creative Art Experience” 96)

H’Doubler’s focus on process and the experience of the individual can be applied to the way choreographers work in rehearsal. Choreographers ultimately need their dancers to express the choreography through their bodies on stage. In taking H’Doubler’s approach in the creative process and taking the time to break down specific movements and discuss the intricacies in the body physically and emotionally, a choreographer can lead the dancer into
integrating mind and body and more deeply experiencing each movement. By encouraging the dancer to go beyond imitating movement, the dancer will become more engaged and invested in its performance. In doing this, the choreographer is supporting autonomy in their dancers and facilitating the internalization of extrinsic motivation, which will be discussed further in Chapter Two. Allowing dancers to take ownership of their own expressive and creative capacities and supporting the individual’s growth and development will lead to a more successful performance of the choreographer’s work because the dancers are more invested in the work on a personal level.
CHAPTER TWO

Applying Principles of Sports Psychology to the Creative Process

Fostering engagement, ownership and community is something that leaders in many settings strive to accomplish. One set of leaders that have much in common with choreographers are coaches of sports teams. Like choreographers, they work with a group of athletes to accomplish a physical task. Where coaches differ from choreographers is the lack of artistry coupled with physicality that is present in dancing. However, choreographers can help their work reach it’s fullest potential in performance by acting more like a coach and utilizing tools from sport psychology during the rehearsal process. The field of sport psychology tackles the dualism of mind and body as discussed by Dewey; it seeks to integrate mind and body in studying the psychological concerns of physical activity and sports. Application of sport psychology helps coaches and athletes work more effectively in practice to achieve success in performance. These same principles can be applied to the dance making process.

Facilitating Engagement Through Motivation

The psychological concept that I have found most relevant to the discussion of engagement through process is motivation. Motivation can be defined simply as a “person’s willingness to expend effort to achieve a particular goal under a particular set of circumstances” (Snowman, McCown and Biehler 367). When a dancer commits to dancing for a choreographer, they are willingly expending effort. If this is true, they have a certain
amount of motivation when beginning the process. Every dancer has a different initial motivation for doing a project: interest in the choreographer’s work, exposure in the field, desire to perform, etc. What if, however, the original motivation for dancing in the piece fades away throughout the process? The choreographer can work in a way that encourages their dancers’ motivation, and thus fosters engagement in the process.

Generally, there are two defined types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is the “tendency to engage in an activity for its own sake, the enjoyment it provides, or the feelings of accomplishment that it fosters, without the incentive of an external reward” (Lazaroff 26). Extrinsic motivation is engaging in an activity for external reasons outside of the self such as rewards or the influence of others. Hardy, Jones and Gould point out that, like dancers, athletes engage in sports for both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. However, they determine that it would be difficult to maintain high levels of motivation through all of the setbacks that many athletes go through without high levels of intrinsic motivation for their sport (Hardy, Jones and Gould 74). Based on this theory, it can be assumed that dancers who agree to work with a choreographer are at the outset intrinsically motivated for their love of the art form.

For a choreographer, working with people who share an intrinsic motivation for the art form is a good start in creating a positive working environment. Other factors may come into play (compensation, desire to perform, etc), but a shared love of the art form and the choreographer’s work is essential for working towards a common goal on an artistic project. Along with intrinsic motivation, autonomous motivation is desired in the creative process. According to Deci and Ryan’s Self Determination Theory (SDT), “…when a person’s behavior is perceived as more autonomous or self-determined, he or she is likely to
experience well being and exhibit signs of effectual engagement” (Quested and Duda 3). Autonomous motivation, which is desired for psychological well being, means that the activity is being done “…with a full sense of willingness, volition, choice, and endorsement” (Deci 3). On the other hand, if the activity is a result of controlled motivation, it is being done with a sense of obligation and pressure, as a means to an end. Deci and Ryan’s research shows that when people are autonomously motivated, they are not only psychologically healthier; they perform better, especially with creative activities and those that require flexible thinking. The process of dance making and performing requires the dancer to be very flexible in their thinking as well as able to learn and perform movement accurately and quickly.

Deci and Ryan also state that it is possible to guide someone into being intrinsically motivated to do an activity that they started doing at first for extrinsic motivation. For example, a doctor strongly recommends exercise to a patient who is initially extrinsically motivated to comply. As they begin the activity, they can internalize the extrinsic motivation and become autonomous in doing the exercise. Fully internalized extrinsic motivation such as this is autonomous but slightly different than intrinsic motivation. Deci says, “Intrinsic motivation is based on the interest and enjoyment people experience regarding the task, whereas fully internalized extrinsic motivation is based in the importance and value of the task for people” (Deci 4). When extrinsic motivation is fully internalized, it becomes autonomous motivation.

A central aspect of SDT is that socializing agents who provide support for autonomy can foster an environment where internalization is promoted (Quested and Duda 4). Deci offers guidelines for facilitating the internalization of extrinsic motivation:
1) Provide a rationale for the activity; 2) Listen to the individuals to understand their views of the situation; 3) acknowledge their feelings, including feelings of boredom, dislike, or anger; 4) provide choice about what to do and how to do it; 5) offer specific and constructive feedback, especially positive feedback; and 6) minimize the use of external controls, including the use of controlling language such as ‘should’, ‘must’ and ‘have to’. (Deci 4)

In following this structure, you can guide a person into understanding that the activity is meaningful and important to them, thus leading to autonomy and internalized extrinsic motivation.

In the creative process, a sense of autonomy and intrinsic motivation in dancers can lead to a more a successful presentation of the work. A study done by Eleanor Quested and Joan L. Duda that evaluated autonomy support and motivation in dance classrooms concluded that, “features of autonomy supportive environments are motivationally advantageous in dance settings” and “In such settings, students will be more likely to take ownership of their learning process and associated outcomes” (Quested and Duda 10). As I have previously stated in Chapter One, a choreographer is also a teacher and the rehearsal studio is analogous to a classroom.

Choreographers are the socializing agents that create the environment in which the dance is made and have the power to facilitate the internalization of extrinsic motivation of their dancers. Deci’s guidelines for accomplishing this can be applied to the way choreographers communicate with their dancers in the creation of a new work. Deci’s first guideline is to provide a rationale for the activity. This can be applied in the choreographic
process when teaching movement. If the choreographer explains the intention behind the movement, it will help the dancer find meaning in the movement. For example, a choreographer may want to create a change of dynamics in a certain moment of the dance. Instead of just teaching the movement, by telling the dancer that a change of dynamics is their intention, the dancer can bring her own artistry to the movement and help to convey this in her dancing.

The second guideline is to listen to the individuals to understand their views of the situation. If a particular movement phrase is not working in the dance, rather than placing blame on the dancers for not executing it properly, it is useful to ask the dancers why it is not working. Sometimes what is being asked of the dancers is difficult, awkward and a choreographic problem rather than a performance problem. Without open lines of communication between dancer and choreographer, these places in a dance can just become a point of frustration for both parties. By creating an environment where dancers feel free to express their experience with the choreographer, problem places in dances can be more quickly and easily fixed by either an adjustment in the choreography or coaching of the dancer in the performance of the movement.

Open lines of communication also initiate Deci’s third guideline of acknowledging feelings, including those of anger, boredom or dislike. If a dancer is getting frustrated in rehearsals it is worthwhile to have a conversation about these feelings. They may be frustrated with themselves in trying to master choreography, frustrated with other dancers, or with the choreographer’s way of working. Whatever the situation, allowing the space for communication demonstrates to the dancer that they are important in the process of creating the piece.
Deci’s fourth guideline, provide choice for what to do and how to do it, can be difficult for a choreographer. If the dance is a structured improvisation or a collaborative piece, the dancers will automatically have more choice than in a set piece of choreography. However, this can be applied to set choreography in allowing space for the dancers’ artistic interpretation of the movement given. Instead of choreographing every dynamic detail of the execution of the movement, it can be interesting to allow the dancer the freedom to find their own way in a movement phrase. Often things will occur that the choreographer had not thought of and adds to the success of the piece.

The fifth and sixth guidelines can be applied to the way a choreographer gives corrections and feedback to the dancers. Deci says to offer specific and constructive feedback, especially positive feedback, and to minimize the use of external controls, including the use of controlling language such as ‘should’, ‘must’ and ‘have to’. When giving a dancer a correction, when a choreographer is specific the dancer can apply the correction and change the way they are performing a movement. If the correction is vague, i.e.; “this section is sloppy”, it is more difficult for the dancer to decipher what the choreographer wants. It is easy to speak in broad terms like this, but when a choreographer takes the time to really work with a dancer and be specific, the dancer will be more successful in their performance, which fosters feelings of reward and thus greater autonomous motivation. In turn, the piece will flourish from this attention to detail.

Minimizing the use of controlling language and offering positive feedback to dancers along with constructive criticism will enhance feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy in dancers. Self-efficacy, a theory developed by Alfred Bandura, is defined as “the degree to which people believe they are capable or prepared to handle particular tasks” (Snowman,
McCown and Biehler 282). A person’s self-efficacy can influence the level of motivation they bring to a task. Those who believe they will be successful will approach the task with more concentration and creativity, manage their time well, and monitor their own performance (Snowman, McCown and Biehler 282). Based on this theory, a dancer who is encouraged by the choreographer is more likely to invest himself in the choreographer’s work.

To encourage a dancer and promote self-efficacy, a choreographer’s feedback should be focused on the whole person rather than just the body. Lynda M. Mainwaring and Donna H. Krasnow suggest that if the only criticism offered to a dancer relates to their physique, they may begin to feel hopeless. Addressing other issues related to artistry will enhance a dancer’s self-efficacy because this is something over which they have more control. Related to this, a choreographer can open up the conversation with the dancer about their possible negative thoughts:

It is beneficial to explore openly the dancers’ internal dialogue, especially as it reflects negative self-talk and the impact of negative inner dialogue and the associated underlying beliefs on diminished skill development and performance. While it is the nature of dance training to develop self-critical skills, constant negative thoughts and belief systems interfere with concentration and the willingness to take risks. (Mainwaring and Krasnow 18)

Being open to dialogue about a dancer’s negative self-thoughts can help the choreographer give the kind of feedback that is most beneficial to the dancer. Promoting self-esteem and
self-efficacy will help dancers feel more positively about the piece and this should lead to a better performance.

Following Deci’s guidelines, a choreographer can explain their intentions for the piece and guide dancers into intrinsic motivation for the work they are creating. A choreographer’s vision and expectations of the piece, which begin as external motivators for the dancer, can become internalized so the dancer shares the same goals as the choreographer. The choreographer’s motivation becomes the dancer’s motivation, and both are autonomously motivated. The dancer will not feel that they “should” perform a certain way, but instead will want to perform in that way and participate in the process. When this occurs, the dancers become engaged in the work.

Goal Setting

A tool that can help facilitate motivation is goal setting. Often applied to organizational settings, sports, and dance education, goal setting can also be a way to encourage motivation in the creative process. Sport psychologists have identified three different types of goals: outcome, performance and process goals. Outcome goals typically refer to winning and losing in a competition. Performance goals refer to an athlete’s actual performance “…in relation to his or her own standard of excellence” (Weinberg 26). Performance goals in sport are usually measurable. For example, an athlete may want to run two seconds faster in a race. Process goals focus on how a specific skill is performed. Weinberg uses the examples of a tennis player working on bending their knees when hitting a low shot or a baseball player keeping the bat straight while waiting for the pitch (Weinberg
When thinking about goal setting for dancers, process based goals are the most appropriate. There are no numerical measurements in dance performance; success is based on the physical performance of movement combined with the artistry of the performance.

Locke and Latham (1985) were among the first to apply goal setting theory to a sport environment. They identified ten key aspects to setting goals in sports:

1. Specific goals will regulate action more precisely than general goals.

2. For quantitative (specific) goals, the higher the goal the better the performance, assuming sufficient ability and commitment.

3. Specific, difficult goals will lead to better performance than goals of “do your best” or no goals.

4. Using short-term goals plus long-term goals will lead to better performance than using long-term goals alone.

5. Goals will affect performance by directing activity, mobilizing effort, increasing persistence, and motivating the search for appropriate task strategies.

6. Goal setting will be most effective, if not only effective, when there is feedback showing degree of progress in relation to the goal.

7. With goals that are difficult, the higher the degree of commitment the better the performance.
8. Commitment can be affected by asking the individual to accept the goal, showing support, allowing participation in the setting of the goal, training, selection, and incentives and rewards.

9. Goal attainment will be facilitated by a suitable plan of action or strategy, especially when the task is complex or long-term.

10. Competition will improve performance to the degree that it leads to the setting of higher goals and/or increases in goal commitment (Locke and Latham 209).

Following their discussion of these ten aspects of goal setting, Locke and Latham conclude that in addition to its affect on performance, goal setting gives an athlete a sense of control and positive self-direction. A goal provides “anticipated satisfaction for desired accomplishment as well as the basis for a negative appraisal” (Locke and Latham 219). Appropriate goal setting provides incentive for action and concentrates that action on a specific task.

Based on Locke and Latham’s conclusions, goal setting can be an effective way for choreographers to facilitate the enhancement of dancers’ autonomous motivation in rehearsal. While dancers are constantly being asked and challenged to improve their technical skills in class and rehearsal, if a dancer is asked to set her own goals and share it with the choreographer and other dancers, she becomes responsible for that goal and is held accountable for her actions.
Team Building

Dance is a social art form. Unless performing a solo work, which is less common, you are working and performing with a group. Dancers talk about things like “breathing together”, “feeling each other’s energy” and “being aware of the other bodies in the space”. But unless there is a sense of camaraderie and community amongst the performers, experiencing these things can be difficult. As an audience member, you can feel when a group of dancers is connected on the stage. You get a hit of kinetic empathy when a group of dancers executes a movement in perfect unison or exhales audibly as if they share the same breath. As a dancer, I have personally experienced the elation of feeling completely in tune with the other dancers on the stage. I have also experienced feeling “off”, or just not quite in sync with the other performers. While even the most greatly bonded team can have off days, chances are the greater the sense of community that exists between a group of dancers, the greater chances are for achieving cohesion and that magical connection on stage.

Team unity is one of the cornerstones on which effective team performance is built. However, as David Yukelson points out, building team unity is a process:

Team building is not something that occurs overnight. Rather, it is a dynamic process that evolves over time, and is influenced by a variety of personal, situational, and team factors. In sport, teams are made up of a collection of interdependent individuals, coordinated and orchestrated into various task efficient roles for the purpose of achieving goals and objectives that are deemed important for that particular team. (Yukelson 74)
To think of this in terms of dance and choreography, each dancer in the cast is an “interdependent individual” whose “task” is the performance of the choreography. Each dancer’s task is specific to them and the success of the performance is dependent on each dancer accomplishing their task. Going back to the idea of motivation, it is important for each dancer to have a sense of autonomy and motivation to perform their role in the group. Building a sense of community within the group can also contribute to an individual’s motivation, and choreographers can borrow team building ideas from sport psychology to make this possible. Yukelson lays out seven components of successful team building, each of which I discuss and relate to the process of dance making.

“Shared Vision and Unity of Purpose” Yukelson writes that successful team building begins with the coach sharing his vision for the team at the beginning of the season. For purposes of this paper, a season for a team is equivalent to the performance sequence of a given piece of choreography. A choreographer should explain to the dancers their purpose in creating the work and what they hope to achieve. Teams work best when they are working toward a common goal (Katzenbach and Smith). For example, if the choreographer was making a socio-political work about the Holocaust but did not explain the intention of the piece to the dancers there would be confusion. Instead, if all members of the team are on the same page about the meaning of the work the dancers can make artistic choices that contribute to the larger goals of the group.

“Collaborative and Synergistic Teamwork” When thinking about dance, this component of team building first brings to mind a collaborative dance company where dancers and choreographer are working together to create choreography. While this structure of making dance is certainly an example of team building, I believe Yukelson’s idea can be
also be applicable to the more traditional style of choreography where the choreographer generates movement and the dancer performs it. Yukelson writes:

In addition to this shared vision and consistency of purpose, there needs to be synergistic teamwork. Each individual must have a fundamental understanding of his/her own abilities and roles and those of everyone else around him/her. (Yukelson 83)

A sense of team and community is developed when each dancer and the choreographer know their role and the roles of those around them. At times a dancer is expected to simply learn choreography. Other times the dancer may be given a task or a correction and asked to manipulate the choreography. The choreographer knows when to be leading the rehearsal and when to be social. There are natural leaders among every group and those leaders know when it is time to help their fellow dancer who may be having difficulty, and when it is time to let the others figure it out on their own.

“A Positive Team Culture and Cohesive Group Atmosphere” According to Yukelson, when team culture is not developed it can lead to the team not performing to its highest potential. Developing a positive environment and fostering a cohesive group atmosphere is paramount in achieving the highest level of success. In the textbook, *Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, Robert Weinberg and David Gould suggest that Carron, Brawley and Widmeyer have produced a comprehensive definition of cohesion. They define cohesion as “a dynamic process that is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs” (Weinberg and Gould 180). Within the multifaceted idea of cohesion there
are two sub-types of cohesion: task cohesion and social cohesion. Task cohesion is working together to achieve a common goal, and social cohesion refers to group members liking one another and interacting socially (180). Typically if a group is successful at task cohesion, social cohesion comes naturally from that. The task for a group of dancers may be the final performance, or it may be smaller tasks within each rehearsal as directed by the choreographer. An example may be a technical task of executing a phrase in unison or achieving a difficult lift. While working through this together the dancers develop social cohesion as well as task cohesion. Maintaining positivity throughout the rehearsal process aids in the development of cohesion.

“Team Identity” This aspect of team building refers to encouraging pride in group membership and a sense of identity as a group. For dancers who may be working on several different projects with the same or different people, it may be difficult to connect to each cast separately. However, the choreographer can help in developing the team culture by identifying what is unique to that group of people. Each piece of choreography and the mix of dancers and choreographers are unique to each project. Recognizing the distinct personality of the group is important in establishing team identity.

“Open and Honest Communication Practices” This component of team building relates directly back to Deci’s guidelines for facilitating the internalization of extrinsic motivation. Maintaining open lines of communication during the rehearsal process promotes an autonomy supportive environment, which in turn supports a positive atmosphere. The group functions more effectively when members communicate openly about problems and successes in the process.
“Peer Helping and Social Support” Yukelson’s final component of team building is about members of the group being there for one another and providing “genuine support” (Yukelson 85). This relates back to the idea of social cohesion; if group members are relaxed and comfortable with one another they are more likely to help each other when needed. Weinberg lays out seven different types of social support that are beneficial in building a positive team atmosphere:

1. Listening Support: the perception that someone else is listening without giving advice or being judgmental.
2. Emotional Support: the perception that another person is providing comfort and caring and is indicating that he is on the support recipient’s side.
3. Emotional-Challenge Support: the perception that another person is challenging the support recipient to evaluate her attitudes, values and feelings.
4. Reality-Confirmation Support: the perception that another person, who is similar to the support recipient and who sees things the same way, is helping to confirm the support recipient’s perspective.
5. Task-Appreciation Support: the perception that another person is acknowledging the support recipient’s efforts and expressing appreciation for the work that person does.
6. Task-Challenge Support: the perception that another is challenging the support recipient’s way of thinking about a task or an activity in order
to stretch, motivate and lead the support recipient to greater creativity, excitement, and involvement.

7. Personal Assistance Support: the perception that another is providing services or help, such as running an errand or driving the support recipient somewhere. (Weinberg and Gould168)

Each member of a cast, dancers and choreographers, can offer any of these types of support to one another in the context of rehearsals. If dancers and choreographers are comfortable listening to one another and genuinely caring about concerns related to the dance, the process of creation will be much smoother and promote a sense of unity and team bonding. Challenging one another emotionally to change negative or unhelpful attitudes in rehearsal encourages a positive environment. Challenging the way individuals perform or approach tasks pushes both dancers and choreographers to be vulnerable and inventive and push artistic boundaries. Lastly, appreciating one another and helping each other outside of rehearsal increases positive feelings and cohesion amongst the team.

Team building may not be a focus of every choreographer, but it can have a positive effect on the atmosphere in which the dance is created and the performance of the piece itself. A sense of team identity, cohesion and social support amongst the group can inspire creativity during the process. On stage, the dancers are more likely to find that magic energy in performance when they have been more closely bonded throughout the creation of the work.
CHAPTER THREE

Players of the Ring: The Choreographic Process

My final choreographic project for the MFA degree at the University of New Mexico, *Players of the Ring*, was presented at Rodey Theatre on February 14-15, 2014. An audition was held in May 2013 to cast the dancers for the project and we began rehearsals in June. *Players of the Ring* was inspired by vintage photographs of circus performers. I sought to convey through movement the way the photos made me feel and depict a quirky, dark, mystical, dirty, sad, lonely and amusing world on stage. To complement the choreography and help create this world, I selected and edited music for each section of the piece, designed costumes, and utilized film projection. However, the most important component for the illustration of my vision was the dancers. Their embodiment of their individual character and performance of the choreography was integral to the success of the piece. As I researched ideas about the value of process in art making and concepts of sports psychology, I attempted to integrate my findings in my own process of choreographing *Players of the Ring*. This chapter consists of a discussion of my successes and challenges as I focused on these aspects during rehearsals of my final choreographic project.

A tool that I used to facilitate a sense of autonomy and ownership in the work was journaling. I gave the dancers a journal at the beginning of the process and left time for writing at the end of each rehearsal. Sometimes I would give them prompts, other times I left it open for free writing. I will include excerpts from their journals to illustrate the dancers reception of my exploration of process.
Facilitating an Autonomy Supportive Environment

Creating an environment that supported autonomy by allowing dancers room to explore and interpret the movement in their own way led to them feeling more ownership in the piece. One dancer wrote about the feeling of ownership she experienced:

Emily was also very ‘giving’ in the sense that she let us interpret and investigate the movement and our characters. Of course, Emily had the final say on the choreography and what it was to be, but she gave us that space for exploration and wasn’t too strict with what she wanted us to do until she knew exactly what to ask of us… All of that did give us a sense of ownership in the end. Yes all of the choreography was Emily’s but she let us have space to develop our characters and let our personalities also influence how we portrayed our characters in our dancing (Dancer Journal Entry).

I believe that giving the dancers the space to interpret the choreography and discover it for themselves led them to feel more invested in the piece and take ownership of it. This in turn led to a more successful performance of the work.

I began creating movement in the summer of 2013, and I knew from the start that one of the sections I wanted to create was a duet between a man and a woman. While researching the circus, one of the images that stuck with me was of a midget in full clown makeup and costume with a tall woman wearing a long every-day dress. I had also come across images of clowns with more glamorous female circus performers dressed in sequins and feathers, but there was a strength in the woman in plain clothes with the midget clown. The two had a bond that overcame physical differences and the expression on their faces showed
determination that their love would win over the adversity they faced as a couple. I wanted to create a duet with two people who had very different physical body types but who could use their strengths to find a common bond. So I began work on the duet with a strong and weighted female dancer and a shorter than average, petite male dancer. I was interested in their difference in height and mass and how I could use these differences to create movement.

After several rehearsals, the piece began to develop with several movement phrases and partnering combinations. Circumstances changed suddenly when the male dancer got an opportunity with a dance company in New York and I had to make a decision about how to move forward with the duet without him. The original choreography was created specifically for these dancers’ bodies and I was unsure if I could recast it and get the same results with a different body in the mix. I paused for a moment and reminded myself that I was focusing on the process of the creation of this work, and hoped that this setback would not be negative but an interesting problem to work through in rehearsal. So I recast the duet with a male dancer who had a very different body type than the original dancer; he is about six feet tall.

This recasting ended up being one of the most positive things that happened in the creation of the concert. At the beginning of the rehearsal process with this new male dancer I made clear that I wanted him to find his own character and not be tied to what the character was for the original cast. By offering this goal to him, he became motivated to discover what this new character was going to be and in doing so he became very engaged in the process. I decided that I wanted to capitalize on his physical length and planted the seed of the “Tall Man” as a character idea. We started to play with his length in the duet and I decided we could take this idea of the Tall Man and develop it further in a solo section. The process of
creating the Tall Man solo helped the dancer hone in on his character and I had the opportunity to try out theories of motivation in a one-on-one situation.

As stated in Chapter Two, creating an autonomy supportive environment promotes engagement. I strived to give this dancer the freedom to explore the movement I gave him and truly make it his own. I attempted to use Deci’s guidelines for facilitating the internalization of extrinsic motivation while working with him. The rationale for the solo was to explore his physicality as a dancer and more fully develop his character for the larger work. Having worked with this dancer before on other pieces of choreography, I knew his strengths and weaknesses as a dancer. The qualities of release, suspension, and heavy weight were things I wanted him to find and improve upon in the dancing of this solo. I expressed this to him and allowed him to communicate with me freely about his challenges and successes in discovering these things in the choreography. By acknowledging his feelings about different movements I opened the door to deeper discussions about particular movements in the piece. For example, in one moment he runs stage right, imagines he is hit by an invisible force, contracts and shuffles back toward center stage in a deep contraction with his hands to his face and his head facing the ground. The dancer had a difficult time performing this movement and expressed to me that he felt like he was doing it incorrectly. It felt awkward and he was concerned that it looked awkward as well.

This opened up a conversation about the movement in which we discussed what muscles were being used to initiate the contraction and the importance of head-tail connection as he traveled backwards in space. We explored together the dropping of weight in the pelvis as he shifted from a high releve position to a deep plie in the contraction. We spent a large amount of that one rehearsal on this specific movement. Thinking of
H’Doubler, I encouraged him to explore both the kinesiology of the movement and the emotions inherent within the action. The muscles used in the dynamic way required of a contraction elicits emotion from the body. A true contraction gives the movement a new meaning than if it was performed without its full expression. By taking the time to investigate the movement, and allowing the dancer the freedom to explore within it, I believe he became more invested and engaged in its performance. That movement now had subtext, and he had motivation to perform it more completely. The dancer’s extrinsic motivation was me, the choreographer, asking him to perform this movement because it was important to the structure and intent of the solo. In taking the time to listen to his concerns about the movement and investigate it more deeply, this extrinsic motivation became intrinsic and autonomous. The dancer wanted to figure out the movement for himself so that he did not feel awkward executing it, because he wanted to perform it well. My wishes as the choreographer were secondary to his personal desire to accomplish and understand the movement.

Another dancer that I worked with individually and attempted to engage through supporting autonomy was the woman who danced the duet. The male dancer ended his solo upstage right and the female dancer entered the space downstage left. Working from the original image of the powerful looking woman and the midget clown, I wanted the female dancer to portray a strong, authoritative woman who was in control of the relationship. I began her solo section in the space between losing the original male dancer and recasting the duet with the taller male dancer. I did not know where the duet would go, but I knew there should be a section that was specifically the female’s. I went into rehearsal with her one day in July with the goal of generating movement that was specific to the character she would portray. The keywords I wrote in my journal were “strength, power, individual, intellectual,
woman”. I also wanted to make something that was distinctly hers. She is an intellectual dancer whose personal aesthetics lean more towards the abstract. I wanted to make something that suited her body and her own choreographic tastes.

To do this, I decided to do an Authentic Movement exercise with the dancer. I was first exposed to Authentic Movement in visiting professor Zoë Knights’ Creative Investigations class in the fall of 2012. The concept is that one person is the mover and another is the witness. The mover directs their attention inward and moves with their eyes closed. They only respond to stimuli within their own bodies, never consciously initiating movement. The witness observes the mover and watches without judgment. The witness should notice the self-awareness of the mover. In working this way, the movement generated by the mover is “authentic” and not influenced by anything outside of their own body. I explained the task to the dancer and she was on board to give it a try. We did the exercise and I filmed her while she moved. I recorded in my journal that the dancer felt like she had to make movement when it first started, but as the exercise continued it became very meditative for her. She did a lot with articulating her feet and shifting her weight. Afterwards, without looking at the film footage, I recreated in my body some of the things I remembered her doing and taught it to her as a short phrase. The next rehearsal we repeated the exercise and the outcome was very different; evidence that a mover can generate completely different things from their body depending on the day. The second time she had a much wider range of motion and traveled more in the space. Again, I created a phrase from what I saw. Following this rehearsal I looked at the footage of the dancer doing the Authentic Movement exercise and added on to the phrases we had already built. I tried not to take her movement verbatim,
but rather would take a small gesture or a body position and make something that felt similar to the quality of movement she generated during the exercise.

The Authentic Movement experiment led to the creation of movement I would not normally choreograph, and movement that fit well with the dancer’s body. Since the essence of the movement began with this dancer, it was not difficult to get her to perform it in a way that looked organic and natural for her. I encouraged her to continue to explore the different qualities within her solo section of movement and asked her to make it her own. Again, since it began with her own Authentic Movement, it was easy for her to take ownership of the piece and feel a sense of freedom in the choreography.

I did learn in the process of creation that every dancer works differently and responds to working methods in their own way. I created a solo for another female dancer based on the life of Lillian Leitzel, a great aerialist of the early twentieth century. Leitzel was a celebrity of her time and eventually fell to her death from the top of the circus tent while performing an aerial act. The dancer I chose has a strong presence on stage and knows how to draw the audience in when she is dancing. I purposely choreographed many places in the solo when she is facing directly downstage to give her moments to connect with the audience. The dancer performed these moments well, with strong focus and intention. However, in many of the more technical sections of the solo she had a difficult time finding the same power and confidence in herself. I employed many of the same techniques that I used with the “Tall Man” solo dancer; giving freedom to explore and interpret the movement, allowing open communication about the movement and acknowledging feelings of discomfort and misunderstanding. We took the time to break down specific movements and talk about the
kinesology and emotions, which did help her execute the movements technically more precise, but didn’t seem to help in boosting her confidence.

The dancer’s confidence was essentially an issue of self-efficacy. If she would falter while rehearsing she would begin to think that she could not perform the rest of the piece well, and then she would not. A mistake damaged her confidence in her own abilities. I knew that this dancer had the technical and artistic capacity to perform the piece, I just had to find a way to get her to believe that as well. Thinking back to Mainwaring and Krasnow’s idea about promoting self-efficacy and self-esteem by addressing negative self-talk, I thought about how to bring this up in rehearsal.

I walked through every count of choreography in the solo with the dancer and discussed what she was thinking about in each moment. I specifically asked her to think in terms of imagery, what she saw and felt beyond the studio in each movement. A few of the images that emerged were: the ghost of Leitzel’s mother calling her to the other side of the stage, dancing in a field, and posing for photographers. At times there were practical things that came to mind like “which foot should I be on” or “make sure my knee is straight when I piqué”, but I tried to give her more artistic imagery to think about than technical elements. The negative self-talk that was happening in the dancer’s head started to melt away when she had clearer images to focus on. Her performance of the piece became much more dynamic as she was able to get past her own thoughts about not being able to do the steps. Helping this dancer realize her capabilities and empowering her to find meaning in each movement improved her performance significantly.
Thus far I have discussed three individuals who I worked with in a one-on-one situation. I applied the same principles when working with the group, but it manifested itself differently with the group than with individuals. After the success of the use of imagery with the “Leitzel” dancer, I decided to do an activity with the group that guided them into creating imagery themselves. I brought in several books about the circus and asked the dancers to pick an image from one of the books and recreate it in their body. After making the position with their body, I asked them to write down what they felt in the pose physically and emotionally. They each wrote a story that accompanied that pose and repeated the process with two more poses. After showing the three poses to each other and sharing their stories, the dancers then taught each other the movement sequences they had created.

By giving the dancers a specific task I was clear with my intentions for the rehearsal time. By allowing them choice in which image they chose from the books and how they interpreted the image I followed Deci’s guideline regarding providing choice about what to do and how to do it. I ultimately shaped the choreography, but in this instance the dancers generated the movement and the imagery and emotions behind the movement. In a way, this exercise combined the work that I did with the two female dancers regarding authentic movement and imagery. In the process of teaching one another the movement they created and sharing the story that went with it, the dancers were forced to articulate verbally their thought processes. In the responsibility of creating and teaching it, the dancers took ownership of the material. One dancer wrote in her journal:

It’s great because we are keeping our idea of the circus in tact and maybe when people see it they would have no idea where this movement eminates
from, but we do. It felt fun and like a challenge to have the time to really get into your story and character (Dancer Journal Entry).

In the end, this phrase of poses was used in the video portion of the show. The poses were shot behind a screen so only the dancers’ shadows were seen. Because they had a clear intention and motive for each movement, and because it originally came from their own bodies, the movement was clear and articulate even though the dancers’ faces and bodies were masked behind the screen. I believe this experiment was successful in generating interesting movement material and getting the dancers engaged in the process of creation.

All of these methods (discussing kinesiology and emotion of movement, Authentic Movement, addressing imagery and self-efficacy, and giving a task to the group) took a significant amount of time in rehearsal. Prior to this project, it would normally make me very nervous to “waste” precious rehearsal time with things that did not directly involve teaching or cleaning choreography. However, in challenging myself to enjoy the process, I learned that taking the time to do these things is absolutely worthwhile. Taking time to talk, try new things, and really investigate the movement leads not only to more interesting choreography but a deeper sense of investment of the group as a whole. As one dancer wrote in their journal:

Dance is ephemeral, fleeting- ever more so with “Players”. So much work for two nights [of performance]! But then I look back at the process, at all that work. It was worth it. And it was more about the process than the performance anyway. ‘Players’ allowed me to discover more of my own dance- how I move, how I like to work, and how I grow (Dancer Journal Entry).
Goal Setting

As I researched tools to facilitate motivation, the most straightforward idea that resonated with me was goal setting. Thinking of Locke and Latham’s list of effective goal setting (“Using short-term goals plus long-term goals will lead to better performance than using long-term goals alone”), I asked my dancers to set two goals in the first month of rehearsals; a long-term goal and a short-term goal. Most of the dancers’ goals focused on specific aspects of their dancing. For example, one dancer wanted to concentrate on engaging her core while dancing. Another wanted to find length in his movement by fully extending through the limbs. I asked the dancers to write down their goals and then share them with the group. This strategy directly relates to Locke and Latham’s eighth aspect of goal setting, “Commitment can be affected by asking the individual to accept the goal, showing support, allowing participation in the setting of the goal” (Locke and Latham 209). Knowing what their personal goals were, I could encourage them to work toward their goals in my rehearsals. For example, I often reminded the dancer to engage her core while performing the choreography and I worked with the dancer to fully extend through his limbs while doing a section of movement. This not only benefitted the dancers’ personal growth, but I also believed it would make the performance of my choreography more successful. The dancers become more engaged in the piece and focused on their performance when concentrating on personal goals.

I followed up with the dancers the following week to ask if they felt they had accomplished their goals. They responded that they had thought about their goals and tried to do what they wanted to do (engage their core, fully extend through the limbs), but that there was no way it could ever really be accomplished. This is the problem with goal setting in a
dance environment; dancers will never be satisfied with the work they do physically, there is always more that could be accomplished. So I asked the dancers to re-think their goals and set something that could be accomplished, finished and crossed off. When asked to make much more specific goals, they changed their goals significantly. One dancer was battling an injury that week so she decided her goal would be to ice her ankle every night that week. Another was going to practice a specific combination of movement at home so that at the next rehearsal she would not make the same mistake she had been making.

In some ways these more specific goals were more successful because they were more tangible. The first week of implementation the dancers were engaged, thinking about their goals outside of rehearsal and progress was made in terms of the performance of the movement. However, as the weeks went on it was progressively more difficult to keep up with the goal setting strategy. Seeing only small groups of the dancers at a time made it difficult to speak to the whole group. If I talked about the goals with some, I would forget to bring it up with others. With no unit of measurement associated with the goals, they began to seem arbitrary and it was difficult to quantify success. Essentially, working through a creative process made it difficult to focus on the pedagogical task of goal setting. With this in mind I began to re-evaluate what I thought about goals in the creative process.

In a rehearsal, the choreographer is constantly giving the dancers goals in the form of corrections and feedback. Goal attainment is sometimes quick, like fixing a mistake in the performance of choreography. At times the attainment process is longer, for instance, working toward initiating a movement with different muscles or finding a new quality in the movement. A dancer retains the information they receive from a rehearsal and typically knows what they need to work on. When given the appropriate feedback, a dancer knows
where they are faltering and what they need to improve upon. The dancer also gives themselves goals internally as they work through learning and perfecting movement. The rehearsal time is all about setting goals, achieving them, and setting new goals. It is constant, and the formality of writing down goals and sharing them with the group is a step that is not entirely necessary in this setting. Taking the focus off of the creative work for too long can hinder the creative process of making dance. By recognizing that goal setting and achievement is an ongoing task that happens within all rehearsals in the form of feedback, the choreographer can stay in the moment of creativity without stepping outside of it to write down goals.

Locke and Latham’s aspects of effective goal setting can instead be applied to the way in which choreographers give feedback in rehearsals. The first three statements in their list refer to the specificity of the goals that are set:

1. Specific goals will regulate action more precisely than general goals
2. For quantitative (specific) goals, the higher the goal the better the performance, assuming sufficient ability and commitment.
3. Specific, difficult goals will lead to better performance than goals of “do your best” or no goals. (Locke and Latham 209)

When a choreographer gives a correction it should be specific. For example, instead of telling the dancer to “work on that piqué arabesque”, the choreographer could say “I’d like you to reach your foot as far away from your body as you can before you piqué onto it, and then keep both knees straight as you go into the arabesque”. It sounds simple, but this way the dancer knows exactly what their goal is. The choreographer should also challenge the
dancers and give them more to work toward artistically if the technical elements are achieved. When the piqué arabesque is done with straight knees, the choreographer can ask the dancer to then work on the height of the arabesque and address issues in the upper body. When this is achieved, the choreographer can begin giving the dancer imagery to think about during the performance of the arabesque. Giving them more advanced goals that one knows they can achieve will yield a better performance because they will usually rise to the occasion.

I discovered the importance of this aspect of feedback/giving dancers goals when working with my quartet of four women. The quartet was a fast paced, jazzy, highly performative number. The idea was that these four women represented the idealized dream of running away to join the circus. They loved the allure, the glamour, the glitter and rhinestones of the life of the celebrity aerialist. The choreography included stylized gestures of the arms and hands, a variety of small jumps, and running patterns that used the entire stage space. There was a lot of unison movement, but I encouraged the dancers to let their characters’ personalities shine through even when dancing in unison. The piece as a whole contained only a few movements that were repeated, for the most part it was a sequence of almost entirely new choreography for four and half minutes of dancing. As I worked, I found that cleaning the unison sections of this piece was very difficult. The four dancers I selected for the quartet had distinctly different styles and ways of moving and even when they would execute a movement at the same time, it would look different. I would break down the counts of each phrase, and give the dancers the same goal of performing the movement at the same time. I would also give them the same goal of how to perform the movement. In one instance, the four dancers are in a horizontal line downstage. In a parallel second position they plié one
leg and lift the opposite, turning the knee towards the standing leg and reaching the toe to the side away from the body. The arms are in between first and second position and the head falls toward the standing leg. They repeat this on both legs at a quick pace several times, mimicking what it would feel like to ride on the back of an elephant. Though I demonstrated the movement, told them exactly where to place every part of their body, and gave them the exact counts, for some reason it was not looking the same. I had given the four dancers all the same goals, but the goals were too vague for the dancers to accomplish complete unison.

What I eventually realized was that each dancer needed their own specific goals for this particular movement. One needed to be given more specific information about the arms and how they coordinated with the legs. Another needed feedback about the weight shift that happened between each leg lift. The other two needed to thoroughly understand the bobble movement of the head. Originally, I had not taken into account the generality of the feedback I had given about this movement. Even though I felt I had been specific to the group, I failed to realize that each individual dancer was expressing the movement differently according to how it felt in their body. Giving them specific goals addressed to each individual helped them to understand the initiation of the movement in their body. After doing this, they were more successful in performing this section in unison.

After giving each dancer a specific goal for that movement and getting them to perform it in unison, I was sure to tell them when they had achieved the correct execution and unison desired. Locke and Latham’s sixth aspect in goal setting is that it is most effective “when there is feedback showing degree of progress in relation to the goal” (209). I found that when I encouraged the dancers to continue working on the corrections I had given, or let them know when they were close to achieving them, they were more apt to have success.
Throughout the process I found that immediate goal setting and attainment through the act of corrections and feedback in rehearsal were more effective than writing them down. However, the week before performances I did find it valuable to take the time to sit down and discuss goals as a group. Each dancer spoke about their individual technical goals and artistic goals for the last week of rehearsals leading up to the show. This opened up conversation about the goals of the group as a whole, and led them to discussing what they needed to do as a team to make the performance successful. Because of the nature of the busy university performance schedule, we did not have a chance to discuss whether or not they achieved these goals after the show. However, as I deemed the performance a success, I am not sure it matters whether each individual goal was achieved. The larger triumph of this conversation was the involvement of the dancers in the goal setting process. Because of the feedback they had received throughout the rehearsal period, they all knew exactly what they needed to work on and what goals they should be setting for themselves. By this point, they were invested personally and emotionally in the piece and desired a successful performance of the work. Taking the time to talk about their final goals was less about the act of setting the goals, and more about the fact that they were communicating as a team about how they could work together to bring *Players of the Ring* to life on stage.

**Team Building**

In my experiences as a dancer, I have found that when I encounter a strong sense of community with my fellow performers and choreographer, I have had a more positive rehearsal and performance experience than when community was not prevalent. As Halprin
discovered, building community through process creates a powerful energy in performance. With this in mind, I set out to build a team and a strong sense of community from the beginning of my rehearsal process with *Players of the Ring*. Above all other methods of sports psychology, I believe this is the most important aspect in achieving success on stage.

At the very first rehearsal, I shared with the dancers that I was interested in circus culture and wanted to make a work that reflected the emotions evoked from vintage photographs of circus performers. In my own journal I had written the words “twisted” and “quirky”, and this was essentially the starting point for generating movement. Though my initial ideas were vague, as most are at the beginning of a creative process, I wanted the dancers to be on the same page as me. I strived to constantly be in dialogue with the dancers about my reasoning and purposes for creating specific phrases of choreography. As the dance developed, the group as a whole knew what we were creating together. As a group we shared vision and unity of purpose, Yukelson’s first component of successful team building. Even when I did not know exactly why I was creating a section, I shared this with the dancers as well. Many times the dancers were able to offer insight about their experience performing the movement and together we constructed meaning.

An example of this is the first large group number of *Players*, which I titled “Maddock Nights”. It was an expansion of a trio I had originally created a year earlier, in the fall of 2012. The movement material felt “twisted” and “quirky”, and I thought it would be easy to re-contextualize into this new larger work. I taught the movement to the group and made changes to the choreography as I morphed it from a trio to an eight-person dance. I felt that my use of space with the group was successful, and spent quite a bit of time drilling the counts and working on dynamics with the dancers. However, none of us really knew what the
piece was “about” in the context of the new work for a very long time. As I developed other sections of *Players*, the characters began to emerge but they were not translating into “Madcap”. We all knew it was about the circus, but couldn’t determine what this first section meant in the grand scheme of the work. As I worked with individuals in different sections, I asked them what they felt during “Madcap”. For many it was unclear; they still just thought about counts. One day I asked them to forget about thinking about the counts and just think about their relationships with the other individuals on stage. The next run of the piece was one of the most gratifying moments of the entire process. The dancers were elated after dancing it, and could not believe how much more they *felt* during “Madcap”. They said to me that they had finally found meaning in the movement; it was simply about relating to the other dancers in the space, and setting the stage for the rest of the piece. It was like a prologue to *Players*, a welcoming of the audience into their quirky, bizarre circus world. If I hadn’t communicated with the dancers my intent for the work, or kept open lines of communication as it developed, I doubt we ever would have realized what “Madcap” was truly about. By sharing the vision of the work, we bonded as a team and constructed meaning together.

When each team member knows her role in the group, synergistic and collaborative teamwork is possible. In *Players*, this developed naturally because of the way my rehearsals were organized. For the fall semester I had only one full group rehearsal a week, and then rehearsed with smaller groups several times a week. In the small group rehearsals we worked on the sections of choreography that were unique to those people in the rehearsal. Whether it was one of the solos, the duet, or the quartet, during those rehearsal times the material we worked on was theirs. I was able to give corrections/goals to the individuals and get deeper
into the material because it was a more personal setting. I was more laid back as a director and allowed space for more personal conversations during these rehearsals. Because of my attitude, the dancers tended to feel more comfortable asking questions, both technical and artistic, in these rehearsals. In this atmosphere I was also able to communicate more clearly to each dancer their strengths and weaknesses. When we got into the full group rehearsal, my attitude changed to more of a strict director role. Less time with the full group meant there was less time for questions and deep conversations about the work in these rehearsals. However, the dancers carried over the information from their small group rehearsals and brought in corrections/goals into the full group rehearsal. Knowing their own strengths and weaknesses, natural leaders emerged, and they knew when to talk with their fellow dancers to complete a task and when to stay quiet and listen to what I had to say. The separation of rehearsals helped the dancers define their characters (their role in the dance) and also define their role in the group as we worked through their strengths and weaknesses. The whole team worked together well because during the time we spent in small groups we continued working toward the same vision for the piece as a whole.

While having these separate rehearsals helped in defining roles and working together synergistically, at times the separation made it difficult to bond as a full group. Each small group bonded through task and social cohesion, and the soloists and myself bonded in rehearsal, but the group as a whole could feel fragmented at times because of so much separation. Working in the university setting, scheduling can be difficult and I did struggle with managing my student dancers’ schedules. Luckily, after the fall semester we were able to schedule more full group rehearsals over the winter break and during the spring semester. Without coming together as a full group, even for the sections that did not include everyone,
I do not believe we would have achieved the level of cohesion we did in the end. A significant amount of time spent together working on the project is key in building a team. One dancer wrote in her journal:

> It is great to be having these rehearsals since the beginning of the summer because it gives us a chance to come together as a group and I feel that this will really show during performance time. And I also feel that this is great because as we are all students, in various pieces, with a lot of other classes to worry about, having more time to work on just one piece gives us the opportunity to sink into the choreography, story, characters and also with the other people we are dancing with (Dancer Journal Entry).

Even though I felt it was fractured at times, because we started working on the piece nine months before the performance, we had more than enough time to build a team atmosphere. The dancers appreciated the time we had to work on the piece and felt that it was important to build team unity for a successful performance.

Allowing significant time to work on the project also helped to develop team identity. Yukelson wrote that this aspect of team building refers to encouraging pride in belonging to the group and a sense of identity. From the beginning of the project I told the dancers how important this work was for me. As my final choreographic project at UNM, *Players* was to be not only the longest work I have made to date, but also the culmination of what I have learned as an artist during my time in graduate school. I made clear that I took it seriously, and the dancers also then took the project seriously. From time to time faculty would come in to see the work and give feedback, but for the most part our rehearsals consisted of just our
group in the room. One dancer wrote that “we were a secluded group for this work, we were part of ‘Emily’s MFA’”. I encouraged the dancers to have pride in the work and know that they were creating something special. Being part of “Emily’s MFA” became something they were proud to be involved in. We also worked on developing characters for this work, and in doing so we developed our own world that we entered during every rehearsal. We got to know each other’s characters and became a band of circus folk; we developed a unique identity as a group working on this project together.

During the time we spent together, a level of trust developed between the dancers and myself as the choreographer. Yukelson wrote that open and honest communication practice leads to successful team building, which is also what Deci considered imperative in facilitating the internalization of extrinsic motivation. When communication is honest and open, not only do these things occur, but trust is built as well. Trust is an important part of working together as a team in a dance making process. The dancers must trust that the choreographer will make something with integrity, and the choreographer must trust the dancers to execute the work and make the performance successful. Through the open communication that was maintained throughout the process of creation, I trusted my dancers completely. They were fully engaged and invested in the success of the work and I knew I could count on them to apply corrections, and give everything they had to the performance. I believe the dancers trusted me as well. I did not always know where I was going with the choreography, but they took whatever I gave them and did not question my authority or creativity. A dancer wrote in her journal:

We began to not always dance to impress our choreographer, we began to dance to show her that she didn’t need to worry, she could trust us because we
have it. We knew all the steps and we knew what was expected of us. We
owned the choreography and although Emily created it, she was entrusting of
her vision into the hands of other people. And that’s a lot of weight to carry as
a dancer but it’s a lot easier to carry that weight when the choreographer is
trusting, but also clear about what they want. As dancers, we know the
choreographer, the creator, has the final word and the choreographer knows
that we are the executors of their vision. Trust us. And we will deliver… and
Emily let us deliver. (Dancer Journal Entry)

This kind of trust between dancer and choreographer relates to what Brown said about
reciprocity. There is a mutual exchange that happens between dancer and choreographer, and
without allowing that exchange the piece would never come to fruition. Open communication
and trust is vital for making dances that fulfill their potential.

Trust leads directly to peer helping and social support. When a group is relaxed and
comfortable with one another they develop social cohesion and naturally provide one another
genuine support. I noticed this in my rehearsals often. When a dancer was having a bad day,
the other dancers would console them and offer encouragement. When a dancer achieved
something in rehearsal that they had been working on for awhile, the other dancers shared in
their accomplishment with joy. They pushed each other to dance better and became even
greater friends throughout the process. When members of a group emotionally support one
another, challenge one another, and appreciate one another it builds a positive team culture.
This aspect of successful team building is the most important for me in my process. Without
a positive team culture and cohesive group atmosphere, motivation dwindles and success is
difficult to achieve. Positive team culture is built through all of the other aspects of team
building: open communication, trust, peer helping and social support, team identity, collaborative teamwork, and shared vision. Maintaining a positive attitude as a director while developing all of these aspects sets an example for the rest of the group. If the choreographer is positive, chances are the dancers will be positive as well. This is not to say that there cannot also be constructive critical feedback within a positive environment. I have found that the corrections/goals that I give to the dancers are taken more seriously when I maintain a positive atmosphere in rehearsal. Not all choreographers maintain a positive atmosphere throughout the process; it can be easy to get frustrated and let negativity seep in. Positivity is one of my strengths as a choreographer and I believe the dancers feel this in rehearsal. One wrote in her journal, “Emily’s rehearsal process has felt like a relief sometimes”. This is encouraging to me that the dancers feel comfortable in my process, but also worrisome that other choreographers they are working with may not have been able to build a positive working environment. It is my hope that other choreographers will recognize and utilize the benefits of team building and developing a positive team culture throughout the rehearsal process.

We take part in this art form because we love it. We love the joy of dancing and moving our bodies together in space. If there is no joy in the process, then there is no reason to do it anymore. By the time Players was performed in February, we had developed a strong sense of identity as a team, the group had bonded cohesively, and the positive team culture led to a feeling of excitement and preparedness. Halprin tapped into the energy of the community moving together, and I believe I built this kind of community among my dancers. The energy from the stage is not something that can be described in words; it is something that has to be felt in live performance. The dancers had built a community together offstage,
and the power of their cohesion was palpable onstage. They related to one another in a genuine way and created a world that the audience was could experience. Above all else, team building is the most important aspect during the process of creation that leads to successful performance.
CONCLUSION

The interactions that occur between the dancer and the choreographer during the rehearsal process are ultimately what shape the creation of a dance. If the choreographer can utilize tools to facilitate dancers’ engagement in the process, they are more likely to have a more successful presentation of their work. A dance reaches it’s full potential when it is performed with physical accuracy and artistry, and the dancers communicate the content of the work through their performance. Artists have written about their own creative process and the value of the dancers to their work. Educators have theories for how to work with dancers in educational settings. However, if given a description of practical methods which choreographers can use to facilitate dancer engagement, they may be more apt to employ the methods in their own process. Through the application of theories from the field of sports psychology, and thinking of the choreographer as a coach, we can begin to discover how choreographers can use methods of motivation to build investment in the work and allow the dance to reach it’s full potential.

At the end of my own process creating my MFA concert, Players of the Ring, I determined that addressing issues of motivation is the key to facilitating engagement in the work. As the socializing agent in control of the rehearsals, I had the power to facilitate the internalization of extrinsic motivation for my dancers. I worked to share my vision of the work, maintain open communication and build community so that my motivation for the creation of the piece became the dancers’ motivation for the piece. My feedback and corrections were not placed upon them externally, but they began to find it within themselves to improve their performance because they were internally, or intrinsically, motivated. In encouraging the internalization of extrinsic motivation, I supported the dancers’ autonomy.
Their intrinsic motivation led them to be more self-determined, and according to Self-Determination Theory when a person is more self-determined or autonomous, they will take more ownership in the process and the outcome. Making team building a priority helped in creating a strong sense of community within the group. A strong sense of community is shown to support autonomy. Which, as stated above, leads to higher motivation and engagement.

Not all aspects of sports psychology directly translate into the creative world. My application of goal setting theory led me to discover that the formality of writing down goals interfered with the flow of rehearsals. Instead, it worked to re-think the way goals are set in a dance environment. Realizing that goals are constantly being given and reached through constructive criticism and feedback helped to keep me and the dancers in the creative place of dance making. However, taking time to talk with one another throughout the process about the meaning of the work and dissecting technical execution of movement was worthwhile. Making time to journal and discuss openly about both my and the dancers feelings regarding the progression of the work encouraged engagement in the process and the product.

The dancers’ engagement in Players of the Ring was seen during performance and I believe the dance reached it’s full potential because of the engagement facilitated in the process. Sitting in the audience, I could feel the energy of the community because they related to one another in a real way onstage. Taking the time to discuss and work through the proper execution of movement led them into intrinsic motivation to perform the movement well. I saw that the dancers executed the movement with precision on stage. Encouraging the dancers to make individual artistic choices let them take ownership of the work, and the performance of the dance was much richer because of the dancers’ artistry. The intention of
my work was communicated to the audience clearly through the dancers. This is because of their devotion to the vision of the piece and engagement throughout the process of development.

As an artist whose work is brought to life through the bodies of dancers, it is important that the dancers be committed and engaged in the work. The dancers don’t automatically come into the process engaged. It is something that happens over time and needs to be encouraged by the choreographer throughout the entire performance sequence. Thinking more like a coach and focusing on creating an environment where dancers were engaged in the work and in the community we developed, I found more artistic fulfillment throughout the rehearsal process. I found myself focusing on how to be a better teacher while teaching choreography and challenging myself to work with the dancers in different ways to encourage and advance them as artists. By placing importance on the interactions between myself and the dancers during the process, I found that my end result in performance was more successful because the dancers were invested and engaged.

As a coach, the choreographer is responsible for creating the motivational climate of the rehearsal process. When choreographers make engagement in the work a priority for dancers by building a community, fostering a positive team environment and encouraging motivation they make possible a more successful performance of their work by invested dancers.
REFERENCES

References Cited


References Consulted


During the third year and final year of study, the MFA in Dance degree candidate is required to engage in to parallel streams of research. The first is the creation of a final MFA Choreographic Project, which takes the form of an evening of original choreography. This choreography must demonstrate the highest level of artistry and craft. The second is the creation of a written Dissertation. In addressing the first, I created 50 minute choreographic work titled *Players of the Ring*.

*Players of the Ring* was performed on February 14 and 15 in Rodey Theatre at the University of New Mexico Center for the Arts in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In order to provide the reader access to this choreographic research, a video of the February 14 performance has been archived as a “supplementary file” to the LoboVault repository. Thus, the concert may be watched in its entirety by accessing the digital file, which accompanies the PDF file for the written dissertation.

Appendix 1: *Players of the Ring* CONCERT VIDEO-FEBRUARY 14 PERFORMANCE

Submitted as a Supplementary File to LoboVault Repository