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# TEACHING CHOREOGRAPHY IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING: EXPERIENCING COLLABORATION THROUGH DRAMATURGICAL THINKING

Ariel Burge

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**TEACHING CHOREOGRAPHY IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING:  
EXPERIENCING COLLABORATION THROUGH DRAMATURGICAL  
THINKING**

**BY**

**ARIEL BURGE**

**BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS, DANCE  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SANTA BARBARA, 2005**

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**DISSERTATION**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**MASTER OF FINE ARTS  
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The University of New Mexico  
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I would like to thank my family for always supporting and encouraging me especially my mum, who has always given me the extra push I have needed to accomplish the hard stuff. I love you!

Thank you to my little daughters, Madeleine and Laila, for being my dancing stars of chaos! - Ariel Burge, (April 2016)

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**by**

**Ariel Burge**

**B.F.A., Dance, University of California Santa Barbara, 2005**

**M.F.A., Dance, University of New Mexico, 2016**

**ABSTRACT**

I began my research with the intent of finding a way for student choreographers in university dance programs to become more involved in their peer's work. In addition I hoped to find a teaching model that would provide the experience of peer collaboration. I found in my own training that I wanted to have more interaction with my peers through working creative relationships. I felt that choreography classes were the ideal place to implement a working collaborative experience. Through my research I discovered the concept of dance dramaturgy. I realized that choreography students engaging in the practice of dramaturgical thinking could gain access to multiple perspectives when viewing and creating choreography. The action of dramaturgical thinking therefore could potentially become the means to collaborate with peer work enhancing the choreographic experience and real working relationships between peers.

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## CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

### *Developing I Am Because We Are*

Creating a choreographic work should bring individuals together in an empowering and supportive community. Traditionally, dance has had this power and often this purpose. In the forward for the book *Anna Halprin: Dance – Process – Form*, by Wittmann, Schorn, and Land, dancer and choreographer Anna Halprin writes that the specialization of technique has segmented dance from the community (7). Just as it is necessary to bring our life experiences into our artistic work, giving life to our artistic ideas, the experiences we have as artists, whether as performers or choreographers, influence our lives and are carried with us into our everyday interactions. I wish to support artistic experiences that are positive and empowering in choreography classes by building respect for the artist that the student already is and providing opportunities for personal artistry to be explored through working relationships with their peers.

As partial fulfillment of a Master of Fine Arts in Dance at the University of New Mexico, I produced and choreographed an evening-length work titled *I Am Because We Are*. From the beginning of this process, I was determined to work collaboratively with my dancers on the development of the material and I hoped to establish a choreographic structure that, in its construction, left space for the dancers to make spontaneous decisions during performance. My desire to work collaboratively in my M.F.A. concert was inspired by a Creative Investigations class led by Vladimir Conde Reche, UNM Professor of Dance, and Peter Gilbert, UNM Professor of Music. The class was designed as a collaborative project between musicians and choreographers in which the students

conceived, developed, and produced the show *Looking Glass*. It was in this class that I met musician and composer Lauren V. Coons, who became a collaborator for *I Am Because We Are*. Coons composed an original score for *I Am Because We Are* that was performed live on stage with the dancers. As I reflect back on our periodic meetings throughout the creative process I realize that we engaged in dramaturgical thinking to find clarity and common ground as we exchanged ideas. We considered our meetings to be integral for the success of the work and the clarification of vision essential to the satisfaction of our mutual efforts.

Along with collaborating with Coons, I wanted to extend the collaborative experience to involve the dancers as well. Prior to rehearsals, I held a week-long workshop with the goal of familiarizing both my dancers and myself with how we all moved as individuals. This was a highly gratifying exploration, and we continued to play and experiment with movement beyond this initial week. However, I struggled with shaping the dancer-generated movement to fit my artistic vision. I did not know how to develop what we had created together. Consequently, I switched to the choreographer role I was accustomed to and began setting movement to counts. My approach differed from my previous choreographic work in that all the material was created in real time with the dancers as opposed to movement phrases being choreographed prior to rehearsals.

Elements of my creative process, particularly the workshop exercises, were successful. Also effective were reflective writing assignments, some dancer-generated movement, collaborating with the composer, the live interchange between musicians and dancers in performance, and a structured ending that allowed for improvised choices to

be made by the dancers. Nevertheless, my motive was to facilitate a creative relationship akin to the relationship of co-artists, rather than that of choreographer and dancers. However, at the time, I lacked sufficient background in my training to cultivate this environment. My need for more process skills in developing choreography and working collaboratively was highlighted by my inexperience in leading dancers through a progressive exchange of ideas. I did not know how to incorporate suggestions that were offered from dancers to evolve the process and did not have the language necessary to engage dancers in the development of the material.

From my experience of creating *I Am Because We Are*, along with my interests in the areas of collaboration and teaching choreography, the subject of my dissertation topic emerged. I wanted to find a model for teaching choreography that presented opportunities for students to work collaboratively during the course. As I began to conduct my research, I did not find literature relating to teaching choreography with collaboration. I proceeded to examine how a collaborative, choreography teaching model might look and how this model could possibly work. I re-evaluated the purpose of this teaching model and determined that the main objective is for choreography students to engage in creating work with peers in order to learn from and with each other. In my experience, learning from life-like situations that require working relationships is an effective methodology. I believe that choreography classes are an appropriate place to implement this method.

I found that, despite the favorable nature of choreography classes for peer collaboration, this approach does not appear to be regularly used. I needed to discover a successful teaching model that would facilitate collaboration. Based on my own experiences I determined that it is insufficient to take exercises meant for a solo

choreographer and apply them to a group as collaborative exercises. Solo tasks cannot necessarily be made into collaborative ones. On multiple occasions I have witnessed a group of choreographers assigned the same responsibility within a group task and felt that there must be a more effective way to collaborate with peers in choreography classes.

Kasi C. Allen, a faculty member of Lewis & Clark's Graduate School, reappraises group work in her article, *Keys to Successful Group Work: Culture, Structure, Nurture* and writes that a group task must be "group worthy" for it to succeed (310). When applying similar approaches to choreography classes, it must be considered that the tasks cannot simply be transferred from individual tasks to a group; tasks must be tailored to meet the needs of a group task. Allen has found that although group work may fully engage students to be present there is a requirement that student contributions are relevant to the advancement of the solution for the work to be considered truly collaborative: "Assigning roles fosters full participation in the group, but true cooperation necessitates engaging in a task that one person cannot readily accomplish alone" (Allen 310).

By building a platform for critical discourse with the purpose of advancing student choreography through idea exchange between peers there emerges a structure for collaboration with relevance and affirmation of peer participation. This platform for intercommunication historically stems from the Judson Church dancers. A group of artists came together in 1962 to perform their choreography at the Judson Church in Greenwich Village. After the success of the first showing, a handful of the artists continued to meet every week and became known as the Judson Church Dance Theater. They challenged modern dance standards and the hierarchical structure that had settled into place. They followed the modern dance legacy, which championed freedom of

expression and experimentation, and began looking at ‘everyday’ movements as meaningful choreographic material. New choreographic styles and approaches emerged from this intense period of experimentation (Banes xviii). Their choreography workshop met every week for two years with the purpose of showing their works in progress to each other for feedback. The aim of the criticism was to call attention to what they saw. The choreographers stated their intention and the group said whether they felt the intention was apparent or not. A stipulation made by dancer and choreographer Steve Paxton was that anyone could say whatever he or she wanted to as long as it was said in one sentence (Banes 80). The Judson Church dancers became close and trusted friends with which to exchange their ideas and critiques. They went so far as to require that all decisions be made by group consensus and not by majority vote (Banes 80). They found unity in their community and, in doing so, produced very unique and individual choreographic styles and methods.

The Judson Church Dance Theater went beyond the democratic model and became a community for evaluation and validation. They cultivated very clear communication and an understanding of how to conduct a constructively critical environment as they pushed the boundaries of art-making. This sense of community is fostered when each individual’s worth is recognized and it is this supportive community that I would like to develop within the university setting. I believe student learning can be enhanced if the classroom structure is expanded to facilitate learning from peers as well. Although this is already present in dance curriculums, I believe that a greater emphasis placed on peer interaction is beneficial for students. The creative self can be discovered through relationships with others. As a result of this understanding, I began to ask

questions regarding whether this sense of community can be found by teaching choreography students to work collaboratively and whether this would provide students additional choreographic skills.

Research into peer collaboration and the pedagogy of choreography has refined my understanding of what may help student choreographers acquire the skills I found were missing when I aspired to guide and lead dancers through a collaborative process. The literature indicates that reorienting the classroom toward a process focus may be more beneficial to student choreographers than product-focused classes. Students' creative process skills may be developed further by making the link between theory and practice, reflective writing, placing greater responsibility for learning with students, and getting them to collaborate on projects. I discovered the concept of dramaturgical thinking as a way to view the overall structure of a work or process by utilizing multiple perspectives. I believe that integrating dance dramaturgy into a choreography course will produce more versatile choreographers by providing a vehicle with which to participate in peer work and therefore develop collaborative skills. I consider the results to be that student works evolve in unexpected directions as choices are made in response to feedback and reflection, and students become true collaborators as each person becomes "another artist in the room" (Thomson 117). Over the length of the course, the teacher also moves from lecturer to facilitator to co-artist.

In this first chapter of the study I provide a brief history of dance dramaturgy. In chapter two I speak to the divide of theory and practice within dance studies and introduce dance dramaturgy as the conceptual framework in which to develop choreographic skills and dramaturgical thinking as a way for student choreographers to

collaborate effectively with their peers. I advocate for integrating dramaturgical thinking with dance composition and craft in teaching choreography and present my research questions. In chapter three I go on to discuss how restructuring the classroom gradually shifts the teacher's role from lecturer, to facilitator, to co-artist as more responsibility is placed with the students as they take on the varying perspectives found in dramaturgical thinking. I will explain how students' development of language and diverse perspectives become the tools for collaborating with peers. In chapter four I conclude with my aspirations for this teaching model in practice. Throughout my writing I make significant reference to the book *Dramaturgy in Motion: At Work on Dance and Movement Performance*, written by professional dance dramaturg Katherine Profeta and the dissertation *On the Nature of Art Making in Dance: An Artistic Process Skills Model for the Teaching of Choreography*, written by Penelope Hanstein, Cornaro Professor Emerita of Dance at Texas Woman's University.

### **A Brief History of the Dramaturg**

Dance dramaturg Katherine Profeta explains in her book *Dramaturgy in Motion* that the use of the word dramaturgy regards "both how the play was written and how it was meant to be performed. The dual usage recognizes that the structure of the text informs how the show should be produced" (3). The original use of the word "dramaturgy" is applied to an actual body of work. The dramaturgy of a written play is found in the subtext of a script. Currently the word is used in various contexts and has led

to some confusion about what a dramaturg is and does. This confusion may persist as the role of the dramaturg continues to change along with the evolution of the theatre.

As a young man, the German poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht was inspired by the work of Erwin Piscator, with whose theatre he was hired as part of a team of playwright-dramaturgs in Berlin from 1927 to 1928. Piscator had re-invented the idea of the dramaturg as part of an active team who researched and wrote to “rework . . . texts in the light of our political standpoint” (Profeta 6). This shifted the role of the dramaturg to become a critic of the theatre itself and they took on the responsibility of guiding the theatre toward the political sphere that was more fitting for the times (Profeta 18). In the book *Dance Dramaturgy: Modes of Agency, Awareness and Engagement*, scholar and Dance Dramaturg Nanako Nakajima writes in her article *Dance Dramaturgy as a Process of Learning: koosil-ja’s mech[a] OUTPUT*, that the evolution of dramaturgy’s role in the theatre continued and the “conception of dramaturgy as audience education” further advanced the duties of the dramaturg under Brecht’s leadership in the early 20th century. This concept matured with the emergence of “experimental theatre that lacked traditional dramatic texts” (*Dance Dramaturgy as a Process* 164). This new form of theatre called for dramatic shifts in the development of the dramaturg into new areas. German theatre scholar, Hans-Thies Lehmann and Professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Leipzig and director of the Dance Archive Leipzig, Patrick Primavesi, together developed a Master’s dramaturgy program at the University of Frankfurt. In their article, *Dramaturgy On Shifting Grounds*, published in *Performance Research* 2009, they state:

In postdramatic theatre, performance art and dance, the traditional hierarchy of theatrical elements has almost vanished: as the text is no longer the central and superior factor, all the other elements like space, light, sound, music, movement and gesture tend

to have an equal weight in the performance process. Therefore, new dramaturgical forms and skills are needed, in terms of practice that no longer reinforces the subordination of all elements under one (usually the word, the symbolic order of language), but rather a dynamic balance to be obtained anew in each performance. (3)

Theatre and dance both moved beyond the accepted parameters of their form and expanded the perspective of what theatre and dance could be. This transition paved the way for the development of the dance dramaturg. As the blending of dance and theatre occurred it facilitated the leap of the dramaturg from theatre to dance.

Raimund Hoghe, a collaborator who worked with choreographer Pina Bausch and her Tanztheater Wuppertal between 1979 and 1990, was the first person to use the title of dramaturg in the context of dance (Profeta 7). Bausch initiated a collaborative trend in dance making by asking intriguing questions of her dancers in order to develop material. By opening up the choreographic process to include an exploration of meaning beyond craft the role of dance dramaturgy found relevance. Bausch extended the creative development of her works beyond just herself as she surrounded herself with artists who were dedicated to her vision and in doing so created poignant works of art.

The establishment of the dramaturg in contemporary dance as a practiced profession happened in the mid-1990's in Europe. The dance dramaturg's role commonly became the "mediator" between theory and practice. Dance Dramaturgy is on the precipice of yet another transformation. Bojana Bauer is a dance and performance theorist and dramaturg. In her article *Propensity: Pragmatics and Functions of Dramaturgy in Contemporary Dance* she looks at the history of the dance dramaturg as

the “critical observer” and proposes a shift to place the dance dramaturg in the “midst of the creative process” where the distinct and distant vision of the dramaturg is replaced by an “integration of the body of the dramaturg into the body of the process” (33). As freelance artists and project centered work is becoming standard she finds that collaborative models of working are being used more often professionally (36) Each choreographer or project has different needs and the dramaturg must live in a flexible role. It would be a pitfall for the dramaturg to only offer a critical framework, as this would stall the creative process. It is the fluidity of moving between perspectives that serves the dramaturg’s role. Profeta, who has been working professionally as a dance dramaturg for the last twenty years, writes that she never distinctly settles in one role or the other but passes through them as “a quality of motion” (Profeta 15).

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Great Divide Between Theory and Practice

I have found, from my own experiences and reports from other dance students, that the required academic subjects in a dance program, such as dance history or theory, are often considered to be less important to them than the practical subjects of technique and choreography. Dancers often have a resistance to writing, and do not necessarily make the connection between writing and critical thinking and dance, choreography, and performance. Perhaps dance students who have chosen to express themselves with movement do not feel confident as writers and expressing themselves with words. I have certainly thought and felt this both as an undergraduate and graduate student. 'I just want to dance!' Thomas DeFrantz, a professional dance dramaturg, identifies the “concept of intellectual labor as excess” is commonly found in dance studies (*Dance Dramaturgy as a Process* 166). However, dance, and choreography students in particular, would benefit from finding a connection between required academic dance subjects for direct practical applications.

Clare Croft, Professor of Dance History at University of Michigan, writes in *A Mutually Satisfying Pas de Deux: Feminist Dramaturgy and Dance in the Undergraduate Dance Curriculum*, that “dancers, inclined to kinaesthetic learning and moving rather than speaking, frequently consider their classes beyond the studio as irrelevant to what they see as their main focus: dancing” (188). As a dance dramaturg for a university production Croft was able to assist students in making connections between what they were learning in her dance history class to what they were learning in their rehearsals.

She claims, “dance studies flourish when dance dramaturgy meets dance history, because it creates more space for discussions about representation” (189). Croft integrates dramaturgical practices into her dance history courses to encourage students to observe how dramaturgy can provide “perspective on dance history, and also how dance history can come to bear on their choreographic and performing practices” (189). As a professor of dance history, she feels strongly that history is a vital component of dance studies. She states that it is essential that the separation and confinement of the various areas of dance be undone if students are to recognize the significance of dance history to the performing arts. Croft finds the importance of incorporating dramaturgical practices into her dance history classes in order to provide students with the practical application of academic dimensions. “Healing these splits among the components in the dance curriculum hopefully makes students sense greater coherence among the requirements of the major, but also demonstrates the value of dance history and theory to production-focused departments” (189). University dance programs require students write academically about dance, study dance history and theory, and engage in critical analysis in conjunction with practical subjects. By introducing concepts of dance dramaturgy to choreography courses students may experience more possibilities of theoretical practices at work within the creative process. For students this may offer additional validity of academic dimensions to the study of dance.

Dance dramaturgy also promotes analytical thinking as an integral part of choreographing a dance. Writing and speaking analytically and critically helps students to form connections between academic and practical subjects. Dramaturgical thinking welds the academic and practical dimensions within a creative process and can be a necessary

“compositional and ideological” starting point, as well as an “empathic and intuitive process” (Dramaturgy as Ecology 18). Dance dramaturgy may become the spark, the vehicle, and the path toward a successful final product. Nakajima describes dance dramaturgy as the “process through which interrelated metaphorical, analytical, and critical discourses are absorbed into the creative process” (*Dance Dramaturgy as a Process* 166). This amalgamation may contribute to an informed artistic vision and recognition of where student choreographers find themselves in connection with their dance lineage. Dance dramaturgy becomes both the thought process, uniting all learned dance knowledge, and the action through which to access this knowledge to inform the creative process.

If students are then required to apply their critical and analytical expression to peer work as a means of collaboration, this may become further motivation for students to fully understand the breadth of perspectives in dramaturgical thinking. Dance dramaturgy, as a means to channel acquired dance knowledge into a creative process, establishes a solid foundation and broader context for students’ choreographic choices by providing them access to theoretical language and history to support their ideas. As a choreography student, I felt I needed more experience in evolving choreographic concepts and communicating artistic concepts to others within the classroom. Theoretical and practical dimensions brought together through dramaturgical thinking can become the impetus for choreographic ideas that further enhance student work as they learn to respond to the dance they are choreographing. With dance dramaturgy practices, students may establish useful language and an understanding of practically applied history and theory within a collaborative effort.

### **How Dance Dramaturgy Behaves**

The choreographers of Belgium's premiere dance theatre, Les Ballets C de La B, make their dances in collaboration with their dancers rather than setting the works on the dancers. They also work closely with dance dramaturgs. In the book edited by Katalin Trecesenyi and Bernadette Cochrane, *New Dramaturgy: International Perspectives on Theory and Practice*, choreographer Koen Augustijnen speaks of the qualities he desires in a dramaturg, or any collaborator, as someone who can provide additional and personal perspectives from which to view a work in progress. (Going 'Au-dela' 165). When dance dramaturg Lou Cope first began working with Augustijnen, Cope found the roles in their relationship could remain undefined. Freed from definition the work was allowed to take precedence and the collaborators were able to provide what the work requires. Cope, speaking of previous work, says, the "lines between being a dramaturg, a coach, and a mentor are sometimes clearly drawn. In this case, they weren't. It was immediately clear that Koen was very open and very keen to engage in a dialogue not only about the work but also about his personal journey and his practice too" (*Going 'Au-dela'* 165). This penchant to keep the dramaturgical role undefined speaks to the importance of flexibility and accommodation of change and how this easiness is integral to collaborative process.

Today the developing trend is for all collaborators within a project to employ dramaturgical thinking throughout the creative process, rather than being confined to set roles with un-crossable boundaries. This resilience contributes to one's responsiveness to the work as "flexibility grants any collaborator, including but not limited to the

dramaturg, the ability to respond to the real course of inspiration, as it evolves” (Profeta 17). The capacity to flow fluidly between perspectives opens up possibilities for collaborators including the occasion for all, including performers, to engage in dramaturgical thinking. In the professional field of dance dramaturgy the amorphous nature of dramaturgical thinking has called on the dramaturg to perform as well. In the piece, *The Sleeping Beauty Notebook*, choreographed by Donald Byrd, the work led the professional dance dramaturg, Thomas DeFrantz, to become a performer, showcasing the role he was responsible for in the creative process. In the essay *Field Notes: In the Studio with Ralph Lemon and Donald Byrd*, DeFrantz relates that “acting onstage. . . . literally demonstrated for the audience an intellectual, outside-the-dancing presence connected to the strands of creative invention inside the performance at hand.” (*Field Notes* 155) He performed his dramaturgical thinking for the audience as he explains guiding “a pointed discussion of our reflection on the work we were in the process of witnessing together” (*Field Notes* 155).

The concept of this most recent evolution of the dramaturgical form into dramaturgical thinking as a course of action for collaborators was initiated by European dramaturg Myriam Van Imschoot and taken furthest in her 2003 article *Anxious Dramaturgy*. Here she explains that the activity of dramaturgy is a pivotal enough component to the creative process that it is becoming democratized among artists, which she considers to be a positive advancement of the form. Although many still preserve the role of dramaturg for an individual, discussion of the dramaturgical as “a field of operation that is ‘dispersed’ in different dimensions of the work of art” is gaining momentum (Van Imschoot in Profeta 11). It is the action of dramaturgical thinking I

believe will benefit choreography students the most as the intention for a choreography course is not to produce dance dramaturgs but rather to use dance dramaturgy as a means for expanding choreographic perspective. In broadening the way student choreographers may think about choreography with the introduction of multiple perspectives they also gain tools to effectively collaborate with peers.

Dance dramaturgy as an activity brings choreographers into conversation with their material by way of critique and discussion, leading them to question 'why?' It is through this process that clarity of intention is formed and this provides the choreographer with an advantage when making artistic choices. (Lavender 9) Choices that are made solely on craft may create pleasing compositions, however, they may not have been made in connection to the choreographer's intent (Lavender 7). It stands to reason that successful choreography is neither created from purely intellectual or craft-focused perspectives and the dance dramaturg or choreographer should not be limited to these perspectives in his or her work. Critical analysis stems from a synthesis of the visceral and rational responses. The role of the dramaturg, or someone engaging in dramaturgical thinking, is to merge aesthetic experience with critical analysis. The analysis evolves after, what Bojana Bauer calls, "moments of suspension of conceptual knowledge" (38). She expounds that the practice of art making moves beyond conventional norms and into an aesthetic realm of "unique experience" (37).

Throughout the creative process, a dance dramaturg may practice active seeing as a necessary means to enable a choreographer to "transcend the familiar, go beyond the representation of known images, and formulate new insights and perspectives" (Hanstein 155). This requires not just a "passive encounter or mere exposure to the environment,"

but also “directed and active seeing” (Hanstein 155). In dramaturgical thinking the creative act flows freely through critical discourse and aesthetic choices and “the conception of a network as an integrated and interactive system invites connections among the various processes and emphasizes the multidimensional, rather than linear, nature of the transactions.” (Hanstein 160) By engaging in dramaturgical thinking the act of thinking becomes movement itself (Profeta 139).

Lynn Thomson, dramaturg, director, teacher, and scholar, headed an M.F.A. Dramaturgy program in theatre at Brooklyn College between 1997 and 2001, where she developed a model of teaching that sought to erase the divide of critical thinking and practice and unite students in the common ground of process (Thomson 117). Her model focused on collaboration. In her article *Teaching and Rehearsing Collaboration* she describes this model in practice. For many of the “making” tasks, students were paired up as a dramaturg and, in this case, director. Despite the distinct separation of roles, Thomson often encouraged the students to not set the responsibilities of each role at the beginning but to allow what served the work to delineate them (117). She advocated for students to flow freely between roles.

Collaborative relationships thrive when flexibility is admitted. The ability for all collaborators to slip in and out of roles, which are not rigid, but instead transverse perspectives, is the direction many dance dramaturgs wish to take the practice. Profeta refutes the dramaturg role as a “static position within an artistic chain of command” (xvi). She aligns herself with the ideas of Flemish essayist and dramaturg Marianne Van Kerkhoven, arguing that the dramaturg’s role, if it were to be defined, can only be described as having a “quality of motion, which oscillates, claiming an indeterminate

zone between theory and practice, inside and outside, word and movement, question and answer” (Profeta xvii). The dramaturgical thinking may become a thoughtful and thought provoking sounding board of the creative process for choreographers. In order to be successful, many skillsets must merge together.

By employing dance dramaturgy in a choreography course students may develop these skills in the dance making process. Dramaturgical skills become process skills, which may make more effective choreographers. In an integrated collaborative classroom structure that allows students to apply dramaturgical thinking in collaboration with another student’s work provides real context for integrating various perspectives in creative process. Classroom collaboration becomes an experiment in the experiential process of integrating dramaturgy and choreography. The class becomes interdisciplinary in project-based learning by synthesizing multiple perspectives of dance making.

### **Research Questions**

My research focused on teaching collaboration in choreography classes. I was assuming that this model would be completely craft based and began looking at how the tasks of craft based choreography could be distributed among choreographers so that each student was only responsible for specific craft based tasks within a collaborative whole. In my mind this broke down to students becoming responsible for the isolated tasks of the story, distilling the essence of the story for the main theme or concept, determining what style of dance would best portray the concept, how long and how many characters the

piece would have, creating a movement vocabulary bank, deciding where in space the movement happens, determining dynamics, and then the roles of audience, critic, and the interpretation of the reactive responses to then be applied to the piece for revisions. After the students would go through this process they would then switch roles so they could experience each role. Although this exercise is intriguing and may produce interesting results it failed to provide an actual framework for collaborative choreography. It is only one exercise in collaborative choreography and not a methodology for teaching.

As I continued to research I came across Hanstein's dissertation. Her concept of developing various perspectives to make more effective and competent choreographers was compelling. I was interested in her ideas but at the time of reading her paper I did not find relevance to my research question of how to provide peer interaction and participation through collaboration in a university choreography course. I went on to discover the practice of dance dramaturgy when I read an article about Katherine Profeta, professional dance dramaturg for choreographer Ralph Lemmon, and then her recently published book on the subject and her experience.

I did not find that dance dramaturgy in and of itself contributed to my research question either but with the introduction of the concept of collaborators employing dramaturgical thinking I began to see how dance dramaturgy could be a way to develop the skills that Hanstein was advocating for and, if integrated into teaching choreography courses to develop choreographic skills, then it could be translated into a collaborative effort by giving the responsibility of these practices to students to apply to craft based choreographic tasks.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Unexpected Results

Inspired exploration leading to discovery and surprise can happen more readily when choreographic tasks become process oriented rather than focused on achieving a successful end product. With process orientation students may then authentically explore the nature of the work being created. Profeta observes that when students are given product oriented choreographic tasks, they strive for the success of the product and may try to “match definition rather than discover something new” (29). Tim Etchells, artistic director of *Forced Entertainment*, writes, “dogma never prospers” and “the surprises of improvisation, mistakes and changing one’s mind are the only certainties worth clinging to” (Etchells in Profeta 29). Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Jacob W. Getzels, authors of the book, *The Creative Vision: A Longitudinal Study of Problem Finding in Art*, determined the solution to a creative problem must be “discovered in the interaction with the elements that constitute it” (Csikszentmihalyi and Getzels in Hanstein 27). It is the process where creative development occurs and if the creative problem is solved too soon, the process stagnates resulting in undeveloped choreography. Csikszentmihalyi and Getzels concluded that it was the interaction with the process that made better artists (Hanstein 27).

Problem solving is collaborative and problem finding, by asking questions, leads to answers and changes required in the creative process (Thomson 120). The element of surprise and change is extended in the choreographic process when peer input becomes an active element in shaping a work. Introducing additional artists into the creative

process creates multidimensionality lending to the potential for a creative work to grow beyond what one person can imagine. When students begin to engage in collaborative relationships certain power play modes may appear. One of the considerations Profeta speaks to in her book is the unconscious assignment and identification of traditional gender roles to the collaborative roles (21). She relates an example of the feminization of the dramaturg role as subservient to the “genius body” of the dancer and/or choreographer (22). Another direction this role-playing may go is an idealization of the dramaturg as the intellectual, cerebral head overruling the feminized role of the feeling and emotional dancer/choreographer (21). Profeta explains:

What’s needed is a more sophisticated conceptual toolkit for understanding existing collaborative systems, so all such creative relationships do not snap immediately to a two-dimensional grid, in either a vertical relationship of served and servile, or a horizontal relationship of fifty-fifty authorship, neither of which feel familiar to my working process. The understanding of dramaturgical collaboration as a complex mode of friendship can also be helpful here (Profeta 21).

A more sophisticated collaborative relationship would require respect for an individual’s artistry and trust that comes from the understanding that input will come when and in the form that is needed for the work. It is not a relationship that would work well under an expectation of delivery. This 'friendship mode' speaks to a naturalness of being with and creating with someone else. A genuine responsiveness is required, necessitating full engagement with each other and the work. Profeta affirms that in a piece built from scratch, where the collaborators do not have “set rules or recipe, but rather work to locate the rules or recipe”, that responsiveness is imperative (17).

It is inevitable that there will be disagreements between collaborators and contradictions with the influx of ideas from differing perspectives. To work as ‘close friends’ means there will be ups and downs that come when exchanging real opinions and at times this means disagreeing. When negotiating these differences, “collaborators do not have to change who they are, but only how they engage” (Thomson 125).

Psychologist Charlan Jeanne Nemeth determined that often opposition results in more creative problem solving and she coined the term “authentic dissent”, which is characterized by the “articulation of sincerely held conflicting views instead of the more theatrical act of devil’s advocacy [and] increases the range and fitness of proposals generated by group problem solving“ (Nemeth in Profeta 19).

It is necessary to cultivate awareness within the collaborative relationship that the aim is to be surprised by the work. Profeta states that a “productive tension is only a starting point; from there it requires labor, dialogue, and an openness to recognize potential answers when later, exhausted, you stumble across them and they look nothing like what anyone first had in mind” (*Field Notes* 158). She relates that the experience of working with Lemon on a particular project produced more disagreements between them than usual because the work was so personal to Lemon. The positive outcome is that this kind of disagreement may become “a crucible for the work” stimulating change (*Field Notes* 157). This requires that collaborators move past butting heads so that they can be informed by the creative process and in react appropriately in order to provide what is needed. The best results are not attained when one clings to an idea.

For some choreographers relinquishing control of the final product as the work grows beyond their initial vision may be challenging. However, choreographers will learn

to control compositions through craft. With a process-centered approach students may learn more as they let go of control and gain valuable experience as they become able to recognize what is needed instead of trying to obtain a specific outcome. This keeps students engaged in the present. Rather than trying to form a complete idea, they may bring the seed of an idea to life and let it grow. The results may be unpredictable and astonishing.

The randomness and indeterminacy of this process brings to mind Chaos Theory, which emerged in the twentieth Century, as explained in the book *Putting a New Spin on Groups: The Science of Chaos*, by Psychology Professor Bud McClure as the theory that “describes living systems in process and is part of a larger discipline known as nonlinear dynamics”, and the well-known Butterfly Effect (2). The Butterfly Effect, discovered by mathematician Edward Lorenz, called “sensitive dependence on initial conditions” in Chaos Theory, is the theory that “small perturbations at the outset of a system, or in a chain of events, can have enormous effects on the outcome” (8-9). Relating Chaos Theory to theories of creative process from Carl Jung, Swiss psychiatrist and founder of the school of analytical psychology, McClure writes “When the mental apparatus is disrupted, chaos ensues, followed by a period where the organism reorganizes at a higher level of complexity.” (22) This may be transferred to the process of collaboration in a choreography course. The hope is that through collaborative discourse, which may involve a messy intervention upon a choreographer’s intent, there will result in a more complex creation. In dramaturgical thinking, this disruption takes the form of questions. By questioning choreographic intent there is the hope that through “asking and listening to catalyze a discussion. . . we will eventually generate more, or better, or just plain

different materials” (Profeta 15). It is through this questioning process that students develop an understanding of choreographic choices and can witness creative process in action. I believe this will develop a deeper understanding of craft and a broader choreographic view.

### **Teaching Diverse Perspectives**

Through the interchange of perspectives, additional skills, including effective communication, may be learned in a true collaboration, while still teaching the fundamental compositional elements that have been deemed essential in a university choreography course. I recommend that students work together, each with a distilled perspective, as a means to learning dramaturgical thinking. I believe the interchange between different perspectives in an integrated peer collaborative model allows for a deeper understanding of each perspective. In this way, students explore compositional elements, the relationship between them, and the impact that each choice has on the work. By placing the focus on process rather than product, peer involvement through collaboration, and combining multiple perspectives, students learn skills that they can continue to develop into their real-life collaborations.

A choreography course will most likely explore the craft of choreography through elements of composition, refine how to critique other students' work, and use improvisation to generate movement. I wish to expand the perspectives of critique and how to view choreography beyond craft, while still teaching the fundamentals of dance

composition. I would like students to transcend the common experience of choreographing solo works alone in a studio for the purpose of performing in front of a group for teacher lead critical analysis toward an experience where students eventually transverse multiple perspectives and roles within a collaborative project. Undeniably, knowledge of compositional craft is intrinsic to an effective dance product. However, Hanstein argues that “utilizing the conceptual aspects of choreographic design principles as a theoretical framework fails for several reasons to provide an adequate conception for structuring learning of the artistic process in dance” (9). She considers this to be true for product-centered tasks because students are then focused on trying to produce successful products rather than trying to gain a full understanding of why and how particular choices communicate intent to an audience. The purpose of shifting from product to a process-centered approach is to further develop this understanding of the craft of choreography.

Howard Gardner, developmental psychologist, best-known for his theory of multiple intelligences, proposes a model of four roles from which to view an artistic work: The Artist, the one who creates the work, the Audience Member, the one who “apprehends the final perceptual form”, the Critic who analyses and evaluates the work, and finally the Performer who will “transmit the created work to the audience” (Hanstein 41). Hanstein suggests that each of these roles “require distinct abilities or skills for participation in the artistic process” and recommends that further exploration of how the roles interact within creative process should be studied (43). The interaction of these perspectives is what Hanstein believes will help individual choreographers further develop their skills.

The Audience perspective is a highly personal, physical and emotional response to the work and interprets the meaning of the work. In *The Highly Engaged Classroom* by Robert J. Marzano and Debra J. Pickering with Tammy Heflebower, I found three questions to evaluate personal engagement that may be useful for the Audience perspective: 1) 'How do I feel?' 2) 'Am I interested?' 3) 'Is this important?' (Marzano). In conjunction with the last question I would add, 'Why or why not?'. The perspective of the Critic differs from the perspective of the Audience as the initial goal of the critical response is to remain as objective as possible. The role of Critic, according to Gardner, acts differently from the other three roles of Artist, Performer, and Audience Member. For example,

Meaningful images and symbolic constructs of the dance are created by the choreographer, interpreted and transmitted by the performer, and perceived by the audience. All of this occurs through interaction with the medium of dance – movement. In contrast, the critic focuses attention on the art object or event, however, the role is carried out, not in the symbol system of the art work just apprehended, but in the symbolic form of discursive language (Hanstein 48).

The critical perspective then must have a sufficient grasp of medium specific language. Use of academic dimensions for supplementation of this skill is beneficial.

Author Diana F. Green distinguishes four steps in the critical response, which she calls a Critical Thinking Model, in her book, *Choreographing From Within: Developing the Habit of Inquiry as an Artist*. The first step is analysis, describing what actually occurred in the work. The second step is reflection, which becomes personal as the Critic reflects on what he or she perceives the meaning of the work to be. The third step is integration, relating aspects of the work to any previous experience the Critic has had.

The final step of the critique is evaluation; determining the success of the work while using comments from the three previous steps to support the argument (12-13). In Green's model the steps of reflection and integration are congruent to Gardner's perspective of the Audience.

Using critical thinking is an essential aspect of the creative process and diversifying the ways to view choreography seems beneficial to students. Thomson differs from Gardner and views the role of critic as a process, which "avoids judgment, pre-conceived and unexamined opinion, and champions risk, discovery, and an appetite for the unknown" (121). Critical thinking, in this context, must be a process that puts the various perspectives into dialogue with each other. Hanstein advocates that choreographers learn to view dance from multiple perspectives to gain an understanding of the "multidimensional character" of the artistic process (49). Each role "distinguishes a segment of the artistic or creative activity of the choreographer. Combined, they form a composite portrait of the creative artist at work in the dance medium" (139). The dance making is at the center of the model while the roles, or perspectives, become "interrelated and interactive skills" (157). Perceiving "dance as an interpretation of an idea", it is inherently collaborative as the presented product displays an interchange between the "idea, medium, choreographer, and dancer" (79-80). Here Hanstein points out the inherent collaborative nature of choreographing in terms of a choreographer's intent being executed by the performer, as well as working collaboratively with their intent and the medium of their craft as an interactive dialogue.

I agree with Hanstein's suggestion that the development of a skill-oriented teaching model for each of these perspectives would be a worthwhile endeavor (190). I

would like to extend her sentiment a step further by applying the concept to a collaborative model. The purpose of examining each perspective is to first thoroughly understand how each point of view behaves independently with the end objective of integrating them. I wish to see the interaction of perspectives extend from the individual choreographer to include peers as a way to explore the interaction of perspectives collaboratively. If a collaborator can only work from one perspective, her input may become limiting to the work. A critical perspective may come across as “combative” writes Profeta, rather than productive, and may feel like an accusatory “line of questioning” (15). This may lead the choreographer to defend herself and to shut down rather than open up. Learning how to move fluidly between perspectives ensures that students will not get stuck in a single mind-set. To be taught effectively, these roles, or perspectives, may be distilled and, using analytical and critical thinking along with reflective writing as tools, explored individually as elements of dramaturgical thinking within a choreography course.

Each perspective will be investigated by working on small tasks giving students a clear understanding of what each perspective is and how to apply the perspective to dance making. With smaller task based projects the focus of critical analysis moves away from an individual who is responsible for an entire work, and onto the outcome of specific compositional choices made by the choreographer and how the input from various perspectives affect the work. Consequently the orientation becomes how to view the task from the lens of a specific perspective, how to relay thoughts in language, and how these thoughts are then applied to the choreographic task. This encourages the students to gain a full understanding of the perspective for which they have a responsibility. Student

influence is heightened throughout because students are involved in their peers' creative process and the choices made by others influence the direction of the work. In this way student input is validated and they learn to express themselves objectively.

### **Restructuring Classroom Learning**

In teaching choreography, finding harmony between dance dramaturgical practice and dance compositional craft presents a possible framework for peer collaboration while also providing additional process skills for students. This potential framework led me to research strategies that shift the focus of the class from product/result to process. Strategies include investigating and questioning throughout the artistic process about how the dance is being made and how the students are making their choices. With the shift of focus on process rather than product students will learn from each other as they observe how each individual approaches the action of making artistic choices. In a process-oriented class additional tools may be learned during a choreography course due to the involvement of students in their peers' process.

Hanstein reports primarily a product-oriented focus in her overview of printed material on teaching choreography. She finds a gap in the literature addressing methods to guide students through the activity of making dances. Often mentioned in the literature are elements of fundamental choreographic methods that go beyond the craft of dance composition, yet no framework is offered to present these as tools for students. Hanstein

suggests that these tools are refined through “idea finding and formulating, qualitative exploration and negotiation, idea transformation, and multifaceted perception and thinking” (22). If the classroom is re-oriented toward process students may gain a more substantial grasp of craft and the affect of their compositional choices to their choreographic intent. The development of these skills is emphasized through the making aspect of dance and is learned in a classroom oriented to process.

There seems to be some consensus among dance pedagogues that dance curriculums should move toward process focused classes to provide the most valuable education for choreography students. Donna Davenport, Professor of Dance at Hobart and William Smith Colleges writes in her article, *Building a Dance Composition Course: An Act of Creativity*, published in the 2006 Journal of Dance Education, that the teaching methodology of dance traditionally used in the United States of America is to “assign movement studies and to critique students’ presentations in class” (25). This approach emphasizes the “quality of the product” rather than actually teaching students the “activity of creative process, which itself requires critical reasoning” (25). Product-oriented choreography tasks often have students striving to produce the correct answer. This does not promote inquiry and experimentation for the student (Davenport 25-26). Teachers will not be able to teach students everything they know. What is most valuable for choreography students is to teach them process skills so they will continue to grow as artists beyond the classroom (Hanstein 10).

Larry Lavender, Professor of Interdisciplinary Arts at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, notes in his article, *Creative Process Mentoring: Teaching the “Making” in Dance-Making*, published in the 2006 Journal of Dance Education, that in

dance composition classes students come to effective results often by accident and may not understand what they did that made the work successful (7). Usually hundreds of creative choices are made when creating a work during what Lavender calls “operational moments” (6). Therefore, surveying a choreographer’s process for critique rather than a choreographer’s dance may be more effective. He proposes a “creative process mentor” who may assist a choreographer through these challenging moments with rehearsal criticism rather than dance criticism (6-7). The function of the process mentor is to “engage the artist regularly in retrospective analysis of rehearsals, not for the purpose of “fixing the dance,” but to orient the artist within the unfolding narrative of her process and to help imagine upcoming chapters” (11). A creative process mentor engages with a choreographer in a reflective dialogue “through the use of open-ended clarifying questions” about how the work is being made and not about the work itself (7).

Lavender found that too much time was spent in his choreography classes trying to fix dances that were defective. He switched the classes focus to the making of dances and came up with a four-part model of artistic making (7). His four-part model has the acronym IDEA and consists of four basic operations: Improvisation, or any means to “inventing or generating material for a dance or for some part of it,” Development, Evaluation, and finally, Assimilation (8). It is the assimilative evaluation that determines how the dance is perceived and viewed as a whole by the audience (10). Lavender concludes that “dance making is fundamentally a critical process (that is, the need arises continually to evaluate the work)” and this is the most pivotal work a choreographer performs (9).

The article written by Lavender intends that the teacher would take on the role of the process mentor. This goes some way toward what I wish to see in choreography classes regarding process focus and critical reflection of compositional choices. However, I propose the concepts in IDEA are taken a step further by placing the activity of reflection as student responsibility and as a way to tune their sensitivities to process. The teacher therefore becomes a facilitator of peer mentorship. I feel that the concept of IDEA is contained within the context of dramaturgical thinking as an integral aspect to choreographic process.

### **The Teacher Serves As An Example of A Co-Artist**

In the restructured classroom, the teacher becomes an example of a co-artist for the students. This would not be immediate but would take place over the length of the course. The teacher moves from lecturer, as the students learn the information required, to facilitator, as the students experiment in their roles, and eventually the teacher becomes a co-artist along with the students. Allowing the teacher to move beyond a facilitator to co-artist is an empowering step for the teacher and students alike, as all viewpoints potentially hold equal weight and influence. In this way, the teacher provides the information for students to expand their perspectives but does not hold authority over artistic choices. The teacher as co-artist does retain their own voice and influence of artistic choices through active engagement in the creative process and teaches through example. The extent to which the teacher can move into the role of co-artist may depend

on the level and experience of the class and how effectively the curriculum has been designed to accomplish this ambition.

Gretchen Alterowitz, Associate Professor of Dance at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, is also a member of AGA Collaborative, a trio of dance artists-scholars who collaborate in order to create experimental research and performance. Prompted by her own experience of ballet training, she expresses in her article, *Toward a Feminist Ballet Pedagogy: Teaching Strategies for Ballet Technique Classes in the Twenty-First Century*, published in the Journal of Dance Education 2014, that dance educators need to challenge the mind-set that “patriarchal methods are considered essential to the development of the physical, technical, and aesthetic requirements of a professional ballet dancer” (8). As a university dance educator, she desires a different approach to teaching. In her article she quotes Robin Lakes, Associate Professor of Dance, University of North Texas, noting, “*how* a subject matter is conveyed can be more powerful than its *what* - the content” (11).

Alterowitz aims to “interrogate ballet’s traditional teaching methods and values” with an “intervention on tradition” by introducing a democratic philosophy into her classroom (8-9). When Alterowitz first opened her classroom to dialogue, all the questions were directed to her. Over time the questions led to commentary, which is a more “complex skill that requires higher level thinking and engages more deeply with the material” (13). She continues to explore how teaching the ballet discipline can be democratic and still disseminate what is necessary for a technique class, believing that if “...ballet teachers look closely and honestly at ballet ideologies, perhaps the classroom will become the place in which we start to ask ballet to examine and evaluate its

principles in the service of a ballet that resonates with twenty-first-century concerns” (16).

Dance, like oral tradition, is passed from mentor to student (Before, Between, and Beyond 204). As dancers become teachers, the teaching and mentorship style is absorbed as it is found to be sufficiently effective. There is an influx of new information and research that challenges these traditional teaching methods and many dance educators are learning how to integrate these new teaching strategies while maintaining effectiveness. Alterowitz’s experience with her ballet class may seem unrelated to teaching choreography yet, a hierarchical teaching structure is standard in many university and studio settings. Typical characteristics of a product-centered choreography class include what Davenport describes as an “implicit classroom hierarchy that presumes the teacher owns the expert opinion” (26). The orientation of these classes is toward making “‘strong’ compositions to receive positive feedback” with the “predictable classroom rhythm of showing-and-critiquing that can dull the senses and dampen the creative spirit” (26). This form of critique necessitates “verbal, linear-logical articulation of kinaesthetic perceptions (which is often impossible)” and is structured around a singular aesthetic perspective with the choreography teacher’s “emphasis on craft and the presence of unspoken parameters, such as biases against particular dance genres or narrow definitions of “authentic” movement (26). Davenport’s severe analysis of the quintessential choreography class highlights my sentiment that although the teacher likely has the most experience and therefore validates the value of their opinion, student learning is more effective when students are placed in a position to have artistic agency in the classroom.

I believe choreography students would benefit from a teaching model that moves away from the traditional teacher-student hierarchy towards an integrated collaborative approach. To achieve this, the teacher must actively unsettle the traditional hierarchical structure by becoming an example of a co-artist, collaborator; neither more nor less. In this model the teacher does not lead everything or become the expert on everything; nor does she step out entirely. The teacher facilitates student learning by first providing the necessary information while systematically relinquishing responsibility of the creative process roles to the students. Thus, the classroom becomes a functioning collaborative system, a laboratory that provides more interaction between peers and their work, and more action within the classroom as co-artists promoting artistic agency.

### **What is the Student's Responsibility?**

As varying perspectives of critique and analysis within dramaturgical thinking become an active part of the creative process, it is the responsibility of the students to engage in the practice. This becomes a feedback loop informing the practices of dance dramaturgy and dance composition as the choreographer actively responds to the comments of their peers. This course of action adds to students' experiential learning.

Canadian educator Denise Wallewein writes about her experience of facilitating a completely student-led collaborative creation from start to finish and the significant impact it had on the students. In her article, "*Collective Creation*": *A Multidisciplinary Drama Program*, published in *The Clearing House* 1994, she postulates that students

benefit from this full responsibility which, “spurs them to work for the best final performance of which they are capable. . . appreciate one another's strengths and talents, and. . .compensate for each other's weaknesses” (347). In working this way the students were able to identify what was needed from them as individuals to contribute to the growth of the work. During this collaborative process the students were “acquiring knowledge through the research process, . . . constantly searching for creative ways to transmit this knowledge to others” (347). Students who can take greater responsibility for their learning and choices become more fully engaged in the work. From her experience, Wallewein states that “when students are given the opportunity to combine their efforts, they are capable of the extraordinary” (347). Making choices generates a sense of ownership in students as they take responsibility for their accomplishments and their defeats. Ownership fosters commitment and establishes a healthy attitude towards learning, which can be applied to other future learning situations (Cooper 10).

In the book, *The Intimate Act of Choreography*, Lynne Anne Blom and L. Tarin Chaplin write about the effectiveness of “experiential learning” and they suggest that improvisation is the vehicle that blends kinesthetic and intellectual knowledge (xiv). When improvising, what a dancer knows about dance and movement is translated rapidly into the body and informs how the dancer moves. The moving body then supplies instant feedback regarding the information in practice and is re-assessed by the dancer in real time. This is experiential learning. Another way to extend experiential learning for students is by them cultivating working relationships between themselves and their peers in the classroom. Within a working relationship, students can potentially blend together their increased range of abilities and thus expand their experiential learning. Students

more readily absorb information if they put what they are learning into immediate practice, combining what they know with the new information available to them.

The responsibility of collaboration affords space for students to apply what they are learning in the course to their choreographic approach. Hanstein states that “a compendium of skills is of little significance unless presented within a framework that depicts the real-life experience to which the skills are intended to apply” (160). True collaboration offers additional choreographic lessons that can only be learned through the experience of it. An important aspect of collaborative learning is the self imposed responsibility students administer when they are held accountable to their peers rather than to a teacher. Joyce Morgenroth, Associate Professor of Dance, Cornell University, believes that despite the disparity among dance composition students they respond well to high standards. In her article *Contemporary Choreographers as Models for Teaching Composition*, published in the Journal of Dance Education 2006, she states, “If we as teachers come to our composition classes with high standards and give maximum responsibility to our students, there is a greater likelihood they will work hard, probe deep sources, and produce studies that arise from a place of excitement, discovery, and commitment” (20). Giving full responsibility to students and requiring peer engagement provides the special opportunity for guided collaboration in choreography classes. This may reveal more to students about the dance making process than only solo studies and will contribute to their future, working relationships. In order to be able to effectively relate to peers, these skills must be developed over the duration of a course. Essential to student development in effective communication is the expansion of their artistic language.

### **Putting Thoughts into Words**

A strong command of the medium of language enables students to express themselves more confidently with words. Reflective writing is an effective strategy to assist in the expansion of relevant language for communicating complex thoughts and becomes another learning tool for synthesizing new information relayed in the classroom to personal and significant student experience. Dance educator Betsy Cooper began a project that was motivated by her experience in the professional world of dance, “to promote engaged learning and improve student confidence through the use of writing” (5). In her article, *Reflective Writing/Reflective Practice: Promoting Engaged Learning and Student Confidence in the Beginning Ballet Class*, published in the 2013 Journal of Dance Education, she notes that most dancers train in a formal setting, where the “teacher as expert is the authority figure, and the student as novice is often the passive recipient of information” (5). The formal learning environment is an example of transmissive learning. Translateral learning, another learning pathway, offers students a way to deepen and strengthen their learning as they contemplate the material they have absorbed through transmissive learning and find connections to past courses, lessons, and experiences (5). Transmissive learning provides the necessary knowledge and translateral learning is driven by self-reflection and happens over a longer period of time (5).

Cooper hoped to employ the two learning pathways using reflective writing as a means for students to become co-participants in the direction of their learning. As co-

participants, students make choices for their learning goals. Therefore, Cooper had to release some control over her decisions about learning in the classroom. Over time she noticed students began to “develop a metacognitive and self-directed approach to learning” (8). Through reflective writing, the students became more involved in their own learning which Cooper saw exhibited in their “problem identification, strategy development, problem solving and self-assessment written from a more objective and analytical perspective” (9). Student confidence began to grow as they became skilled in “functional language use” (9). As co-participants, students held responsibility for their own learning rather than passively participating in the traditional learning setting, which Cooper believes tacitly implies a division of right and wrong choices. Cooper reflects on her students' responsiveness to guiding their own learning and concludes, “students become more involved in their learning when the teacher hat gets passed around” (5). She determines that reflective writing develops skills that are “requisite, not only to expertise and success in the dance field, but to lifelong learning” (10). She saw a shift in her students from obedient and passive recipients of the information to enthusiastic, self-directed learners on a journey of self-discovery and self-confidence (10).

Reflective writing may be used in a choreography course as a tool for examining process and exploring language. This may assist students in effectively articulating their ideas confidently in front of the group and with their peers when operating dramaturgical thinking. In addition, writing is another means to survey choreographic choices and gain an understanding of the results of these choices. The American choreographer Deborah Hay reveals that when she began scoring her dances in written language she gained new understanding of her own choreography by approaching the medium from a different

perspective. “[I] learned things about other dimensions of the dance that I did not know were there until I wrote them down” (Hay in Profeta 27). Reflective writing utilizes a multiplicity of perspectives by employing analysis in order to form thoughts and opinions about a work or process. In this way, new understanding can be found through the act of writing.

Sinead Kimbrell, a teaching artist working with Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, led school workshops with a “creative process-based dance residency” program she co developed called Movement as Partnership (331). MAP focuses on professional development for teachers in arts integration and student learning and guides students through the Laban principles of body, energy, space, and time, to “cultivate innovation by exploring students’ understanding of the world through movement” (329). She describes a particular workshop called Move Right into Reading in her article, *Managing Movement as Partnership*, published in the 2011 *Studies in Education* (333). A reflective method she used with students for viewing dance is an approach called Eyes See/Mind Sees. With this approach students simply recall what they saw in a dance with their eyes and then move toward what images those qualities became in their mind (335). After the students have found the basic understanding and language to distinguish between describing movement, movement concepts, and interpretation, they begin to draw from stories and poetry as a basis of inspiration for choreography. Through these workshops students are “encouraged to find their personal voice or ownership of the process” and specific language to best express their ideas (342). Kimbrell characterizes dance as cooperative since most dance artists will not be working as soloists and the collaborative

activities in the workshops are designed to teach students to become “effective communicators” in dance and beyond (342).

The complex use of words and speech to convey thoughts in dance making is applicable because dance often does not follow a linear thought process or narrative. Profeta expresses herself with language in the rehearsal room, when it is not anatomy specific, “through copious simile and metaphor” (Profeta 26). Often, creative ideas do not land on the absolute but shift between meanings and can only be expressed as “linguistic gestures in the direction of what cannot exactly be spoken” (Profeta 27). Reflective writing is an effective way for students to explore metaphor and figurative language to support their elusive thoughts. Developing language is useful for choreographers to be able to speak confidently about their work with others. Profeta praises the benefit of dialogue as a way to refine the artistic vision in her working relationship with Lemon. She relates “I did not need to win the argument, but both the project and I did need Ralph to clarify his intentions by better explaining why I was wrong” (Field Notes 157). The means for clarification is what is gained here.

Andre Lepecki explains that his role as dance dramaturg for the choreographer Meg Stuart is to verbalize what he sees happening with what he calls “metaphorical explosions” between sequences of events that happened randomly with no logic or coherent dramaturgy” (*Dance Dramaturgy as a Process* 165). After rehearsals, a more “comprehensive and critical discussion of the emerging piece” happens (*Dance Dramaturgy as a Process* 165). With Lepecki’s example, we see how the contribution of language becomes part of the work and that through his insights the work evolves. His performance analysis contributes to discussions during and after rehearsals affecting the

creative process and, “through that, the reformulation of event sequences” (*Dance Dramaturgy as a Process* 166). Thus, dance dramaturgy, in this case, is the process through which interrelated metaphorical, analytical, and critical discourses are absorbed into the creative process.

One argument against emphasizing the use of language when discussing dance is that it is incapable of fully revealing what is conveyed in a dance. As dance is expressed through movement, language may fall short (Profeta 25). Profeta still advocates for the “transformative” power of words as a stimulant for creative activity in the dance making process (26). She explains that the “figurative language is laid up against embodied experience in order to evoke an overlap, but not an equivalence” using language as a way to catalyze change by turning language into an “active agent” (26). The expression of language is in response to the dance, affirming that “language always comes second, for first there is something to be languaged, to which the languaging process is applied, and that thing is movement, or other embodied experience” (26).

I suggest that the purpose of reflective writing in choreography class extends our ability to engage in dramaturgical thinking and brings students into a position where positive, collaborative dialogue between peers is possible. This asks for student accountability by deepening an understanding of compositional choices and selected language used with peers. Reflective writing is a useful skill for choreographers with practical application in enhancing their creative process. As students begin to connect what they see choreographically and representationally with language, they may learn to collaborate more effectively with their peers. The collaborative relationship may simply

be a choreographer expressing intent to dancers. Profeta offers an example illustrating how words may be used to highlight choreographic choices:

‘This movement always turns to the right. Is that a choice?’ or ‘When there is speech, Performer A always begins. Should we emphasize that?’ No answer need be presumed; it could be yes or it could be no; no opinion need be stated, though the dramaturg may also have and share one. But the same way the words ‘rib cage’ simply draw a dancer’s attention to that anatomical location, this sort of naming of assumptions draws attention to something that was always there but perhaps not noticed. (Profeta 26)

By calling attention to aspects of choreography in a nonpartisan manner this allows student choreographers to consider their choices in relationship to their intent and whether or not they have made a conscious choice, perhaps it was an element that was over looked. The choreography students who are only engaging in the dramaturgical aspect of the particular piece will still gain valuable experience as they observe their peers substantiate their choreographic choices.

Movement may be the final form of artistic expression, but the use of words to communicate ideas during rehearsals and throughout the creative process is essential. Developing figurative and metaphoric language broadens students' overall artistic language and may be developed in a choreography course through dramaturgical practices.

## **CHAPTER FOUR- Conclusion**

### **Coming Together with a Unified Perspective**

The various perspectives can be taught individually but operate together in dramaturgical thinking, giving students well-rounded skills to find their artistic voice. Through process, the how and why of choreographic decisions becomes refined and clear. Multiple perspectives come together to express a unified vision. Students who are able to synthesize their range of dance experiences through the unification of multiple perspectives have greater capacity to generate products of conscious choice. Through process a “conscious attitude toward. . . communication” is discovered and this consciousness is what moves choreography from only form to an “art form” (Hanstein 56).

I think that training in an integrated collaborative method would have assisted me through my choreographic process by helping me find confidence in delivering choreographic concepts to my dancers and specific language to assist the dancers in developing movement as they absorbed it into their bodies. The practice of viewing work from various perspectives would have aided my ability to shift, change, develop, and evolve my intent when a performer offered a suggestion, opinion, or query for why we were doing something a particular way. I feel the biggest impact would have been on my process and would have given me the ability to work more collaboratively with my dancers as I had hoped to do for my M.F.A. concert.

The main purpose for an integrated collaborative method is to build confidence and experience in student interactions, expand their choreographic practice to include complex thinking, and to build a supportive learning community. An open learning dynamic means student influence becomes an active part of a class allowing individual ideals to enter the classroom and be present in process. This assists students in the discovery of their active, artistic voice. Through collaborative discourse the validation of one's thoughts through another's actions would be invaluable as an artist.

Every artist creates differently and the way an artist works is always changing with each project and over time. Through history, the way people think about making art also changes. Student's "capacity to extend present creative boundaries or discover new artistic territories" should not be underestimated (Hanstein 9). Students' creative impulses may provide new insights into the creative process. Applying dramaturgical thinking to creative process may encourage students who only wish to engage in the practical side of the work, access to additional tools. As choreographers, the ability to transverse a multiplicity of perspectives with confidence is a fruitful attribute. If students and teachers are able to broaden their concept of creative activity, it opens up possibilities for dance. I believe that creating space and relevance for dance dramaturgy in creative process promotes collaboration by providing additional ways to engage with peers. Process skills learned through dramaturgical practices in choreography classes may make more competent choreographers as they broaden their skill set to become complex communicative collaborators.

By engaging in active seeing, developing a proficiency in medium specific language, reflective writing, and opening up discussions in order to evolve work, students

take on the diverse perspectives, which fall under the umbrella terms of choreographer and dance dramaturg. With confidence gained by language discovery through generative discussions and reflective writing and experiencing practical application of history and theory to process, the interdisciplinary and collaborative approach to teaching choreography through dramaturgical thinking seems a worthwhile pursuit.

It may be difficult for some teachers who are teaching choreography for a specific style of dance to see how this would be implemented into their classroom. In these cases I suggest that teachers incorporate elements that they consider to be constructive for their classes. A dramaturgical discussion or reflective writing assignment regarding the relevant history pertaining to a particular piece or how the history is portrayed in present circumstances will find significance in all choreography classes regardless of style. This type of assignment does not have a prerequisite skillset, only some research done necessarily outside of the classroom.

In my time pursuing both my undergraduate and graduate degrees as a dance and choreography major I would have benefited from more homework within my choreography classes. As an undergraduate I found little relevance for the academic dimensions of dance because I was never required to directly apply what I was learning to my area of focus, choreography. History and theory felt like completely separate subjects from choreography and performance. With the separation of subjects, as many dance programs are designed, the additional homework may result in a work overload for students. In this department design what I would like to see happen is the combining of choreography course assignments with history and theory course assignments so that the

relevance of history and theory is found through direct application to choreographic work.

The American Dance Legacy is an organization that integrates dance history and performance through the preservation, re-creation, and teaching of historic dance works. The history is a primary aspect of the programming and is emphasized as the students learn the choreography. I experienced this integration when I learned the Limon Etude with Carla Maxwell and rehearsal director Mary Anne Newhall at UNM. I found the process challenging as I had never had the responsibility of history attached to my performance before but it was a powerful and informative experience for me as a dance history student, choreographer, and performer.

I would like to see choreography courses taught in a way that allows for the responsibility of this integration to be taken up by the students. I believe that students initiating their learning provides agency for them as artists and scholars. Artistic agency can more readily be fostered in a non-hierarchical collaborative teaching model. In conclusion I believe that accepting a collaborative teaching model for a university choreography course is beneficial for students as it provides access to peer learning, artistic agency, accountability of their own learning, and teaches process skills, which can be developed further beyond their university career.

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## APPENDIX A

*C'est la Vie* Concert Program Front Cover

Poster Design: Lauren Golightly, 2015



**APPENDIX B****“I Am Because We Are” Cast and Crew****CAST***Dancers*

XueXia Bruton	Yarrow Perea
Roxana Jian	J. Stuart Smith
Amanda Johnson	Dante Morning-Star
Michelle Kassmann	Ysabela Trujillo
Kimberly Martinez	Kendra Williams

*Musicians*

Lauren V. Coons	Yakima Fernandez
Gabriela Garza	Christian Newman

*Artistic Direction and Choreography*

Ariel Burge, Degree Candidate

MFA in Dance

**CREW**

Stage Manager: Ana Arechiga

Lighting Designer: Genevieve Noel

Master Electrician: Shawn Nielson

Main Light Board Operator:

Graphic Design: Lauren Golightly

Performance Photography: Travis Lewis

Performance Videography: Miguel Gandert

## APPENDIX C

## Image from “I Am Because We Are”

Photograph by: Travis Lewis



## APPENDIX D

**“I Am Because We Are” Concert DVD – September, 2015.** Submitted as a Supplementary File to LoboVault Repository

For fulfillment of the MFA in Dance at UNM each candidate is required to create and produce an evening-length concert of original choreography in addition to the dissertation.

**“I Am Because We Are”** was performed as part of the show *C’est La Vie* September 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>, 2015 in Rodey Theatre at the University of New Mexico Center for the Arts.

A DVD of the performance has been archived as a “supplementary file” to the LoboVault repository.

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