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# African American High School Girls' Perceptions Of Dance-Based Physical Education And Sport-Based Physical Education

Kimberly Ann Maljak  
*Wayne State University,*

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**AFRICAN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS' PERCEPTIONS OF DANCE-BASED  
PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT-BASED PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

by

**KIMBERLY MALJAK**

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

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Approved By:

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Advisor

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Date

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## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **Overview of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine African-American (AA) high school girls' perceptions of dance-based physical education (PE) in relation to their past experiences in sport-based PE. The rationales for this study were based on several issues: (1) the prevalence of childhood obesity, (2) physical inactivity among youth, (3) consequences of obesity, (4) the potential of school PE to play a significant role in addressing childhood obesity and physical inactivity, (5) the considerable literature base documenting many students' negative perceptions of and experiences in PE, and (6) the importance of understanding culturally relevant curricula that can engage a wider segment of urban youth, in particular AA girls.

### **The State of Urban Youth Health**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2013), over the last 30 years childhood obesity has doubled in youth ages 6-11 and tripled in those ages 12-19. Regardless of age, sex, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), education level, or geographic region, obesity rates have increased considerably. Approximately 17% of all youth are affected by obesity. This number has tripled in comparison with the previous generation. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2012) found among youth ages 6-19, almost 33% are considered to be overweight or obese and approximately 18% are considered obese.

However, there are greater increases in the prevalence of obesity documented among adolescent females, ages 12-19, ranging from 12.2% to 26.5% (Huh, Stice, Shaw, & Boutelle, 2012). The increase in obesity in adolescent females between the ages of 10-17 could be

attributed to lower physical activity (PA) levels in adolescent females than in adolescent males (Sweeting, 2008). Typically, as children grow into adolescence, PA and exercise become a lower priority and other interests become more prevalent (Hills, King, & Armstrong, 2007). Additionally, some female adolescent students have after-school commitments such as attending tutoring programs, working in order to help contribute to household financial needs, and other familial responsibilities such as babysitting younger siblings and household chores (Elkins, Cohen, Koralewicz, & Taylor, 2004; Humbert, et al., 2006; Maljak, et al., 2014).

Furthermore, obesity trends are higher among minority females, specifically AA adolescent females. Over a ten year period, results from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) indicate AA adolescent females had a larger increase in obesity (8.5%) compared to non-Hispanic white females (5.8%) and Mexican-American females (5.2%) (Fryar, Carroll, & Ogden, 2012). The continuous increase in obesity can be associated with girls' beliefs, expectations, and experiences of PA (Taylor, et al., 1999). Barriers such as being too tired, sweating too much, and not feeling safe in their neighborhoods prevent girls from participating in PA which leads to sedentary behaviors or activities (Fahlman, Hall, & Lock, 2006).

In addition, AA adolescents living in inner-city urban areas tend to have higher obesity rates than adolescents in other areas of the United States (Elkins, et al., 2004). According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS, 2013), 47.9% of youth grades K-12 were considered overweight and obese in one specific Midwest, inner-city urban area. On average, females were considered 20.8% obese and 27.1% overweight. The lack of PA and recreational facilities in inner-city urban areas could be a significant contributor and affect individual behaviors, leading

to obese and overweight adolescents (Gordon-Larsen, Nelson, Page, & Popkin, 2006). Furthermore, “the overall opportunities for participation for inner city youth are significantly more restricted than in middle class youth” (Elkins, et al., 2004, p. 186). According to Lopez and Hynes (2006), physical inactivity could be influenced by poverty, racism, and violence in neighborhoods discouraging social connections and interests with neighbors. Overall participation in after-school team sports is also considerably lower in inner-city areas; especially for girls (Elkins, et al., 2004).

Finally, low income youth tend to have higher obesity rates than those who come from higher income backgrounds (Ogden, Lamb, Carroll, & Flegal, 2010). More specifically, low income AA adolescents tend to have higher rates of obesity and overweight due to sedentary lifestyles (Singh, Kogan, Van Dyck, & Siahpush, 2008).

### **Physical Inactivity among Youth**

Lack of daily PA among youth is a key factor in rising obesity rates (National Institutes of Health [NIH], 2013; National Physical Activity Plan [NPAP], 2014). Unfortunately, youth today are not as active due to reasons such as inaccessibility to safe routes for walking and bicycling to school, lack of green spaces or community centers to play, and minimal variety of extracurricular activities such as sport, dance, or fitness programs (Let’s Move, 2014). By the time children reach adolescence, PA declines and they begin to live a more sedentary lifestyle. According to the CDC (2013), only 27.1% of high school students participate in the recommended 60 minutes per day of PA and only 29% attend daily PE.

Although PA tends to decrease among all adolescents, research indicates there is a greater decline in PA in adolescent girls (Kimm et al., 2002). According to Kimm et al. (2002),

behavioral risks such as smoking and pregnancy tend to affect the decline in PA among girls. Other factors include living in a single-parent household and the level of education among parents in the household. Finally, girls who are overweight throughout their childhood are likely to have a decline in PA sooner than their non-overweight peers.

While PA levels decrease in females as they grow into adolescence, a more significant decline in PA is seen among the AA female population (Kimm et al., 2002). Their PA levels tend to decline twice as much as Caucasian females and by ages 18 and 19, the majority of girls have no PA other than what they do during the school day (Kimm et al., 2002).

Research also indicates inner-city urban adolescents are less physically active than rural adolescents and adolescents living in small cities (Matre et al., 2008). Other studies report urban adolescents tend to be less active than rural adolescents as well, resulting in a higher quantity of obese or overweight adolescents (Liu, Bennet, Harun, & Probst, 2008). According to the YRBS (2013), among youth grades K-12 in this Midwest, inner-city urban area, approximately 21.3% did not participate in the recommended 60 minutes of PA in one day. Furthermore, 75.5% were not physically active at least 60 minutes per day for five days and as high as 86.7% were not physically active at least 60 minutes per day all seven days. However, AA females living in urban inner-city environments tend to have the biggest decline in PA and the highest rate of overweight and obesity compared to their adolescent peers (Kimm et al., 2002; Lopez & Hynes, 2006). For example, within a seven-day period, 89.2% AA females in the Midwest, inner-city urban area were not physically active for at least 60 minutes per day.

According to Hanson and Chen (2007), family income and neighborhood crime among low SES families also have a strong influence on overall PA among adolescents. They are less

likely to be active than those coming from middle to high SES families, have strong parental support, and live in safe neighborhoods. Furthermore, based on family income, females who come from low SES backgrounds might be limited to activities they are able to enroll in such as dance or after-school sports teams. Therefore, they tend to be less active than higher SES females.

### **Consequences of Obesity and Physical Inactivity**

Several chronic diseases are associated with overweight and obesity such as juvenile diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, stroke, respiratory problems such as asthma, and some cancers (Slawta, Bentley, Smith, Kelly, & Symon-Degler, 2008; Slawta & DeNeui, 2010). According to the CDC (2014c), overweight and obesity are usually caused by lack of PA among other factors such as poor eating habits. Also, lack of PA causes illnesses that include cardiovascular disease, obesity, hypertension, bone, and joint diseases (Warburton, Nicol, & Bredin, 2006). Participation in the recommended amount of PA can help prevent these diseases as well as overweight and obesity.

Psychosocial consequences of obesity and lack of PA in adolescents can include social isolation, poor classroom performance, and poor body-image (Caprio et al., 2008). When the health of an adolescent is jeopardized, their physical, social and emotional, or overall well-being is affected (Preventing Childhood Obesity, 2005). Past literature indicates obese and overweight adolescents are often stigmatized, marginalized by peers, subjected to negative stereotyping, and discriminated by others (Lobstein, Baur, & Uauy, 2004). Social marginalization can lead to lower self-esteem and depressive symptoms (Richman & Leary, 2009; Strauss, Harold, & Pollack, 2003). For example, overweight and obese adolescents are ignored, teased, and

excluded from social activities leaving them to have fewer friends than their normal-weight peers (Puhl, Luedicke, & Heuer, 2011).

Although physical inactivity and obesity tend to increase in many adolescents, there is a much higher prevalence for both to occur in female adolescents. Female adolescents are less likely to have high body satisfaction and have a lower sense of well-being than males (Alberga, Sigal, Goldfield, Prud'homme, & Kenny, 2012; Sweeting, 2008). When recognized as being overweight or obese, males are more likely to begin exercising, reducing BMI, and gaining upper body mass compared to females (Sweeting, 2008). Furthermore, psychosocial health issues in females tend to be higher than in males as well due to intense bullying and name-calling which lead many female adolescents to depression.

Unfortunately, chronic diseases caused by obesity, psychosocial issues, and other health-related consequences lead to high health care costs. Between 2002 and 2004 there was more than \$20 billion spent treating obesity-related diseases (Centers for Disease Control, 2013; Sweeney, Glaser, & Tedeschi, 2007). According to Withrow and Alter (2011), obese people were found to have 30% higher medical costs than their normal weight counterparts. The direct costs of childhood obesity include the medical costs (i.e. doctor visits) for treating obesity-related illnesses which accounts for 27% of the rise in health care costs between 1987 and 2001 (Cawley, 2010). The indirect costs are associated with work and school absenteeism. For school-aged youth, absenteeism often leads to academic underperformance.

In addition to various illnesses caused by obesity and inactive adolescents, academic achievement and overall school performance is negatively affected by obesity and physical inactivity. According to a systematic review conducted by Castelli et al. (2014), the history of

physical activity and academic performance indicate healthier children learn better. Physical activity, even in modest amounts such as two to three hours per week, can produce health benefits in children (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). Health benefits include but are not limited to: lower cholesterol and blood pressure, decrease in overweight and obesity, increased bone density, and better mental health with lower chances of depression. Students with higher self-esteem are more likely to attain higher academic achievement. For example, extracurricular physical activities and curricular PE increase self-esteem and influence positive feelings of attachment to school which are important factors in academic achievement (Trudeau & Shephard, 2008).

According to a meta-analysis conducted by the CDC (2014b), “The core messages articulate the importance of increased access to healthy foods and physical activities in schools as ways to enhance the academic achievement of students” (p. 4). According to the Institute of Medicine (IOM, 2013), “...because children and adolescents spend so many hours at school, school-related physical activity must be a large contributor to overall physical activity among youth.” Also, according to the CDC (2014b),

Schools can create environments supportive of students’ efforts to eat healthy and be active by implementing policies and practices that support healthy eating and regular physical activity and by providing opportunities for students to learn about and practice these behaviors.

Therefore, schools can influence PA behaviors by increasing recess at the elementary level; incorporating PA breaks in the classroom; and offering before and after-school PA opportunities. PA can decrease rates of student absenteeism, lessen behavioral problems, and increase school-wide test scores and grades.



## **The Potential of Schools and School Physical Education**

Due to decreasing PA and rising obesity trends, researchers and other organizations have suggested schools could be ideal venues to help increase overall childhood PA (IOM, 2013; Pate, et al., 2006). With support from administration, teachers and principals have the ability to offer PA in a variety of ways in the classroom, before and after-school, during lunch, and during PE (Let's Move, 2014). According to Pate, et al. (2006), the school environment is where youth spend the majority of their day and could benefit from classroom PA breaks, PA clubs offered when classes are not in session such as before-, during, or after-school, organized sports or intramurals, recess for elementary students, or active transport to and from school. Let's Move Active Schools (LMAS) is a national collaboration of numerous health and education organizations that encourage PA in and out of school, reduce and market healthier food options, and encourage students to drink more water (LMAS, 2015). Furthermore, it is known attendance rates and test scores are higher and adolescents behave better in classes when they are healthy. Several wellness modules tailored to individual schools promote PA and healthy eating throughout the school environment as well as when adolescents are away from school. Most organizations emphasize adopting or creating programs similar to a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP; CDC, 2014a) which encourages PA throughout the school day using five separate components including quality PE, PA during school, PA before and after school, staff involvement, and family and community engagement. (National Physical Activity Plan [NPAP], 2014). A common thread in these organizations regarding PA in schools is they all emphasize quality PE as the centerpiece for increasing PA among students.

However, the Shape of the Nation Report (National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE] & American Heart Association [AHA], 2012) highlights findings for PE requirements that indicate school-aged youth are not necessarily receiving adequate time in PE. For example, the report indicates, “38 states (75%) mandate that schools must provide their students with physical education in elementary, middle/junior high, and high school” (p. 1), which means students could potentially be participating in PE only one time in middle/junior high school and only one time in high school. Additionally, only six states require PE in grades k-12 and 28 states allow exemptions or waivers for PE due to time or credit requirements.

The Shape of the Nation Report also shows those who are fortunate to receive PE are not always receiving quality PE from a licensed/certified PE teacher. For example, for states who allow students to acquire PE credits online, only 17 out of 30 states require the class be taught by a certified PE teacher. At the elementary level, 68.6% of states allow elementary classroom teachers to teach PE instead of going to the gym with a certified PE teacher. On average, approximately 23.4% respondents reported meeting the recommended minutes of PE per week: 150 minutes per week at the elementary level and 225 per week in middle/junior high and high school. Finally, the report indicates PE teachers may not be meeting the state standards. For example, only 76.0% of states are required to comply or align with the National Standards.

Due to rising obesity rates among adolescents, a plausible solution to increase PA and combat obesity is to offer quality PE during the school day where teachers have direct daily access to students. Providing quality PE classes on a daily basis could significantly increase students’ moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) and provide cardiovascular strength and endurance, muscular strength and endurance, and flexibility and bone-strengthening

exercises to improve their overall health status. According to programs such as CSPAP and *Let's Move Active Schools*, PE is the most central location in the school environment to provide opportunities to be active, develop skills and knowledge to become competent and confident during PA, learn to socialize and respect others while being active, and encourage PA enjoyment for the health and well-being of each individual.

The goal of PE, as defined by the national standards, is to “develop physically literate individuals who have the knowledge, skills and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity” (SHAPE America, n.d., para. 1). In order to provide these skills, PE teachers must be equipped with a range of knowledge and the competency to provide a variety of activities such as individual and team sports, adventure, dance, and fitness education. Teachers who are well-organized, pre-planned, and know their students’ interests, are more likely to have higher success rates in increasing the PA level in their classes (Azzarito, Solmon, & Harrison, 2006; Enright & O’Sullivan, 2010). Past research indicates when planning and implementing a diverse, well-rounded curriculum, PE could have positive influences on students’ PA levels as well as impact future PA choices to potentially become healthier teens and adults (CDC, 2014; Chen & Ennis, 2004).

### **Students’ Perceptions of and Experiences in Physical Education**

Despite schools’ potential to increase youth PA, especially throughout the school day, there is an extensive amount of literature documenting students’ perspectives that indicates students find PE boring, irrelevant, and sometimes very discouraging (Carlson, 1995; Cothran & Ennis, 1999; Olafson, 2002; Spencer-Cavaliere & Rintoul, 2012; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). For example, some students feel the content is irrelevant (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011) because

the skills being taught do not seem to have a purpose and do not pertain to their current lifestyles. Students also feel PE is boring because they do not understand the goals of each lesson or feel as though they are not learning anything. Students find PE meaningless with little to no value which causes them to move aimlessly as they are ‘going through the motions’ or altogether disengage (Spencer-Cavaliere & Rintoul, 2012; Trout & Graber, 2009).

Typically, the content offered in traditional PE classes tends to focus heavily on competitive team sports which generally targets the already, highly-skilled athletes and leaves the rest of the students feeling less competent than their peers. According to Shen, McCaughtry, and Martin (2008), students are more likely to participate in future PA during leisure time if they have higher perceived competence during PE. In many studies, competence is acquired when students perceive an autonomy-supportive environment which allows some choice and freedom in contrast to a strict and controlling teaching style (Goudas, Biddle, & Fox, 1994; Standange, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2003). Likewise, Goudas, Biddle, and Fox (1994) support the idea students tend to be more competent and motivated to participate in activities when they do not feel some type of pressure to do so.

According to Carlson (1995), in addition to the lack of competence experienced during most skills, these feelings often leave adolescents with a sense powerlessness, being left-out of games, and chosen last to be on teams as if they do not belong. Furthermore, because the activities and games are generally team-sports or competitive in nature, often, teachers do not provide opportunities for students to work together, be creative, or form their own teams leaving students to become disengaged from their peers. This environment creates social isolation among students and does not give them the opportunity to connect and relate to their peers.

Participants in one study agreed if they sometimes had the opportunity to choose what they did during class, they would have something to look forward to and more students would participate (Spencer-Cavaliere & Rintoul, 2012). Whereas if the teacher and the curriculum fit the needs of the students and encouraged them to be actively involved with their friends and some decision-making, they might become more interested and eventually enjoy PE (Olafson, 2002).

Not only is content an ongoing problem in PE, but students find the delivery of the content is often scarce because teachers assume students know how to perform the skills or play the games. Instructors provide little to no skill instruction or support during games leaving unskilled students feeling humiliated and sometimes ridiculed (Spencer-Cavaliere & Rintoul, 2012). Exploring alternative teaching strategies could provide more positive student interactions and improved perceived competence (Cothran & Ennis, 1999; Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010). Overall, the negative perceptions and feelings described above have caused many students to fake illnesses, skip class, or come up with other excuses to avoid participation in PE (Carlson, 1995; Lamb, 2014; Olafson, 2002; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011).

Many urban high school PE classes tend to focus on competitive team sports due to value placed on membership in team sports (Cothran & Ennis, 1999). Also, they are sometimes forced to play competitive sports such as soccer, basketball, and football due to the lack of equipment (McCaughtry, Barnard, Martin, Shen, & Hodges Kulinna, 2006). Unfortunately, sport-based PE tends to privilege the highly skilled or trained athletes and is likely to lead other students, especially AA girls, to disengage from activity.

At times, sports might be taught in ways that could have a positive effect on AA female students. For example, Ennis' Sport for Peace curriculum provides responsibility to develop a

sense of learning, trust, respect, and a sense for family (Ennis et al., 1999). This curriculum allows males and females of varying skill levels to feel more successful and promote participation. Likewise, Siedentop's Sport Education Model provides opportunities for students to learn various roles such as referee, coach, and statistician, as well as allow for skill practice opportunities and life-like games (Siedentop, 1994). However, not all PE teachers who are sport-oriented are using these models to implement sports into their classes. PE teachers are generally focused on competitive team sports with little to no skill instruction and no support during games leaving girls feeling frustrated and humiliated (Olafson, 2002).

### **Gender in Physical Education**

Research indicates, as they grow older, adolescent girls' participation in any type of PA declines and they become less engaged in PE as well (Cothran & Ennis, 1999; Pate et al., 2005). Carlson (1995) found five themes regarding strategies students used during PE to avoid participation and humiliation. She explained some students attend class due to a possible extrinsic reward, such as a good grade, but they do not truly want to be there. Sometimes, students attend class daily but sit on the sidelines or the bleachers, or even try to blend in by standing around while everyone else is playing the game or activity (McCaughtry, 2004a; Spencer-Cavaliere & Rintoul, 2012). According to other studies (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010; Olafson, 2002), researchers found many girls skip PE class, forget their clothing on purpose so they are forced to sit out by the teacher, or hide in the locker rooms to avoid playing in PE. Some girls pretend they are involved by making themselves look busy during games while also avoiding all contact with the ball or ridding it from the playing area (Olafson, 2002). Similarly, one study found boys who feel marginalized or oppressed during PE

will pretend to participate with little to no intensity such as standing in the back of the court and barely trying to actively engage in the game (McCaughtry & Tischler, 2010). And finally, Tischler and McCaughtry (2011) found many students engage in “faking” illnesses or injuries so they are given permission to sit out or not participate versus admitting they do not want to engage.

Female adolescents have explained numerous reasons for their disengagement in PE such as feelings of embarrassment when they are put on display to perform skills while other students stare at them, make negative comments, or make fun of their lack of ability (Olafson, 2002). Furthermore, girls do not like when teachers force them to demonstrate skills in front of the entire class because it tends to cause emotional pain when hearing their classmates calling them names (Spencer-Cavaliere & Rintoul, 2012). Many girls do not prefer the activities offered such as, military-like drills, running around the gym or track, and competitive team sports (Olafson, 2002). Lastly, adolescent girls often feel self-conscious and exposed due to the attire they are forced to wear during class (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; van Daalen, 2005).

### **The Importance of Culturally Relevant Physical Education**

There is a need for culturally relevant physical education (CRPE) to help connect PE with the most disadvantaged groups, specifically AA, inner-city girls who are at the highest risk of physical inactivity and obesity. Many past researchers have provided analyses of how to connect PE content with particular demographics of youth.

According to Flory and McCaughtry (2011), in order to effectively implement CRPE within school environments, PE teachers must fulfill three needs so the content taught is relevant to the student population within a particular school: 1) have an in-depth understanding of the

students you teach, 2) understand how community dynamics and students' dispositions influence ability and willingness to learn during PE and be active outside school, and 3) develop strategies to bridge the cultural distance such as the connections between what is taught in PE classes and the cultural identities of the community. Flory and McCaughtry (2011) describe the fulfillment of these three needs as the "cultural relevance cycle" (p.49).

Tischler and McCaughtry (2011) examined boys who were low on masculinity hierarchies and found they did not feel like they embodied strength and power, did not feel athletic, and typically felt marginalized. However, the boys enjoyed PA when they were in safe places with their friends and family or during PA sessions with the researchers. When they identified safe-play, they were more than willing to play different activities and games and truly enjoyed it.

Finally, Oliver, Hamzeh, and McCaughtry (2009) studied low income Hispanic girls in elementary school who claimed they did not like PA because they were "girly-girls" and did not want to get dirty, sweaty, or mess up their hair. Oliver discovered the girls actually enjoyed PA however, they did not like to do the activities offered at school nor did they want to play with the aggressive boys who would kick or knock them over. The girls enjoyed jumping rope and creating their own games which in fact, did allow them to be aggressive with one another, mess up their hair, and get sweaty, all while laughing and having fun. Given the obesity and physical inactivity increases in AA inner-city girls, more analyses is necessary to determine how to develop CRPE to connect girls with motivating PA experiences and help PE reach its potential as a powerful public health tool.



Past literature repeatedly reports girls' desire to have dance, aerobics, and other fun movement activities with music incorporated into their PE classes (Cothran & Ennis, 1999; Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010). Therefore, the question is whether offering a completely different approach to PE, one focused almost exclusively on dance, can have a different type of effect on AA girls given the fact we know dance is so central to many AA girls' cultural identities (Hazard-Gordon, 1983; Robinson et al., 2003). What kind of impact might result when PE curriculum is organized around and tailored to the unique cultural identities of AA girls?

According to Emery (as cited in Farr, 1997), dance is a popular pastime in AA culture and has been for centuries. Dance has been incorporated into religious ceremonies and rituals, and as a form of expression of every emotion from anger to joy. Dance was used by slaves to express emotions, practice religion, and perform for slave owners for entertainment. Traditional dances have been passed from generation to generation through organizations, dance studios, and social interactions.

A dance-based PE program offers a variety of benefits for an individual such as: 1) exploration of the mind and body and allows students to release energy to further benefit optimal learning in the classroom (Koff, 2000), 2) increases cultural knowledge for students through exposure to cultural dances that teach about birth, marriage, or celebration, 3) increases social competency working together to create choreography and/or through exposure to popular line dances that enable students to participate in school dances, weddings, and other group events throughout their lives, and 4) facilitates understanding dance is a practical form of PA that can promote positive physical and mental health in ways such as helping prevent excessive weight gain and cardiac arrest, reduce stress, and increase life satisfaction (Olvera, 2008).

Pelclova, Fromel, Skalik, and Stratton (2008) found girls who enrolled in dance-based PE spent 30 minutes doing MVPA which is the healthy recommendation for adolescents (aged 11-21). They spent more than 50% of their class time being active. The girls were also involved in decision-making of the lessons and were given the opportunity to engage in creating the lesson which is in congruence with the National Standards for K-12 Physical Education (SHAPE America, 2014) and the National Standards for Dance Education (SHAPE America, 2014) According to other studies on sport-based PE, students practicing skills and engaging in games were unable to meet the PA recommendation of 50% of class time (Fairclough & Stratton, 2005; McKenzie, Marshall, Sallis, & Conway, 2000).

Stinson (1997) observed and interviewed students at several middle and high schools and found many were highly motivated during their elected dance-based PE class. In comparison to all other classes, students expressed dance was a way to have fun, relieve stress and relax, increase focus and concentration, learn about and express oneself, and provided the freedom to work with their friends as they create movement which is meaningful to them.

### **Self-Determination Theory**

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emphasizes the social and contextual factors that influence peoples' behaviors and choices and the degree to which they are able to satisfy their psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT highlights the degree to which people are self-motivated and self-determined to accomplish desired outcomes via modes of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan propose three psychological needs, labeled nutriments, need to be met in order to maximize growth, social development, and well-being. They are autonomy (i.e., the need to self-direct one's behavior), competence (i.e., the need to engage

effectively in one's environment), and relatedness (i.e., the need to feel a sense of connectedness to other people; Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Previous studies showed an autonomy-supportive environment which provides choice and opportunity as well as greater positive feedback from teachers can enhance students' feelings of autonomy, fulfilling one satisfaction need of self-determination theory, thus resulting in positive motivational behaviors (Standage, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2005). Likewise, these authors also found a less competitive atmosphere where students are assessed based on their own performance, rather than social comparisons, provided a better fulfillment of competence among students. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), all three needs are important for those who are typically lacking motivation. In terms of relatedness, students need to feel a connection to their peers but more importantly, their teachers. A lack of connection with peers and/or teachers is usually what drives a-motivated behaviors such as disengaging from the lesson. Students might change their behavior by engaging in a lesson because they feel valued by significant others with whom they have a connection. SDT will guide this study to understand AA girls' perspectives of dance PE and sport PE.

### **Intersectionality Between Frameworks**

Two theoretical frameworks were selected for this study because they could best answer the research questions. Furthermore, CRPE and SDT are complementary and mutually supportive of one another. If educators implement CR curricula in PE they will most likely satisfy the three needs of SDT. For example, as mentioned above, inclusion of dance in PE settings can be a great way to create a CR curriculum because it allows students to explore, create, and express themselves through movement (Koff, 2000; Stinson, 1997). Additionally,

allowing students to make decisions regarding choreography and creativity gives them a sense of ownership and freedom (Pelclova et al., 2008). According to Standage et al. (2005), autonomy can be measured by items such as “I have choice in what I want to do” (p. 417). By creating movement and demonstrating personal expression students are given the opportunities to choose exactly what they want to produce thus creating an autonomy-supportive environment. According to Gillison, Sebire, and Standage (2012), when it comes to exercises and PA, girls tend to be more motivated when they can set personal goals and achieve meaningful challenges.

Given the opportunities to set personal goals and achieve meaningful challenges facilitates a sense of competence and achievement (Gillison et al., 2010). Subsequently, when they acquire skill in PE environments, students tend to feel more competent (Standage et al., 2005). Additionally, according to Stinson (1997), when students create their own movement it has a tendency to have more meaning which enhances motivation to achieve a higher level of proficiency. Overall, when providing CR lessons in PE, such as the examples listed above, students will work to achieve this level and become more competent.

Finally, in a study on urban high school girls’ sense of relatedness and engagement in PE, results stated, “...nurturing quality relationships between and among both teachers and peers may hold promise for enhancing learning” (Shen, McCaughtry, Martin, Fahlman, and Garn, 2012, p. 231). By implementing the three steps of the CR cycle, and developing care for students, teachers can build relationships with them. In order to be an effective teacher, they should not only get to know their students but also how to teach them by learning where they come from and how to make lessons relevant. This connection will form a sense of relatedness to meet the third need of SDT. Additionally, allowing time to work with peers in PE builds

social competency which can help form connections and a sense of relatedness in the gymnasium (Olvera, 2008). Using dance-based lessons allows this freedom to work with friends while creating choreography to produce a final dance or helping one another with challenging movements (Stinson, 1997).

### **Significance of the Study**

Given what is known about the decline in PA among adolescents, specifically AA females, (Ennis, 1999; Kimm et al., 2002), it is logical PE programs would make changes to accommodate students of varying skill levels and interests. For decades, research indicated students have been struggling against the desire for less competitive activities and more lifelong physical activities such as aerobics, yoga, walking, and adventure (Carlson, 1995). However, all PE teachers are not implementing these changes. McCaughtry (2009) found participants wanted activities to be fun, popular, and what they considered “cool.” These terms describe how students feel about the types of activities they want in PE versus what the traditional PE activities look like.

For the purpose of this study, dance-based PE classes consisted of correctly identifying and displaying basic dance movements; learning basic anatomy of the body and how to execute proper alignment; experiencing physical conditioning as a life skill; engaging in non-verbal communication through movement; and participating in culminating dance performances to demonstrate accomplishments. Sport-based PE classes included gaining knowledge to improve physical development; learning exercises to increase strength and endurance; promoting overall health and wellness; and participating in a plethora of sports and physical activities.

It appears dance-based PE could be empowering for girls but more work needs to be done in this area. Currently, there have not been any previous studies addressing dance-based PE

classes looking at the three constructs of SDT. Likewise, no previous researchers have studied dance through the components of cultural relevance theory. This study is designed to examine specifically the female AA culture. It is intended to observe AA female students' behaviors during dance-based PE, gather insight on their perspectives of dance-based PE in comparison to their past experiences in sport-based PE, and to gain an understanding of the motivation behind their desire to participate or disengage from PE classes and PA outside of school.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine AA high school girls' perceptions of dance-based PE in relation to their past experiences in sport-based PE. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do issues of cultural relevance affect AA adolescent girls' experiences in sport and dance-based PE?
2. How do the core tenets of Self Determination Theory (SDT – autonomy, competence, and relatedness) impact AA adolescent girls' comparisons between sport and dance-based PE?

## CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine AA high school girls' perceptions of dance-based PE in relation to their past experiences in sport-based PE. The research questions guiding this study were: (1) How do issues of cultural relevance affect AA adolescent girls' experiences in sport and dance-based PE? and (2) How do the core tenets of Self Determination Theory (SDT – autonomy, competence, and relatedness) impact AA adolescent girls' comparisons between sport and dance-based PE?

Due to the nature of the research questions guiding this study, the use of one theoretical framework was not sufficient in answering these questions. First, I was interested in issues of cultural relevance within the specific context of PE. Therefore, I used the culturally relevant physical education framework (CRPE, Flory & McCaughtry, 2011) to specifically describe findings related to potential cultural differences between teachers and students, community dynamics and the affect they had on adolescents' abilities and willingness to learn during PE, and strategies used to bridge cultural distance such as connections between what is taught in PE classes and cultural identities of the community. This framework was most relevant in examining the issues of cultural relevance and the affect it had on AA adolescent girls' experiences in two types of PE classes.

In addition, I used SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) to investigate social and contextual factors that influenced girls' behaviors and choices in PE. This framework describes three essential psychological needs necessary for growth, social development, and well-being: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy is the need to self-direct one's behavior. Competence

is the need to engage effectively in one's environment. Relatedness is the need to feel connected to other people (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Understanding these needs and whether or not they were being met in either PE environment helped answer my second research question regarding the comparison of both classes. The remainder of this chapter will specifically outline each framework, discuss previously conducted research using either framework, and explain how CRPE and SDT were the most appropriate frameworks to answer the research questions guiding this study.

### **Culturally Relevant Physical Education**

The most useful framework for answering my first research question is CRPE (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011). The question focuses on issues of cultural relevance and how those issues affected girls' experiences in sport and dance-based PE. For example, do teachers know their students' personalities, cultural background, or family life in order to provide relevant content? Are teachers familiar with cultural distance between themselves and their students and what strategies are they using to connect that distance? The idea of culture can be thought of as a paradigm: the way in which teachers and students experience their lives and how they define it (Diller & Moule, 2005). There are several dynamics within culture such as gender, race, SES, and an urban, suburban, or rural environment. The main focus of this study was the dynamic of gender and race within different PE environments. The other dynamics certainly played a role in the outcome of the study and were not ignored. Later, I will explain what affects they did or did not have on the study as well as how they were used as parameters to create interview guides.

Cultural competence takes time; it is an ongoing process. Sleeter (2008) stated, "Racial and cultural competence is a relative state, not a final point of arrival" (p. 93). It takes time to



learn, develop, and grow and may change within different environments and with different individuals. Before describing CRPE and how it is significant to this study, it is important to understand culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) in the general school environment.

**Culture and education.** According to Ladson-Billings (1995),

CRP rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (p. 160).

First, students must develop academic success in order to be active participants in all areas of living such as school, work, and community. They can acquire academic success and competence if teachers “attend to students’ academic needs” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.160) and encourage them to choose academic excellence versus failure. Unfortunately, according to Howard (2003), AA and Latino students, who constitute the largest ethnic minority group in the U.S., are either behind grade-level in core subject areas or tend to have the highest dropout rate. It is necessary for teacher educators to influence preservice teachers in areas such as race, ethnicity, and culture and provide them resources to teach their students content that has meaning and relevance to “students’ social and cultural realities” (Howard, 2003, p. 195).

Second, Ladson-Billings (1995) explains the importance of cultural competence as a student. Unfortunately, AA students who were academically successful were often marginalized by other AA peers and told they were “acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p.176). Often, students are forced to act a certain way or to conform to the norms of the school culture. It is important for teachers to discourage this behavior and encourage students not to acquire the norms of the dominant culture but to recognize and not give up their cultural identity (Morrison, Robbins, & Rose, 2008).

The ability to effectively teach cross-culturally means a school system or an individual teacher has cultural competence. Cultural competence does not happen overnight; in fact, it is an ongoing, developmental process that consists of reflection, self-evaluation, professional development of new and advanced skills, and continuing education (Diller & Moule, 2005). According to the authors, schools must have a set of values or assumptions that consist of clear understandings. For example, being culturally diverse is positive, education should be based upon specific cultural needs, and pedagogy should be empowering to students in order to encourage academic success.

Ladson-Billings (1992) describes culturally relevant teaching designed “not merely to *fit* the school culture to the students' culture but also to *use* student culture as the basis for helping students understand themselves and others, structure social interactions, and conceptualize knowledge” (p. 314). This idea encourages teachers to get to know the culture of their students and construct learning in a way that has relevance and meaning to students' social and cultural lifestyles (Howard, 2003). Howard (2003) explains, “racially diverse students frequently bring cultural capital to the classroom...” (p. 197). Cultural capital is described as “norms, social practices, ideologies, language, and behavior that are part of a given context” (p. 197). Therefore, if schools emphasize the “norms” of the dominant culture in the U.S. but a particular culture is not familiar with those norms, students from the latter group tend to fall behind in the system or may be at an extreme disadvantage compared to their peers.

Consequently, teachers need to address individuality and understand relationships and differences in the classroom to avoid compromising students' cultural heritages (Gay, 2000). Likewise, students should feel comfortable challenging the oppressive elements surrounding

them in a classroom to prevent falling behind and gain success. Gay (2000) addresses a pedagogical paradigm necessary to improve academic performance of underperforming students from different ethnic groups. This paradigm is described as “one that teaches *to and through* their personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments” (Gay, 2000, p. 24). Instead of using traditional instructional strategies that tend to reach our dominant, middle-class, European American students, the use of this type of paradigm changes curriculum content and teaching strategies because it addresses cultural frames of reference. Therefore, content is more meaningful and easier for students to be successful.

**Culturally relevant physical education.** Likewise, a CRPE curriculum is critical for success of all students in all PE classes. However, oftentimes, we do not see this success happening because PE teachers plan according to their ideologies of what should be taught in PE, as well as what resources they have, versus planning a curriculum based on students they see in class daily (Theodoulides, 2003). Therefore, the CRPE framework (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011) is a useful framework for investigating issues of cultural relevance and how they affect adolescent girls’ experiences in sport and dance-based PE classes.

Flory and McCaughtry (2011) developed a three-step process to describe CRPE and provide culturally relevant instruction in the gymnasium: (1) knowing the public served, (2) recognizing areas of cultural distance, and (3) creating strategies to bridge cultural distance. Below I describe the three-step process and how curriculum may or may not connect with specific groups of adolescents.

**Knowing the public served (students).** The first step of the cultural relevance cycle (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011) involves teachers knowing the public they serve and connecting with those students, as well as understanding the community in which students live. As the school year progresses, PE teachers should genuinely get to know students, hence creating a trusting environment (Ennis & McCauley, 2002). The more teachers know, the better they will understand and connect with their students (Timken & Watson, 2015). For example, teachers should know with whom students live; married or divorced parents, grandparents, or other. This information could inform teachers how much home support students receive. Learning about the support system at home could influence volume and type of homework teachers give students (Sanders, 1998). It is necessary to learn about students' SES background. Knowing whether they come from a high or low SES background could inform teachers if students are properly clothed and fed which can impact students' ability to learn. Learning the geographic location and what occurs in that environment, such as neighborhood violence and crime, might provide teachers with knowledge to assist them in understanding why students portray different behaviors such as possible defense mechanisms or survival instincts. Finally, it is imperative for teachers to have an understanding of their students' ethnicity, race and culture and obtain information about potential past events that put these students where they are today both developmentally and psychologically (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011). Knowing this information should help guide teachers' content development and pedagogies. Creating culturally relevant lessons is an important feature for engaging students to participate during PE (Ennis, 1999) and have active adult lifestyles (McCaughtry & Centeio, 2014).

“As a helping profession, teachers are called on to understand their own emotions, interpret those of students, transform subject matter into meaningful experiences, and excite students to learn” (McCaughtry & Ferry, accepted). It is important teachers recognize their own emotions and how these emotions affect their teaching strategies, willingness to implement new activities, and ability to connect with students. More importantly, teachers must understand student emotions, interpret what these emotions mean, and learn how to cope with them in order to make a deeper connection with their students. For example, Diller and Moule (2005) point out the importance of sharing and emotional closeness when teaching minority adolescents. These students need opportunities to interact with teachers and peers. According to McCaughtry et al. (2008), “...emotionally connecting with students is a central component in nearly every teaching decision that teachers make...” (p. 281). It is necessary for teachers to make this connection about specific cultures and create a culturally sensitive environment in the gymnasium. When the environment is cooperative and supportive, students tend to participate, learn, and have positive interactions with peers (Carlson, 1995; Ennis, 2000; McCaughtry et al., 2008).

The example above also implies the importance of teachers acquiring cultural knowledge of students when their students are different from themselves. For example, when White, affluent, suburban teachers teach PE in inner cities they might wonder “... am I adapting my curriculum for my black students?” (McCaughtry et al., 2006, p. 490). Teachers are presented with challenges to meet the needs of a specific community and educate students so they can be successful within their community (Casey et al., 2013). For instance, should PE teachers continue to teach activities already popular in the community such as basketball, football, and

jump rope? Or should PE teachers allow students to learn new activities such as dance, fitness, and adventure education?

Additionally, when teachers' cultural backgrounds differ significantly from their students', there is huge potential for cultural distance. Only deep learning about students' cultural background can begin the process of bridging cultural distance. For example, McCaughtry et al. (2006) explained how some teachers in urban, inner-city areas had to translate curricula to meet the needs of their students. PE teachers in this study expressed concern for their AA students' inability to understand language used in some of the stories or examples presented in lessons. Teachers made strong attempts to portray images of AA athletes engaged in non-stereotypical sports as opposed to stereotyped sports of basketball and football. These are potential ways to begin bridging cultural distance between students and teachers of different cultural backgrounds.

**Identify cultural distance.** Second, it is important to identify cultural distance between teachers' beliefs and students' realities of life. "It is important for teachers, especially, not to perceive kids' potential to succeed academically only through their limited economic circumstances. Such teachers might miss the inner potential of some kids..." (Obidah, 2008, p. 56). It is one thing for teachers to learn, understand, and acknowledge cultural distance between them and their students, but it is another when teachers make assumptions regarding the information they have. These assumptions can put students at a disadvantage because they have not been given opportunities to demonstrate success versus automatic failure.

Sleeter (2008) described experiences as a White female educator in an inner-city high school. She described her classroom as "a rainbow of diversity" (p. 84). Over several years, she

explained how she observed students' behaviors, had discussions with students and adults about their experiences in particular neighborhoods, and listened to what was going on around her regarding potential racism and cultural nuances. She learned about neighborhoods, the struggle to locate decent housing, and continuous police surveillance in some areas. Sleeter (2008) explained, "By asking questions, I learned things such as how to interpret Black students' nonverbal behavior in the classroom or how to interpret various family structures" (p. 87). Teachers need to be aware and ask questions sensitively in order to truly understand their students and the possible cultural distance between them.

When conducting research in an environment where teachers have distinctively different backgrounds than their students, it is critical to investigate whether or not teachers are aware cultural distance exists between them and their students. For example, teachers have to begin with self-awareness; knowledge of their background and how different it can look compared to the background of their students (Diller & Moule, 2005). Also, because students and teachers might come from different backgrounds, miscommunication could occur due to misinterpreting or misjudging one another or specific behaviors. Unfortunately, cultural incompatibilities tend to be at odds and school and home culture are likely to have different objectives, values, and beliefs. Teachers have the ability to make changes for the success of their students by integrating students' culture and family values into their lessons to enhance learning. According to Diller and Moule (2005), teachers should consult cultural experts and resources to adapt and adjust teaching practices to accommodate cultural differences. Nieto (1996) found, "The more consistent that home and school cultures are...the more successful students will be" (p. 235).

Furthermore, it is important to examine how teachers understand cultural distance that might exist between themselves, their instruction, and students' lives outside school. "Culturally relevant teachers use students' culture as a vehicle for learning" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 161). When designing curriculum, teachers need to think of students' lives outside of school. For example, do PE teachers recognize some AA females enjoy hip hop music and dance or the synchronized, rhythmic movements of stepping? How does stepping, hip hop music, and dance differ from what is being taught in traditional PE? Is the lack of relevant content in sport PE classes causing disconnect and disengagement among students? Is there an implication deeming these out-of-the-norm activities less important than traditional team sports (Timken & Watson, 2015)? Dance, hip hop music (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and stepping (Hastie, Martin, & Buchanan, 2006), are just a few examples of legitimate and culturally relevant lessons for AA students to engage during class and to use outside of school with family and friends. Lessons regarding dance, hip hop, and stepping can encompass history, culture, and tradition among AA students (Corneille, Ashcraft, & Belgrave, 2005; Farr, 1997). Similarly, exploring ways to help students engage during and after school and knowing their cultural background, can help develop relevant curriculum and allow teachers to provide support when possible.

Step two was relevant to this study because it was important for me to observe PE teachers' relationships with students and whether or not I thought they are aware of cultural distances within their classes. Through interviews and observations I examined their feelings about cultural awareness about themselves, students, and curricula. I observed whether or not they assumed students would pass or fail in their class environment and what they did to ensure



success of all students. Also, I carefully examined those teachers who made it a priority to recognize cultural distance and, through student interviews, I attempted to further understand how it changed the dynamic in the classroom. I asked students about the affect it did or did not have on their learning abilities and how they felt about teachers who made an effort to learn about culture, background, community, and so forth. Through observations and interviews I investigated whether or not teachers were integrating students' culture into lessons or if there appeared to be cultural distance in lessons. Finally, I observed overall curricula in both sport and dance PE to learn *why* students chose to participate or disengage.

**Strategies to bridge cultural distance.** Lastly, teachers need to use cultural knowledge and create strategies to help bridge cultural distance among teachers, students, and home, in order to provide culturally relevant instruction (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011). According to Banks (2008), one way to bridge this distance is to, "...use examples, data, and information from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate the key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in their subject area or discipline" (p. 31). These ideas can be expanded to familiarize students with a variety of diverse backgrounds. Teachers implemented four strategies (curricular content, care, communication, and respect) to bridge the cultural distance between themselves and their students (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011). These strategies were built upon what they learned in step one of the cultural relevance cycle. Creating relevant content helps bridge cultural divide between school and home for particular populations of students and informs family members teachers truly care for their students.

When teachers get to know students and genuinely show concern for them, they are demonstrating genuine care for students as individuals. Diller and Moule (2005) define care as

“giving permanent value – considering each child as of value regardless of behavior” (p. 158). Flory and McCaughtry (2011) found two types of care demonstrated by teachers: global care and discipline-specific care. Teachers demonstrated global care by expressing concern for students’ well-being, happiness, and safety. Two community dynamics related to global care are family structure and rates of crime and violence. When teachers are aware of these influences in students’ lives they can attempt to build stronger student-teacher relationships so students feel safe with them and gain trust. Discipline-specific care focuses on “mastery of content and academic success necessary for life” (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011, p. 53). During PE, teachers demonstrated these caring behaviors by making sure content related to everyday life such as staying healthy after graduation. Teachers were passionate and committed during PE and oftentimes joined in with their students while performing exercises. Teachers communicated expectations and planned daily activities that increased students’ PA levels.

Additionally, communication is a critical component to providing culturally relevant instruction (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011). Communication must happen inside and outside the classroom; between students, parents, and teachers. Gay (2000) expressed, “communication cannot exist without culture, culture cannot be known without communication, and teaching and learning cannot occur without communication or culture” (p. 77). Teachers need to familiarize themselves with the students’ backgrounds to better understand verbal and non-verbal messages and cultural communication styles in order to better educate students (Gay, 2000). By doing so, students have a better chance at success. When asking students to make eye contact while talking to them, some teachers might be unaware this act is not appropriate or respectful for Asian or other cultures (Gay, 2000). Teachers might misread the rambunctious behavior of an

AA student as “acting out” or causing trouble in order to upset the classroom or intimidate the teacher when in fact the child might actually be trying to say he or she is having difficulties with content or instruction (Nieto, 1996). Furthermore, teachers might get anxious as they wait for their American Indian students to answer a question because in their culture this response time indicates they are deeply thinking about the answer before responding (Nieto, 1996). Although brief, these examples give indication, even in the most subtle ways, cultural misunderstandings can actively interfere with successful learning. “The more teachers know about the discourse styles of ethnically diverse students, the better they will be able to improve academic achievement” (Gay, 2000, p. 109). In order for teachers to be successful in improving students’ academic skills, teachers need to examine and reflect upon their preferred discourse styles and determine how students respond to them. In learning how to communicate differently with students, teachers can better serve the needs of ethnically diverse students by implementing culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2000).

Finally, respect plays a vital role in representing teachers’ understanding of cultural distance and how to bridge the gap. Flory and McCaughtry (2011) described two forms of respect: reducing social hierarchies among students and flattening social hierarchies between teachers and students. In order to implement a plan of respect in the classroom or gymnasium, teachers must know and understand community dynamics. For example, being aware of gang culture within the school and community and how it influences or intimidates students not involved in gangs, can help teachers learn best ways to discipline inappropriate actions. Or, understanding how some students fear others based on neighborhood status, such as those who live in nicer neighborhoods tend to threaten peers who live in poverty-like neighborhoods

because they feel they are better than their peers and can bully or otherwise intimidate them. Teachers who have a clear picture of events happening in class can create policies to avoid negative behaviors. Flory and McCaughtry (2011) found some teachers who implemented a no “trash-talking” policy which prevented students from putting down and making fun of others. Additionally, teachers in these environments need to avoid competitive activities that put already skilled students on top while others feel unimportant and alienated to prevent insults and arguments. Similarly, teachers gained respect from students by having strong management practices and structured classrooms. Teachers respected students first by allowing freedom and choice as well as disciplining in private (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011). Teachers can create a safer and enjoyable environment by strictly following respect policies.

This step of the cultural relevance cycle was important to this study because it indicates specific strategies teachers use during PE to connect with their students. Much like the lesson examples described earlier to reach a particular population, as the researcher I was able to observe whether or not teachers chose culturally relevant content. It was critical to record unique ways teachers delivered content, student expectations, and rules and classroom management techniques used to bridge cultural distance between themselves and AA female students. Additionally, this step was important to recognize whether or not the process happened occasionally throughout the semester or if it was an ongoing process as indicated earlier (Diller & Moule, 2005; Sleeter, 2008).

**CRPE and high school students.** The concept of implementing culturally relevant content in PE has been the foundation of numerous studies over the past two decades (Ennis, 1999; Flory & McCaughtry, 2011; McCaughtry et al., 2006). Cothran and Ennis (1999) studied

urban high school students' perceptions of the relevance of school in general along with relevance of lessons or activities in PE. They found, "Many students did not believe that school and physical education had significant meaning or value in their lives" (p. 238). Students reported they wished teachers would teach them "stuff" they could use in their futures, real life skills. More specifically, students did not find relevance in PE because they could not find value, or educational benefits, of various sports introduced in class. However, when basketball and football units were introduced, more students (males and females) engaged in lessons because there was cultural relevance between playing those sports in PE to what they did within their home neighborhoods (Cothran & Ennis, 1999; Flory & McCaughtry, 2011). Students (mostly females) who enrolled in dance and fitness PE courses expressed positive feedback regarding curriculum (Cothran & Ennis, 1999). They found importance in fitness PE classes because they learned about their body and how to take care of themselves. Dance PE classes taught poise and how to present oneself in public, which is something they will always need in life. Tischler and McCaughtry (2011) studied a group of boys who expressed negative peer culture in the gymnasium. The authors explained negative peer culture as how boys were ridiculed, ignored, bullied, and made fun of by both students and teachers. However, boys expressed enjoyment in PA outside of the gymnasium such as when they were home playing with friends and family. Mistakes were made in PA but messing up was not a big deal; they merely played games to have fun.

In another study the authors focused on teachers' viewpoints about what type of curriculum they should introduce in the gymnasium (McCaughtry et al., 2006). They interviewed one teacher who thought it was important to include culturally relevant activities

popular in the community and eventually will allow students to participate with friends and family at different events such as picnics. Another teacher expressed concern for outdated stories within his curriculum stating, “They’re just not relevant to what my students are saying out there in the real world” (McCaughtry et al., 2006, p. 490). Therefore, some of these teachers “culturally translated” these stories so they made sense to students and the environment they were living in. Participants of another study suggested teachers make learning and the environment more fun, novel, and enjoyable for students (Strean, 2009). Students enjoyed teachers who had fun with them and created new, active games into learning skills. In contrast, some PE teachers incorporated technical drills, which typically led to student disengagement.

Finally, students do not feel connected to school, teachers, or other students. They often report feelings of social isolation in the gymnasium (Spencer-Cavalier & Rintoul, 2012). “Lack of social connection between students and teachers impacted the students’ willingness and ability to participate in class activities” (Cothran & Ennis, 1999, p.241). Oftentimes, class sizes are extremely large in urban high schools. Teachers admitted there is not always ample time to get to know their students. Similarly, students expressed feelings of being rejected, not having friends in their classes, and feeling left out of activities (Spencer-Cavalier & Rintoul, 2012). According to Strean (2009), participants agreed social issues were more important than rules and game play. They enjoyed bonding with other students in class, which made games more fun. They agreed playing with friends was more fun than playing with peers they did not know.

**CRPE and high school females.** Although much of the research done on culturally relevant pedagogy has focused on both males and females in various environments, there is a significant amount of research that describes cultural challenges faced by AA adolescent females

in inner-city urban high school settings; specifically in sport-based PE programs (Ennis, 1999; Olafson, 2000; Oliver & Lalik, 2004; Shen et al., 2008). Many PE programs are designed around competitive team sports, which generally entice aggressive, competitive, and already skilled athletes. Unfortunately, for those who are less skilled or not interested in sport-based activities, this type of curriculum design tends to lead to disengagement or dislike of PE and PA (Carlson, 1995). Research suggests most girls in these situations feel they are always chosen last to be on teams, feel marginalized and alienated, and do not get equitable playing time because dominant aggressive players tend to control the games (Azzarito et al., 2006; Ennis, 1999; Olafson, 2002; Spencer-Cavalier & Rintoul, 2012). In order to meet the needs and entice all students, PE teachers should design more diverse curriculums, which includes personal/social skills, leadership roles, and sociocultural contexts of students' lives (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010). Additionally, the need for a variety of "cool" and popular activities such as fitness, dance, and adventure education (McCaughtry, 2009) as well as different sport models that encourage skill development and practice are equally important (Ennis, 1999).

Furthermore, students often complain about the lack of pedagogical strategies used to deliver content (Azzarito et al., 2006; Streaan, 2007; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). Many teachers who implement a sport-based curriculum tend to emphasize elite performance and competition. Tischler and McCaughtry (2011) explained how many teachers go straight to game play with without teaching any skills. The participants in this study disengaged from sports once games began because they did not know how to play and lost interest. Additionally, they expressed frustration because aggressive athletic boys in class were so competitive they focused more on who was winning than having fun. Participants in another study described an enjoyable

learning environment as one where PE teachers give structure, specific instructions, and teach strategies (Streat, 2007). It is nearly impossible to play a competitive team sport without understand rules or strategies of the game. Finally, Azzarito et al. (2006) explained how high school female participants perceived themselves as unskilled because they were never taught proper technique nor given time for skill practice.

Aside from content and delivery, another perspective comes from the idea many girls feel uncomfortable with their bodies. In some cases, students are forced to wear the schools' PE "uniform" versus choosing their own desired attire in which to be physically active. Unfortunately, this "one-size-fits-all uniform" does not appeal to all shapes and sizes and causes embarrassment and harassment from others (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002). Some girls feel like they do not "fit in" with the highly skilled or popular students. They are all-too concerned with social media and advertisements of "the perfect look". These negative feelings of isolation and not fitting in are intensified when girls' bodies do not satisfy the social requirements of a particular size and shape. Adolescent girls dislike being put on display, allowing others to stare, judge, and make fun of them, (Azzarito et al., 2006; Olafson, 2002) which altogether causes disengagement from being physically active in PE.

**CRPE and AA high school females.** As discussed in the above paragraphs, there is a considerable amount of research that discusses negative student perceptions of sport-based PE programs. There are also a significant amount of studies mentioned where girls, specifically AA high school girls, express the desire to implement dance, aerobics, and other movement activities into the curriculum. Furthermore, there are many studies describing the benefits of dance and its relevance to many students, which I will discuss in the next section.



As mentioned briefly in Chapter One, dance is a popular pastime in AA culture and has been for centuries. According to Farr (1997), dance plays a significant role in the lives of AA's and is used as a primary language of expression. Farr (1997) explains how dance is natural and instinctive and can be used to demonstrate a range of emotions such as joy, sorrow, fear, anger, and religious rituals (as cited in Thorpe, 1989). Hazzard-Gordon (1983) defines four ways in which AA's viewed Afro-American dance in a social aspect. First, she explained a sense of identity, whether or not the individual feels he or she is able to dance. Second, cultural integrity, or the ability to dance, means an individual belongs more or less to the cultural group. Third, Afro-American dance can be looked at as a quality that denotes whether or not one has membership into a group, much like a gang or peer group. Finally, at the political level, if AA's viewed themselves as better dancers, it separated or distinguished the differences between them and "whites" making them feel superiority.

In a more recent study about AA female adolescents (Corneille, Ashcraft, & Belgrave, 2005) the authors discuss ways to engage females through theories and issues relevant to AA females. For example, understanding the Afrocentric worldviews of this particular culture means to know their basic beliefs, values, and interactions with the world. The authors discuss similar social aspects as the ones listed in the paragraph above. It is important for AA females to understand their ethnic and gender identity, how and where they belong in community context, and historical considerations. Dance, along with music and poetry, was used to enhance Afrocentric values. Girls were able to express their values through rhythmic and creative movements and perform their stories in front of others (Corneille et al., 2005).

Dance has been described as structure, discipline, hard work, fun, challenging, satisfaction, self-expression, stress release, freedom, and transcendence (Stinson, 1990; Stinson, 1997). These adjectives are completely opposite views we typically hear from adolescent females when it comes to describing sport PE. Meglin (1994) makes a strong point stating, “...(dance) has been so often minimized in curriculums at all levels of education...lack of inclusion of dance...communicates that female interests and pursuits are not important or legitimate disciplines of study” (p. 27). Azzarito et al. (2006) explained, in traditional sport-based PE classes gender discourses are reinforced with regards to femininity and masculinity around sports. Adolescent females often feel discouraged and “reported perceived unfairness when denied the opportunity to participate in specific physical activities” (p. 226). Participants in another study were given the opportunity to create a curriculum focused on sociocultural contexts of their lives and activities they chose centered around “individual, non-competitive activities, which they could engage in with music...and they (girls) could imagine choosing...outside of school” (Enright & O’Sullivan, 2010, p. 218). Providing opportunities to expand curriculum generally engages more students during class.

**Importance of CRPE.** Understanding culture, cultural differences, and culture in the classroom helped me recognize how issues of cultural relevance affected AA female adolescents’ experiences in PE. Some students were able to identify with their teachers depending on whether or not they were from similar cultural backgrounds or whether or not teachers got to know students’ cultural background. It was necessary to investigate teachers’ backgrounds and how they were using their backgrounds to connect with students. Conversely, when backgrounds were different, how are teachers adjusting and adapting to their students in order to develop

relationships and connections? It was necessary to recognize classroom management and policies being used and how they affected the overall climate in the gymnasium or dance studio. For example, whether or not students were respecting one another and how they demonstrated those behaviors. Whether or not teachers demonstrated respect toward students and their behaviors. And, observing whether or not students acted out using negative behaviors because they did not sense care, communication, respect, or relevant content. Understanding AA female students' culture and lifestyles shed light on their feelings toward sport and dance PE. When students leave school are they able to use what they learned in PE classes or was the content irrelevant? Will students be able to attend family parties, picnics, and school dances and participate in activities being offered? As students enter adulthood, will they be able to join group fitness classes or other adult leagues? Understanding teachers' ideologies and perspectives of what should be taught in PE helped confirm or disconfirm students' experiences and future use of activities learned. Identifying and recognizing factors that have influenced AA girls' participation or disengagement in PE offered incredible information as to how CRPE can positively affect students' future PA levels.

### **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**

As explained in Chapter One, SDT emphasizes the social and contextual factors that influence peoples' behaviors and choices and the degree to which they are able to satisfy their psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT highlights the degree to which people are self-motivated and self-determined to accomplish desired outcomes via modes of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Pintrich and Schunk (1996) define motivation as something that gets individuals interested, keeps them engaged, and inspires them to complete a desired task.

Motivation has two main components: energy and direction. Typically, youth they have plenty of energy but are in need of some direction to help channel that energy in a positive way; together, the process affects their behavior (Sun & Chen, 2010). According to Sun and Chen (2010), students are expected to engage in the learning process in a PE environment, which requires a particular level of motivation. In order to enhance motivation, educators need to create lessons to meet students' psychological needs (Tessier, Sarrazin, & Ntoumanis, 2010). According to Sun and Chen (2010), when students begin to recognize value in lessons, they begin to participate. This participation could be based on extrinsic factors such as praise or punishment from a teacher or parent. However, ultimately students should become intrinsically motivated to engage in activities because they feel confident and choose to do so, recognize a sense of satisfaction, or identify social connections (Ntoumanis, 2005).

**Basic human needs and social support.** As stated, according to Ryan and Deci (2000), three shared psychological nutrients required to maximize growth, social development, and well-being (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). Social environments that promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness are more likely to facilitate intrinsic or internalized motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). When social support is developed between students and teachers as well as among students, these three psychological needs can be met and promote motivated behaviors. For example, motivation can be affected by social factors within the gymnasium such as the PE teacher's teaching style (Tessier et al., 2010). If he or she uses a multi-dimensional teaching style that includes support for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, they might satisfy the needs, which are "...essential for the healthy development and well-being of all individuals..." (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 231). Examples for autonomy support

include allowing choice in activities, reducing competition, and emphasizing social skills with different communication tactics (Amado et al., 2014). The social context to increase competence support encourages teachers to modify exercises to meet individuals' ability levels and provide positive feedback along with suggestions for improvement (Tessier et al., 2010). Finally, Amado et al. (2014) suggest teachers allow for in-class time to develop social skills through group work and integrating student opinions. The extent to which students' psychological needs are filled through social support could considerably improve motivation and participation in PE.

**Autonomy.** Individuals need to have the opportunity to self-direct one's behavior. An autonomy-supportive environment, such as choice, acknowledgment of feelings, and opportunities for self-direction, facilitates intrinsic motivation, allowing the feeling of autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation and feelings of autonomy can be enhanced by activities that are novel, challenging, and have aesthetic values (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, as Sun and Chen (2010) pointed out, teachers have to be aware of what they consider an autonomous environment and what students perceive as autonomy. The authors discussed the overall school environment being controlled primarily by educators and oftentimes students do not feel a strong sense of choice or decision-making which may lead to less motivated behaviors.

**Competence.** According to Deci and Ryan (2000), "...events such as positive feedback that foster perceived competence tend to enhance intrinsic motivation, although people must feel responsible for the competent performance in order for perceived competence to have positive effects on intrinsic motivation" (p. 235). Competence is the need to engage effectively in one's environment. When provided positive feedback versus no feedback, intrinsic motivation increases and individuals receive a sense of satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Conversely, when

negative feedback is provided versus no feedback at all, intrinsic motivation decreases and prevents satisfaction.

**Relatedness.** Relatedness is the need to be connected to and receive care from others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For students, this connection can come from the ability to do activities with peers or from teachers who demonstrate sincerity and affection toward their students. However, there can be situations where “relatedness is less central to intrinsic motivation than autonomy and competence” (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For example, sometimes people engage in intrinsically motivated behaviors alone, such as going to the gym to work out. Social support is not always required to participate in activities however, having a social base, or security enables an individual to feel motivated.

**Levels of motivation.** SDT focuses on the degree to which people are self-motivated and self-determined. SDT theorists propose a continuum of motivation that consists of three types of motivation: 1) intrinsic motivation, which is the highest level of the continuum where people engage in activities because they really want to participate; 2) extrinsic motivation is when individuals engage in activities for reasons not fully internalized such as rewards or punishments, and; 3) amotivation, or lack of motivation, where people disengage because they do not see purpose or value in the activities; they are neither intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated (Standage et al., 2005).

At the top of the continuum lie intrinsically motivated individuals who are most self-determined. They engage in activities because they are personally interested (Ryan & Deci, 2000). They express benefits of activities and feelings of pleasure and satisfaction; no extrinsic rewards are necessary (Deci & Ryan, 1985). For example, if an individual participates in an

activity because they feel pleasure and satisfaction from the activity, they are intrinsically motivated. Satisfying the three needs can be a strong motivator for individuals (Sun & Chen, 2010). The next categories on the continuum are related to extrinsic motivation or a person's motive to participate in an activity because of a separate outcome such as a reward or punishment (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Extrinsic motivation includes four sectors: integrated regulation (highest degree of self-regulation), identified regulation, introjected regulation, and external regulation (Standage et al., 2005). According to Sun and Chen (2010), "It is hoped that through these regulatory processes, an individual will move from a motivation state to another toward to the intrinsic motivation" (p. 367). Finally, on the lowest end of the continuum lies amotivation, or an absence of motivation. According to Deci and Ryan (2000),

All forms of extrinsic regulation, even the most controlled, involve intentionality and motivation, so a-motivation stands in contrast to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, for it represents the lack of both types of motivation and thus a complete lack of self-determination with respect to the target behavior (p. 237).

Individuals who lack any type of motivation tend to think activities are useless, might not feel confident in their ability to succeed, or are not quite sure why he/she should participate (Standage et al., 2005).

**SDT and education.** "Self-determination theory, when applied to the realm of education, is concerned primarily with promoting in students an interest in learning, a valuing of education, and a confidence in their own capacities and attributes" (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991, p. 325). According to the authors, forcing students to memorize facts in the classroom is not enough for excellent education. Furthermore, allowing students to think it is acceptable to just "fit in" or comply with social demands is not optimal for social development. However, these ideologies are "complementary when the school context stimulates certain kinds

of motivation in its students” (p. 326). Several studies summarized by Deci et al. (1991), indicate although teachers’ orientations influence the classroom, students with autonomy-supportive teachers tend to have more intrinsic motivation, perceived competence, and higher self-esteem. Conversely, students who perceived teachers’ intense control over activities and choice in the classroom are associated with non-self-determined forms of motivation.

According to Burke (1995), connecting curricular content with the learner is a primary form of motivation. Educators should focus on students’ interests and needs to succeed and apply content to get positive outcomes. When content is related to the real world, stimulates curiosity, encourages choice, and is self-fulfilling, it becomes motivating for students to engage (Brophy, 2008). Therefore, motivation and content are considered interrelated and one should not replace the other; they should be connected to acquire optimal learning from students.

According to Niemiec and Ryan (2009), “...when students’ basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are supported in the classroom, they are more likely to internalize their motivation to learn and to be more autonomously engaged in their studies” (p. 139). The authors suggest minimizing pressure by alleviating evaluation and competition, as well as maximizing choice and opinion regarding content and instructional strategies. Most likely, these efforts will create an autonomy-supportive environment encouraging optimal success for students. Furthermore, providing challenging activities to stimulate the brain, as well as appropriate feedback to promote success, can establish feelings of competence within students. Lastly, students desire the need to feel connected to others (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Relatedness can be acquired by teachers who demonstrate genuine care for their students and who allow students to work with their peers.



**SDT and PE.** Based on the various levels across the motivation continuum, students crave different levels of success in anything they participate in; including PE (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students who are intrinsically motivated are interested in learning the health benefits of being PA so they can continue being active into adulthood (Hein, Muur, & Koka, 2004) and students who are amotivated are generally not interested in being in class whatsoever (Standage et al., 2005). Unfortunately, PE programs are often set up for student disengagement, lack of motivation, helplessness, and alienation from games or activities; discouraging students of all levels of motivation from participating (Spencer-Cavaliere & Rintoul, 2012). In a past study on amotivation, the authors defined major causes of amotivation, how students displayed disengagement, and what can be done to offset these behaviors and ensure success (Ntoumanis et al., 2004). Based on students' responses, learned helplessness beliefs, low need satisfaction, and contextual factors are three main perceived causes of amotivation. Students admitted these negative actions and overt displays of disengagement through nonattendance, little to no participation in class, and demonstrating low desire to be physically active after leaving school causing motivation to diminish. Similarly, in a more recent study, students' amotivation was directly affected by teachers' relatedness support (Shen, Li, Sun, & Rukavina, 2010). According to Shen et al., (2010), "Those students who felt unimportant or ignored by teachers were more likely to suspect their ability and wonder the reasons why they should participate in physical education" (p. 427). Likewise, Shen et al., (2010) found lack of competence support played a factor in amotivation of students. The authors suggest teacher-student interaction and providing students feedback and appropriate instruction could enhance motivation. Ntoumanis et al. (2004) present some solutions for PE teachers to create a more supportive, friendlier environment to

engage students, encourage motivation, and promote success. Solutions include offering a wide range of activities, especially less-competitive in nature where more choice might be available; promoting a master motivational climate where students participate in cooperation and teamwork; and de-emphasizing strict dress code and changing routines in the locker room. Students also provided various suggestions to benefit from PE and feel successful, such as making lessons more enjoyable to maximize participation and satisfy the three needs of SDT, adapting where lessons are taught according to weather, adjusting length of lessons, and allowing choice of clothing so students feel comfortable (Ntoumanis et al., 2004).

According to Amado, Del Villar, Sanchez-Miguel, Leo, and Garcia-Calvo (2014), one of the best practices to increase motivation is through dance and physical expression by both students and teachers. After training a group of PE teachers to incorporate dance into their PE programs in attempt to promote self-determined motivation and increase satisfaction for the basic psychological needs, students in this study showed significant satisfaction for meeting the needs for autonomy (Amado et al., 2014). Likewise, Quested (2011) stated, "...features of autonomy supportive environments are motivationally advantageous in dance settings" (p. 11). To create this type of environment, the authors suggest encouraging student choices and providing feedback to increase confidence and competence. In the first study (Amado et al., 2014), there was a slight increase in their sense of relatedness because as the sessions continued, they felt positive changes in their teachers and felt a sense of affiliation in class. However, this study lasted only six weeks; the authors stated if there was more time and students had opportunities to work with peers, the sense of relatedness could be stronger. Relatedness is also strong among dancers immersed in task-and ego-involving dance climate, allowing them to work individually,

with peers, and/or with their teachers (Quested & Duda, 2010). Furthermore, when given sufficient time for skill practice, competence during the dance unit could improve as well (Amado et al., 2014). At the end of six weeks, there was not a significant change in competence due to learning a novel skill such as dance; however, students expressed a definite increase in their perception of autonomy.

**SDT and high school students.** According to Standage et al. (2005) in order to positively impact motivation and positive motivational outcomes, a need supportive environment is imperative for high school PE teachers. This social context facilitates self-determined motivation and will enable need satisfaction in all three tenets of SDT. In order to foster perceptions of autonomy in secondary students, “PE teachers may seek to increase the students’ opportunities for choice, provide increased opportunities for student input, and/or establish peer-learning groups” (p. 426). Avoiding competitive situations where evaluation outcomes are contingent upon others and promoting self-evaluations are ways to facilitate students’ perceptions of competence. Finally, to enable students’ perceptions of relatedness, “PE teachers may use small group activities and develop reward structures that support cooperation” (Standage et al., 2005, p. 426).

Another study found similar results regarding PE teachers’ autonomy-supportive environment and benefits it has on students’ need satisfaction and learning achievement, especially for those students who are not self-determined (Shen, McCaughtry, Martin, & Fahlman, 2009a). In order to promote success in students, PE teachers should adopt characteristics such as being responsive, supportive, and flexible. According to Shen et al. (2009a), teachers ought to provide a meaningful rationale for activities taught, recognize and

respect students' suggestions so all lessons are not teacher-directed, and provide a variety of activities allowing choice of activity selection, difficulty of task, and other alternatives. Autonomy-oriented students tend to be more intrinsically involved in PE than those who are concerned with proving competence in comparison to their peers (Shen, McCaughtry, Martin, & Falhman, 2009b).

Unlike any other subject in school, students' abilities are exposed to all teachers, friends, and peers in PE. Unfortunately, much research has found students disengage or become uninterested in PE as they become older; mostly due to ridicule, bullying, and cruel comments from peers who are judgmental of varying ability levels (Olafson, 2002). Students expressed their dislike of being "put on display" for all to see and make fun. Standage et al. (2006) found competence to be the main predictor of self-determined motivation in a short-term PE setting. Most likely, this result "may be attributed to the fact that physical competencies are publicly visible and salient in PE..." (Standage et al., 2006, p. 107). Similarly, Shen et al. (2009b) found participants who were avoiding unfavorable judgments were extremely concerned with demonstrating competence in comparison to their peers. This competency proved their drive and motivation to succeed in PE; even if it was only temporary to avoid ridicule and judgment.

Relatedness, or the connection between teachers and students, can be demonstrated through personality characteristics and whether or not their personality lends them to a motivational way of teaching (Tessier, Sarrazin, & Ntoumanis, 2010). Students in this study saw a significant increase in relatedness from their teachers after attending training to increase teachers' autonomy support, structure and interpersonal involvement. Teachers demonstrated connection by better organizing and communicating their lessons, providing more feedback, and

giving praise and encouragement more often to foster motivation. Teachers also became more involved with their students, listened to them more often, and demonstrated more support. Likewise, it is equally important to develop relatedness with peers. Students who have peer interactions and are able to work with friends during activities are more likely to feel motivated and self-determined (Ntoumanis, 2005).

**SDT and high school females.** Studies have proved, when met with the three needs of SDT, female adolescents are more likely to participate in PE. For example, Ferrer-Caja and Wiess (2000) indicated multiple factors predicting motivated behaviors, such as choice of challenging tasks, effort, and persistence. Because teachers were able to create a learning climate in a non-competitive, autonomous environment, female students' intrinsic motivation was positively related to self-determination with respect to autonomy and choice; however, participation was negatively related to ego orientation. Similarly, Wang and Liu (2007) found female students with high task orientation felt fairly autonomous to participate in PE classes. Also, female adolescents who had high incremental beliefs or saw opportunities to get better with practice were satisfied with the learning process and hoped to display competence versus inability to their peers. These results showed "incremental beliefs were positively associated with task orientation, relative autonomy index (RAI), and perceived competence" (p. 156) which reported high enjoyment in their PE classes.

Creating a well-rounded, relevant curriculum by incorporating creative movement activities with music can influence motivation and participation among female adolescents. Because dance is considered to be a more largely female content, female participants in one study felt a sense of accomplishment above male participants, which led them to show off their

sense of competence (Amado et al, 2014b). They preferred a direct instruction technique, which allowed female students to repeat choreography demonstrated by the teacher and accomplish specific skills in execution.

**SDT and AA high school females.** Many researchers have focused on autonomy-supportive learning environments and how this environment positively affects participation and motivation in PE (Tessier et al., 2010). Shen et al. (2008) discovered “female urban adolescents’ perceived autonomy had a stronger association (than males) with their perceived competence” (p. 854). These perceptions tend to develop simultaneously and the interaction between perceptions of autonomy and competence become more evident in PE for females. However, when female urban adolescents lack competence in PE, they are less likely to participate in PA outside of school and in their future.

Additionally, Shen, McCaughtry, Martin, Fahlman, and Garn (2012) found a “higher sense of relatedness led to greater emotional and behavioral engagement in physical education...” (p. 241). According to their results, urban high school girls’ motivation to participate in PE is directly influenced by their sense of relatedness. Those who feel a strong sense of relatedness from their PE teachers were more likely to show enthusiasm and effort to participate in activities whereas those who felt neglected or unimportant were more likely to become bored and alienated from engagement. However, Shen et al. (2008) point out although teachers might meet the needs of SDT by keeping an active and non-competitive environment and reinforcing positive feedback and encouragement, they cannot neglect content in PE. Previous literature repeatedly stresses the importance of a well-rounded, relevant curriculum to ensure lifetime PA for all students.

**Importance of SDT and how it guided my study.** The extent to which the three needs of SDT are fulfilled influenced students' participation in PE classes. Past research has shared a great deal of insight regarding the tenets of SDT and their role in PE. However, much of that research tends to focus on one of the three needs of SDT rather than all three simultaneously. Specific to this study, understanding AA female adolescents' feelings, experiences, and challenges in PE in relation to autonomy, competence, and relatedness creates a clearer picture of what PE teachers need to do to increase motivation and participation in the gymnasium. Understanding whether or not teachers are meeting these three needs in a sport or dance PE environment can help them better plan relevant curriculum for AA female students. Understanding exactly how the three tenets of SDT impact AA female students' comparisons of both PE classes will clearly address their motivation or amotivation to participate in PE.

During data collection, I observed how PE teachers supported autonomy and whether or not autonomous environments promoted motivation to participate in sport or dance PE. I observed whether or not the teachers provided novel activities, freedom of choice, appropriate social skills, and reduced competition and whether or not students demonstrated motivated behaviors in relation to these teaching strategies. If teachers did not create an autonomous environment, I was interested in observing whether or not students behaved in the same manner as another PE class where the teacher was providing these options. During interviews, I investigated students' perceptions of autonomy and how they felt it did or did not directly influence their participation. Additionally, I tried to understand why they thought it may or may not influence them.

Competence is an important determinant of participation. Understanding students who chose not to participate because they did not feel a strong sense of skill ability encouraged me to observe whether or not teachers were breaking down the skill techniques and providing ample practice time. If given enough time to practice, it appeared more students were willing to participate. Extra practice time seemed to give a stronger sense of skill acquisition. It also appeared the sense of competence of a skill enhanced motivation to participate. Along with observations, I examine what made students feel competent, what influenced teachers to provide detailed instruction or not, and how students and teachers felt about fulfilling the need to feel competent.

Lastly, teachers who satisfy the need to feel connected appeared to have a positive influence on students' participation and perceptions of PE. I observed how relatedness positively affected students' participation in PE environments and how it played an important role. I asked students why it was important to connect with other students and their PE teachers, how this connection made them feel each time they came to PE, and what the overall effect this connection meant to their motivation to participate. During interviews I asked detailed questions about relationships between students and their teachers and whether or not teachers took the time to know students and their backgrounds. I also inquired about peer relationships and whether or not there was time during class to develop friendships and connect with others.

**SDT and qualitative methods.** Most studies that have examined SDT have adopted the quantitative methodological approach (Ryan & Niemiec, 2009). According to Ryan and Niemiec (2009), "SDT opposes reductionism and instead focuses on the internal frame of reference of participants in understanding and predicting what energizes, directs, and sustains behavior" (p.



262). Therefore, because the majority of researchers using SDT have utilized the quantitative approach, there could be a potential gap in our knowledge regarding adolescent students in PE settings; specifically AA adolescent females. Similar to the words of Hassandra, Goudas, and Chroni (2003), “As the school environment is particularly complex, there may be several other variables associated...” (p. 213). In this study, the school environment, but more specifically the PE environment, was observed. I believe several variables associated with SDT could be missing by the sole use of quantitative methods. “The bottom line is that research approaches should be mixed in ways that offer the best opportunities for answering important research questions” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 6). Because primarily quantitative methods have been used to examine the area of PE, I felt it was important to extend beyond that approach and dig deeper to get rich, detailed data on exactly what AA female adolescents desire in PE settings; what would truly inspire and encourage participation and motivation.

As explained further, in detail, in Chapter Three, I observed numerous sport and dance-based PE classes and conducted interviews with students and teachers. The qualitative approach used allowed me to study three separate cases in depth, use rich detail to describe phenomena as situated in each context, and descriptively explain each setting in the words of the participants themselves (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This information can be used to inform future PE teachers how to implement a CR curriculum and how it might affect their students in terms of the three tenets of SDT. Unfortunately, using a quantitative approach could cause the researcher to miss out on the phenomena occurring or obtain information “too abstract or general for direct application to specific local situations, contexts, and individuals” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.9).

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

In this study I examined AA high school girls' perceptions of dance-based PE in relation to past experiences in sport-based PE. In this chapter I will explain my research methodology and include: 1) a summary of theoretical justifications and assumptions of the interpretive paradigm, 2) participant recruitment strategies and data collection methods, 3) data analysis techniques, 4) ethical principles, and 5) researcher bias that might influence the study.

### Theoretical Justifications and Assumptions of the Interpretive Paradigm

In this section I will describe the theoretical assumptions of the interpretive paradigm that guided this study. Paradigms, or worldviews, are “different ways of thinking about the research process” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 9). Researchers need to understand who they are and what they believe about the social world when choosing a paradigm because that paradigm will outline the research strategies one will use (Crotty, 1998; Esterberg, 2002). The interpretive approach guided this study, as I examined the meaning, or “participants' perspective” of events, experiences, and behaviors in two different types of PE classes. Students' encounters in different social and cultural spaces (i.e. with teachers, peers, and curricula) will help define their individual sense of social reality in the way they feel it is experienced (Crotty, 1998). As the researcher, I used participants' views and experiences to interpret what I found; an interpretation also influenced by my own experiences and background (Creswell, 2007).

Rather than begin with a theory, researchers using the interpretive paradigm must examine the empirical world. In other words, “they should begin by immersing themselves in the world inhabited by those they wish to study” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 16). The researcher seeks to understand the participants' views of any given situation or experience of the world in which

they live (Creswell, 2007). These meanings are created through interaction with others as well as through historical and cultural norms in individuals' lives. The interpretivist should spend ample time with the participants during a variety of different occasions. Additionally, the researcher should begin with more general questions and keep them more open-ended so participants can create the meaning of an event or situation (Creswell, 2007). The researcher must recognize how his or her own experiences will influence the interpretation of the participant's perspective. As the researcher listens carefully to the participants' answers, he or she must seek to gain the best possible understanding of others' worldviews.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), all research "is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied" (p. 31). These paradigms shape the research strategies and reflect the beliefs of the researchers (Esterberg, 2002). And, each paradigm makes different assumptions about ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Maxwell, 2005). The following paragraphs outline the theoretical assumptions of ontology, epistemology, and methodology through the interpretivist perspective.

### **Interpretive Theoretical Assumptions Regarding Ontology**

According to the interpretive paradigm, ontology, or the nature of reality, is based on social construction; how reality is constructed through social interactions and the meanings created through a process of interpretation (Esterberg, 2002). First, reality comes from the meaning and interpretations people develop from individual lived experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). For example, two people could share the same experience in school (teacher, peers, curriculum, etc.) but in reality, that experience is developed through their own

interpretation of what really happened in the classroom and what the experience meant. Reality is considered subjective and based on “meanings directed toward certain objects or things” (Creswell, 2007, p. 20) and relative to individual constructions based on the meanings each individual develops from an experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Esterberg, 2002).

Second, interpretivists focus on meaning and interpretation as the primary subject matter (Lincoln & Denzin, 1998) because peoples’ outcomes are based on their perspectives of happenings in the world. According to LeCompte and Schensul (2010), “interpretivists argue that reality differs, depending on whose reality is considered” (p. 67). In other words, these perspectives cause people to make decisions or take actions in different ways. Interpretive researchers’ goals are to understand participants’ reality and how it affects their decisions (Creswell, 2007).

Third, interpretivists deem culture to be a primary influence on the construction of meaning. According to LeCompte and Schensul (2010), culture can be anything shared within a group of people such as language, symbols, and other forms of communication. Geertz (1973) states, “culture is composed of psychological structures by means of which individuals or groups of individuals guide their behavior” (p. 11). Interpretive researchers should be aware of the makeup of a group they are studying as to recognize the varying behaviors, diverse cultures, and the numerous meanings that could evolve in one social event or experience.

### **Interpretive Theoretical Assumptions Regarding Epistemology**

Epistemology, or the nature of knowledge, is “a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). It is a combination of historical and social context as well as shared understanding and compromise between the researcher and

participants. Assumptions about the nature of knowledge and its construction stems from a subjectivist epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008); solely based on or influenced by the participants' experiences as well as the researcher's interpretations. First, interpretivists believe, "what people know and believe to be true about the world is constructed...as people interact with one another over time in specific social settings" (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010, p. 67). Additionally, situations, people, and interactions will be defined differently by individuals based on feelings and meanings developed from past experiences and current knowledge and feelings they have regarding the situation or phenomenon in which they are involved (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010).

Second, interpretivists believe knowledge results from constant interaction between the researcher and participants. The researcher should know and understand the sociopolitical status of participants before he or she can speak on their behalf (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). More accurate interpretations can develop through direct one-on-one interaction and participating in the lives of research participants. Researchers should minimize the distance between themselves and those being researched in order to produce authentic and valid ideas of individuals involved (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010).

### **Interpretive Theoretical Assumptions Regarding Methodology**

"Different ways of viewing the world shape different ways of researching the world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 66). Interpretivist researchers study the meaning of the social life-world through emergent design and naturalistic methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The methodological assumptions come from their beliefs about the nature of reality and knowledge

construction. These assumptions highlight dialectical interactions, the significance of cultural context, and recognizing the researcher as the primary research instrument.

Interpretive researchers engage in conversations with participants over time to gain understanding. Through ongoing conversations, new ideas emerge and new constructions about the participants' world and perspectives are formed (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Researchers should spend ample time with participants to build trust, otherwise participants may be hesitant to share the truth about how they feel and instead tell the researcher what they think he or she wants to hear. Typically, research questions guide these conversations. Because interviews are an important feature in learning to understand the participants, as mentioned earlier, questions should be more general and open-ended to allow for participants' perspectives to emerge and allow the researcher to understand the world the way participants see it (Patton, 2002).

The cultural context must be observed by the researcher to help inform possible themes from dialectical interactions. Observations can be participant or non-participant depending upon what the researcher is trying to understand. He or she cannot fully understand a phenomena or insights of others strictly through interviews; therefore, observations will help inform these insights (Patton, 2002). It is important to view participants in their social environments to watch their interactions with other individuals and to describe the social context as much as possible through descriptive notes with depth and detail (Patton, 2002). These observations are important for the researcher to recognize whether race, class, and gender are significant in this environment, and if so, individual behaviors may or may not change.

“Interpretive practice engages both the *hows* and *whats* of social reality” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 174). Because this focus is on the social construction of how people construct

their worlds, the researcher is the primary instrument and must immerse themselves in the field to guide the development of understanding (Patton, 2002). Additionally, they must acknowledge their own biases and perspectives such as their past experiences, what they believe, and how they feel in regards to significant cultural issues such as race, class, and gender. They are also bound by ethical obligations, such as explaining the study and requirements to become a participant, warranting confidentiality and anonymity, and ensuring participants feel heard, as in what they have to say is important. In order to build trust with participants, they should feel well-informed and comfortable with the study and their personal interests.

### **Study Methods**

Below, I describe specific criteria participants were required to meet in order to participate in this study. Next, I will discuss the rationale for choosing these participants and settings to conduct the study. Finally, I will describe my data collection, data analyses techniques, and trustworthiness strategies.

### **Research Setting and Participants**

Purposeful sampling guided the recruitment of 19 AA, female adolescents enrolled in a dance-based PE class at three different high schools (Maxwell, 2005). In addition, three high school teachers who taught dance-based PE and six high school teachers who taught sport-based PE at three different locations were recruited and participated in this study. Below I describe why and how I recruited high school females and teachers for this particular study.

As defined in Chapter One, dance-based PE classes consisted of correctly identifying and displaying basic dance movements; learning basic anatomy of the body and how to execute proper alignment; experiencing physical conditioning as a life skill; engaging in non-verbal

communication through movement; and participating in culminating dance performances to demonstrate accomplishments.

The dance-based PE classes typically began with a full-body warm up to prevent injuries and conditioning of the body to build strength and endurance. The warm up consisted of cardiovascular exercises such as jumping jacks and jogging in place as well as extensive stretching of the muscles. The conditioning portion of class usually included abdominal work and some type of upper body strengthening exercises. After properly warming up the muscles, teachers generally worked on technical aspects of modern dance or ballet, which are most commonly used in lower levels of dance because they focus on the basics and the premise of all dance movement. During warm up and technique teachers focused on correct vocabulary and meaning so students could identify not only with demonstration of the movement, but also by verbally communicating the movement. According to their syllabi, students were expected to pass written and practical exams in regards to movement. They had to learn to spell the words, translate meaning, and demonstrate movement. Throughout the class, teachers also tended to focus on correct body alignment for proper execution of movements. Then, students learned combinations of movements and ways to express feelings, or tell a story, through movements. They were often given time to practice with groups before performing for the class or receiving a grade. This entire process led students to their culminating performance at the end of the semester. The performances were advertised throughout the school and held at each individual school in the evening. The following week, students were able to view their performance on video and reflect on what they learned. Teachers guided them through a discussion to think



about where they were when they began, what they learned throughout the class, and how to improve in the future.

Sport-based PE classes included gaining knowledge to improve physical development; learning exercises to increase strength and endurance; promoting overall health and wellness; and participating in a plethora of sports and physical activities. Each sport-based PE class began with some type of cardiovascular warm up which most commonly involved walking and jogging laps around the gymnasium. Each individual class varied with regards to how many laps, how many minutes, or whether or not they should walk or jog. In most classes, students were expected to enter the gymnasium and begin moving around the gymnasium immediately while waiting for the teacher. Following the initial warm up, students participated in a few stretching exercises and some strength and conditioning such as push-ups, planks, mountain climbers, and abdominal work. Once the classes were warmed up, teachers generally went right into playing the sport for that day or week. There was minimal focus on basic fundamental skills and more focus on competitive game play. Some teachers allowed students to choose teams while others randomly assigned students numbers and divided them into teams according to their number. Depending on the teacher, students spent 1-2 weeks playing a sport before switching to a new one. Most teachers assigned homework and asked students to identify muscles groups used during specific activities or learn the rules of a game before it was introduced in class. In most cases students were physically assessed based on ability to perform each skill and use appropriate techniques. However, in half of the classes throughout the semester, minimal feedback was given to help improve skills and techniques which could have affected students'

overall grade. In the other half, students received positive reinforcement when executing skills properly and constructive criticism to make improvements.

**Participant recruitment.** First, I acquired permission from each school district research office, school principal, PE teacher, and the university institutional review board (IRB). Then, during my first visit, I issued an explanation of this study along with an invitation to participate to all AA female students enrolled in the dance-based PE class I was observing. Students who were interested in participating were asked to share their ethnicity, grade, and if they had a sport-based PE class in high school. Next, the female participants were chosen by criterion-based selection and purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2005). Because I was interested in studying the AA female population and their comparisons of high school PE classes, participants were required to meet the criteria of being an AA female who had already taken a sport-based PE class in high school and was currently enrolled in a beginner or mid-level dance-based PE class. I made much effort to avoid higher level classes as it seemed there might be bias added to the study because those students might be trained dancers who take classes in studios outside of school. Therefore, I observed beginner to intermediate level classes in an attempt to avoid biased information during interviews. Finally, I chose participants from the students who agreed to be involved in the study and who met the criteria.

Second, while searching for teachers who might be willing to allow me to conduct research in their classroom, I tried to avoid first year teachers because I did not want to add extra stress or responsibility to their schedules as they prepare their class structure and management plans during their induction years. I was not concerned with the gender of PE teachers because my focus was on students' perspectives of PE classes. Also, I was not focused on specific race

or ethnicity of the instructors because it was not relevant to the study. However, I believe instructors' perceptions provided a clearer insight to what students shared with me during interviews. Based on my knowledge of different PE programs' curricula and recommendations from PE teachers I have met over time, I found three teachers willing to allow me into their classrooms for one semester: One AA male (Antonio Smythe) and two AA females (Natalia Burnett and Tanya Banker) who have all been teaching for over ten years. Antonio and Natalia taught in the same urban, inner-city public school district while Tanya taught in a suburban public school district. Pseudonyms are used to describe all participants and schools to ensure anonymity.

Antonio was certified in several areas including English, theatre, and speech with a concentration in dance during his undergraduate years. He has taught all subjects over the last 28 years and was currently teaching all dance PE classes at Carter High School during the time of the study. He has been at this school for the past 16 years. There were a total of five PE teachers at Carter High School but Antonio was the only one who taught the dance PE classes. The nature of sport PE classes taught by the other four teachers was structured as general PE and included activities such as: individual and team sports, lifetime fitness skills, and weight training. Antonio had all types of students enrolled in his dance PE classes including athletes and those who had no movement experience whatsoever, but many of them were likely to come from the performing arts department. Students who were enrolled in lower level dance PE classes were usually introduced to dance or creative movement for the first time. However, regardless of their level, Antonio enjoyed introducing all genres of dance such as classical ballet and modern and strongly emphasized the proper technique for each style of dance. He also

stressed proper etiquette in the classroom and while attending performances. And, he taught life skills, such as how to properly present and carry oneself, as well as how to cooperate and work with others.

Natalia was certified to teach health, PE, and dance. She has taught all three subjects over the last fourteen years. At the time of the study it was her tenth year at Denver High School. Besides Natalia, there were two other teachers who taught dance PE classes and one teacher in her department whose focus was sport-related. These were the only PE classes offered at Denver High School. The majority of students who were enrolled in the dance PE classes were females with only half of those students having any knowledge of the subject area. Natalia was a well-rounded teacher who emphasized proper technique of skills, flexibility of the body, quality of movement, appropriate discipline and etiquette, and how to be a better performer. These diverse qualities made her class ideal to observe students and compare their experiences in both types of PE.

Tanya was certified to teach PE and dance. She has been teaching for 18 years and during the time of the study it was her sixteenth year at Huntington High School. She has taught dance PE and Pilates; both classes met the PE requirement at Huntington. Including Tanya, there were seven PE teachers in the PE department. In addition to dance, classes for students to receive PE credit were: athletic conditioning, introduction to PE, advanced swimming and lifeguard training, personal fitness such as weight training, individual and team sports, Yoga and Pilates, and strength training and conditioning. Tanya was the only teacher who taught dance PE classes. She explained the diverse group of students enrolled in her classes ranged in levels of ability, dance experience, race, and SES. The majority of her students were female; however,

she said she occasionally had a few males in class. In past years the PE department and athletics were much more supportive of one another and encouraged athletes to take a variety of classes for different training such as strength and flexibility. Currently, fewer athletes enrolled than past years. Typically, students enrolled in lower level dance PE classes were introduced to dance movement for the first time. Tanya emphasized discipline and structure. She felt class procedures were critical; not only to her classes but in learning life skills. She stressed perseverance and encouraged students to finish what they started. Tanya used dance as a tool to focus on success and taught technique to instill discipline in students.

**Setting.** Because my population focus was AA females, I focused on finding high schools that offered dance-based PE classes with a greater AA female population in those classes. Two high schools were located in an urban, inner-city school district in Midwest United States where the AA population was the highest and the third school was located in a suburban residential area. Qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) was used to understand “case variations and uniquenesses as well as commonalities” (Patton, 2002, p. 492). This process clarified similarities and differences with each individual case between dance-based PE in urban and suburban settings; AA students in both.

According to the state requirements for graduation, high school students must take a total of one credit of PE and health which means  $\frac{1}{2}$  credit of PE and  $\frac{1}{2}$  credit of health developed by the department and approved by the board (Michigan Department of Education, 2015). An extracurricular activity approved by the district and deemed acceptable for the credit may be a substitution for the  $\frac{1}{2}$  credit of PE. In addition to the state requirements, each district requirement varied slightly. For example, the two schools located in the urban, inner-city district

aligned with the state requirement of a ½ credit for PE. However, the suburban school district required one full credit of PE.

Carter High School was one of twenty-three high schools located in this inner-city school district. Again, this district graduation requirement aligned with the state requirement of a ½ credit of PE. The school agreed with and did not alter this requirement whatsoever. Students could choose from the sport-based PE, or general PE class, which included individual and team sports, lifetime fitness activities, and weight training. Or, they could choose a dance-based PE class.

Denver High School was also part of the twenty-three high schools in the inner-city area who agreed with the state requirement of a ½ credit of PE as a graduation requirement. However, the graduating classes of 2015 and 2016 were required to take the sport-based PE class as their ½ credit before choosing any dance-based PE classes. Those graduating any time after 2016 are no longer required to take the sport-based PE class. They may now choose from the plethora of dance-based PE classes or sport-based PE class offered at Denver High.

Huntington High School was located in a suburban residential area and was one of four high schools in this district. This district required students to take one full credit of PE: a ½ credit for introduction to PE, which all freshmen were required to take, and ½ credit for a PE elective. The intro to PE class included swimming, individual and team sports, and a minimal amount of lifetime skills and activities. After this requirement was met, students were able to choose from advanced sports, Yoga, Pilates, weight training, and dance.

Located in the urban, inner-city district, Carter High School was comprised of approximately 2,294 students enrolled; 87.4% AA, 5.9% Asian American, 3.8% Hispanic, 2.0%

Caucasian, and 0.9% Arabic. Based on enrollment, 70.4% of the students participated in the free and reduced meal programs.

Also located in the urban, inner-city district, there were approximately 559 students enrolled in Denver High School; 98.7% AA, 1.1% Hispanic, and 0.2% Caucasian. Based on enrollment, 48.8% of the students participated in the free and reduced meal programs.

According to their most current report, there were approximately 1185 students enrolled in Huntington High School, located in a suburban, residential area; 40.42% AA, 6.33% Asian, 1.86% Hispanic, 51.31% Caucasian, and 0.08% multi-racial. Based on enrollment, 32.4% of the students participated in the free and reduced meal programs.

### **Data Collection**

I collected data at three high schools via observations and interviews with 19 high school students, six or seven students from each school, and three high school dance teachers over the span of five months during the 2014-2015 academic school year. In addition, I observed seven high school sport teachers and their classes. The decision to choose six or seven students, representative of the population I studied, from each school, was based on the nature of the topic. Research study, design, and questions were clearly stated and I obtained most of the important information needed via interviews (Morse, 2000). I also felt as though students chosen through criterion sampling would exemplify characteristics needed to maximize my chances to find patterns for which I was searching (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). Then, through purposeful sampling of those who met the criteria, I had a variety of participants representing the AA female population. They consisted of diverse personal backgrounds, were able to provide rich, detailed information during interviews and helped answer my research questions based on their varied

experiences. I decided to choose up to seven students due to the possibility of transient students or other potential reasons they decided to leave the study. I preferred not to have less than five students to maximize perspectives and information to complete this study. Over the course of five months, I spent almost two days per week at each school observing both PE classes (dance and sport) for a total of 12 observations in each class at each school. Class times at each school varied from 50 – 70 minutes. It was important to utilize my time spent at each school having informal conversations with both students and teachers in order to build a solid rapport with my participants. During observations and informal conversations in the first couple weeks, I strived to gain adequate information to develop a solid set of questions for my first round of interviews. Previously, I conducted a pilot study where I spent approximately six weeks in similar settings and was confident I built a trusting relationship with the students and teacher and it gave me ample time to have personal conversations with the teacher. I believe five months to conduct this current study provided more than sufficient time to build trust. Furthermore, time spent in the setting allowed me to talk freely and comfortably with participants building positive relationships to ensure they provided useful, detailed information to my interview questions. Over the five-month period, I observed a sport-based PE class at each school, following my visit to each dance-based PE class. Similar to the pilot study, these observations helped enhance and further my understanding of girls' perceptions of their experiences in each class (Patton, 2002). I recorded behaviors, interactions, conversations, and events as they happened (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Following observations, I reflected on these actions and developed more in-depth interview questions based on my observations directly related to my research questions. In addition, I looked for similarities or differences, which occurred in both classes.



Reflection allowed me to review my field notes and write them up with full, complete descriptions of what occurred during each observation (Esterberg, 2002). I created my own understanding of the social scene and events that took place at each individual location. I described my initial impression of the setting and participants, interactions between participants, and other events that stood out. It was imperative to have as much description as possible in order to write up rich, detailed results.

Additional data collection methods I used included, informal conversations with students and teachers, three rounds of semi-structured interviews with students, two rounds of semi-structured interviews with teachers, six focus group interviews (FGIs; two with each group of AA girls at three high schools), and 12 classroom observations in both PE settings. Rounds of interviews and observations continued over five months until data was saturated and I could answer my research questions.

**Interviews.** Because the purpose of my study was to examine students' perspectives of their experiences in different PE classes, it was important to conduct formal and informal interviews with them to find common themes within their answers and gain specific, detailed information on the same topic (Esterberg, 2002) from different viewpoints. Interviews helped confirm what happened during observations as well as provided additional information that might have been missed during observations (Maxwell, 2005).

In addition to individual and FGIs, other interview participants included three dance-based PE teachers from the schools discussed above. These teachers had expertise, training, and experience teaching a plethora of PE classes and were able to provide a range of knowledge based on their experiences. They were able to share their insights and feelings regarding girls'

experiences in their classes with the ability to compare what they saw in dance-based PE versus their views during sport-based PE.

The first round of interviews was conducted two weeks into the semester after allowing students to get used to the class, teacher, and my presence during class. First, I prepared a student interview guide based on my findings in a previous pilot study, my initial observations, and my research questions. Then, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews with the girls from each school. The first round of semi-structured interviews allowed me to get to know the girls, encourage them to openly speak to me, and explore a basic understanding of girls' experiences in both PE classes (Esterberg, 2002). As Esterberg (2002) suggests, following each interview, it is important to record thorough field notes regarding small details during the interview such as setting, appearance of the interviewee, and how I felt the interview went. Then, I transcribed the first round of interviews and coded for possible themes (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Based on my findings from students and my research questions, I created an interview guide and conducted round one interviews with three dance PE teachers in order to get more in-depth information about the PE program, background information, and particular topics discussed during round one student interviews.

Toward the middle of the semester, I completed the first round of student and teacher interviews, transcribed and coded, and moved on to my first FGI with each set of girls at each school. FGIs were a great way to get participants to interact with one another and discuss ideas about certain topics, providing me with a considerable amount of data. FGIs helped me learn about the social norms within the environment, behaviors, opinions, and particular structures or patterns with a community or group (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). During this FGI I asked

them to participate in an activity which they had to list the top five things that stood out in their mind in both PE classes and then rank them from most important to least important.

Next, I created a new interview guide for students and conducted round two semi-structured interviews in the same fashion as the first picking up on themes that may have formed, moving in new directions, and asking participants to elaborate on various topics (Patton, 2002). After completing individual interviews with students I transcribed and coded for themes.

Then, I repeated this process by creating the last student interview guide for the third interview with individual students. The purpose of this last interview was to hear final thoughts about the semester and allowed students to provide insight on a full semester of both dance and sport-based PE classes. Additionally, I followed up on all themes that emerged from FGIs and individual students' and teachers' interviews and allowed students to confirm these themes are indeed what they told me.

After transcribing all individual interview rounds, I created the final FGI guide. During the final FGI, I asked students to really dig deep into emotions and behaviors about them and others during sport and dance PE classes. Along with several questions about emotions and behaviors in both PE settings, during this FGI I asked the girls to create an ideal PE class; one where they could choose the activities, rules and guidelines, ideal teacher, and grading policies. I took notes during the interview, transcribed, and coded for final themes.

Finally, I took all the information I had gathered and created the final teacher interview guide. I waited until the very end of the semester, once all the dance concerts were finished, and conducted the final interview. I waited until the end so their feedback was truly reflective of the entire semester and they could speak from authentic events, including their culminating show.

All interviews were recorded using two separate recording devices and I transcribed the interviews personally. Throughout the entire process, informal conversations occurred during water breaks, in the hallways, or if students were working in groups. I reflected and recorded detailed field notes after having conversations with participants. As mentioned above, reflections allowed me to write up descriptive notes about setting, participants' behaviors and personalities, and events that occurred as well as my initial impression of specific conversations, interviews, or observations (Esterberg, 2002).

**Classroom observations.** A second form of data collection I used was classroom observations to help inform interview responses (Patton, 2002). Observations occurred at each school approximately twice a week for five months, for a total of approximately 12 observations in each class at each school. It was important to specifically describe the school environment such as the facility itself, whether or not classes and hallways were overcrowded, equipment and resources teachers and students had access to in the classes I visited, and the overarching culture of the students. These factors could affect students' physical and emotional behaviors, which could also impact them socially and academically (McCaughtry, Tischler, & Barnard Flory, 2008). More specifically, observations allowed me to describe, in detail, the setting where the participants' daily interactions took place in the gymnasium and/or dance studio and whether the curricula were student-focused or teacher-dominated (McCaughtry, Tischler, & Flory, 2008).

Interpretivists believe "meaning can be created only through human interaction" (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Therefore, my role as a participant observer in the dance PE was important to learn the culture of the class, expectations for behavior, develop a more personal connection to the content of lessons, how they were taught, and how students received the

information. I also had a better chance to build rapport, gain acceptance, and talk with the girls. Given the rationale for this study, it was critical I immersed myself in the setting to learn as much as possible about the culture within PE classes as well as try to understand perspectives of adolescent students.

I did not have to rely solely on the participants to describe the school and classroom environment to me because I spent so much time in the setting each week. Observations permitted me to see things students themselves might not see; interactions between students, teacher-student interactions, behavior issues, levels of participation, body language, and facial expressions (rolling of the eyes, smiling, nodding head, etc.). During visits, I observed both dance and sport PE classes and learned about the PE program at each school from my own viewpoint and compared it with the way students saw it. I also learned things participants were not willing to discuss during an interview. Finally, I had firsthand experience in the setting and was able apply it to prior knowledge of the topic. Also, I was able to describe in rich detail through my own experiences rather than through the interviewees' experiences (Patton, 2002).

### **Data Analysis and Management Plan**

Before I began data collection, I created a strong study protocol, data management plan, and data analysis process in order to stay organized and continue to progress throughout the study. Using constant comparison and inductive analysis, I identified themes and relationships from the data (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Below, I describe the 19-step cyclic process I used over a period of one semester.

First, I created separate folders for each data collection setting on a flash drive, home computer, and school computer in order to help facilitate organization during this busy time of

the study. In each school's folder, I also created separate folders for student behavior notes, student interviews, and teacher interviews.

Second, I contacted each teacher and set up scheduled days and times each week throughout the entire semester to visit classes and conduct observations. Observation days stayed consistent throughout the school year scheduling additional time when necessary. Interview days varied based on how much time each round took with students. Teacher interviews usually occurred during their prep time.

Third, I created interview and observation guides based on the research questions guiding my study. For example, during the first interview I asked students to describe their past PE experiences such as, when they last took a PE class, what types of skills, games, or activities they learned in PE, and how they felt about each experience. The observation protocol was used to identify the date, setting, content being taught, teacher delivery of the content, behaviors and interactions among teacher and students, among all students, and among AA female students, and other interesting occurrences that happened each day. Observation field notes were a critical component used to interpret, cross check, and cross validate other observations, informal, or formal conversations (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013).

Fourth, during observations, not only did I describe environment, instructors, students, or content, but I also engaged in informal conversations before and after class and/or during water breaks or group work. These conversations helped compare what was happening during real time observations and also to casually confirm ideas or topics discussed during interviews (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). For example, during one sport-based PE class, several female students were sitting on the benches. I asked the instructor why they were sitting out, how it

affected their grade, and if he offered solutions to each girl's problem to help them participate. Similarly, during a dance-based PE class, one AA female stood with her arms folded in the corner during a new combination of skills. The teacher encouraged her to keep trying and provided positive reinforcement. When I asked the teacher about it after class, she explained how this particular student often gives up during new skills but the teacher believes everyone is capable of learning so she continues to encourage her students.

Fifth, I scheduled interview times with teachers and students. At each school I arranged for a quiet, empty classroom, conference room, or office to conduct and record all interviews.

Sixth, I conducted the first round of semi-structured interviews with students to help answer my research questions. For example, I wanted to know how the three tenets of SDT impact females' experiences in both dance and sport-based PE. Using appropriate high school language, I asked students to describe whether or not these tenets played a role in their experiences in PE. For example, I asked if they were given any choices in each class and how they felt when given choices or not given choices (autonomy).

In the seventh step, and repeated after each visit, I immediately transcribed audio-recorded interviews, observation field notes, and informal conversation field notes up to this point. I created separate folders on a flash drive, home computer, and school computer to ensure safety of these documents. I used constant comparison to identify events, acts, and outcomes. I was flexible and thought abstractly while sorting through data (Patton, 2002).

The first step in analyzing the transcriptions was to create organizational, or broad, categories I anticipated I might find similarities and label them (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002). For example, from past experience, I hypothesized my participants will tell me they enjoy music

during dance PE versus no music during sport PE so I created a broad category on this topic and determined whether or not to keep it as I continued analyzing based on subsequent findings. However, it was also necessary to remain open to discovering ideas and hypotheses not accounted for in the initial designs (Patton, 2002).

Next, I narrowed discovered topics based on what I thought was occurring due to specific descriptions of the participants' perspectives, concepts, or beliefs (Maxwell, 2005). I continuously modified and refined as themes were compared across categories to figure out what fit together (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It was important to search for recurring regularities in the data that revealed consistent patterns which could then be sorted into categories (Patton, 2002).

Finally, I created connections, pieced new information into categories it might fit, and attempted to make most sense of the data (Patton, 2002). In other words, I looked for relationships, not necessarily similarities, which connected statements and events that aided in understanding individuals or situations, making the topics coherent. I completed this process until sources of information were exhausted and different sets of categories were saturated (Patton, 2002).

In the eighth step, I created the first teacher interview guide based on emergent themes from students and potential topics that helped answer my research questions. Again, interviews were set up according to teachers' availability and took place in a quiet empty classroom, conference room, or office. During the first interview I asked them to describe their background, what influenced them to pursue teaching as a career, subjects they were certified to teach, and how they felt their students enjoyed their class.



Following the first round of teacher interviews, step nine included the process of transcribing and coding as described in step seven.

Step ten involved the creation of the first FGI guide. Questions encouraged participants to interact with one another and discuss ideas about certain topics discovered during individual interviews. I used elicitation techniques to stimulate and encourage discussions (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). For example, I invited participants to anonymously rank the top five reasons participating in PE classes became less desirable as they got older and what an ideal PE class looks like to them.

The eleventh step involved setting up the first FGI, followed by the process of transcribing and coding as described in step seven.

Step twelve involved the creation of the second interview guide for students. These questions followed up on potential themes from the first round of interviews and conducted member checks to confirm my interpretations of their realities were accurate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, to better understand why they enjoyed having choices, I asked them to describe how they felt when given or not given choices (autonomy). Additionally, I developed questions allowing me to search for new data and interpretations to emerge such as what is or is not culturally relevant in each class and how it affects their experiences in each class.

The thirteenth step involved setting up the second round of student interviews followed by the transcription and coding process described in step seven.

I developed a third and final student interview guide in the fourteenth step and set up times to conduct interviews. Interview questions were created by pulling all information together from individual interviews. I encouraged participants to discuss relationships, not

necessarily similarities, which connected statements and events that aided in understanding individuals or situations that emerged during all other individual interviews. Because of the time spent with participants, I felt comfortable asking questions that were direct such as, “Which class is more motivating to participate in and why?” or “Which class do you genuinely enjoy more and why?”

During the fifteenth step I conducted the final rounds of individual interviews followed by transcribing and coding as described in step seven.

In the sixteenth step, I took all analyzed data, focused on the most prominent themes, and created a second FGI guide that helped obtain more information about class, cultural norms, or social norms within the environment, behaviors, attitudes, and opinions. At this time all sources of information were exhausted and final questions saturated developed categories.

In the seventeenth step, I followed the transcription and coding process described in step seven to identify relationships and emergent themes within focus groups.

After student interviews were completed, in the eighteenth step I created the second interview guide for teachers based on potential themes that emerged from the first interview or occurrences I witnessed during class observations. I asked teachers to describe their instructional and motivational techniques, rapport with students, how they ensure competence within their students, and whether or not they get to know their students’ backgrounds, interests, and home-life.

In the nineteenth step, I conducted teacher interviews and followed the transcription and coding process as described in step seven.

### **Trustworthiness Strategies**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest qualitative researchers emphasize trustworthiness by being fair, balanced, and aware of several perspectives, interests, and realities. It is imperative researchers conduct their study with rigor to accurately and precisely report their findings with these aspects in mind. According to Patton (2002), "...trustworthiness of the data is tied directly to the trustworthiness of the person who collects and analyzes the data – and his or her demonstrated competence" (p. 570). I demonstrated competence in this study by establishing trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

**Credibility.** Credibility is described as the "truth value" to a study; how accurate the findings are to the audience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To increase and ensure the credibility of my findings, six techniques described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and member checking.

Prolonged engagement requires sufficient time spent in the environment to build trust, learn the culture, and test for misinformation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I spent approximately two days per week at each school observing both dance and sport PE classes for one semester as well as interviewing students and teachers. Over the five months, I had ample time to build adequate trust, learn about the culture, and determine whether any misinformation occurred and what to do with that information. Therefore, prolonged engagement built credibility in my study.

In addition to prolonged engagement in the setting, persistent observation provides more depth to this study. It allowed me, as the researcher, to identify characteristics relevant to my

study and examine them in detail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Consequently, because I spent a significant amount of time in the setting, persistent observation added credibility to my study.

Triangulation is another mode of improving the credibility of my findings and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation was used in this study by comparing multiple forms of data such as informal interviews, formal interviews, and observations. I compared teacher interviews with student interviews as well as with observation field notes. While comparing, I looked for emergent themes and whether or not interview responses matched actions I observed during classes. Findings credibility was enhanced using triangulation in my study.

Another method used to ensure credibility was peer debriefing. A peer debriefer is a person who is not necessarily interested or invested in the research itself, but can investigate what the researcher is studying by probing at biases, meanings, and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to the authors, the process of peer debriefing keeps the inquirer “honest” (p. 308). Regular meetings with a peer debriefer were necessary in order to keep my biases and values out of the analysis of data. The peer debriefer had knowledge of qualitative study, literature in PE, and a clear picture of the study, participants, and setting. She was not responsible for asking questions to investigate emerging hypotheses. It is important the peer debriefer pushes the researcher to explain the next steps in the research design or to encourage and suggest new steps not considered (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Negative case analyses were also used in this study to ensure credibility. It is a “process of revising hypotheses with hindsight” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). The process involves continuously searching through interview transcriptions and field note observations for data that

contradicts emergent themes. It is important to continue searching for those cases and instances that do not fit within already established themes or categories until there are no additional negative cases established (Patton, 2002). Then, the researcher needs to decide whether a category should be further investigated, altered, or altogether eliminated.

Member checking was the final and “most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). Member checking should happen continuously throughout the investigation of the study and has many opportunities to occur. I conducted member checks with my participants to confirm my reconstructions of their realities were recognizable to them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I was able to perform these checks by providing a summary of an interview or asking participants to reiterate what I thought I heard during an observation or interview. At the conclusion of the study, participants were allowed to read the final report and provide feedback (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Transferability.** The criterion that measures whether findings of one research study are applicable to other contexts or settings is transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I attempted to make my findings applicable by using thick, rich descriptions of participants and settings. It was important to describe similarities and differences of each setting to enable those interested to decide “whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility” (p. 316). However, it is not solely my responsibility to establish transferability but to provide the “data base” (p. 316) for others to make their own judgments regarding transferability of my study.

**Dependability.** Another trustworthiness technique used in this study was dependability. It is the notion of replication; or how findings can be replicated to ensure reliability and consistency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although the idea of dependability dictates the study

should be easily replicated without changing the results, qualitative research can potentially involve unexpected variables (Krefting, 1991). According to Krefting, the instruments are assessed for consistency of the researchers and informants who could vary often in a research project. Qualitative research captures the uniqueness of human situations which is where variation comes into play, rather than identical replication (Krefting, 1991). In order to provide dependable data, I collected data from a desirable sample size using different forms of data collection, including formal and informal interviews, and observations. Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss the idea of an audit trail, much like one used in a business. It kept track of how data was collected, analyzed, and converged into themes. These concepts helped ensure my study is dependable.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability is the final trustworthiness criterion I used, as it indicates whether or not results are neutral. In other words, it reveals if the findings are the result of the research itself; not of researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to the authors, the confirmability audit is the best technique for establishing confirmability. The audit includes raw data such as written field notes, data analysis techniques and synthesis products such as the formation of themes and categories, daily reflexive notes kept in a researcher journal, and instrument development information such as how I created interview guides (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This audit trail will be available for my peer debriefer and committee members to follow the steps to my findings.

### **Researcher Perspectives**

In this section, I describe two critical components to designing and conducting interpretivist research. First, I will explain ethical considerations of participants and how the

researcher can protect them from risks. Second, I will discuss my own researcher subjectivity and dispositions on the specific subject matter being studied.

**Ethical considerations of research.** Researcher responsibilities extend beyond the duties of designing a competent study. They must also consider appropriate ethical principles such as how to eliminate or minimize risk against people they are studying (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Possible risks can include social, physical, financial, and emotional harm. Furthermore, due to the nature and design of a qualitative study, data collection techniques are frequently more personal than quantitative studies that often use surveys and immediately protect the anonymity of their participants. Qualitative researchers spend significant time in the setting having informal, as well as formal, conversations with their participants; hence forming intimate relationships (Esterberg, 2002). My concerns while designing this research study were obtaining permission to conduct the study and protecting participants' anonymity and confidentiality.

Before I began this study I acquired permission from each school district research office, school principal, PE teacher, and the university institutional review board (IRB). Second, I requested a waiver of consent from the IRB. Each parent received a research information sheet describing the study, benefits, risks, costs, injuries, protection of rights and confidentiality, and the option to withdraw their child from the study. Each student received a student assent form explaining similar details including a description of the study, confidentiality protocol, and the right to volunteer or withdraw from the study.

Throughout the research process, I hid each description of settings and participants of any identifiers to protect their anonymity and replace each with a pseudonym. All hand-written field notes were discarded after being transcribed and saved electronically. All recorded interviews

were transcribed, saved electronically, and deleted from the recording device. Participants were told interview answers would not be held against them in any way and would not reflect their grade in the class. I respected participants' answers, asked them to answer questions honestly, not how they think I wanted them to answer, explained there was no right or wrong answer, and deleted any information I deemed harmful to them. Additionally, they were reminded this study is voluntary, they may choose not to answer certain questions, and were able to withdraw at any time.

### **Researcher Subjectivity**

Several influences led me to conduct this study, including my intense training and background in dance, being a physically active child and adolescent, opportunities and experiences I had as a teacher, behaviors I witnessed with my own students, as well as experiences and knowledge I have gained as a graduate student.

My perspectives of this study were greatly influenced by a middle-class, White, suburban upbringing where I attended K-12 schooling primarily with Caucasian students. It was not until late in my undergraduate years when I became more familiar with diversity. Because of my race, potential difference in SES status, and the suburban location of my upbringing, there were significant differences between myself, and the students I observed and interviewed. Although my experiences, newfound interests, and graduate studies have led me to inquire and gain knowledge about minority populations, I continue to reside in a majority White suburban neighborhood while furthering my education in graduate school.

Because I am a Caucasian, middle class individual, who I am directly impacted how I engaged in research with AA female students of which some are from low SES backgrounds.



My social position impacted how I acted in the environment, what I saw in the classroom, and how I interpreted and perceived what I observed. Additionally, it most likely impacted how others (e.g., young AA female students, teachers, or parents) viewed me. My Caucasian, middle class upbringing and experiences up to this moment most likely had an effect on how I acted and how I was perceived in the research setting.

When I was in preschool I became friends with two girls, Jenni and Colleen. One day, they came to school and showed off their newly learned dance to me during “free” time. I immediately went home crying and pleading for my parents to put me in dance class. From that moment on, I was hooked. I continued to take a variety of classes in all genres, became a competitive dancer, a dance teacher assistant, and eventually taught my own classes. I proceeded to major in dance as an undergraduate student and achieved a professional dancing career with the National Basketball Association, Detroit Pistons Dance Team, for six years. Aside from dancing, I loved PE in elementary school; I actively played games during recess such as tag and kickball; and enjoyed using the playground equipment as well. During kickball I was very competitive and eager for my turn to kick the ball as far as possible. I knew that was my strongest quality for that sport. At home, my dad encouraged me to play basketball and baseball with him and I also liked joining the neighborhood kids in the field behind our house to play numerous other fun games such as volleyball, kickball, and bocce ball. Eventually, I used my kicking strength on a varsity team. As an adolescent I played soccer and became captain of my high school soccer team during my senior year. Growing up I was very fortunate to have supportive parents who had financial means, time, and access to transportation to take me to various activities and after-school sports.

After my undergraduate years were over, I continued to teach dance and finish out my professional dancing career. However, I did not know what I was going to do with my Bachelor's in Performing Arts degree. I knew I enjoyed teaching youth how to dance and I felt competent in my teaching skills, so I decided to go back to school for a teaching degree. I achieved several long-term positions at various grade levels but was really hoping for a permanent position at a high school. When it finally happened, I was grateful for the opportunity to teach in the public school district but ecstatic at the prospect of teaching dance and health to a very diverse population of high school students (e.g., race, SES, culture, and gender). The many encounters I had over a five-year period really opened my eyes to cultures, events, and experiences I never learned in the White suburban school district I attended. I had a very positive rapport with teachers and students in the building and I was extremely interested in learning from my students. I observed behaviors from different groups of students and was curious to know why they might exhibit those behaviors. Sometimes, it was just too difficult to ask for the sake of offending or hurting ones' feelings, so I kept those curiosities to myself. Although I had these experiences while teaching, I realized my background would still greatly impact my demeanor in the research setting.

While I was teaching in this district I went back to school to pursue my Master's in Kinesiology while also obtaining my teaching certification in PE. It was during that time when I met three Ph.D. candidates who all served as teacher assistants in a variety of my classes. I watched them with interest and respect. I was impressed at their knowledge and opportunity to teach collegiate students. And, during one particular class I decided I wanted to further my education and follow in similar footsteps. I wanted the opportunity to expand my knowledge in

education, to assist professors in classes I may one day teach, and to grow as an educator and as a person.

During graduate school, I was given the opportunity to assist a variety of classes where I would give lectures, assist in creating and grading assignments and tests, work one-on-one with students to problem solve, and work closely with scholars in our field. I have been involved in several research projects where I was assigned tasks such as observing classrooms and after-school PA clubs, interviewing students, teachers, and other staff members, and designing, collecting, and analyzing data. My coursework expanded my knowledge base in so many ways. I learned to read documents in a more informative matter and to address it to my personal interests in research. I learned how to conduct research and how to address students by some of the most experienced scholars. During this time a thought occurred to me. I can finally address those curiosities I had as a teacher, through research. I realized I could create and conduct pilot studies to address the specific population I was interested in: AA adolescent females. After interviewing a small sample of students, I was certain I wanted to address my concerns as a full research project. My experiences as a teacher, graduate student, and student researcher influenced this study.

However, the qualities I possess as an educated, Caucasian woman sometimes caused challenges with data collection in terms of teachers making time for me as well as created barriers when it came to building rapport with particular students. Yet, I was fortunate to have previously built connections with a few teachers throughout my career which aided me in getting permission to spend time in their classrooms for one semester. For example, I completed my student teaching at Denver High School and worked with the department chair at the time. And,

although Ms. Burnette and I did not work directly with one another, she was teaching dance PE in the school at the same time. When I approached her about observing and interviewing her students, she was more than welcoming. Furthermore, the department chair was excited to have me visit their classes, show me around the department, and introduce me to everyone. When I was introduced to Mr. Decker, we immediately had a connection as well. He attended training for secondary PE teachers which was part of a grant program I worked with at the nearby research university. Because I had previously worked at Denver, the same inner-city school district as Carter High School, I was familiar with Mr. Smythe and his work; however, we did not have a direct connection. But, through the grant program, Mr. Fister attended the same training as Mr. Decker so we initially had a familiarity with one another. Finally, Ms. Banker at Huntington High School attended the same research university as many of these teachers as well as me. We met when I was completing my dance education certification and attended a few classes together. It is also important to mention while I was teaching at the secondary level, I attended the state conference with many of these folks for several years.

In terms of building rapport with female participants, some were a bit apprehensive to interact with me because I was an unknown person coming into their environment. Therefore, it was important to make my presence friendly and comfortable versus judgmental or disruptive. They may have made assumptions based on race, perceived SES, or my appearance and potentially not trust me. Consequently, I dressed professionally, yet appropriately for attending PE settings so I was presented in the same fashion as other PE teachers. However, I was unable to change my race or SES, but I did my best to portray openness to the setting and willingness to learn from what the students had to say and share with me.

Additionally, I was considerably older than my participants and needed to build a connection with them in the best way possible in order to get a true perspective from each. Because I have a background in teaching secondary education as well as currently coach a high school team, I felt I could converse with most students in a manner in which they will feel comfortable and open to discussion. Some individuals really enjoyed talking about themselves. It was important for me to ask them to tell me about themselves, but also not be opposed to answering questions about myself, when asked. However, other students were not as willing to discuss themselves and their personal lives. I was patient and allowed them to talk when they felt comfortable. Overall, I needed to be open-minded, non-judgmental, and focused on my research questions while spending time with participants in PE settings.

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine AA high school girls' perceptions of dance-based PE in relation to their past experiences in sport-based PE. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do issues of cultural relevance affect AA adolescent girls' experiences in sport and dance-based PE?
2. How do the core tenets of Self Determination Theory (SDT – autonomy, competence, and relatedness) impact AA adolescent girls' comparisons between sport and dance-based PE?

The major findings described in this chapter are based on participants' perspectives of cultural relevance in the classroom as well as how autonomy, competence, and relatedness shaped their experiences in dance and sport-based PE. This chapter is organized into three separate case studies. Each school will be described as a separate case including five sections for each case. The five sections will be broken down by: (a) description of the overall dance program; (b) description of the overall sport program; (c) dance teachers' perspectives of the school's sport PE and their own dance PE environments, their approach to culturally-relevant lessons in dance PE, and how they provided freedom and choice, ensured students were competent and confident with skills, and connected with their students; (d) students' perspectives of the dance environment with focus on the same topics; and (e) students' comparative perspectives of the sport environment addressing these areas as well. After describing each case, I introduced the commonalities and differences found between cases.

Each teacher had the opportunity to share with me their past experiences in PA, what led them to be a teacher, role(s) they played in their schools, and their current teaching philosophies, strategies, and pedagogies. As mentioned in chapter three, classes for PE credit included a variety of PA classes including, but not limited to, Yoga, team sports, weight training, and dance. Students were able to share their past and present PE experiences, strengths and weaknesses about PE, changes they would make to PE programs in general, and overall content learned in PE classes.

### **Carter High School**

Carter High School was a spacious, urban inner-city school located within a Midtown district neighborhood just off a main expressway and part of a large public school district. It was surrounded by old, worn down apartment buildings and unkept, empty parking lots full of trash and weeds. Carter was a huge five story building with nearly 2,300 students enrolled. Students must take an entry test to get into Carter and as freshmen, must choose a career path from several options such as, but not limited to, architecture, music, business, and sciences. Carter High School is ranked in the top 5% of schools within this state.

Because of the location of the school, Carter was highly secured with metal detectors at the front entrance and several security guards checking backpacks and making sure all visitors signed in and received a guest pass. There were also many security guards patrolling the hallways throughout the entire school. I was kindly asked several times to inform them of the purpose for my visits, my destination, and whether or not the teacher knew I was coming to observe their class. Finally, my visits became so frequent they recognized me upon arrival and

had conversations with me about my research interests and wondered if I was gaining the information I needed to finish my data collection.

The school day consisted of eight academic class periods from 8:00 A.M until 4:15 P.M. Students were required to be in school during these hours but could have had an open hour where they spent time in the cafeteria doing homework. Those who had a free period 1<sup>st</sup> hour usually did not come to school until 2<sup>nd</sup> hour. Because of the large number of students, lunches began during 2<sup>nd</sup> hour at approximately 8:55 A.M. The cafeteria was located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor and was always full of students working, eating, or socializing.

### **Dance-based PE**

Dance was considered an elective class at Carter High School and also as PE credit toward graduation. Students enrolled in dance-based PE classes attended class daily for approximately 60 minutes with five minutes to change before and after class. Class was held in the dance studio located on the third floor of the school, down the hall from the cafeteria. Participants included in this study attended the level two dance class during 2<sup>nd</sup> hour from 9:00 A.M. until 10:15 A.M. The dance studio was spacious, bright, and clean. The hardwood floor was covered by marley-type flooring preferred for many dance styles such as ballet, modern, and jazz; all studied at Carter. Two walls were covered with windows and two walls with mirrors. Along one window were portable ballet barres which could be used anywhere in the space and a piano for visiting pianists to accompany class. At the front of the room were the teacher's desk and chair and an updated stereo system including CD players and iPod connectors with speakers overhead. Mr. Smythe's office and costume closet were conveniently connected to the studio so students were rarely unsupervised. Just outside the double doors where students entered and



exited the studio were two locker rooms: boys and girls. These rooms remained locked at all times throughout the day except during the five minute changing period before and after class.

Students entered the studio dressed in required and proper dance attire: black leotards, skin-colored tights, and barefoot or appropriate dance shoes. Extra clothing such as shorts, skirts, sports bras, or pants were not allowed. They were expected to begin warming up and stretching their muscles while the teacher took attendance. Students replied, “ici” to indicate they were “here.” Because ballet terms are French, Mr. Smythe wanted students to practice the language and discover ways it might be transferrable or beneficial outside the dance studio.

Mr. Antonio Smythe was the instructor for this dance class. He portrayed a kind, caring, and passionate personality who connected well with students. He kindly greeted them each morning, wrote the expectations and schedule for the day on the white board, and explained what they would accomplish. He was able to joke around with them yet when it came time to be serious students were able to wind down and become focused. Mr. Smythe enforced discipline in his classroom, in the sense of dance as well as behavior, which students appeared to portray when I saw them in the hallways as well. When students attended outside performances they were expected to dress professionally as they were representing Carter High School and act appropriately during performances; arrive early, clap for all dancers, and cell phones silenced. Mr. Smythe encouraged these behaviors and disciplined those who did not comply.

Mr. Smythe kept his classroom extremely immaculate. Some mornings I would arrive to him cleaning the floor with disinfectant and spraying the mirrors with Windex. He kept the studio room doors locked and did not allow people to randomly come into his room. When visitors were allowed, they were expected to remove their shoes at the door and walk along the

aisle of carpet at the front of the room. He was very protective of the dance floor and made sure it was always clean and safe for the dancers.

As students came into the room to warm up and take attendance, they tended to migrate toward their friends and have quiet conversations while they were stretching. This dance class consisted of approximately 30 students; two boys, two non-AA females, and the remainder were AA females. Although this class was primarily AA female students, I noticed a slight bit of segregation between race and several cliques of friendships. One of the boys in the class was enrolled and one was a student aide/choreographer. However, when a student needed help with a particular movement or dance, everyone was welcoming and typically joined in to review it as a class; regardless of race or gender.

Mr. Smythe demonstrated passion and commitment to content taught in the dance class. He included discussions about the meaning of dance, purpose of the choreography and how the audience portrays the movement, ways to express the story they are trying to tell, and how to successfully perform for an audience. Throughout the semester I observed this class learning basic movements and vocabulary for ballet and modern dance. As students progressed, became more advanced, and were placed in higher levels, they were introduced to more genres such as jazz, hip hop, and lyrical. Mr. Smythe was very thorough when he taught combinations and dances. He explained the exact placement of the body from head to toe. He added counts to all movements and sometimes chose music to complement the movements. Other times students danced without music and had to learn how to keep pace with one another. I observed him constantly encouraging students to dance bigger, more extreme, and to improve daily. He was very energetic and passionate about helping every student.

Mr. Smythe provided practice time for students to work individually and/or with peers. Students were expected to rehearse and perfect the combinations because they were graded during practicums, which were performance-based tests, every few weeks. Sometimes the choreography being tested was given to the students by the teacher and other times students were given criterion to follow and choreograph their own pieces. Furthermore, some practicums were individual, with a partner, or in groups. They were expected to cooperate and learn to work together, respect and compromise each other's ideas, and create a final piece of choreography. Mr. Smythe encouraged students to learn from one another and demonstrate respect toward each other's ideas. Students were graded on memorization, musicality, presentation, and proper execution. Mr. Smythe also issued written exams testing students on vocabulary, placement, and other areas such as different genres and eras of music. Often, I observed students reviewing terminology with peers and putting it together with correct movements. On one occasion, while I was observing, a few students asked for my help with vocabulary as well.

Each technical aspect, every individual movement, and the plethora of combinations and practicums all led to the culminating performance at the end of the semester. Mr. Smythe and an advanced student choreographer taught the class a dance which consisted of modern, ballet, and partner work. As students learned it, they had to audition for each part. If they could not catch on to the choreography, they could not be in this dance for the final show. In addition, the class broke up into groups of their choice and choreographed their own dance to audition for the show. Mr. Smythe advised students to work with a range of people; not just their friends. He informed them working with friends could cause conflicts. He was encouraging and wanted them all to be successful.

After approximately three months of choreography and rehearsing, the groups auditioned their pieces and were either chosen or not chosen to be in the final show. During the following class period Mr. Smythe reviewed their adjudication scores and allowed them to discuss what they felt went well and what they needed to work on for future auditions or the final performance. He also explained students who did not make the cut and were performing fewer dances in the show were expected to write a paper on the observations they made during the performance. The show was an evening event open to the public who could buy a ticket from students in advance for \$10.00 or pay \$12.00 at the door. Students were expected to attempt to sell a minimum of five tickets. Any profit made on the show went to the dance fund for future use for costumes, music edits or resources, and guest choreographers to teach master classes.

The AA participants observed and interviewed seemed to genuinely enjoy this class and wanted to learn and progress. Overall participation in this dance-based PE class was extremely high. I rarely observed students sitting out and not participating, but when I did, the reasons they sat out were they did not have their dance clothes, were injured, or not feeling well. Students entered the studio with enthusiasm, giving hugs to one another, discussing television shows they watched the night before, playing music on their phones or iPods, and wishing happy birthday to those who celebrated during the semester. They were respectful to one another and appeared to get along regardless of race or gender. On several occasions I observed students in this class help one another regardless of race. They helped adjust costume straps or pieces for each other, showed dance movements, and taught counts to the dance. Additionally, students respected Mr. Smythe when he spoke and he rarely raised his voice. Those who sat out observed class quietly and respectfully. During class, students were actively engaged while practicing movements,

listened to the instructor and feedback, and asked questions when needed. There was a lot of giggling among females when Mr. Smythe made comments or corrections because although he was teaching them proper technique and helping them succeed, he approached these corrections with a sense of light-heartedness. He said things calmly and kindly with a slight sense of humor and would over exaggerate a demonstration of what a movement should *not* look like.

The dynamic of the class changed a bit when students were allowed to choose their own groups. They tended to form groups with friends, who were usually students of their own race, and often excluded the two non-AA students. For a good portion of the semester I observed two larger groups comprised of all AA females. One group worked really well together. They listened to one another's choreography and music ideas, demonstrated new movements to potentially put in the dance, and helped review sections of the dance for those who were absent or falling behind. They seemed to work well independently as a group because they were all trying to achieve the common goal of creating a finished product. They expressed their desire for their dance to look the best, and were focused, and serious about completing it. The second group, comprised of one male and seven AA females, seemed to have good intentions and were very participatory as well, however, there were some stronger personalities in the group who were inclined to take over each rehearsal. Typically, the females were overpowering and did not allow the male student to offer much input on creating the dance. The female students bickered about where he should stand, whether or not he should partner with someone, and if so, with whom he should partner. The stronger personalities continued to dominate so they were not as productive as a collective group in getting their pieces finished early; but did complete the assignments. Mr. Smythe tried to instill appropriate and professional behaviors. If students

became escalated because of a disagreement, he encouraged them to deal with it using conflict resolution skills discussed previously in class.

During the innovative portion of the semester it was fun to watch these females use their creative minds and express emotions through dance. They chose music to enhance the story they were trying to tell and moved their bodies to complement different beats and rhythms in the music. Although some of the females expressed their nervousness, they demonstrated energy and excitement through those nerves when it came time to show off their dance to the class and enjoyed praise and applause when they finished.

### **Sport-based PE**

Five days a week, sport-based PE classes were taught during various hours by four different teachers at Carter High School. Students enrolled in sport-based PE classes attended class daily for approximately 60 minutes with five minutes to change before and after class. Classes were held in one of three locations: the auxiliary gym located on the main floor; the main gym located down the hall from the auxiliary gym on the main floor; or the track and weight room located on the second floor. I visited each sport class four to five times throughout the semester so I could better connect what students shared during interviews regarding the different teachers, content, and overall classes.

The auxiliary gym was used by two of the four teachers I observed during sport-based PE. It was dull and dingy, very spacious, and not extremely clean. On one wall there were bleachers usually pulled out for non-participating students to sit and the bleachers on the opposite wall stayed folded in. On the adjacent sides of the gymnasium were basketball nets. There was one table and two chairs at the entrance, which served as a desk for the two teachers

who taught in this gym. They used it to do paperwork, record fitness scores on their laptops if they were testing, and take attendance. The equipment closet was located opposite the entrance and always remained locked.

The main gym was very large, bright, and full of activity. It appeared to be a very popular hangout for students who had a free period or did not feel like going to class. These unexpected visitors usually caused chaos and were kicked out when the teacher arrived and began her lesson. Upon arrival, the teacher who used this gym would lock the doors in attempt to keep students from disrupting her class. This gymnasium also had two sets of bleachers, two main basketball nets used for district basketball games, and four more nets to maximize playing time during class. The bleachers stayed folded in at all times unless there was an event. There was one locked equipment closet and two large gymnastics mats located at one end of the gym where students usually hung out and socialized when they were not participating in class activities. Daily, student aides set up a table and chairs along the perimeter of the gym floor for their teacher to set her belongings. Just outside the double doors, where students entered and exited the main gym, were two locker rooms: one each for boys and girls. Locker rooms were shared by all students enrolled in sports classes and teachers attempted to keep the locker rooms locked at all times throughout the day. However, students seemed to get in from other entrances and let other students in when they were not supposed to be there.

Last, the weight room and track were located above the main gym. One teacher held his classes there unless they came down to the main gym for a sport or free time. The weight room was large enough for an entire class and had plenty of equipment for use. The equipment looked

fairly up-to-date and well taken care of. The teacher, who was also the head varsity football coach, had his office located inside the weight room which kept him close to his classes.

At the beginning of class, all four teachers expected their students to come in and start walking or jogging laps around the gymnasium or track. Often, the teachers were not present at the beginning of class so there was not much control and students did whatever they wanted. Many times, boys played basketball if they found a ball lying around, while others practiced jumping up to try and touch the rim. Most girls would walk laps and talk with peers or sit and socialize or look at their phones.

Two teachers, Ms. James and Mr. Fister, taught in the auxiliary gym. They chose two students each class to lead warm-ups. I observed these students to be the same couple each time I visited; I did not see much rotation with the entire class. Students called out exercises and the classes were supposed to follow. Students who led the warm-ups tended to do each exercise completely while the rest of the class followed along however they felt like doing it. The lead students also tried to encourage everyone so they could participate fully but the classes always complained the warm-ups were boring. The student leaders would count aloud the odd numbers from one to ten to hold stretches and the rest of the class yelled back the even numbers. While these warm-ups took place, both teachers seemed to consistently show up late. By the time the teachers arrived, students claimed they were finished running and stretching and were ready to play the designated game for the day. In reality, they rarely completed the required laps around the gymnasium and half-heartedly performed the stretches.

Ms. James and Mr. Fister both shared spaces for their office, health classes, and PE. They generally planned PE lessons together and covered for one another if the other was absent.



One day I arrived to observe Mr. Fister's class. Students kept asking if I was their substitute teacher or if I knew who was going to teach their class. Much to my surprise, after about 30 minutes and no instructor, I walked down the hall to ask Ms. James about a teacher for the class. She told me not to worry and calmly explained, "Mr. Fister has health issues and is often late or absent so the students are used to running class by themselves."

Mr. Fister used a direct-instructional approach to teaching. He always commanded the class do exercises and games, often "barking out" orders to get them moving. He sounded very much like a drill sergeant and always sounded as if he was yelling at students. Even when he was trying to encourage them to play, it sounded a lot more like he was yelling at them. When students did not participate he called them names such as, "lazy butt" and "special ed." He was somewhat personal with his students and would joke with those he knew well. He participated during games and usually joined the less talented team. He also pitched when they played softball. Outside of teaching PE, Mr. Fister seemed like a kind and funny person, but when it came to PA and sport in a high school PE class, he came across as a bit too serious.

During observations, Mr. Fister introduced competitive team sports and minimal activities with little to no instruction. Sports included softball, volleyball, and basketball. Additionally, he included numerous free days, basic warm-up drills, and calisthenics. He was rarely in attendance for the warm-ups and hardly ever taught proper technique for calisthenics; risking injury upon students. One morning I observed Mr. Fister conduct a static push-up and sit-up test while half the class practiced free throws. He provided a brief explanation as to why they would perform their sit-ups on a mat; to prevent injuring their back. As one AA female struggled to complete her sit-ups, the Mr. Fister yelled, "C'mon, Lana, you're a basketball

player!” I am assuming he was trying to encourage her; however, in my opinion, yelling and humiliation is not meant to be used as a motivational tool.

During a softball lesson, a few girls stood by themselves in the outfield while others paired up with a friend. Two AA females were step dancing in the outfield, creating rhythms with their bodies, and laughing with one another. Two more AA females stood at first base while talking and laughing together. All students waiting to bat stood against the wall, arms folded, participating in absolutely no PA. At no point during this lesson did Mr. Fister stop and explain what they should be doing or vary the game to add more PA. He continued to pitch for both teams and bark orders at students. Additionally, when teams switched from outfield to infield, several girls stood in line and played “patty-cake” type games with their hands and created rhythms; others stood still against the wall.

Similar actions were mimicked during a volleyball lesson. Again, most girls entered the gymnasium well after the boys. Mr. Fister yelled at them to hurry up because he “doesn’t have all day to wait for them.” He expected students to know the rules, skills, and techniques to play the game; however, that was not the case. Hence, he became irritated and impatient, yelling things such as, “C’mon girls! Don’t just stand there and look pretty.” He told them to unfold their arms and get in the ready position so they would be prepared to hit the ball when it came their way. The female students did not react.

Ms. James was not as direct as Mr. Fister but her class was very much teacher-guided. She was consistently ten minutes late, claiming it was because she was coming from her previous class; it was right down the hall. When she arrived she would say to the students, “Y’all know what to do!” Students would scatter into groups and begin playing the game of the week.

Because she and Mr. Fister planned their classes together, content consisted of the same games and activities: softball, volleyball, basketball, numerous free days, basic warm-up drills, and calisthenics.

At times Ms. James separated the class by gender. For example, when they played a basketball game named “21”, she had the boys play on one side of the gym and girls on the other. Surely, she provided a bit more instruction than Mr. Fister. For instance, she reminded them where the three-point line was and explained proper foot position in order to make the basket count for three points. During this basketball lesson I observed what seemed like a lack of interest; instead of playing basketball, one AA female decided to sit down. Ms. James told her to get her lazy butt up and participate. Two other AA females left the court and began choreographing a step routine. Ms. James told me there was a group of girls in the class who would dance every day if she let them; they were not interested in her team sport lessons.

During a softball lesson I observed Ms. James converse with one student almost the entire class period while the rest of the students attempted to engage in a softball game without teacher guidance. The only rule I heard her enforce was a rule prohibiting students from throwing the baseball bat. When a bat was thrown, she called an out on that team. During this lesson most AA females gathered into small groups of two to four and backed themselves into the corners of the field. When the ball came their way, they stood still and did not try to retrieve it. On another occasion of softball, several students made fun of one heavier AA female who was up to bat. One boy yelled, “Who is going to run for her,” and everyone burst into laughter. Ms. James did not address this behavior; she simply ignored it. Ironically, the most excitement I

saw during this lesson was when a few students noticed a mouse in the gym and quickly went running to the other side of the room!

Aside from her lack of teaching appropriate behavioral and technical skills as well as never being on time, Ms. James participated with students at times and talked with them individually. I heard her ask one girl about her haircut, another about her absences, and genuinely ask students questions about school or sports. She was very straight-forward and appeared to have a hard outer shell, but when she spoke with students one-on-one she seemed sincere.

The third sport teacher I observed was referred to as Coach O'Connell. She was outgoing, enthusiastic, strict but funny at the same time, and serious about teaching and coaching. Her class was a bit more independent when it came to getting things started. Student aides would gather equipment from the closet, set it up as necessary, and take attendance. Students sat in squads immediately and Coach O'Connell ran the warm-ups. She called out each exercise, and at times, performed them with students, while students counted to ten to perform exercises or hold stretches. Consistent to most classes, some students performed exercises completely, few moved their bodies to appear as if they were doing the exercises, and others stood with their arms folded or doing something completely unrelated. Those who chose not to participate were often AA females. This class was comprised of only two non-AA females, several boys, and the majority of the students were AA females.

Coach O'Connell incorporated a variety of activities in her class. I observed lessons on softball, volleyball, badminton, Yoga, and free days. Warm-ups included specific skills such as stretching, jumping jacks, abdominal exercises, jogging, and push-ups. This class was during 4<sup>th</sup>

hour and seemed to consistently get interrupted by other events happening in the school. I visited on several occasions where she had a lesson planned and ended up giving students a free day because she had to combine classes with another teacher, change location half way through class, or the period was cut short by a half-day of school. During these unexpected free days students were able to do whatever activity they chose.

I observed a volleyball lesson where Coach O'Connell instructed students to play without the use of a net. She provided rules to the game, reiterated how to serve, bump, and set, and demonstrated proper serving technique when someone performed incorrectly. Because this class was larger in size, she instructed one team to perform PA on the sidelines while they were not playing the volleyball game. The other team who was not playing acted as the net by standing in the center with their arms in the air. After each win, she rotated the teams.

I was impressed to watch this teacher include Yoga in her curriculum. The entire program seemed dominated by team sports but she did not seem to mind trying new things with her students. She focused on four poses during each lesson as well as proper breathing techniques. The majority of the class appeared to be trying the poses. There was not any talking but a few glances at one another followed by laughter. My assumption was the pose was more difficult hence causing awkward laughter. Coach O'Connell was engaged in the poses as well and encouraged students to keep trying.

Coach O'Connell was constantly boosting students to participate, telling them not to give up, and not forcing students to do something they did not want to do. Her teaching philosophy was never to force participation but to be positive and encourage. She participated in every

activity with the students and made games appear fun. She was loud in a positive way and created a safe and comfortable environment that inspired students to participate.

The last sport teacher I observed was Coach Witten. He was also the head varsity football coach. His teaching style was extremely lackadaisical and his personality demonstrated lack of interest in his students, their well-being, or teaching them anything. He was consistently late to class, always talking on his cell phone, left his class unattended to meet with football scouts, and disappeared often leaving the class wondering where they could find Coach Witten. I did not observe any sport lesson the entire semester.

Students started the semester changing clothes, meeting on the track, and walking or jogging laps. They quickly figured out Coach Witten would most likely be late or absent. Slowly, students stopped coming to class, changing, or doing any PA whatsoever. Student aides took attendance and would sometimes sign students in who were not present.

During three out of five visits I observed Coach Witten introduce some content such as machines to improve cardiovascular fitness and exercises such as sit-ups and push-ups. He used a direct approach along with peer modeling. The first lesson I observed he showed students the cardio machines in the weight room and explained how to use each, told students to try each machine for three minutes and rotate. Then, he disappeared. On another occasion he explained how to bench-press and had a male student demonstrate proper safety and technique. Several girls complained the bar was too heavy and left the room. He did not make modifications for the female students who struggled nor helped them find other options.

During the last lesson I observed, he asked students to practice sit-ups and static push-ups for their final exam. I heard a lot of mumbling about how they never practiced the exercises so

they should not be tested on this material. I asked one female about all the complaining and she told me he was just putting on a show because I was visiting and they normally did not do anything. He wanted the students to perform their sit-ups on mats to avoid back injury. As he pulled the mats out from behind a wall he was chatting on his cell phone. The mats began to fall over and he almost lost his call. He spoke frantically into the phone, "I'm here. Here I am. I'm right here." He was trying to keep his phone intact while he prepared for class. This behavior demonstrated lack of care on his part and deterred students from caring about the tests and his class in general.

### **Dance Teachers' Perspective of PE Environments**

**Dance PE environment.** During my interviews with Mr. Smythe, we discussed the dance and sport PE programs, each environment, and content taught for both classes. He has been teaching for almost 30 years; 17 years at Carter High School and will potentially move in to an administrative role next year. He believed he had many roles at Carter High School and enthusiastically exclaimed,

I'm everything! I am mother, father, brother, sister, uncle, aunt. I am the official and only dance teacher of the fine and performing arts here and I am also heavily involved in special projects that come into our building. One of those special projects being an elementary (dance) group we are forming now. I wear a lot of different hats around here.

Mr. Smythe was heavily involved with the school, thought of as a role model by students and staff, and had a solid rapport with parents, who in turn gave him great parental support.

**Approaches to cultural relevance.** Mr. Smythe described his dance studio as bright and cheery with a large, open physical space to participate. He encouraged students to leave bad energy and their problems at the door and promoted an upbeat and positive environment inside the studio. He explained how students felt the dance studio was a safe place where they were

free to come in and be themselves without being judged. He said, “It’s one of those environments where they can just breathe here. They can just be who they want to be.” He also expressed the feeling of family in his studio and how he treated students like they were all brothers and sisters so they could be comfortable with one another rather than competing against each other. For example, he said,

I think in the sports (class) there is another thing when the boys are added to the mix and it becomes a ‘let me try to impress the fellas’ type thing. There is a whole thing that happens with girls and they change into little monsters and become really bitchy with one another and competitive in the wrong type of ways.

He felt by treating his students like family, females were less likely to portray competitive, petty behaviors. To complement his technique of creating a family-like environment, he was attentive to his students’ personal lives and individual backgrounds, became familiar with their family and existing community, and met their parents or guardians each semester at the parent meeting. Mr. Smythe also expressed his enjoyment in getting to know about his students and learn from them as well. He stated, “I ask some questions about their culture so I can learn as well. I try to, as much as possible, learn from my students in addition to them learning from me.” He laughed and explained how sometimes the parents are extremely strict at home but the students enjoyed their freedom at school. He said,

It’s interesting to have the students in class and have them responding and doing things one way and have the parents different. Some are very strict and traditional in terms of their culture and the kids are kind of like, shhh [implying they did not want Mr. Smythe to tell parents].

He truly enjoyed getting to know his students and their families and said, “I think I have a pretty good rapport with my students. Several of them talk to me about issues. I think I’m approachable.”



Mr. Smythe was confident he implemented a solid, relevant curriculum which he said has evolved over the years with much fine-tuning. He commented, “I think my strengths would be in the creative areas and providing different types of content for the students.” Throughout the semester I observed classes where he taught many genres of dance, made connections to core subjects in school, taught life skills such as proper etiquette as a dancer, audience member, and in society, and how to transfer what was learned in his class to other areas of life now and in the future. He explained, “Whatever they [students] learn here they can take it and apply in any other classes and also what is happening outside of school. Learning is an ongoing process; you never stop learning. There’s nothing we learn here that does not apply to life.”

He exposed his students to other dance companies in the district by attending district-wide concerts and encouraged his students to audition to be part of the concerts. He brought students on field trips to see professional dance companies and had them analyze and write about performances they watched. Mr. Smythe tried to make a connection to personal culture and invited students to research dance within their culture and write a paper about the connection. He explained, “I help them understand what we are doing is connected to other classes. I specifically point out when we are using science, math, English terms, so they are getting that connection; and life skills they are getting in here as well.”

He believed many of his AA females might have decided to take dance because of their culture. He expressed, “I know dancing is a great part of the lives of these girls so they probably connect with it a lot more.” He also explained many of the AA females in his class have mentioned they have fun dancing with their families. He commented, “They talk about when they go to family picnics and how the families are dancing.” He also told me several of his AA

females are involved in liturgical dance through their churches and their families are involved with that as well. Mr. Smythe alluded to his AA females being “more familiar with dance” because they grew up seeing a lot of AA females dancing in music videos and as little girls and teens, “they want to imitate that.” He felt the majority of AA females preferred dance to sports because they tended to gravitate toward it when they were younger and he commented, “The environment itself could have an impact.” He reiterated his bright, cheery, and drama-free studio as a place where they could be themselves.

Finally, he explained how he promoted lifelong fitness and dancing in his class. He knew everyone would not want to dance professionally or take a classical ballet class as they grew older but he encouraged them to do something, “Do Zumba. Get on a bicycle. Walk. Do something,” Smythe said. One piece of advice Mr. Smythe would give to any PE teacher would be to make movement part of their class. He advised, “PE has to include movement. It has to. I don’t know if we can make it less intimidating [in the gym], but it’s about the approach to the class and the work that happens in it.” He discussed the benefits of dance for all athletes whether they are basketball or tennis players or gymnasts. He said, “Here, every Friday night before their game, the football team would come up and ask me to warm them up and stretch them out so it was really cool.” He felt he was respected by the coaching staff as well as the players and felt it had a lot to do with his approach to dance and teaching movement. Whether dancers in his classes or athletes on the varsity football team, Mr. Smythe exclaimed, “I think the instructor needs a have a certain energy,” and he felt he brought this energy to these students.

**Approaches to autonomy.** When I inquired how Mr. Smythe created an autonomous environment he explained how students could choose partners or groups, create choreography

within different genres of dance using self-expression, decide whether or not to use music, select different styles of costumes, and lead class in preferred warm-up activities. He explained these ideas were used in hopes students would be interested and willing to participate of their own free will. Mr. Smythe said, “Sometimes I randomly select and pair them together. Other times I allow them to select their own groups.” He added, “I think having choices and working with your friends during class keeps them motivated and the whole experience for preparing for this concert; they are working toward common goals so they are on it and they are focused.”

According to Mr. Smythe, in terms of independence, ownership, and control, students gained confidence from the ability to choreograph and create dances to express feelings and emotions. He was very open-minded and encouraged students to explore unique themes, difficult topics, and challenging movements to tell the story. He felt they also gained validation of their ideas and concepts and mentioned, “They realize they bring things to this environment and they are good things that really do count.” He enjoyed using a variety of instructional strategies and stated,

Sometimes I am right in there and this is how I want it and I need to see it like that...other times, it's okay like what do you think we should be doing to accomplish this goal...so then there is student input on what we are doing. And then there are times of course where it's totally students, like group projects.

**Approaches to competence.** Mr. Smythe remarked, “I have a philosophy that all children are capable of learning. All children have capacity to learn greatly!” Although he understood not all students had the same ability and would not necessarily achieve the same level he confidently exclaimed, “I guess that would be my primary philosophy is that every child is capable of learning and I should be able to provide for that child.” He consciously created an environment that promoted success for all students.

Mr. Smythe was particularly aware of his students' progress and provided constant positive feedback and constructive criticism. I watched him each visit try to ensure students felt successful and provide ways for improvement. Early in the semester he gained students' trust and respect as well as built a positive rapport with them. With that relationship, students developed trust and accepted his corrections or praise. He explained they might not be the best dancer in the class but as long as he sees them progressing he is satisfied. He explained, "I give some reassurance. I try to talk to my kids a lot and part of that talk is being honest yet positive." He continued, "I need them to know realistically where they are but there is no limit where they can be." Mr. Smythe's philosophy is all children are capable of learning. By running a differentiated dance class, he successfully engaged and taught every student in the room.

**Approaches to relatedness.** As mentioned in the previous section, Mr. Smythe allowed students to work with partners or groups whether he created the groups or let students choose. When I asked Mr. Smythe if he felt there were benefits to his students working together in groups he excitedly replied, "Oh my gosh! A ton! I think they get a lot from working together. I think they gain benefit because they get prepared for the bigger picture." He was extremely adamant about advising students to not always work with friends. He described how everyone works and learns differently; some may be faster, some more creative. He explained to them, "...but you have to learn how to work with those people to accomplish whatever the goal is." Mr. Smythe said he often saw new connections and friendships when students worked in groups. He told me one student could not believe how close she became with another student once they were forced to work together. She told him had they not been forced to work in the same group, she would have never spoken to the other student. Mr. Smythe enjoyed those moments and

shared, “You see new friendships start to develop and emerge from group work. And that makes me feel good.”

In addition to the relationships built among students, Mr. Smythe made strong efforts to connect and built relationships with students as well. He commented, “So one thing I do, of course, is build relationships with children. That is part of getting them to do anything.” As mentioned earlier he created a safe and supportive environment where students could be themselves, he demonstrated care by getting to know students and having an open-door policy, and he took time to meet family members and connect with them and the community. He added, “But yeah, I know the backgrounds of my students.” He was confident, if he was not aware of issues with students, others in his class would inform him. Furthermore, he was often in contact with parents and could gain a feel for what was going on through discussions with them.

**Sport-based PE.** Mr. Smythe described the sport-based PE program at Carter High School as inconsistent, too much free time, and lacked teaching and learning. He stated, “It’s inconsistent. I’m seeing a lot of free play type of things. That’s what I’m seeing mostly. No teamwork. No rules.” He also mentioned inconsistency with whether or not students dressed in the required sport PE uniforms and how much participation versus sitting on the sidelines happened in each class. He felt the program lacked structure and teamwork. He explained,

From my perspective I don’t see it as teaching how to be a part of a team or how to learn the rules of volleyball versus basketball versus football. I don’t see that type of thing happening in the PE classes. Of course, I see no type of research going on. That’s my perspective.

Mr. Smythe said he did not believe the sport-based PE classes were relevant to students’ current or future lives because they were lacking instruction and implementation of life lessons. Additionally, he felt no cultural connection to students attending Carter High School. He

commented, “They could use it [sport] if there was structure there; if there was teaching of being on a team or how you as an individual fit into a team but maintain individuality. Those are life lessons and I think some of those are missing from those classes.”

Regarding cultural relevance and connection, he thought there was a possibility to make the connection but stated, “I would have to say the possibility exists that there could be some cultural connections but I don’t think that is explored.” When asked to explain the difference between the dance and sport PE classes, Mr. Smythe said,

How about a little more structure in the gym and teach those things we just talked about!? How we can take what is learned in the classroom, such as teamwork, and apply it to what is outside in the community and the world. They get structure here (dance). They get life connections here.

#### **AA Females’ Perspectives of Dance-Based PE**

Dance was among many classes available as electives at Carter High School along with band, choir, Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC), photography, and several others. I interviewed six girls at Carter High School who ranged from grades 9 – 11: Rachel, Reneh, Dayna, Kelly, Ashton, and Mika. They all chose to enroll in dance PE as an elective in addition to previously taking the sport-based PE class.

**Cultural relevance.** In the beginning of the semester, a few of the girls thought the dance class was going to be similar to sport because they were both considered PE classes and revolved around getting exercise; however, they all agreed that was not the case. The participants established they learned more material in dance and students were more active and engaged. For example, Reneh explained, “It’s different. We actually do things in dance. The dance class is more of a workout and we can relate and are interested. Everyone is moving in this class.” Kelly, a sophomore student, agreed they learned more in dance and commented, “In

the sports class it was about how fast you could go or quantity of something [push-ups, sit-ups]. In dance it's more quality. You're learning more in dance like all the different words about dance and different types of movement so you have new dances." The female participants also decided the sport class was more like a free period where students could do whatever they wanted and teachers did not seem to care.

Throughout the semester Mr. Smythe covered a plethora of ideas, concepts, and information on different genres of dance such as ballet and modern; genres and eras of music and how it relates to dance; personal hygiene and appropriate dress and appearance; dance etiquette inside and outside the dance studio such as hair and make-up, classroom and stage space, being an audience member; and team building and cooperation. Reneh explained, "He [Mr. Smythe] taught us different dances, different types of music, and expanded our genres of music. Also, the etiquette like how dancers are supposed to keep their hair and a lot of stuff like that." Mika also commented, "He taught us how to carry ourselves, he taught us about hygiene, he taught us a lot."

The participants said students enjoyed participating in activities in dance because they were fun, not boring, and different every day. Dayna expressed, "I like participating because I can talk with my friends and it is not all controlling." And Kelly added, "I like to participate because it's helpful. You can see how all the activities apply to dance and they also apply outside of dance. So if you participate you are going to learn something." Students had fun talking and working with their friends, being creative, learning choreography, and trying new things. Ashton excitedly replied, "I like participating in the activities because they are just really fun. I love dancing and I love choreographing. It's really nice to get to work together and try

new things out. I just love it.” They also agreed all this content would be applicable outside of class such as in other classes, daily lives, and in their future.

Additionally, a few females used dance at their church or with friends and felt a connection to what was taught in the school dance class. For example, Rachel explained, “I dance in church so I can help my friends because I have friends in church and we do that together, not really sports. Sometimes we choreograph for fun. Like homecoming and stuff like that we dance.” Whether or not Dayna enrolls in a dance class as an adult, she felt she would continue to use dance in her church. She explained, “I dance at my church so I feel like I will always be dancing at church, even if I’m just teaching the dances. I just like church dancing and teaching the preteens.”

Several females said they dance at home with their mom or at family events. Rachel remarked, “I think dance is relevant to my family because everybody always likes dancing.” Mika laughed and said, “My family loves to dance. They like to dance a lot. So dance would be relevant to them. We dance at family parties, both extended family and close.” All female participants agreed dance was relevant to their culture in the community and with family. Ashton reported, “I feel like dance has relevance to my African American culture because dance is a way to connect and it’s really down to earth.” She also exclaimed, “It’s no secret that African Americans danced and stuff sometimes for praise dance. Dance just goes a long way to express yourself and I think that goes with the culture.” Kelly added, “I feel like all cultures dance but dance differently. We have our different dances.” And Dayna said, “We hustle at family reunions and parties.”



Finally, we discussed pop culture and most of the participants said they listened to music and watched television shows that connect with dance. Reneh shared, “Most of the songs I listen to you can dance to and the shows I watch are dancing and performing arts type stuff.” Dayna added, “There is a lot of dancing in our culture; a lot of music. So I think it’s really relevant. I think the music influences the dancing.” Rachel thought dance was relevant with her peers in social situations. She stated, “Yeah, I would dance with my friends at parties and stuff like that.”

In addition to the connection to and relevance of the content in dance, the participants expressed their appreciation for their dance teacher, Mr. Smythe, because he interacted and talked with students. Dayna, a junior, explained, “He interacts with us. I like that he gets out there and dances with us.” They unanimously agreed they were excited to go to this class each day. They thought the environment was warm and welcoming and felt the students and teacher made it feel that way. Ashton, the only freshman interviewed, stated,

I feel really good about it, like really good. If there’s one class I look forward to during the day, it’s probably the dance class. The environment, the people, what we do during the dance class...it’s very warm. I feel very good when I participate in the class. I feel very good.

The other participants expressed feelings of warmth from the teacher, a welcoming and somewhat quiet, relaxing environment. Kelly mentioned, “It’s welcoming. The classroom is smaller so you are not so spread out and everybody is friendly.”

Mr. Smythe was described as a funny, nice, caring, understanding, kind man who liked all students and made everyone feel comfortable. He was professional, serious, and strict when it came to dance but was able to have fun at the same time. He did not judge students and if he was aware of a personal issue such as financial problems, he was known to keep it private.

Ashton kindly described Mr. Smythe,

Smythe is honestly everything I look for in a teacher. He's probably one of the best teachers I've had in a while. He has that professional aspect in him but he can also just laugh with us, talk to us, and if we have questions he won't hesitate to answer. I really like that about him.

Kelly added, "He's really nice to his students and he cares about all his students so that's good."

Also, Dayna openly shared, "If I forget to bring money for leotards and stuff and I come and talk to him and ask if he can pay for it and my dad will pay him back tomorrow and he will allow it. He's really kind and understanding."

The female participants felt they would develop, or already developed, a strong relationship with Mr. Smythe because of his personality and characteristics. They felt all teachers should know their students and a variety of ways to help them; teach their subject with fun and novel strategies; and be helpful, kind, caring, and strict but also have fun. Mika said she would learn better from teachers if they knew her, "...because they would understand you more about how you like to learn and what you pick up easily." They said teachers should become more involved in students' lives, but not too much, have one-on-one conversations with students, create a safe place to learn and be yourself, be confidential about students' personal issues, learn students' names, and say good morning or hello to students. Additionally, they thought teachers with these characteristics could influence students to learn better because they would feel if comfortable asking for help. When Rachel told me how knowing her teacher could better affect her learning she said, "Because I would be able to ask for some help and to understand things more. I would feel more comfortable asking for help."

**Autonomy.** As mentioned previously, Mr. Smythe attempted to create an autonomous environment where students would be interested in participating through their own sense of motivation. He allowed freedom of choice in areas of partner and group work, encouraged

expression through choreography, music, and costumes, and offered leadership opportunities such as choreographing for others and leading warm-up activities. He wanted students to provide input and feel a sense of ownership of their final choreographed pieces. This effort was recognized, identified, and felt by many of his students. For example, they expressed enjoyment working with others because it taught them how to work with different types of personalities and understand that all people learn differently. They also said they enjoyed the freedom given to them and ability to experiment with new movements and ideas. Although Mr. Smythe had rules he wanted them to abide and lessons he wanted to introduce, he also allowed students to do their own thing because he believed it could encourage and increase participation.

Rachel explained, “We were able to choose those groups and we can make up our dances and find our own music.” Reneh added, “He lets us add our input on certain things or certain parts and he said he would let us look at some costumes and choose the ones that fit our dance best.” And Mika commented, “We get to pick our own groups when we do group projects. We get to pick our own music. We get to pick a lot of stuff in this class!”

The female participants seemed to enjoy having these choices and felt it gave them freedom to work with others and create movement to express feelings. Ashton explained, “I think everyone loves choreographing because they get to express how they feel through dance and their own movements and I think that’s really cool.” Rachel added, “It’s good because I get to express different thoughts through dance so it’s good and we can be with friends also and then all your ideas just come together. They can come together into a wonderful dance.” Reneh commented, “It’s fun. He lets us experiment.” Mika agreed with Reneh, “I like it because we

get to venture out and do a little more. I like dance more because it has more value and meaning and I can take it outside of dance.”

**Competence.** As mentioned previously, Mr. Smythe always tried to create an environment that promoted success for all students which in turn would hopefully increase levels of competence. He delivered constant feedback and was always willing to help students when they did not catch on to movement or technique. He provided differentiated instruction for all ability levels and did not expect everyone to be the same. However, he gave constant reassurance and pushed students to achieve their highest potential.

Students were excited to come to the dance PE class because they knew they would learn something new and improve their performance levels which increased competence and confidence as well. Kelly commented, “If you participate you are going to learn something.” Mika said, “I’m not a dancer. But, once I started learning some stuff I started to like it. I like the class.” Rachel felt good about her success in this class and added, “I like the class because I like to dance and it’s something I can do!” Excitedly, Ashton agreed, “I enjoy the class a lot! I love dancing. I feel very successful.” Furthermore, feelings of accomplishment were increased because they did not feel as though their peers were judging or making fun of them. Ashton commented, “We all don’t do that much judgment in here. It’s not like a place where someone is like oh wow,” referring to making fun of how someone dances.

Additionally, students in dance PE claimed they gained a sense of competence because Mr. Smythe was a great teacher. They considered him this way because he specifically broke down movements one step at a time and specifically demonstrated what movements should look like. Dayna said she felt confident in his class; “I do [feel confident] because Smythe knows

how to explain things really well and he shows us and he dances with us.” When asked whether or not Mr. Smythe delivered exact instructions when teaching skills and technique, Mika replied, “He delivers exact instructions and *shows* us how to do it.” In contrast to past sport PE experiences, Reneh replied, “He [Mr. Smythe] actually teaches, does the technique, makes us warm up; everyone is moving in this class.” And Dayna was in agreement based on her past sport experience, “He works with us a lot more than any other PE teacher I have had.” After introducing a skill or combination of movements, the instructor allowed time to practice the skills. Rachel remarked,

Yeah [there is time to practice] after we learn it. Say we learn it for ten minutes, he will give us five minutes to go over it with a partner or your groups and then he will say to come back and go across the floor again and see how it is and then he will let you know to keep practicing.

Mr. Smythe continued to provide feedback so students could improve. Ashton noted, “He provides feedback. He provides a lot of feedback, both positive and constructive.” Mika enjoyed feedback and it encouraged her to keep trying. She explained, “He gives us constructive criticism and he tells us when we are doing a great job or if we need to work on something. I keep trying to do better at it.”

I observed Mr. Smythe constantly encourage students to keep practicing when they did not catch on to a movement or dance combination. He worked with students one-on-one and helped to ensure they caught on. Generally, when students felt competent about movement it boosted their confidence as well. Reneh said, “He boosts up my confidence a little bit when I’m trying to do things and I feel like I can’t quite get it. He’ll help me out one-on-one for a bit, just work with me.” They tended to feel confident in this class because they worked hard to accomplish the movements and their grades reflected that hard work. Mika, a sophomore

basketball player, explained, “Some of the movements I didn’t feel confident in but once he showed us and came around and helped us I actually felt more confident in dancing. I feel really confident in it now.” Kelly added, “I do feel successful because I get good grades on the dances and I catch on.”

**Relatedness.** Students in Mr. Smythe’s class described a true sense of relatedness in the dance PE class. They were able to work with current friends and meet new peers who eventually became friends as well. Ashton truly enjoyed working with her friends and stated, “I feel really good when I work with my friends. When I work with my friends it’s very productive and we work really nicely.” But she also felt the entire class bonded quite strongly. She commented, “I feel like the peer relationship is very strong, definitely.” Because of their strong bond there was plenty of time to make new friends such as in the locker room, during group work, or during stretches when they first arrived to class. Dayna explained, “Like in my group there is a girl named Tamara and me and her were not friends because I couldn’t pronounce her name or remember it but me being around her so much made me remember and we laugh together and it was fun. She’s like my little sister.”

Ashton added, “You have to work together and when you see somebody dance and they might do something funny like fall or a certain facial expression you can laugh. And when you laugh you get to know each other more.” Rachel and Mika enjoyed the overall pleasant environment of the class. Rachel said, “Everybody talks to everybody in the class. It’s calm and cordial.” Mika noted, “I like the people in the class. I like the teacher.”

In the beginning of the semester I asked the participants to share what type of relationship they would like to develop with Mr. Smythe. Rachel expressed, “We will have a good

relationship because he's funny at times but when it comes to dancing he really wants stuff to be right." Reneh shared, "I'd like to develop a good relationship with him because he's a real nice person to talk to and I feel like I could go to him if I need some help and he would be welcoming." Eventually they developed a close and comfortable relationship with Mr. Smythe which essentially increased participation and engagement in class. Ashton shared, "I love how he connects with us. You can always talk to him." Kelly, who was originally not enrolled in his dance class but really wanted to be in it, explained how Mr. Smythe was helpful in making it happen for her. She said, "I like how he caters not only to his students but people outside his class. I wasn't in his class the whole time I wanted to be in it and he helped me out and got my counselor to get the class for me." Kelly proceeded to explain how his act of kindness stood out to her, "It showed he wasn't just helpful to his own students but that he would help people outside of the dance department. He didn't know me and he helped me."

When asked how Mr. Smythe was similar or different from past PE teachers the participants offered a plethora of reasons. Rachel reported, "In dance he [Mr. Smythe] was more involved. He actually taught us and kept going over it with us. In gym she only showed us for one day and that was it." Dayna followed, "Mr. Smythe is more into the class and present often. Witten wasn't there. He didn't really have any connections with kids. And we didn't learn any life lessons." The others agreed sharing things such as how Mr. Smythe listens, makes them feel comfortable, acts fun and funny, and overall, is a great role model.

### **AA Females' Perspectives of Sport-Based PE**

All students were required to take one semester of PE at Carter High School but there were not many options to choose from; The Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), sport PE,

and dance PE. The sport PE classes were taught by four different teachers. Students were not able to choose which teacher they preferred but had all previously taken the sport class. They did not seem to enjoy the sport class and participation was minimal.

**Cultural relevance.** During sport PE, students were graded on attendance, participation, and whether or not they changed their clothes. Reneh shared, “We had to change. We had to wear the green PE uniform they have in the bookstore. If you didn’t have that on you had to either run or sit on the black line and you got an F for the day because you had to sit out.” In addition, sport PE teachers expected students to know the material so there were fewer explanations and demonstrations provided during lessons, students were forced to participate or they would fail, and it was too competitive. Ashton expressed, “There was no real guidance in high school as to what to do. If there was something, he already expected you to know it. It’s sort of weird because there was no teaching or learning.” Although Coach O’Connor provided some guidance, most girls were not interested in the material. Reneh explained, “Coach O’Connor helped us out but the girls really, well, some of us took interest and some didn’t.” Several female students were not excited to go to class because they were not learning anything, had to change, or it was too early in the day. Furthermore, most of the females did not think their sport teacher cared about them, their personal lives, or their families. Ashton felt disconnected to Coach Witten and reported

I don’t know him. We don’t know him. We are not that connected to him...he’s a typical football coach. He’s just with all the guys. He expects us to know stuff when we learn something new. He tells us to go home and print off a picture of arm muscles for homework and know it and turn it in. He won’t test us on it...he doesn’t even put it in the grade book. We don’t know his teaching style. When he says it, he expects us to know it. I don’t think he wants to repeat himself.



Mika was in agreement about Coach Witten and added, “Like, he doesn’t really care much. Most of the PE classes have sports players in it so he gets the sports players to introduce new skills and show how to do it.” Kelly felt Mr. Fister was only connected with some students. When asked if he demonstrated care toward students she replied, “Me personally, no. But he knew some other people who played sports.”

Each participant felt quite differently about the environment in either the gymnasium or weight room. Rachel was not sure if she felt comfortable participating or not. She replied, “The boys were always competing because that’s what they do. The girls were not really.” For Kelly, the environment was intimidating and for Mika it was uncomfortable. Mika said, “It was loud. It made me uncomfortable. I didn’t really like his class.” Kelly stated,

At first it was kind of intimidating because I didn’t really know anybody in there. It felt that way for a long time because I didn’t get to know anybody but after a while I got used to it. I just felt it was kind of neutral and I was just bored in the class. I didn’t want to participate but I just did for the grade I guess. I didn’t want to do it.

Dayna agreed with Kelly and added, “I was bored because we didn’t usually have to participate in activities so I didn’t want to do it. However, according to Rachel and Reneh the environment was welcoming. Rachel commented, “It was usually quiet because I had gym 2<sup>nd</sup> hour so everybody was still waking up. It was welcoming; no one was intimidating or nothing.”

Content taught in sport PE classes at Carter High School varied a bit from class to class depending on the teacher. Three of the females experienced kickball, volleyball, basketball, softball, and dodge ball. When Coach Witten was present, the other three females learned how to lift weights or play golf. Because he was usually busy taking care of coaching duties or not in class, students would do homework or hang out and socialize. The three female students who experienced a variety of sports agreed they enjoyed playing volleyball but did not care to

participate in the other activities. Reneh shared, “Volleyball was fun. I didn’t like dodge ball. Me and my friend used to just sit out.” Rachel added, “I didn’t like kickball because I wasn’t coordinated to do that. I liked volleyball. I didn’t like softball. All I did was catch the ball and throw it back to them and that was pretty much it.” Rachel also commented how basketball was her least favorite sport and caused her to disengage. She said, “In sports I didn’t want to do basketball.” Ashton and Dayna did look forward to going to class because they did not learn anything. Dayna noted, “I wasn’t really excited to go to the class. When he did decide to teach us he taught us weight stuff and I think that’s because he had a lot of football players in the class. I wasn’t learning anything and the weights were heavy and I decided to sit down.”

Collectively, they agreed testing and final exams in sport PE were their least favorite part of class. Kelly explained, “My least favorite thing would probably be the end of the year when we have finals.” Rachel added, “And the worst memory was finals because we had to run stairs and that was not good. The only thing we did was sports, we didn’t run and stuff to prepare for finals.”

Aside from activities, they learned about teamwork but not necessarily because the teacher(s) enforced it. Ashton mentioned, “I think in every class you learn a little bit more about teamwork and how to work together and how everybody works but he [Coach Witten] wasn’t the one to enforce it. Nothing was taught where you had to use teambuilding skills.” Additionally, these females explained some ideas and concepts that were relevant, useful, and meaningful to them currently and in their future such as personal hygiene, being responsible and on time, teamwork and the ability to learn how to work with different personalities, and weight-training. Ashton explained, “I find it pretty useless. I don’t see any real benefit from it. I guess the

weights will help my fitness.” Daysia agreed, “Yeah, how to lift weights and safety when doing it.” Mika commented, “It’s not relevant because we didn’t do anything but I wish we did because it would probably help me later on in life if I wanted to become a PE teacher. It could have helped.”

Others felt sports might be useful outside of school such as volleyball at a picnic or other sports with friends. Kelly indicated, “It’s [the sport class] not really relevant unless I just want to have fun or something and I feel like playing a sport.” Rachel added, “At a family picnic we played volleyball there so I could use it with my family. Otherwise, nothing else in my future can be used.” Reneh thought she learned a few life lessons from Coach O’Connor but when asked about sports she replied, “No. I will not use sports. I probably will *not* join any type of sports teams.” And Dayna added, “No. I won’t use sports except maybe at family picnics or spirit week here at school.”

I asked the students to further discuss whether or not sport was culturally relevant in terms of friends, family, and community. When they hung out with their friends they enjoyed dancing and usually did not play sports. Ashton explained, “When we do stuff together we just make up fun dances and stuff.” And Dayna said, “Yeah, we dance at homecoming and stuff.” Most of the girls admitted to dancing at home with a family member such as their mom or a sibling. Reneh commented, “Me and my mom dance a lot. My dad watches sports a lot but me and my mom dance *a lot*.”

When asked if sports were specifically relevant to the AA culture Ashton had mixed feelings and explained, “I don’t really think so. I know our culture likes to do more like football and basketball.” Mika added, “It’s very relevant to my culture cause they love playing sports. A

lot of my culture loves basketball. I think dance fits a little bit with my culture too.” Rachel and Reneh felt sports were not specifically relevant to their AA heritage. Besides Mika, who was a varsity basketball player, the participants felt sports did not have any relevance to their current pop cultural lives such as music, television, or personal interests. However, several female participants pointed out how sports are relevant to their male counterparts. Dayna stated, “A lot of young men want to grow up and be some type of big sport player.” Ashley did not think it was completely relevant to her but definitely to the male students in her class. She commented, “I don’t really think so. I know our culture likes to do more like football and basketball. I mean, the males play basketball every day.”

In general, the female participants felt if there was more communication, care, and connection in the sport PE environment and from the sport PE teachers they might be more apt to engage and participate during sport-based PE classes. Additionally, if teachers tried to get to know them and demonstrated care about what activities they enjoyed they would feel more comfortable and interested in learning. Although Rachel’s teacher took the time to ask students what they liked, she wished her teacher offered more sports. Ashton thought if the teacher would at least know her name she would be interested in joining in some activities. Ashton hesitantly said, “If I could change anything I would do more icebreakers. I’m positive he doesn’t know anyone. He looks at the list to point us out. If he just knew us and actually made us feel welcomed. There’s such a big distance between us.” Although Kelly enjoyed dancing and working hard in Mr. Smythe’s dance class, she did not enjoy Mr. Fister’s sport class. Kelly was truly unhappy and exclaimed, “I don’t want the teachers doing a bunch of other stuff outside of

teaching and focusing on the class. Don't do so much intense physical activity because everyone is not trained for that so it only caters to the athletes who might train after school."

Each student's individual experience was truly influenced by the overall content and teacher they had for class. The four teachers were described generally as nice or distant. Coach Witten was distant with his students and did not appear to be approachable. Dayna commented, "He was distant. He had a lot of stuff to do all the time. We really didn't talk to him unless we talked to him. He wouldn't speak to us unless he wanted to start class that day." Conversely, Coach O'Connor seemed to be the extreme opposite. Reneh exclaimed, "She was very interactive with everyone!" However, the female participants agreed that all four teachers favored males over females and athletes over everyone. Kelly stated, "I guess he would favor the guys over the girls because he knew them better because some of them played football." Reneh added, "She [Coach O'Connor] loved the boys and the athletes." And Ashton chimed in, "He just loves his football players!"

**Autonomy.** Although there was a minimal amount of freedom, choice, and ownership, overall, sport PE teachers did not create autonomous environments for students. Most days, lessons were put into place and could not be changed; however, participants said there were not many activities taught all semester. Kelly stated, "It wasn't that big of a variety." Kelly preferred to have choices in what was offered and continued, "The planned lessons I didn't like because they were not interesting and they were hard." Dayna, who had a different teacher than Kelly explained, "There were only two activities so it wasn't really a variety...we really didn't have a variety of stuff to do so you would get bored." And Mika reported, "We really did nothing." Participants reported teachers offered free days when students were given free time to

choose activities. Dayna thought the males always chose basketball; leaving the females with nothing to do. She explained, "...the boys would play basketball. The females, we usually just leave the class or sit down and watch I guess." During free days, activities were limited to two or three games and sometimes the weight room. Because she had access to the weight room often, Ashton claimed to learn independence in Coach Witten's class. He was never there and when he was, she said, he did not teach. When she visited the weight room unsupervised she explained, "...there are a lot of machines and stuff and you could go running and if you just looked at it for a second you could understand it so I learned to operate more things on my own."

The freedom to choose partners or groups, activities, and other choices varied from teacher to teacher. At some point, all four teachers allowed students to choose partners and teams. When students were able to choose they generally partnered or grouped with their friends. Ashton explained, "We do not have to work with people we don't know." And for Reneh she felt comfortable with the entire class because they had health together the semester beforehand. She said, "I was friends with everybody...we were always paired with someone we knew or was friends with." Mika added, "He just told everyone to get a partner. Everyone picked someone they knew." Collectively, they enjoyed choosing partners and groups.

Along with choosing teams, some teachers allowed choice or free days. Rachel reported, "And some days were free time. On Friday's we got to choose which sport we wanted to play like jump rope, volleyball, and basketball." Reneh's teacher offered similar choices. She said, "Yeah, sometimes she had it set but she would let us choose if you wanted to do volleyball or basketball." Unfortunately, all the female participants did not feel they had enough choices and when they were not given the option to choose they were disappointed. Kelly informed, "The

planned lessons I didn't like because they were not interesting and they were hard." But when given choices she explained there was not much to choose from besides the usual sports. She explained, "There wasn't a lot of choices. I would just walk around. You could play volleyball or basketball or soccer and that was it. We had to walk around if we didn't want to do those." Those students who had Coach Witten and Mr. Fister particularly liked their absence because they used the time to their advantage. Unknown to these teachers, female participants felt freedom in sport PE in other ways. Kelly reported, "I liked having time to do homework and other stuff." Likewise, Dayna said, "In gym I liked that it was another free time or lunch time for me." And Mika agreed, "I liked I got extra work done."

**Competence.** For the most part, participants agreed the environment was not too competitive; however, aside from volleyball, participants felt unsuccessful and incompetent playing sports in class. Reasons they explained for feeling incompetent were they did not feel they were good at sports, did not do sports consistently, and not familiar with the sports introduced in class. Rachel felt competent at volleyball because she played before in other classes and it was fun but stated, "It was kinda easy but I didn't like doing the sports." Kelly also felt competent during volleyball because she knew how to do it but did not feel the same with other sports. She explained how the teacher did not demonstrate or teach the skill, "He would just say the sport and we would play it for a couple weeks but we would just do it without instruction." And Mika agreed that her teacher was similar, "Most of the time he expected us to get up and do it." The female participants agreed they would have been more competent, confident, and successful if the teachers provided detailed instruction, more practice time, and feedback.

When asked to explain their ability level in the sport PE class, most felt they were at the lower end of the talent spectrum. Rachel reported, “I wasn’t really confident because I already knew it wasn’t gonna go right so I didn’t even try as much. Maybe if I would’ve tried more but I didn’t want to.” Reneh laughed and explained, “In the gym class, yeah, I was horrible. I really am not an athlete.” And Dayna, having a negative experience in general replied, “I was below standard, like poor. We never practiced so I couldn’t do a push-up and it was real hard for me because I was never given the chance to practice and work on it.”

Aside from their ability level, some felt their sport PE class was too easy because of the lack of instruction. Reneh explained, “It wasn’t difficult at all. It really wasn’t difficult. It was like a just a care-free environment. You pretty much did whatever you wanted.” Dayna added, “I think the sport class was below standard because we really didn’t do anything.” Dayna, Ashton, and Mika shared strong and similar opinions about their class because they all had class with Coach Witten. Mika noted, “The [sport] PE class was easy. All I had to do was show up, take attendance, and be done.” Ashton appeared most annoyed by her lack of learning and building competence in skills. She commented,

Honestly, for the sports class we didn’t do anything...we rarely dressed and that is definitely a beginner level thing. If it was just a little bit more difficult you would have to be dressing every single day because you would actually be sweating and working and learning. I think that was a very beginner level class but I don’t even want to call it a real thing because I wouldn’t want anybody to take that class. It was nothing to learn from it.

**Relatedness.** While the students were able to choose groups often, they also agreed there was plenty of time to connect and get to know other peers in class. They talked in the locker room, during attendance, before directions or the start of the game, and when teachers were absent. All but Kelly entered the sport class with at least a friend or two and developed other



friendships as the semester progressed. Over time, Kelly also met new people but it took her a bit longer because she was shy. A few participants felt comfortable talking with and getting to know their peers while others felt it was a respectful setting and everyone knew each other but they were not necessarily close. Reneh explained, “We all got along because we knew everybody.” And Kelly reported, “Most of them I didn’t really get to know that well but a few of them I got to know and mostly everybody got along.” She added, “We didn’t interact as much as we do in dance.” Dayna did not feel any reason not to get along because they did not participate in many activities. She said, “We all had fun because there wasn’t anything we had to decide on and so it was fun.” After their sport PE class ended, they still saw each other in the hallways and said hello. Other than that there was not a big connection or lifelong friendships created in these classes.

For the most part, participants said the relationships and connections between them and their sport-based PE teachers felt a bit distant. Sport teachers who were coaches tended to be close with their players and teach their classes as if they were coaching. Dayna said, “He would tell us what to do and we would do it. It was like him being our coach.” In the case of Mr. Fister and Coach Witten, they were consistently absent so students felt that distance and disconnect. Kelly said Mr. Fister was nice, distant, and difficult to find at times. She explained, “He wasn’t there because he had other stuff to do, but when he was there he was nice.” Ashton explained how Coach Witten could have connected more with students if he had been present, “He didn’t relate [to us] at all unless it was sports but we never talked about sports because he was never there.” Mika agreed, “He didn’t have relationships except with his players.” They felt their

teachers did not know their names and connected with them on a very basic student-teacher relationship; as in lacking care and communication.

### **Conclusion**

**Cultural relevance.** Based on these findings and my observations, it appeared students and Mr. Smythe were in agreement when it came to dance-based PE. According to Mr. Smythe, he offered a culturally relevant curriculum full of variety, creativity, connection to other subjects, ability to utilize elements of dance outside of class, and relevant to personal culture. Female participants interviewed enjoyed the content and said it was fun. Content was taught purposefully to connect with church, family, friends, parties, and pop culture. Mr. Smythe became involved with his students' personal lives by getting to know their backgrounds, community they lived in, and home life. Participants enjoyed his involvement and were excited when he interacted and danced with them. Because he provided a family-like environment, which these female students stated was warm and welcoming, participation was extremely high each day I visited. They entered the room with energy and enthusiasm that was contagious. It was definitely a happy place to be where I think students felt part of a special, close-knit group.

In contrast, students did not feel the same way about the sport-based PE classes. For the most part they agreed they would not use sport content outside of this class. They described the sport class as boring and repetitive; playing the same team sports from elementary through high school. Additionally, they thought the environment was always extremely competitive; especially amongst male students. Female participants also agreed they used dance with friends and family but were not interested in playing sports at social events. With the exception of Coach O'Connell who incorporated a bit more variety and enthusiasm, there was not a whole lot

of substance to these classes or from the sport teachers. Coach O'Connell, as stated earlier, was a teacher who broke down skills and provided much more instruction than the other sport PE teachers and females agreed that although she taught well, they were not interested in sport. However, according to female participants, their male counterparts appeared to enjoy sport lessons in PE. The females viewed sport as something male students, brothers, and fathers connected to, but they did not. Furthermore, participants explained if there was more connection, care, and communication between sport teachers and female students they might have more interest in participating in class. However, most of the teachers tended to favor male students and athletes.

**Autonomy.** According to Mr. Smythe, he tried to create an autonomous environment that sparked students' interest to participate during dance PE. He provided numerous choices, offered time to create and demonstrate self-expression, and take ownership and control over choreographed dances. He hoped this environment offered plenty of freedom for students to feel intrinsically motivated to engage in activities. Female participants said they enjoyed choices and freedom to express themselves through movement. They were happy Mr. Smythe allowed time to experiment with new movement and work with others to build off their creativity. Because they felt dance had value and meaning, participation was high and it seemed as though they truly wanted to be involved. However, during sport PE, students wished they had more choices. They were never given opportunities to create their own games or activities and always had to do what the instructor planned. On "free" days participants explained they were only allowed to choose among a limited number of sports; generally favoring competitive, male athletes.

**Competence.** The evidence suggests the environment in the dance studio was set up to make students feel successful. Mr. Smythe was a detailed instructor who provided specific instructions, positive feedback, and solutions when giving constructive criticism. He offered differentiated lessons to help all students feel competent and worked with individuals who struggled. Participants gained trust in Mr. Smythe early in the semester and valued his feedback. They appreciated when he demonstrated movements and clearly explained body placement. They were given plenty of time to practice new skills and I observed everyone moving and practicing. Female participants enjoyed one-on-one attention from their teacher and often felt he helped boost their confidence. During sport PE, female participants explained they did not know how to perform skills and did not feel confident playing the games, therefore, felt unsuccessful. Collectively, the sport PE teachers did not provide much instruction, rarely demonstrated skills, and gave minimal to no practice time. I often observed sport PE teachers doing out-of-class activities which did not benefit their students. I feel as though students wanted feedback in order to make changes and feel successful; but they did not receive any. Because they felt a lack of learning and instruction, they did not feel competent during sport PE and often disengaged.

**Relatedness.** As it appeared, Mr. Smythe was largely involved in the lives of his students. He showed genuine care for them, created a positive rapport with parents, and encouraged respectful behaviors among students. He was willing to help students with personal issues from unfortunate financial situations to getting into the college of their choice. Mr. Smythe worked closely with those who wanted to pursue dance as a career but gave equal individual attention to those who wanted to dance for fun. He connected students and family members with community happenings and exposed them to cultural dance events in the city. Mr.

Smythe encouraged students to work with peers and felt they benefitted tremendously from it. Working together helped prepare them for potential future situations in college or a job environment. Female participants appeared to appreciate his sense of relatedness in the classroom and told me they enjoyed working together and making new friendships because of those lessons. They explained how he cared about his students and actually taught rather than go through the motions. Unfortunately, sport PE teachers tended to provide quick explanations and send students off to play with minimal guidance. Sport PE teachers spoke with dictatorship and demand as if they were running a drill camp or possibly coaching a varsity athletic team. There appeared to be less interaction between students, specifically females, and teachers which caused fewer connections. However, sport PE teachers seemed to connect immensely with athletes they coached and spent more personal time with them in class, leaving the rest unattended.

### **Denver High School**

Denver High School was a large performing arts high school located in an urban inner-city school district within a Midtown neighborhood. It was located on a side street not too far from a large research university. Denver had several floors with dance, music, and art studios as well as regular classrooms, a small gymnasium, and a large performing arts auditorium. There were 559 students enrolled. Students were expected to hold a minimum grade point average of 2.5 and audition in their specialty area to be accepted into Denver. As freshmen, students were expected to choose a major from the list of performing arts options such as, vocal and instrumental music, dance, theater, speck, and radio/television production. Denver High School students have previously worked with well-known music and dance celebrities and Denver is also known for graduating successful artists.

Similar to Carter High School, Denver was highly secured with metal detectors at the front entrance. Several security guards searched student backpacks daily and required all visitors to sign in and receive a guest pass. Although I was still required to sign in all semester, the security guards quickly began to know and welcome me each visit. They greeted me with warmth and wished me a good day or weekend when I left. I felt very welcomed.

First hour began at 8:00 A.M. and the school day ended at 3:25 P.M. Classes were 45 minutes in length and they had approximately 25 minutes for lunch. Because all performing arts areas were typically preparing for some type of performance, audition, adjudication, presentation, or other evaluation, students stayed after school for extra rehearsals most days. They reported getting home late and having to arrange transportation in advance. When transportation was an issue, students were unable to stay for rehearsals and unfortunately, were taken out of programs at times.

### **Dance-based PE**

At Denver High School dance was considered a required class for dance majors and part of their curriculum in order to graduate. However, it was considered an elective class which students could receive PE credit toward graduation as well. Students enrolled in dance-based PE classes attended class for approximately 45 minutes with five minutes to change before and after class. However, they did not meet on Wednesdays and had longer periods on Tuesdays. This schedule was consistent for all classes throughout the school. Dance classes were held in one of three dance studios located on the second floor of the school. The entire hallway belonged to PE; dance included. There were two locker rooms for boys and girls, two costume rooms, a laundry facility, three dance studios, one small gymnasium, and an office for all dance and sport

PE teachers. Participants included in this study attended a level two modern dance class during 2nd hour from 8:45 A.M. until 9:30 A.M. This specific dance studio was small, very warm, and a bit dingy. There were hardwood floors, one wall covered with mirrors and another with windows. Ballet barres were attached to the back wall and the wall adjacent had a white board, stereo equipment, and television. Unfortunately, Ms. Burnett's office and costume rooms were located down the hall. At times, students waited unsupervised for her to finish with business in her office or help students with costumes in the costume room. It was the departments' job to keep all rooms locked at all times. Students and visitors needed permission to enter or use the spaces.

Students entered the studio dressed in required and proper dance attire. Females wore black leotards, black or skin-colored tights, and barefoot or appropriate dance shoes. Extra clothing such as shorts, skirts, sports bras, or pants could be worn during warm-up but removed for the remainder of class. Males wore black or white t-shirts and black shorts or pants. Students were expected to begin warming up and stretching their muscles immediately while the teacher took attendance. Unfortunately, on several occasions I arrived to find many students still in the hallway or dressing room talking with friends and slowly getting ready. Ms. Burnett would arrive and have to raise her voice to coax students into the room. This behavior tended to set a bit of a negative tone between teacher and students for the remainder of class.

Typically students wandered in slowly and joined the stretching exercises with their classmates. The same few AA female students consistently stood in the front of the room so they could see themselves in the mirror, while others chose to stand near friends. This class was 100% AA with five males and 29 females. Once warm-up was finished students often traveled

across the floor working on technique and combinations. They were to travel in groups of two, or three if it was uneven. Students who appeared more talented seemed to group together and push toward the front of the line while the less-skilled stuck by their friends and followed the group.

Ms. Burnett portrayed a strict, straight-to-work, type of personality who meant business and not a lot of personal connection with her students during class. She appeared passionate about dance and committed to teaching students movement with proper technique. Her voice was soft but stern as she specifically explained each body placement. It seemed as though she was close with many students outside of class, but equally not as close with others. Ms. Burnett enforced discipline in her classroom, in the sense of dance as well as appropriate behavior. Although students followed dance etiquette in the classroom well, they did not always demonstrate those behaviors in the hallway or toward Ms. Burnett. Negative attitudes and not caring was a vibe given off by a lot of the female students who were juniors. These junior female students were not pleased to repeat this modern class, which they took last year. Unfortunately, at the time students auditioned to be placed for the following year, their ability was not up to par with the remainder of the juniors and therefore they were not moved up to the next level. Although teachers placed them here because they wanted to see them improve, many of the females were not happy with this decision. Ms. Burnett encouraged positive behavior and did not have much tolerance for those who did not comply. She simply told these students if they were not interested in being there, they could leave or change their major.

Ms. Burnett loved to play music loudly in her class and kept students moving constantly. She did not allow much downtime, moving quickly from one exercise to the next. As soon as



students were warmed up, they participated in a long series of abdominal work, followed by modern dance technique, and finished with high-energy, quick moving combinations across the floor. Class usually started a few minutes late as Ms. Burnett was typically busy in her office or waiting for students, but movement continued until the last possible minute before releasing students to change.

Throughout the semester I observed this class learning basic movements and vocabulary for modern dance. As students progressed, became more advanced, and were placed in higher levels, they were introduced to other genres of dance such as jazz, hip hop, and lyrical. Ms. Burnett was very clear when she taught combinations and technique. She physically demonstrated each movement and explained the exact placement of the body from head to toe. She added counts to all movements and chose appropriate music to complement the movements. It was rare for students not to dance to music in her class. Once taught, Ms. Burnett allowed students time to practice individually and/or with peers. She encouraged them to learn from their peers and hoped all students would improve and feel competent with the movements. Students were expected to rehearse the combinations in case she tested them on what was taught; but she did not always let them know when they would be tested. These tests varied because she conducted them individually, with a partner, or in groups.

Throughout the semester students were given choreography assignments and were expected to cooperate and learn to work together, respect and compromise each other's ideas, and create pieces of choreography. A few girls I interviewed were excited to create their own work and others were not particularly interested in those assignments, as they had to work with

other students in class with whom they did not get along. Students were also given written tests for their midterm and final exam.

Everything Ms. Burnett taught in class eventually led to the culminating performance at the end of the semester. She included different groups doing various movements, students with technical abilities performing small solos, and the entire class dancing sections together in unison. As I observed this class toward the end of the semester I watched students practice the piece choreographed by Ms. Burnett. Some students were extremely fluent and others were completely unsure of the movements. They were supposed to prove they knew the material in order for the piece to be in the show. Unfortunately, a last minute decision by Ms. Burnett and the department head prohibited the piece from being part of the show as many students were not ready. Some of the students were in other numbers choreographed by peers or themselves. In any case, they had to audition in front of the all the dance teachers to be evaluated and determine whether or not their piece would be put in the show.

As mentioned above, students in this class were all AA students, and the majority were females. Additionally, half of the females I observed and interviewed were disappointed they had to repeat the course and therefore, were not always interested in attending class. The six AA females who met the criteria to be interviewed and observed for this study were six juniors who repeated the course for the second time during their junior year. They were the only students enrolled in a lower level dance class comparable to the level of the other students involved in this study and had already taken a sport-based PE class. Other students enrolled in this particular class were freshmen and sophomores who were no longer required to take the sport-based class for PE credit. Additionally, the other dance-based classes offered at Denver were more advanced

modern and ballet, choreography, and company. As described in chapter three, higher-level students could potentially be competitive dancers outside of school and therefore have more bias toward dance than sport. When these juniors were present, it took a lot of coaxing to get them in the room and they were often late; but surprisingly, they always participated once they were in the room. When asked individually, about half of the participants seemed to genuinely enjoy this class and wanted to learn and progress; but they also wanted to be challenged and did not feel they were being challenged in this class. Overall, participation in this dance-based PE class was extremely high. I rarely observed students sitting out or not participating unless they were legitimately injured with a doctor's note, did not have their dance clothes, or were not feeling well. Those who sat out observed class quietly and respectfully. Everyone appeared respectful to one another from my position in the room and seemed to get along. However, I was told quite opposite. For example, as students traveled across the floor, their peers would rudely critique one another or demonstrate behaviors such as eye rolling and making faces to indicate they did not like their dance ability or style. However, students who respected one another also demonstrated respect toward Ms. Burnett. I did not witness direct disrespect toward her such as bad-mouthing or talking back. However, behaviors such as coming into class late, standing with arms folded, or ignoring her when she told them to come in the room were all disrespectful behaviors portrayed by a few of the juniors repeating the class.

Despite their ability level or resentment to repeat the course, throughout class students were actively engaged while practicing movements and following the instructor's lead. Ms. Burnett walked around during warm-up and technique, provided feedback, and physically made corrections to students' body placement. When students traveled across the floor she tended to

stand in one spot in the back of the room and shouted feedback over the music. It was the most ideal spot in the room to stand in order to see everyone in the small space and through the reflection of the mirror. She provided a combination of positive feedback with constructive criticism and explanations to fix students' mistakes.

When students were given the opportunity to choose their own groups they typically created groups with friends. During the middle of the semester I observed groups working in different classrooms or in hallways. Higher skilled groups and groups with students who appeared focused seemed to work well together because they were all trying to achieve the common goal of creating a finished product. They wanted their dance to look the best, get chosen to be in shows, and were focused and serious about completing it. While other groups might have had good intentions and were somewhat productive, they did not seem as focused or concerned about learning the material. It was obvious they usually enjoyed hanging out with their friends in the group, listening to music, laughing, and fooling around.

I enjoyed watching this class choreograph and prepare for the final concert because they put together creative dances based on their feelings and expressions. They chose music to complement movements and help tell their story. Although some of the girls were not as excited to create their dances and work in groups, a sense of pride and excitement showed tremendously when they were able to perform their dances for the class and received applause and praise from peers.

### **Sport-based PE**

Denver High School offered sport-based PE classes five days per week, three class periods per day. All sport classes were taught by Mr. Decker, who was also the health teacher,

obligated to teach health the other three class periods each day. Classes were 45 minutes in length with five minutes to change before and after class. As mentioned in chapter three, students who were juniors and seniors were the last group of students to take sport-based PE as a graduation requirement. Those graduating after 2016 will not be required to take the class.

The gymnasium was located on the second floor, down the hall from the three dance studios and next to the department's faculty office. The gym had two cement walls and two walls which were made of a see-through plastic material allowing the instructor to see into two separate weight rooms from inside the gym. When classes were split up into groups and sent to use different spaces, these windows permitted the instructor to continue to monitor all students. Inside the gymnasium were two basketball hoops and a storage closet. Although this design sounds adequate for PE classes, unfortunately, the small size of the gym made it difficult for large group instruction and activities for 25-30 students in each class. Denver High School did not have any after-school sports programs; therefore, when this building was designed, they did not consider building a full size gymnasium.

One weight room consisted of all donated cardio equipment, such as bikes and treadmills, which were extremely outdated. The second, smaller room contained more updated bikes and treadmills and one bench press machine. Additionally, they had free weights, resistance bands, and jump ropes, which the department received a few years ago from a local grant. Mr. Decker tried to encourage students to take care of the equipment so it would last longer, but pointed out he has already noticed a lot of wear and tear.

Mr. Decker was a fun, caring, and outgoing man who portrayed a sincere love for PE and his students. Each day he entered the gym with a smile on his face and enthusiastically

encouraged students to participate. He never ridiculed students who could not perform well, but helped them be more successful. If students forgot their clothes he tried to encourage them to join in as much as they could instead of sitting out. However, once they started participating in activities and warming up, he would kindly ask students to remove extra clothing such as sweaters and scarves they wore when the weather was colder. When students stood against the wall with their arms folded or demonstrated negative behaviors such as eye-rolling and heavy sighing, Mr. Decker took time to talk with them, ask what was going on, and offer his help in any way possible. Some students responded kindly to his caring personality and others disrespectfully gave him an attitude. I noticed students took advantage of his kind and caring ways and often tested his patience. They thought it was funny to mock and ignore him when he commanded them to come into the gymnasium versus roaming the hallways.

I consistently observed Mr. Decker's first hour class. Students had a tendency to arrive late and this situation caused frustration when planning partner or group activities. Some reasons for constant tardiness were public transportation, living far from school and walking there, or carpooling. Mr. Decker tried to alternate days sending female students into the weight room on Mondays and Wednesdays and males to the gym; then they would switch on opposite days and do other activities on Fridays. If several students were tardy he kept all students in the gym to begin the sport or activity. Each day, students wandered in slowly as if they were still asleep and were reluctant to begin moving. It was well into the class period before Mr. Decker had a larger crowd and by the time the game began, it was time to change and go to 2<sup>nd</sup> hour.

Mr. Decker did not implement a warm-up so students risked getting injured as they just walked in the door. They started skill practice or game-play immediately. He always had

equipment set up and provided a review of what they did the day before. He instructed students what they should continue working on or what they would learn that day. When providing instructions, he always broke down skills specifically. He explained hand placement on golf clubs or racquets, body position in relation to the target, and provided explicit rules for game play. He walked around the gym providing feedback, constructive criticism, and hands-on instruction. Furthermore, he always participated with students during activities and partnered with them as well when numbers were uneven or someone needed extra help.

Mr. Decker provided a variety of activities throughout the semester, not just sport. He taught hockey, badminton, golf, basketball, handball, and pickle ball. He also incorporated fitness testing, pre- and post-tests, during the semester. Furthermore, he included lessons on Yoga, martial arts, Zumba, and hip hop dance by use of DVD and a projector on the plain white wall of the gym.

When first introduced to Yoga, students tended to be reluctant for the first 10 minutes or so of the lesson and then gradually joined in. They made a lot of groaning sounds as they struggled to hold poses and stretch muscles they may not be used to stretching. During hip hop lessons they all seemed to enjoy the music and the video was extremely upbeat. Whether or not they were performing movements correctly, most students were up and moving their bodies.

During a lesson on badminton I watched Mr. Decker provide detailed instructions how to hold the racquet, swing and follow through, and serve. After providing instruction he told the females to stand up and practice while the males went in the weight room. Mr. Decker went with them leaving the female students unattended. Although he enthusiastically provided all these details and practice time, when he left the gym the female students walked around aimlessly.

They did not seem excited about badminton and participation was extremely low. They made comments such as “this is boring” and “I want to break this racquet.” When Mr. Decker returned to the gym he tried to stay positive, provide feedback, and partner with each student. However, they were mostly unresponsive.

During a basketball lesson Mr. Decker divided activity time between female and male students. Every five minutes he rotated in the next group. Male students played five versus five basketball games and female students practiced skills such as free throws and layups. As they practiced, the male students were extremely obnoxious toward them causing several female students to give up and sit down on the floor with their backs against the wall. Toward the end of class Mr. Decker created a game for the females as well. Unfortunately, it was an elimination game, so as soon as someone missed a basket they were back to sitting against the wall decreasing activity time.

On Fridays, Mr. Decker often included health lessons and sometimes brought in healthy snacks for students to taste. Mr. Decker worked on most sports for 2-3 weeks and then asked students to write a reflection paper on that sport. Written quizzes were also given at the end of each sport unit.

### **Dance Teachers’ Perspectives of PE Environments**

**Dance PE environment.** My interviews with Ms. Burnett were very informative. She had many unique experiences teaching at different schools as well as teaching health and sport-based PE in addition to dance. She started teaching at Denver High School in 2005 and has been teaching dance the last 11 years. Several times she offered to teach group fitness classes such as aerobics or Zumba, as well as fitness classes with weights and resistance bands. She explained,



“A lot of students aren’t interested in a sport-based PE program. They just want to come in and exercise.” She felt the PE program in general needed more variety and an additional teacher so it could be offered during all class periods. Ms. Burnett was fortunate to be involved with a grant program that allowed her to offer an after-school PA club. She explained how she could use that concept during school, “Before the grant ran out we did Zumba and aerobics and things with weights. The kids loved it. So I thought that would be cool to implement into the actual curriculum. I’m willing to teach a sixth class just to give that to the kids. But it got shot down.”

In addition to teaching her daily classes, Ms. Burnett was the senior sponsor for the graduating senior class, advisor for the National Honors Society (NHS), and in a leadership position with Mr. Smythe, from Carter High School, in the Dance Teacher’s Association for their public school district. They worked together to make dance programs cohesive within the district and plan the all-county dance concert during the spring. Ms. Burnett was well-known throughout the district and local community and had a strong rapport with parents, faculty, and the community.

**Approaches to cultural relevance.** According to Ms. Burnett, her goal was to implement relevant content and a variety of teaching strategies that allowed students to develop and grow into strong dancers. She explained, “I guess my biggest thing, my goal is to get them [students] to see the potential in themselves that I see in them.” She provided a structured curriculum to enable students to learn and succeed. Ms. Burnett said, “I’m always pushing them to live up to their potential.” She pushed her students out of their comfort zones so they could go above and beyond where they were when they entered Denver as freshmen.

Ms. Burnett also included dance vocabulary and translation and explained how it might be useful in their future when out in public. She said when she learned French dance terms in high school it helped when she was out in public, “I started to see words at restaurants and notice them on the wall and I would be like, ‘Oh, I know what that word means.’” When translating to her students, she tried to use each term in a sentence with a real-life situation; not just an example of dance movement.

In addition to dance techniques and vocabulary terms, Ms. Burnett tried to influence real-life situations that might be useful to her students currently and in the future. She explained, “We try to prep them for the real world outside of here...so life skills, time management. In the real world you can be fired and no one is going to ask you any questions. No one is going to listen to your mom.”

Ms. Burnett also shared her own real life dance experiences growing up and gave examples of times when she had to deal with decisions she felt were unfair. She stated, “Okay, well life’s not fair. It’s not gonna be fair and you need to adjust to that; get them to understand so when they do experience those moments once they leave here it’s not completely foreign.” She tried to emphasize Denver High School, and the city they grew up in is just one area but outside, there is more to the world than their little bubble. She explained, “I talk to them a lot about being an artist and about being an African American artist and what that means and the road that was paved for me in order for me to be able to do that.” Ms. Burnett discussed race, skin color, and discrimination in the world and encouraged her students to go out and become the person they want to be without worrying about those issues. She told students, “Everywhere you go is not going to look like your backyard. So you need to be able to adjust to whatever your

surroundings are no matter where you go. I don't mean losing yourself to do it but learn how to be in the situation and how to get along.”

Ms. Burnett was extremely familiar with the community, as she grew up there and was still living in the area. She wanted to offer as much exposure to her students as she could because, as she stated,

That's what I want for my students and I know their families may not have been as privileged as my mom was with taking me; not that she was all that privileged either, but it was important to her to make sure that I was well-rounded and recognized and knew different people.

Therefore, to expand students' knowledge of dance and the local community, Ms. Burnett scheduled guest artists to visit the school and teach their specialty area of dance. She and the other dance teachers also took students to dance conferences and performances in and out-of-state. She was grateful for her high school dance program as well as the scholarship she received to a local university and wanted to give back to her students. Regarding the dance program at her high school Ms. Burnett noted,

It was a great thing that I may not have had to participate in had I not had it in my school. So, when I decided to become a teacher that was part of it because I want to be able to give back to the community that gave to me. I want to be able to ensure students can have access to a quality dance program without necessarily having to go to a studio and pay out money because that's not everyone's background. Everyone doesn't have those resources.

She was forever grateful for her free dance education and felt her students deserved the same services. She spent a lot of extra time before and after school at Denver High School but truly enjoyed it. She commented,

I enjoy this arena of being able to give dance and the love of dance and sharing dance technique and the things I have learned in my past experiences with students without them having to figure out how they are going to pay for it or how they are going to get there. It's all right here with them in the school they go to.

Finally, Ms. Burnett was confident students would use dance in many aspects of life; currently and in their future. She not only taught specific dance genres but also introduced her students to dance fitness; group fitness classes that included music such as step aerobics and Zumba. She felt it was important for students to be exposed to as many lifetime fitness activities as possible because many students at Denver High School were not interested in sport. She also familiarized them with Yoga and Pilates. Ms. Burnett explained, “I think physically they will take what they learned here to take other fitness classes like Zumba and Pilates.”

**Approaches to autonomy.** In addition to the modern class I observed, Ms. Burnett taught other genres of dance, choreography class, and company workshop for seniors. She explained as students progressed in skills and became more advanced dancers, she offered more independence during class. However, in terms of this particular modern class, it was mostly teacher-directed. She gave instructions and students followed. On occasion she asked them to get into groups and create a piece of movement. She said, “I give them a time limit and give them parameters and tell them to get in their groups...they usually hop right in and get it done.” In addition, she encouraged creativity and wanted students to be able to express themselves. She further explained, “It’s more giving them direction and criteria but they have creativity to guide them. They get the chance to use their own creativity to meet whatever the goal is at the time.” She explained she provided these activities in the hope her students’ internal motivation would increase. She was eager to watch them work together and finish the assignment.

In terms of creating groups, Ms. Burnett went about it two ways; sometimes she chose and other times students chose. She stated, “Generally, I let them choose their own; that is kind of contingent on the class.” She encouraged them to work and get along with everyone in class

but sometimes they really wanted to work with friends. Ms. Burnett wanted her students to use their creativity and work together instead of her always creating choreography. She said, “It gets them thinking and gets their creative juices flowing so that’s the positive side.” Choreographing their own pieces gave them independence and ownership.

Students were also given freedom to choose music when choreographing new dances for the spring show; provided options to lead class in warm-up exercises; and offered opportunities to choreograph. When asked how she felt about trying to create autonomy, Ms. Burnett commented, “I think it gives them a greater buy-in when it’s time to perform and it helps with their excitement level.” She added, “I think they have a greater appreciation when it’s their work versus work that I did. I think they take greater pride when it’s their own.”

**Approaches to competence.** In order to build confidence and competence in her students, Ms. Burnett worked one-on-one with students when necessary or broke them up into smaller groups so they had time to work with others in class. She clarified, “If I see someone is having a hard time with something I usually pull them aside and try to work that out with them.” During one modern technique lesson, I observed Ms. Burnett go over to a student and physically helped place her body into the right position. Sometimes, she said it was more efficient to pair students up with peers. She explained, “I’ll link them with someone else who is doing it correctly so they have something they can model after to help fix that problem.” When teaching she always tried to provide specific feedback to ensure students learned correctly. She explained, “Usually I give it [feedback] while they are performing. I’ll tell them who needs to do what or if they did a great job.” During technique across the floor Ms. Burnett stopped the music to explain what most students were doing wrong with their footwork; then, she

demonstrated the proper way to perform the sequence. Furthermore, when students worked in groups she encouraged peer assessment so they all worked together to make the choreography look like one precise piece. While explaining movements to lower level classes she always tried to deliver detailed instructions. She noted, “I’m probably more specific like your palm is up, your legs are tuned out so...more specific about what it is and placement of where it should be.”

**Approaches to relatedness.** Ms. Burnett felt her rapport with students was good overall but definitely could be based on each individual student as well. She stated, “I get along great with my students, it just depends on the kid.” One day before class I was sitting in the office when a student came to talk to Ms. Burnett before class. She wanted to discuss a personal problem so I left the space and allowed them to talk. Later, Ms. Burnett shared with me the student was leaving school because she was pregnant. Ms. Burnett explained how she connected and related with students and how sharing her personal life stories would sometimes help students get through difficult times. She commented, “I feel closer with some [students]; not necessarily all. For some it’s knowing their background, going through a tragedy with someone or if they lost someone and they shared that information with me.” As with many students, these girls were particularly open with their teachers, especially as they progressed through the program. Ms. Burnett said, “They tell us everything whether it’s great or anything that’s not so great. They always want to talk to us about whatever is going on and we listen. Sometimes we have students who latch on to us for whatever reason; it just depends on the kid.”

When students were assigned group projects, Ms. Burnett tried to introduce strategies to learn how to get along and work together. She mixed up partners and groups and encouraged the use of teamwork to get projects completed. She stated, “And then some groups are friends and

because they are friends they are almost toxic and don't work well together." Other times she grouped students together because they purposefully would not work with someone for reasons such as not getting along, assuming they would not get along, or pre-judging their peers. However, Ms. Burnett noticed when mixing up the groups, dynamics sometimes changed. She stated, "I have seen it happen where they gain a new perspective of someone they didn't necessarily see before." Additionally, she explained it was necessary to teach students how to make connections and relate to others in class. The primary way she promoted this behavior was dividing them into groups or partners. When she provided minimal criteria to creating movement she expected them to use problem-solving techniques to be successful. After they created movement, she asked them to perform for the class and their peers were expected to provide feedback. She reported, "I'll have everyone else say what they are doing right or what they are doing wrong and how can they tell. In the process I'll correct the student as well."

In addition to her positive rapport with most students, Ms. Burnett had a strong rapport with parents. Each semester she held a parent meeting to inform them of program expectations, rehearsals, and concert dates. She became closer with some parents more so than others, but generally knew all of them. She shared, "We get to know their families pretty well and the background of their families. I have a connection with some parents more than others; it just depends on the parent." She suggested these positive relationships were helpful when she asked for donations toward the program; it avoided conflict and confrontation when she held after-school rehearsals; and provided assistance when she needed extra help with fundraisers and events. Ms. Burnett kept communication open and constantly informed parents what was happening. She explained, "We have a parent meeting at the beginning of the school year every

year just to inform the parent what the plan is for the school year, if we are going on any trips, tell them concert dates, and then throughout the year we are always sending notes home.”

**Sport-based PE.** From her perspective, Ms. Burnett described the sport PE program as primarily sport-based with minimal to no variety. She said, “It’s very limited now. We need more variety in this PE program in general. I just think it needs to be expanded.” Ms. Burnett reiterated how students at Denver were definitely interested in moving, but not highly interested in a sport curriculum. Furthermore, she explained the content was not relevant to these students,

I don’t think it is [relevant]. I guess my concern is because we are not a sport-based school...it would be beneficial if we had those sports teams then that is more reinforcement like if I play this sport and we are doing it in gym it helps reinforce my skills. But, because kids come here for the arts I don’t really see it being too beneficial. They are planning to leave here to go dance or sing, play an instrument, or draw or take photography.

She continued to provide a variety of ideas to offer this unique population of students at Denver High. She said, “So what I think would be more beneficial to the students here would be more lifelong physical fitness activities they could take with them when they leave.” She added, “Maybe that is something they actually enjoy so they will continue to do. Or Yoga, those types of things people continue to do.”

Unfortunately, there was only one sport PE teacher at Denver, which limited opportunities and variety in general. However, when Ms. Burnett started at Denver there were four sport PE teachers. She explained, “When I came here there was more than one PE teacher so there was a PE class all eight hours of the day. I think there are only three in the schedule now.” Furthermore, the size of the gym was extremely small and was impossible to teach activities with a lot of students at once. Ms. Burnett, laughing, exclaimed, “The size of that gym, when I first saw it I was like, ‘You got to be kidding! Who was that made for?!’” Some classes



were comprised of 50-60 students who could not fit in the gym all at once. They had to be separated into the weight rooms and hallway, which caused other issues. She reported,

I don't care that the district says it's PE so there is no cap on gym. They are going to kill each other. They can't even turn around without hitting someone. And when he separates the class there is no supervision and that becomes an issue. Kids roaming the halls. Kids in the weight room who could potentially get hurt. It becomes an interruption. It's too much.

### **AA Females' Perspectives of Dance-Based PE**

Denver High School offered a variety of elective classes; however, it was most common for students to take classes within their major curriculum. I interviewed six junior females enrolled in a level two modern class at Denver: D'Asia, Dara, Alicia, Monica, Latasha, and Maria. They all completed their PE requirement as freshmen when they took the sport-based class with Mr. Decker. All six females were dance majors and according to the dance teachers, were placed in modern two for a second year based on level of ability. The majority of these students were extremely upset with the decision to repeat the course. However, they did not have a choice unless they changed their major. Those who seemed indifferent to this decision were happy to continue trying harder to improve.

**Cultural relevance.** For the most part the female students thought the dance class would be similar to the sport class because they would be working out, sweating, and getting daily PA. These assumptions were true; however, when asked a second time if the class met that expectation many said they indeed worked hard, sweat, and conditioned in both classes but dance was different for other reasons. D'Asia stated, "I thought it [dance] would be different. It is very different because I think it's a higher level than in elementary and middle school. You are on a different level. The dance class is different in a good way. I like it this way."

Monica, who eventually wanted to be a professional choreographer, explained, “I thought they would be different and they are. I like they are different because I probably wouldn’t like to do the same thing over and over.” Finally, Alicia added, “It’s different because you have more in common with people when you go inside the dance room and we could talk about stuff.” The students also expected they would get more out of dance; learn more material, work harder to be the best in the class, and move more than in the gym. Alicia commented, “I see I’m more motivated to dance. I’m more motivated because I want to be the best in the class.” Dara added, “I’d like to see myself work harder, push myself more, do better, and sweat a lot more. I really haven’t in years during PE. I didn’t challenge myself in gym.” Monica also had high hopes for better health and explained, “Losing weight because I’m moving more in dance than in gym.”

Content covered in dance included technical elements such as body placement and alignment; performance qualities and use of the stage; and teamwork, responsibility, and dedication. Alicia said, “She did a couple group projects so teamwork was needed. She teaches us stuff about the stage, like stage right and stage left.” Monica agreed, “Yeah, teamwork and learning how not to give up but keep pushing yourself. If you give up you don’t get nothing out of it so I learned how to push myself. I pushed myself and so did my teacher.”

Ms. Burnett also included dance history lessons, dance etiquette, and fitness elements. When asked about their favorite activities in class, the most popular replies were learning new dances and stretching. Dara reported, “I like we get to work together and learning the dances.” Latasha agreed, “I like when I learn new dances. I like when she tries to give us new things.” And Alicia added, “I like learning.” Furthermore, the number one thing they all agreed upon being the most positive thing they learned in class was teamwork; how to communicate and work

together. Alicia said, “I learned that other people learn different.” Latasha added, “Try to communicate because we are a team and we should work together.” Dara agreed, but felt more than teamwork, “To work together and how to try your best; do the best that you can even if you can’t do it.”

When asked if they were excited to attend dance class every day, there was a vast mix of feelings. Alicia and Maria felt the class was a bit too easy. Alicia explained, “For me, it’s not that the dance class is too easy, I just want to learn something new.” D’Asia somewhat agreed, “I think dance is easy because it’s a tenth grade class so it’s kinda easy. And I think I had it already.” Dara thought it was more motivating to attend dance PE versus sport PE. She noted, “Dance, because she goes over it and you will be like, ‘Oh, I can do it.’ So you will get up and do it. But if he [Mr. Decker] chose a sport we didn’t like, we would all just go into the weight room because we didn’t want to do it.” Latasha and Monica felt happy to attend class because they liked dancing in general and found it a positive part of their day. Monica commented, “Dance, because you have fun while you are doing stuff like losing weight and exercising and stuff. In gym it’s like you’re just there.”

In general, the girls felt the environment was welcoming and positive but a bit competitive at times. They agreed it could be competitive when they learned new dances and everyone wanted to compete to be in the front row. During one visit Alicia decided to remove her top layer of clothing after warm-up stretches. As she walked away to put her clothes in a corner, another girl took her spot in the front row near the mirror. Alicia did not appear happy with this girl’s decision. Additionally, a few girls thought it was intimidating at first but said it got easier as the semester continued and Ms. Burnett provided more instruction and feedback.

Although she felt it was a bit repetitious, D'Asia explained her feelings regarding the competitiveness and enjoyment in class. She reported, "It could be competitive because when she makes up dances everybody wants to be in the front so you have to make your way to the front so I would say competitive. But overall, I feel relaxed in the class and confident I can do the skills." Dara thought the music made it welcoming. Each day I visited, Ms. Burnett played upbeat, loud music to help build excitement in the lessons. Maria felt it was a positive environment where she felt good because she knew the dance moves.

The girls thought the dance content taught was relevant to their current and future lifestyles in several ways. They felt they could use dance stretches to stretch out before a workout; abdominal work and other conditioning skills; and specific dance techniques in future dance classes during or after high school. Each class period Ms. Burnett incorporated a lengthy stretch followed by a series of abdominal exercises. Students agreed they could use teamwork in a job setting. Dara noted, "Teamwork can be used for jobs and stuff." Additionally, the concept of trying your best and never giving up could be applied in life. Monica said, "Don't give up. I can use that in life, period."

These female students also found relevance in this class because they used what they learned to dance at social events such as homecoming and parties with friends. D'Asia commented, "I dance for fun anywhere, like social events, you like to have fun and dance around." Monica agreed, "I like to turn on music and choreograph. My one friend who was a cheerleader kinda likes to dance around. We dance at social events like parties." Alicia added, "I have dance friends and we dance together."

Alicia and Monica agreed both of their families like to dance at events as well. Alicia stated, “If we are at a family reunion or wedding we dance for fun.” She also shared everyone in her house dances for fun and makes up dances together; including her mom, which she thought was funny. Maria said, “Sometimes at holidays when we get together we dance for fun.” Monica added, “I think African-Americans like dancing. My family dances for fun at reunions and parties.” Additionally, when asked which was more meaningful, dance or sport, the students’ opinions leaned toward dance. Monica felt dance relieved stress and Dara learned a lot. Latasha said, “I don’t think I will continue to dance in the future but using the health and exercise lessons from there will be helpful, and sports, not really.”

Finally, when it came to pop culture such as television and music, they shared their excitement saying they enjoyed watching shows with dancing and agreed certain music makes them want to dance. Dara shared, “Sometimes the music pulls me in to dance because you get the beat in your head and find movement to go with that song; it kind of just all goes together, music and dance.” The others agreed music and dance fit well together in their lives. D’Asia replied, “Dance is very much so [relevant] because I watch *Bring It* and that is a dance show and ya know, music, music makes you dance.”

**Autonomy.** According to the female participants, they came into this dance class with the expectation to have fun, freedom, and use of expression. As mentioned above, they were excited to experience something different in dance compared to their past sport classes. D’Asia commented, “I expect to like dance since I’ll be doing it till I graduate. I expect to have fun and learn a lot.” She basically summed it up for the group during one of the FGI’s because they all had the same expectations. Ms. Burnett did a great job of providing these opportunities; she

played upbeat, fun music, provided opportunities for students to create their own choreography, offered choices in costumes, and planned a variety of daily agendas. Of course, there were days she had set plans and was not willing to change them, but would kindly offer time at the end of class for students to practice. Dara explained, “She gives us time to work on our pieces if we need it and ask.” While the girls enjoyed the freedom to create and opportunities to choose, they also agreed it did not bother them when they did not have independence. Monica said, “It doesn’t bother me. I like choices sometimes. I don’t like picking costumes because it’s stressful.” Maria added, “It doesn’t faze me,” referring to having or not having choices.

Students were given opportunities to work with their friends and choose groups, while other times Ms. Burnett assigns groups. Alicia commented, “Sometimes we choose but sometime when we are learning a new dance she will separate us into groups and we all combine our choreography together.” Although they enjoyed time with their friends, when it came time to get serious, they chose others to work with. Monica said, “It depends because sometimes when we have group stuff they need to be serious but they start playin’ around. When they are playin’ and I’m serious, I try and if they don’t keep tryin’ I go to another group.” Alicia agreed, “When I’m with Latasha she gets so lazy sometimes and Darnell plays too much. I just want to be serious and show her we can do it.” Latasha and Maria were happier when they were able to select people they knew and would work well together. Latasha stated, “I like working with the people I know.”

In addition to choosing peers to work with, they enjoyed time to be creative and show their talents. Monica explained, “She gives us a sheet and tells us to make something up and then we show it to her and if she likes it she will put it in the dance. And she will ask what we

want to do across the floor.” Dara added, “We do choreography for concerts. When we choreograph ourselves, we can choose our music and costume.” They said they truly enjoyed these opportunities and felt it added variety to the class. Monica noted, “I like that we all work together and we all have fun and it’s not boring. We don’t just sit there and do boring stuff. She asks us what we like to do and she puts things we like to do in our dances.” Latasha agreed, “Yeah, we get to choreograph our own dances and she gives us time to do that.” Alicia commented, “It’s like putting together your very own piece.” Dara was excited to have opportunities to express her feelings through her dances. She stated, “I like the dance class better because that’s just what I’m doing and I like to express myself while doing it...”

**Competence.** Overall the participants said they felt competent in dance class because they were able to successfully perform technical skills and choreography. Maria explained, “It’s stuff I can do and I’m confident I can do it.” D’Asia felt successful and confidently added, “Yeah, because I think I’m good at it.” They also described how Ms. Burnett gave exact instructions, specific details, counts to accompany movements, and a lot of demonstrations. Dara reported, “In most movements she gives specifics about where the hand, knee, leg, is supposed to be so we do it right.” D’Asia indicated, “She gives us counts and we follow the counts. And every other specific detail like hand movements and so on. We have to pay attention to those. And she shows us.” Latasha agreed, “She demonstrates it a lot!” After Ms. Burnett explained and demonstrated choreography, she allowed time for students to practice and review individually or with other classmates. Dara explained, “Sometimes she gives the exercise and we practice by ourselves for a few minutes and then she will play the music and we will do it by ourselves completely.” During one visit while she was teaching the piece for the concert, Ms.

Burnett told everyone to use whatever strategy worked best for them to feel successful. They could work alone, with a partner, in groups, with music, and/or without music; it was up to them to figure it out and show her a few minutes later.

While they performed exercises, she immediately provided feedback to help with students' success. D'Asia mentioned, "She will tell you, show you, and sometimes she will fix you so yeah, constructive criticism. She will give positive feedback too." Maria stated, "Yeah, she will go around the class and help people with anything they need." I observed Ms. Burnett provide constructive criticism and explain why it was incorrect. Then, she would physically take an arm or leg and put it in the proper placement.

When students did not feel successful at choreography or skills they were grateful for any feedback from other students or the teacher. Latasha explained, "In the dance class I feel like I can connect more because I have friends in it and they help me. My friends are very supportive." However, sometimes they felt they did not receive enough feedback to make corrections and were too shy to ask. Dara explained, "I think somebody could help me but I'm not forthcoming to ask for help and I don't know how people's reactions are going to be so I just step back and learn on my own." Luckily, with enough time to practice, whether individually or with others, students eventually caught on and their confidence grew.

**Relatedness.** Despite their resentment to repeat the course, the six female participants seemed to get along with Ms. Burnett; however, some were closer with her than others. But, when asked, they told me they all hoped to develop a good, positive relationship with her throughout the semester. They described her as a nice teacher who helped out a lot and cared for her students. Monica already felt close with Ms. Burnett and did not feel they could get much



closer. During my visits, I saw Monica often visit Ms. Burnett in her office before and in-between classes. Alicia felt Ms. Burnett was a private person who kept to herself. Alicia seemed apprehensive whenever Ms. Burnett asked her to come speak to her; even if it was a positive conversation. And Maria and Latasha wanted to get to know her more before they graduated. They felt they developed a cordial relationship with her early in the semester and could ask questions when necessary. Maria stated, “We say hi and bye and I ask questions when I need to ask questions.” Latasha’s response was similar, “We don’t really have a relationship. I talk to her if I need something or if I have a pain somewhere. She’s helpful about it but I feel closer to other teachers.” Conversely, Monica and Dara felt close to Ms. Burnett. Dara said, “She worries about me and cares. I ask her questions, she helps me a lot,” Monica stated, referring to the relationship she had with Ms. Burnett, “It’s very tight. I’m a teacher’s pet.” Dara added, “She is helpful and welcoming. We kind of have a little bit of a connection like I can go to her about stuff, tell her about stuff, like maybe health stuff and she will help me. I’m comfortable with her.” Alicia commented, “I guess we’re [she and Ms. Burnett] okay. She hasn’t said anything mean to me but it kind of hurt my feelings when she said I shouldn’t be moved up, which is okay. I can be on the same level as the 10th graders.”

Some characteristics used to describe their ideal teacher were nice, warm, positive, helpful, fun, supportive, caring, hard-working, and likes to do stuff. All the participants thought if Ms. Burnett got to know her students a bit more she would understand them which would help understand behaviors. In general, D’Asia thought it could affect students’ experiences in the classroom. She said, “Maybe people will pay more attention to teachers they know.” Latasha and Maria felt if they could connect with teachers their willingness to learn would grow as well

as their overall ability. Latasha admitted, “Ms. Burnett is a really nice teacher. She helps out a lot. She’s the type of person you can go to for anything. It doesn’t matter, personal, school, anything.” Maria added, “I have gotten to know her more each year I take a class with her. It gives me the opportunity to know how she teaches and how she looks at her students and cares about her students.”

Even though there was plenty of time to chat with peers and build relationships with those they did not know well, these six juniors were not particularly interested in forming connections with their grade ten peers. Dara noted, “I don’t communicate a lot so I stay to myself.” They agreed everyone was cordial to one another and got along when necessary but did not always create friendships. Alicia pointed out, “I’m fine with everybody. I don’t cause altercations. That is not me. Some people are friendly back.” On the other hand, Latasha explained, “Everyone in this class is not in the same grade so I don’t talk to the tenth graders but I talk to my eleventh graders because the tenth graders talk about us and say we don’t know how to dance so I don’t like that.”

Conversely, Maria stated, “I think we get to know each other better in a dance class where we actually do stuff and people actually made relationships in this class.” Laughing, Monica added, “We talk most of the time in class. That is why we are always in trouble.” Outside of dance class they said they were friendly to one another when they saw each other in the halls or in other classes. A few of the girls said they would speak to the sophomores while others stated they only spoke to their junior friends.

### **AA Females' Perspectives of Sport-Based PE**

At the time this data was collected, all 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students had already taken their PE requirement with Mr. Decker which was primarily a sport-based class. Although dance was considered for PE credit as well, they were required to take his class first, preferably as freshmen, before enrolling in any elective PE courses. As mentioned previously, current underclassmen were no longer required to take the sport-based PE class with Mr. Decker.

**Cultural relevance.** In sport PE students were highly graded on whether or not they changed clothes, participated, absences, and tardiness. Additionally, Mr. Decker expected students to write reflection papers on each unit. Maria summed up his expectations well. She replied

You couldn't be late. If you were tardy you got an F [for the day]. He wanted everyone to participate so you couldn't sit out. Then he had papers; after each sport you had to write a paper about it so if you were tardy or didn't change, the paper could bring your grade up.

A few girls said they did not mind attending the sport PE class because Mr. Decker introduced a variety of sports, dance, and fitness activities. Sports taught included floor hockey, flag football, volleyball, tennis, basketball, and soccer. Students were also introduced to free weights, cardio machines, and hip hop dance. Maria explained, "I didn't hate it. It was kind of good. I learned something and different sports I never heard of. I actually tried to do the sports." On the other hand, most of the female participants did not care for the class. Once again, Dara explained, "Sometimes I didn't want to do it. I knew it was for a grade so I stuck it out. I got bored with having it so many years and changing every day." Monica and D'Asia agreed they were not excited to go to class. D'Asia stated, "No, I wasn't really feeling the whole active thing."

Latasha added, “My least favorite was when we had to walk around the hallways and we were walking two or three times around to nowhere.”

Mr. Decker’s positive, caring, and warm personality made them feel comfortable coming to class. He demonstrated care by asking students about their lives outside of school and sharing information about his family. When Alicia was injured he asked how she was feeling and spoke to Monica often about her life. He was also described as very engaged in teaching students and helping them succeed. When asked what they would change about the class, Latasha exclaimed, “There were too many sports we played in there! We didn’t have to do all of it; just not so much!” Dara agreed, “I didn’t like doing some of those activities because some of them are hard. It was just too much. Too much!”

The gymnasium environment was described as positive, welcoming, and loud with a lot of activity. The girls felt it was welcoming because of the people in the class and the upbeat personality of Mr. Decker. Conversely, they unanimously agreed the environment was competitive but disputed whether or not it was fun or serious competition. Dara pointed out, “In some sports people were [competitive] and they would get really mad if they didn’t win or their team didn’t win.” Maria and Alicia agreed with the level of competition but claimed it was all in good fun. Maria stated, “You were competing against each other during games but we were having fun actually competing against each other. Some were more competitive but it was fine.”

Content taught in the sport PE class at Denver High School was varied. When asked if the activities were relevant to their current lives and future lifestyles, the participants claimed they would never use sports. Dara said, “Currently, the gym part no, none of the activities.” Maria agreed, “Not the gym part.” Additionally, Monique added, “No, I don’t need tennis or any

of those sports.” Avoiding the topic of sports all together, Alicia commented, “I liked the hip hop exercise video we did. Probably use the hip hop ya know, in the future.” D’Asia added she enjoyed the fitness component and said, “Maybe also when we worked out, oh, and the Yoga...today, tomorrow, and future,” referring to elements of class she would use.

When asked to describe the most positive thing they learned in sport PE they agreed teamwork could be used most. Maria enjoyed learning how to work together with others and noted, “Teamwork; when we got into groups and we had to help each other out with the sport.” Monica agreed, “Same thing, teamwork and work together because you can’t always do things by yourself, you might need help.” D’Asia added, “Yeah, teamwork can be used maybe while working in a job.”

I asked the girls to think about whether or not sports were culturally relevant to them personally in terms of friends, family, and community. Some thought sports could be used outside of school such as in social events like picnics or church. Monica commented, “Yeah, I can use sports with friends at picnics.” Latasha agreed, “Yeah, I can use sports with my family and stuff, the church picnic.” Alicia felt she might be able to teach others games at social events. She reported, “Yeah, probably if I wanted to hang out with people or more like a family reunion when people are looking for games and then I’ll know it.” However, when they thought about their close female friends, they did not tend to play sports; they enjoyed dancing. Maria explained, “Sports aren’t really meaningful. We don’t use sports. We dance at school dances and parties.” D’Asia enjoyed participating in both activities with her family. She replied, “Dance, we play around. There are a lot of fun activities at picnics and family reunions; both dance and sport.” In Alicia’s family, they all enjoyed dancing. She said, “Everyone in the house

dances. Both sisters dance. At home we make up dances for fun. Me and one sister turn on music for fun.” And she laughed when explaining her mom likes to join them sometimes. Monica visits her family out-of-state and reported, “They like dancing.” When it came to popular television shows and music, participants did not feel there was a connection to sports. D’Asia stated, “I don’t watch sports shows and music doesn’t matter for sports.” As mentioned previously, they enjoyed music and television shows that inspired them to dance.

When specifically asked if sport was relevant to the AA culture, there were mixed answers. D’Asia blatantly said, “I don’t think sport is relevant to the African American culture.” Alicia laughed and replied,

The most thing I can think of is when people say basketball they think we [African Americans] can all play basketball. Why does everyone think I can play basketball? Uh-uh (shakes her head no). It is not relevant to me but yeah, to my culture. They are like, ‘I’m gonna be in the NBA.’

The participants related specific sports to their culture; but not to them personally. Monica stated, “I think the two sports relevant to the African America culture are basketball and football.” Latasha said her family members were also interested in playing basketball and football but said she was not interested in sports like she was with dance. And Maria was a bit undecided. She replied, “Sports might [be relevant], I never thought about it. I know a lot of African American people dance and love it.”

Overall, the participants enjoyed learning to work with others to build teamwork skills as well as using the weight room and videos for hip hop and Yoga. However, they did not particularly care to participate in several sports. Dara explained it was beneficial to learn some elements, “Teamwork, how to work together, and cooperation are beneficial.” Furthermore, although Mr. Decker was kind, willing to help students, and thorough with his explanations and

demonstrations of sports, they felt bored after playing several times and looked for something more exciting or meaningful to their future. Alicia stated, “I didn’t like doing the same sport for so long.” Maria commented on the benefits, “Yeah, if you are interested in sports in your future or you want to be a coach. That’s not anything I want to do.”

**Autonomy.** For the most part, Mr. Decker tried to provide a variety of sports and activities, freedom, and choice in attempt to create an autonomous atmosphere where students felt comfortable being themselves and experiencing new activities. During all observations, Mr. Decker always had an exact plan, which he executed with detail and instruction and no leniency whatsoever. He implemented his specific, planned lessons and when students did not feel comfortable engaging in an activity, he did not force them. Latasha explained, “Some days we had the choice to go work out or exercise or do other things he had set up for us to choose from. He would give instructions but if you didn’t want to do that his way, he would work something out with you.” Monica added, “If you didn’t feel comfortable with something he wouldn’t force you to do it so you had the choice not to do it.”

When the sport or activity needed a lot of space he divided the class in half and sent one group to the weight room where they could choose their workout and the other group to the gym to play the chosen sport or game. Dara reported, “Yes, when he opened up the workout room he gave us a choice to go in there or to do the sport we were playing that week. Sometimes we couldn’t change instructions because we had to take tests, like physical tests and sometimes written tests.”

Alicia also commented, “If there were different activities to do we could choose from those activities or sometimes he would just separate us and tell us to go in the weight room.”

The girls agreed they enjoyed having choices when offered to them. Dara said, “I liked choices because if it was a sport I didn’t like playing or didn’t feel like doing or I didn’t know how to do it, I would decide to go in the weight room.” Although they were given opportunities to go into the weight room rather than participating in a sport, they desired more ownership in planning daily lessons. Dara noted, “For [sport] PE class they could let us choose the sports we want to do. It could be one person’s idea and the next week another person just to give us a week to choose.” However, D’Asia felt they were not given any choices. She stated, “Not really any choices. Having more of a choice. Students having more of a choice would make the class better.” Additionally, although there were a variety of sports introduced, and half the participants might be interested in playing as adults, they did not feel motivated to join adult leagues or try sports as adults as a result of this PE class. Alicia said she might try it but commented, “It has nothing to do with gym. Just something fun to try maybe.” Maria did not seem interested whatsoever and replied, “No, I wouldn’t because that’s just not me and sports.”

Although Mr. Decker utilized fitness videos, such as Yoga, and the weight room to facilitate positive PA habits in students and promote and encourage daily PA, he never actually instructed students exactly *how* to use the equipment. During numerous visits I watched students wander around the weight room aimlessly, pick up random free weights and not know what to do with them, ride the bike at a light speed for very few minutes, and sit on the bench of different machines unsure what to do with the weights and bars above their heads. He potentially had good intentions to motivate lifetime PA, but without correct instruction, those behaviors were not going to happen. Most of the participants expressed interest in doing Yoga and Zumba as they



got older but their motivation did not grow because of Mr. Decker's PE class. Dara mentioned, "I would go to Yoga. I think it has to do with the dance class and stretching. It's relaxing too."

When it came to choosing partners and creating groups, Mr. Decker created groups sometimes and other times allowed students to choose. Alicia remarked, "One time we would play boys against boys and girls against girls. And then sometimes he would pick the groups and other times we picked the groups." They did not seem to mind whether they played with their friends or other classmates as long as there was not any bickering and they could finish the game. Laughing, Alicia commented, "I couldn't play with my friends because they weren't taking it serious and I wanted to win."

**Competence.** As mentioned previously, at times the environment was competitive and other times it was merely fun competition. But in either case, these girls did not feel completely confident with sports or activities because they did not know how to do them or the sports were too difficult. Frustrated, Dara explained, "Some sports I didn't understand. Some sports I couldn't do. Some sports I didn't know how to do. And if I did ask someone I would still get lost so..." Latasha agreed, "Not all of them because it was kind of hard for me to do them." Monica added, "Some of them no, because I didn't understand how to play them." Monica also explained her reasons for disengaging in sport class but never in dance. She said, "I don't disengage in dance. But, during football I did because the boys kept takin' over and wouldn't let us play. I was gettin' irritated."

Although they were not competent performing skills of particular games, they felt they had a solid understanding of each sport. Latasha said, "He talked about it, showed us, he demonstrated." During each visit I watched as Mr. Decker gave specific details to rules of the

games, demonstrated each skill, and provided feedback as students practiced. Dara explained, “First he taught us, then we had time to do it by ourselves and then he would switch groups.” Unless he started class immediately with a game, students were given ample time to practice individually or with peers before playing. Maria said he always provided positive feedback and constructive criticism to help them. She explained, “Yes, always. And if we did it wrong he would try to help us do it better or do it the right way.” Latasha added, “Yes, he gave constructive criticism a lot. He would give positive feedback like, ‘keep going, you’re doing good, keep it up.’” Not only did Mr. Decker provide feedback, he was always willing to demonstrate and show students hands-on how to make corrections. For example, during a golf lesson he showed Alicia how to hold a club correctly. However, she was not interested in playing so she acted like she was injured and sat down shortly after he spent time with her.

Furthermore, when they were unsuccessful at skills, they tended to become less confident. Dara admitted feeling embarrassed, Alicia was upset because she thought she worked so hard and tried her best, and Latasha felt sad. Dara commented, “Being in front of the whole class and not being able to do the sport, I kinda felt embarrassed because I don’t know how to do the sport and everybody else does and I’m sitting here like a goof not knowing something. So yeah, I felt embarrassed.”

They did not blame these feelings on Mr. Decker. In fact, they felt he was a good teacher. But, had they been given prior instructions or introductions to the activity in past sport-based PE experiences, they would have felt more confident in this class. Dara and Monica wished someone had taught them previously and Alicia felt people were supposedly born with

the talent to play all sports. When asked what would help her feel more successful she said, “I really don’t know. I think that’s something you are born with.”

**Relatedness.** Because they were freshmen when they took the sport PE class they did not necessarily know everyone as they most likely came from all over the metro area from different middle schools. Two of the girls said they had friends in the class but the others did not know anyone. However, there was plenty of time to meet and get to know new people such as in the locker room while changing, before class started, during practice and game play, through teamwork and problem-solving, and when sitting out. Alicia stated, “We just did it on our own time. You could talk if you were sitting on the side while other people were playing.” Monica and Latasha used game-time to get to know others. Latasha explained, “While we played games we would help each other, talk to each other while playing games.” And Dara added, “In the morning sometimes he wouldn’t get there on time or he would give us time to talk before the bell rang so we were able to make friends.” During classes I observed female students walking in the halls together and chatting or riding stationary bikes, sharing videos on their phone and laughing together.

For the most part the participants agreed there were cordial, friendly relationships in class. D’Asia said, “We got along. And we got along outside of class and were friends. I’m still friends with all of them.” Maria agreed, “If I had class together or if I see them in the hallway I would say hi!” Overall, the connections and relationships in the sport class at Denver High School appeared positive. I watched students spend time with peers encouraging friendly competition during some team sports. For example, during a basketball lesson, they cheered one another on and gave high-fives when someone made a basket.

Mr. Decker was very friendly toward students, seemed to care about them, enthusiastic about PA, and informative about current health issues. He provided a variety of sports and activity which could have allowed for more freedom and choice and he implemented a lot of structure and detailed instructions. In general the participants described their relationships with Mr. Decker as a typical student-teacher relationship. Monica stated, “It was a regular relationship, like teacher-student. He was funny.” D’Asia commented, “We had a very good relationship. He’s very friendly. I wouldn’t discuss a family problem; it was just teacher-student.” Monica thought he was funny, Latasha enjoyed his healthy tips, and Alicia respected his teaching and activities. Latasha remarked, “Mr. Decker was really friendly. I was just really respectful of him.”

### **Conclusion**

**Cultural relevance.** According to the findings and observations, Ms. Burnett and her students were in agreement about content in the dance-based PE class. Ms. Burnett’s goal was to implement a culturally relevant curriculum full of variety, exposure, challenge, community, and relevance to personal culture. Female participants enjoyed the variety, felt more in common with others in class, learned more and worked harder, and often felt challenged. They also expressed enjoyment in learning about stage etiquette, dance history, teamwork and communication, and lifetime fitness. They said they could apply dance to their outside lives with friends and family, pop culture, and future lifestyles. Ms. Burnett exposed students to community events, familiarized them with outside dance companies, and created relationships with their families. Participants felt the environment was welcoming because of the connection to other students as well as the upbeat, fun music played daily by Ms. Burnett. She was very detailed when

delivering instruction, provided demonstrations for movements, and gave constant feedback for improvement and success. Those who had closer relationships with Ms. Burnett felt a good connection; however, others interviewed wished to become a bit more acquainted.

Similarly, in the sport-based PE class, Mr. Decker provided a positive learning environment that welcomed students, delivered detailed and specific instructions for skills and games, and demonstrated care for his students. The participants felt his warm personality created a welcoming environment and made them feel more comfortable around their competitive peers. Furthermore, they appreciated him asking about them and getting to know their backgrounds. However, they did not particularly care for the sport-based curriculum. Although he implemented other activities via DVD, such as hip hop dance and Yoga, they felt his class was repetitive and boring. They said there was a possibility to use sports at a social event such as a family picnic or church gathering, but not anywhere else. The participants said sports were not relevant to pop culture such as television and music and they would not use sports with their close female friends like they would dance. In relation to the AA culture, they stated it could be relevant to others in their culture, such as boys who wanted to play football or make it to the NBA, but not to them personally. Additionally, the participants thought the only reason people would use sports in their future was if they played on a college or pro team or became a coach. Overall, it was the content of sport versus dance that separated the participants' experiences. The dance content highly engaged female participants in much more profound ways than the sport content.

**Autonomy.** Ms. Burnett explained her rationale for implementing a semi-autonomous environment in this modern dance class. She wanted to give students something to look forward

to as they progressed in the program; therefore, this class was a bit more teacher-directed. However, she still provided choice, allowed independence, encouraged creativity and expression, and wanted students to feel ownership over choreography. At this level, she provided minimal guidance and direction to prompt initial motivation and then hoped students would participate at their own will. Participants stated they did not mind when Ms. Burnett directed the class but also enjoyed the opportunities to create dances, express feelings through movement, learn through their best strategies such as solo, with a partner, or group, and enjoyed having fun. Unfortunately, given all the activities in sport PE, students were not given much freedom to choose or create. They wished they had more ownership in creating lessons and said there was no motivation to participate in this class.

**Competence.** Through observations, it appeared Ms. Burnett wanted her students to be successful, competent dancers. She offered adequate feedback and solutions to make improvements, worked one-on-one with students who were struggling, and encouraged group work and peer-assessment. She complimented students as they performed movements correctly as well as physically maneuvered bodies for correct placement and alignment. Students often felt successful in her class because of her help and feedback. They were confident with technique and choreography and enjoyed the extra time given to practice. Participants explained how their friends helped one another and they really felt they had a lot of support, which made them confident as well. Although Mr. Decker provided detailed instruction, positive and constructive feedback, and worked one-on-one with participants, they did not feel competent in sport PE. They explained their lack of confidence was due to not understanding the skill or sport, feeling it was too difficult to perform, and the overall competitive nature of the games. I

watched several female students disengage because male students dominated or took over the playing field leaving females to sit along the wall or wander through the hallways. During observations I watched Mr. Decker try to help all students but a lot of the females chose to sit on the sidelines and not participate.

**Relatedness.** For the most part Ms. Burnett had a good rapport with her students and as mentioned previously, was closer to some than others. She explained how it was dependent on each individual and how much they shared with her. She felt comfortable sharing some stories about herself which helped students get to know her, but other times she was described as a very private person. Additionally, she had a solid rapport with parents and the community. Participants explained she was a caring teacher to whom they could go if they needed help. Ms. Burnett also encouraged peer relationships to develop during class. She wanted them to communicate, use teamwork when creating dances, and cooperate with one another. Participants thought the overall relationships in class were cordial. They tended to hang out with students in their own grade. However, they also explained they had a lot in common with one another so they got along better than in other classes, such as sport PE. Fortunately, in sport PE, Mr. Decker tried to develop close relationships with his students. He was a friendly and outgoing teacher who spoke to students often and shared personal stories about his life. Although they really liked Mr. Decker, participants interviewed explained their relationship as very typical student-teacher. In other words, they did not feel they would approach him with personal problems but he was nice and friendly otherwise. They explained there was plenty of time to get to know their peers and develop friendships; however, it was not the same feeling as with the peers in dance.

### **Huntington High School**

Huntington High School was a large, multi-level school located in a suburban, residential area surrounded by plenty of neighborhoods, businesses, and restaurants. Huntington was home to almost 1200 students who lived within the state defined district boundaries. Those interested in pursuing college-level studies while still in high school had the opportunity to enroll in a four-year International Baccalaureate (IB) Programme. The IB Programme was unique to Huntington because they were the only high school in the district hosting this program and has been since 2013.

Although Huntington was located in a well-known “safe” neighborhood, all except one door remained locked throughout the school day. It was necessary for all visitors to check in with security upon arrival and receive a visitor pass in order to enter the building. Because I visited frequently within a few months, I had my picture taken in the front office and received a temporary staff identification card. Huntington’s daily class schedule was from 7:40 A.M. until 2:35 P.M. unless students were involved in extracurricular activities such as athletics, marching band, or other specialized clubs.

### **Dance-based PE**

Dance classes at Huntington were elective courses as well as PE credit toward graduation. However, regardless if students took dance, they were required to take the mandatory freshman sport-based PE class for credit in order to graduate. All PE classes were 80 minutes in length with five minutes to change before and after class. Dance-based PE was held in the dance studio located conveniently next to the auditorium and dressing rooms on the



basement level of the school. The class I observed was level 1B; students enrolled were beginner level dancers or students who also took class 1A the prior semester.

The dance studio was awkwardly shaped which made it challenging at times for proper spacing, especially with a lot of students in the room. The floor was hardwood and there was a mirror along the front wall of the room. At the far end of the mirror was a portable stand with a sound system, including CD's and iPod connectors. The instructor usually set up her laptop on a stand next to the sound system where she took attendance and entered grades when students were being assessed. There were two doors to enter and exit but the instructor preferred students only used the one at the front of the room. There were ballet barres attached to the wall between the two doors and portable barres in the back of the room. An equipment closet was located in one corner and contained a television and DVD player, Yoga mats, BOSU, stability balls, and dumbbells. Along the wall opposite the ballet barres was a white board where the instructor wrote rehearsal and performance schedules, dance terminology, and other important information. She also hung inspirational dance posters and college dance program information along that wall and in the hallway. Just outside the dance studio was a bulletin board full of audition dates and upcoming dance events as well as a showcase with pictures of the dance company; higher level dancers in the program. Ms. Banker's office was located just around the corner from the studio and the dressing rooms were down the hall. The dressing rooms were used primarily by dance students, unless drama classes were rehearsing for a play.

Students entered the studio in dance attire and immediately began warming up their muscles by doing jumping jacks, leg swings, or light stretches. As students entered, Ms. Banker greeted them and took attendance. Many times I witnessed students from the previous class stay

back to ask questions or students from other classes came down to chat. Meanwhile, the 1B class continued to warm up. Other times she had individual conversations with students as they entered the room for class or with those who were absent the previous class. I observed her openly converse with students and make herself available to talk with students at all times.

As students entered the room they seemed to wander over to their friends and have conversations while warming up. At first it was difficult to recognize cliques but eventually I caught on. The outgoing, older girls migrated toward the front of the room, giggling and chatting with one another while the quieter, younger girls sat near one another and watched the others goof around. The majority of the class was AA; however the cliques were not always separated by race but more by age and personality. There was one AA boy in class who was enthusiastic, happy, and friendly with all the girls. Regardless of race or gender, students happily helped one another throughout the semester.

Ms. Banker appeared to be sincere, kind, and genuine toward her students. She was often described as “mom-like” and appeared to take care of her students as any mother would. She had a soft voice, warm smile, and welcoming personality. It was no secret students felt comfortable and welcomed as well as enjoyed hanging out in her studio. However, Ms. Banker was strict about policies in her classroom such as appropriate appearance, time management, and responsibility. She enforced discipline yet was light-hearted with her students. They demonstrated respect for her by following her policies and explained they did not want to let her down as they had mutual respect for her. Ms. Banker frowned upon misconduct and provided appropriate consequences when deserved.

Throughout the semester I observed Ms. Banker teach basic concepts and movements of dance. In this class she taught primarily ballet and modern dance with proper techniques for both genres. She was very explicit when she taught the position of the body from every small head tilt to the exact direction of the arm and legs. Ms. Banker taught combinations in the center of the floor as well as combinations that traveled from one end of the room to the next using all the space. She taught concepts such as spatial awareness; personal and general space and what it means when dancing. She taught each combination with counts and encouraged students to practice it to feel comfortable before turning on music. Sometimes she challenged students to create their own movements, add on to already taught choreography, or use improvisation as they moved across the floor. Students were expected to cooperate, work as a team, and create a final performance piece to be in the show at the end of the semester. Ms. Banker did not tolerate petty behaviors in class. If she noticed two students not getting along, she would purposely group them together to work out their issues.

Students were graded on participation, dance etiquette, homework assignments, daily journal entries, and written concert reviews. When required to write concert reviews they were given detailed rubrics to follow and a list of shows they could choose from to conduct the review. Their final exam consisted of the entire dance program participating in a culminating event at the end of the semester; the dance concert. The dance concert was open to the public and always a sellout.

The final performance for dance 1B was a collaborative piece between the instructor and students. First, Ms. Banker found a meaningful story and printed it out. Then, she divided up different parts of the story into smaller, individual sections and handed out small sections to

groups of three or four students to analyze. Verbally, each group shared their interpretation of the section they read. Next, she turned on a pretty but strong piece of music for the students and asked them to create movement to tell their section of the story. Eventually the entire class learned each groups choreography and Ms. Banker pieced it together with formations, partner work, lifts, transitions, effects, and costumes. The final performance portrayed a story about everyday struggles people face in life. Many students talked about how they connected to the theme of the dance and how they could show their emotions through movement. They were extremely proud of their ability to be able to tell such a serious and meaningful story through dance.

Students seemed to genuinely enjoy participating in this class. During the entire course of the semester I believe I only observed a handful, or less, of students sit out. They always entered the studio enthusiastically chatting and ready to move. Students had conversations with me, Ms. Banker, and among themselves. They appeared eager to ask questions, help one another, and learn material they might have missed the class before. Typically they warmed up as a whole and then worked on choreography in groups. During group work there were a few dominant students who tended to share ideas more than others. However, when less-dominant students shared, everyone respectfully listened. For example, one female foreign-exchange student, who was extremely quiet, created a powerful section of the final performance piece and all the students cheered her on when she taught it. They were very open to new ideas. Respect in Ms. Banker's class was mandatory. She respected her students and in turn, students demonstrated respect and appreciation toward her. Furthermore, they appeared to have fun engaging in this positive environment!

I enjoyed watching students use their creativity to construct their dance about life struggles. Ms. Banker taught them how to present a serious topic through movement of the body and emotional expression. They learned how to construct movements with the music whether it was hard-hitting, soft, fast, or slow. Ms. Banker taught them how to use the stage, proper spacing, and performance qualities. They were well-rehearsed at the end of the semester and confident in their performance ability for the final dance concert.

### **Sport-based PE**

Sport-based PE classes were offered five days per week at Huntington High School by four different teachers. Each teacher was also assigned to teach health, weight-training, or Yoga and Pilates. Three of the sport PE teachers were varsity sport coaches either at Huntington or another school in the district. Sport-based classes were 80 minutes with five minutes changing time before and after class activities. Classes were held in the main gym, pool, weight room, and fitness room located on the basement level of the school; down the hall from the dance studio. Participants interviewed for this study took the required freshmen PE class primarily with Mr. Bender. Therefore, I observed his class and occasionally dropped in to observe the others for a clearer picture of the entire PE program.

The gym was a large, bright, open space with eight basketball nets and a wall lined with soccer nets. There were two curtains that could be used to section off the gym into three separate spaces when multiple classes occurred during the same hour. Along the back wall there was one set of bleachers and another set the wall opposite. At the end of the bleachers, along the back wall, were doors leading outside which were propped open on warmer days to let the fresh air and sunshine inside. Music often played from the sound system located near one mid-sized

equipment closet at the main entrance. Equipment for daily lessons was typically pulled out into the gym in advance. The boy's locker room was attached to the gym making it convenient for the boys as they came in to change. However, the girl's locker room was across the hall and remained locked when not in use; often causing a line-up of girls waiting for a teacher to let them in to change. The girl's locker room, along with a second boy's locker room, was attached to the pool, which was helpful when they had swimming to prevent students from the embarrassment of passing through the hall in bathing suits.

The weight room and pool were located directly across from the gym and the fitness room was down the hall. The weight room was fairly large with updated equipment and a sound system. There were two pools; the state standard size for swim team competitions and a dive pool which is substantially deeper.

Prior to activity, students were expected to come into the gym and sit in squads for attendance and announcements. After each teacher finished, students were sent to the locker room to change. When they returned to the gym, Mr. Bender's class usually ran a number of laps with the advanced team sports class. While students ran, teachers played music, encouraged students to keep running, and set up equipment for their lessons. Students tended to gather near friends so they could chat during their run; however, many chose to walk. Additionally, I observed several females skipping or dancing around the gym instead of running. Usually Mr. Bender would yell at them to keep running. Also, when too much chatting was happening and not enough running, Mr. Bender usually shouted over the music to pick up the pace. After the attempted run, students formed a circle and a few students called out stretches as students from both classes followed along. Occasionally, Mr. Bender verbally led stretches; but did not

demonstrate. Then, the two classes would separate to participate in their own activities. However, I observed several days when the teachers combined their lessons and had students play together.

Mr. Bender's required class had approximately 30 students; 12 AA females. Content consisted of swimming, basketball, soccer, floor hockey, volleyball, and dodge ball. He used a direct-instructional approach to teaching. He explained the sport for the day or week, provided general rules, arranged teams, and started game-play. He rarely demonstrated skill techniques but often asked students to model skills. Mr. Bender was not very enthusiastic when teaching and never participated in activities during class. Over the course of the semester I also observed several "free" days. These free days consisted of two sports and dodge ball set up around the gym and students "choosing" which game they wanted to play. Students would spread out and begin playing. Slowly, as minutes passed, I watched a few AA female students wander around the gymnasium, arms folded, searching for something else to do. A few females sat against the bleachers looking at their phones with friends. Others disappeared into the hallway or weight room. There were five AA females in the advanced sport class; each played on a varsity sport at Huntington. Although they were considered skilled or athletic, I witnessed these girls portraying the same behaviors as other females in Mr. Bender's class. During one game of dodge ball I observed a group of male students harass an AA female. Her friend tried to pull her away to avoid confrontation but the female kept yelling back at the males. Eventually, the argument died down and the two females walked around the gym the remainder of class. Because I was unsure where Mr. Bender was located at the time of the altercation, I am sure he was unaware of the confrontation, therefore, did not intervene. For the most part, I did not see Mr. Bender have one-

on-one conversations with students unless they approached him about sitting out, absences, or needing ice for an injury.

On several occasions, Mr. Bender had conversations with me because he was concerned about why students do not participate and how he is “at a loss for what to do with these kids”, as he put it. He seemed to blame students for their lack of interest, motivation, or participation but did not seem to evaluate the program itself. He explicitly told me he noticed many students stood around or moved about the playing area pretending to be active but he did not see anything wrong with his teaching strategies. He looked to me for advice and asked what I saw as successful in other school PE programs. Because I was there as a guest to observe and collect data, not advise, I tried to encourage him to think about other options. Unfortunately, he could not see the bigger picture and stuck to the old-school approach he had always known.

### **Dance Teachers’ Perspectives of PE Environments**

**Dance-based PE environment.** When I asked Ms. Banker to share her teaching philosophy and how she viewed the dance PE program at Huntington, she explained her classroom environment was used to stimulate thought process about life and students’ approaches to education. She explained, “I use dance as a vehicle to teach discipline, to teach other life values.” She pointed out how she taught proper dance technique and encouraged creativity but wanted to reach students in more ways than just dance. She often took class time to teach life lessons and draw connections between high school and the future. She used being late for class as an example to explain how employers do not care why you are late. She stated, “...really trying to get the kids to think beyond here and now and get them to be more forward thinking,” referring to students thinking about their futures. Ms. Banker felt her role in the



school was one of many. She took care of administrative work, planning concerts and field trips, creating fundraising ideas, purchasing costumes, teaching classes, and most importantly, caring about students. She exclaimed, “People don’t realize how much I do!”

**Approaches to cultural relevance.** Ms. Banker described her dance studio as a safe place with smaller class sizes, an intimate environment where students could be themselves and not worry about being judged by what they were wearing or what they looked like. Although all students had the opportunity to enroll in dance, Ms. Banker’s classes tended to be mostly females. She said, “I think for the most part with it being girls we have a different type of connection and cause I don’t attract the football players; these kids can come over here and relax a little and not worry about the little extra fat around their midsection or if their hair is not done.”

Ms. Banker assured me her classes were not only safe and comfortable but also relevant to students’ current and future lives. She explained the importance of getting to know what activities students did outside of school and ways to make connections during class. Ms. Banker found out which students cheered, played basketball, or took dance classes after school and described ways to help each student improve in different areas. She clarified, “I know making a connection helps the relationship and I know they are involved in things outside of here and I value them and want to help. That keeps their interest.” She also familiarized herself with students’ family backgrounds by asking questions and making it a point to have side conversations with individuals. She commented, “When you start to talk to them a little bit, not just about the subject [dance], they will open up to you because they recognize you are actually interested beyond that. It builds trust. I’m interested in knowing about them.”

Ms. Banker talked about ways students connect their home lives, as well as other life experiences, with movement. She said sometimes students do not say much about home or family because parents typically prefer them not to tell teachers about their home lives. She commented the lack of communication about personal issues has left many students keeping things inside. She explained how dance class really helped students open up, “I think emotions are really tied to movement and you can’t escape it.” She described how this class made personal experiences real and ways she challenged students to choreograph about sensitive issues such as race, family dynamics, and religion. Ms. Banker said she enjoyed watching students grow. They grew in terms of getting to know other students’ backgrounds and making new friends; being able to expand their knowledge of other cultures; and learning how to express these new findings through movement.

Ms. Banker said she felt confident she provided a strong sense of culture in the dance studio. I listened while she encouraged students to spend time at a friend’s house; have dinner with them and learn about family traditions. She wanted students to gain knowledge on more than their own culture explaining they will encounter much more in the real world. She asked them to share what they learned either verbally or through movement. Because of these cultural lessons and care for students she described the strong rapport she had with them; especially if they took her classes more than one semester. In terms of her connection with students of the same or different cultural background as herself she replied,

I can’t prove that some are not connected to me because of my race but I definitely think the makeup of my classroom is certainly influenced by my race. When I first started teaching here I would say my program represented a good amount of 13% [AA]. Now it [AA population] represents 90% of my class.

Ms. Banker believed she connected her class with the concept of a community and what is involved within a community. This idea was the premise of the students' dance for the final performance. She encouraged students to get to know about the area they live and people they are surrounded by. She said, "I have a huge issue with people feeling like they are culturally competent when they don't even immerse themselves at all in the culture of the other person. We have a diverse community out here."

In addition to culturally relevant content, Ms. Banker implied her overall content was relevant to students because she taught proper warm-up skills to do before PA, injury prevention, lifetime PA such as Pilates and free weights, and overall healthy living. She wanted her students to take something away from her class. Aside from caring about their personal lives, families, and extracurricular activities, she cared about a healthy lifestyle after high school. She encouraged about being on time, demonstrating respect, and staying active. She knew they were not all going to become professional dancers. She commented, "A lot of people are starting to do Zumba now because they don't want the traditional step aerobics so they are getting into different dance types; Jazzercise is making a comeback." She encouraged her students to look at their future and the many fun activities out there for them to get involved. She incorporated Pilates and Yoga and insisted on offering a variety of dance genres students seemed interested in learning. Some of them wanted to include Zumba into class so Ms. Banker agreed. She really wanted the best for all of them and stated, "Give them choice from the get go. Basically, offering choice up front. We could have what's best for kids by giving them choice and options."

**Approaches to autonomy.** As stated in the last paragraph, Miss Banker believed in creating an autonomous environment where students were given freedom to make choices, demonstrate self-expression through movement, and gain ownership of their choreography in hopes to motivate and encourage students' maximum participation. She suggested, "They have to become independent later so you don't want to restrict all of their choices now. You want to see what they're thinking. Give kids the freedom to create." When choreographing dances she wanted her students to create the physical movements. She explained, "I don't give them much. I puzzle it [choreography] together but I don't create it." When it came to working with partners and groups, at times Ms. Banker allowed students to choose. However, she encouraged them to work with peers they did not know well and other times she grouped them by counting off or planning in advance. Students were also given the opportunity to lead warm-up routines or choose different daily warm-ups. I observed several seniors ask to lead a warm-up they learned elsewhere or created themselves. The rest of the class followed respectfully. When students entered the studio they could choose to warm up their bodies the way they felt best. Also, at times when Ms. Banker was busy, I witness a few confident and competent students who were interested in leading warm-up exercises and would begin without any instruction. Ms. Banker said, "There have been times I am so proud of when I walk out the door to talk to someone or anything like that and they will continue on and it's usually someone like Sandy or Noretta; someone who has the confidence to do it."

Ms. Banker felt it was necessary for her students to work together and build relationships. She commented, "A lot of them spend so much time on cell phones that any face-to-face interaction is always good." When working together she felt they learned teamwork,

cooperation, and how to compromise in order to get a job done. She explained different personalities, attitudes, and roles each student adopted in groups. She laughed, “There are absolutely negative behaviors at times but when you have to produce and create, everyone will eventually pull together; especially when there is a grade or when they know they have to perform in front of other people.”

**Approaches to competence.** Ms. Banker appeared to care about her students’ progress and success because when I watched her teach new choreography she carefully broke down movements and chunked material together using a part-to-whole approach. Then, she reviewed the material over and over again. She used numerous teaching strategies to promote success such as verbal cues, demonstrations, practice time, peer-teaching, and assessment. But when asked how she ensured students felt competent with skills, she replied, “I think just repetition; practice.” Later she added, “Some kids feel confident once the dance is all done and it’s starting to flow together; and repetition.”

I also listened to Ms. Banker provide constant feedback which consisted of positive and encouraging comments as well as constructive criticism. Furthermore, she taught her students how to assess one another and how to do it with respect as to not offend someone. She clarified, “Once they have done those two things, they have taught and learned; they should be able to tell each other if they are doing something incorrect and for the most part they have been able to.” Finally, she encouraged the use of videos so students could watch themselves at home and self-assess in order to make improvements. Particularly closer to their final performance I visited classes where students recorded themselves, watched the video, and critiqued the dance. She explained, “I use visualization tools for self-assessing. Those are very helpful.”

**Approaches to relatedness.** As mentioned earlier, Ms. Banker encouraged group or partner work and varied ways in which they were paired. She felt it was beneficial for students to work in groups and said, “Cooperative learning is a good skill. Teamwork! We have kids coming from families where there is only one child so having a group or team situation is about as close as they get to having a sibling and having to cooperate.” In addition to encouraging teamwork and cooperation, students found new friendships in her class. She noted, “Students have actually told me that they would not have met certain people if it wasn’t for being in this class.” She felt she offered a lot of freedom overall and that may have encouraged relationships to build as well. She commented, “Maybe it’s the freedom. Maybe it’s the ability to get to know other kids. This generation is lacking relationships. It could be those connections.” Furthermore, Ms. Banker attempted to develop strong relationships with students. She said, “I make it a point to ask kids random questions like ‘how are they doing or are you going on vacation.’ I certainly feel a connection.”

**Sport-based PE.** Ms. Banker recalled her experiences in sport-based PE and compared it to the current classes at Huntington. She commented, “I think we do a much better job than what I recall in high school.” She felt the staff kept up-to-date on injury prevention and proper warm-up techniques. And, although she did not mention team sports, she seemed against swimming as it was included in the required sport PE class. She took the side of the students and wondered, “Why can’t we choose to do swim outside of school?” But overall, Ms. Banker did not have a lot to say about the sport PE classes. She was indifferent as whether or not the content was culturally relevant and gave examples of different sports that appealed to different cultures such as floor hockey and swimming. She thought the White children would enjoy those

more. However, she stated, “Kids out here [in the suburbs] have far more access to swimming pools than kids in the inner-city, so you’re gonna have White children who are able to swim sooner than Black children are able to.”

As a sports mom, Ms. Banker felt all PA was relevant and beneficial to students. She explained,

So I’m a sports mom (pause) just being physical in the same way dance builds esteem and gives students physical awareness and once you are physically aware you get to start looking at yourself differently. In PE [sport], getting them to move, getting them to develop a skill in some way but ultimately learning how to just take time out for yourself whether it’s to go out and play a sport. And sport can help you lose weight too or it could be relaxation. Life skills, physical fitness, I think it’s all very important.

She also mentioned how being physically active in sports, or dance, could benefit students as adults. She said, “You just never know how something can connect you to other people and that’s what sports, dance...that’s what it’s all about.”

### **AA Females’ Perspectives of Dance-based PE**

Huntington High School offered a variety of elective classes in PE and other departments such as foreign language classes, art, orchestra, photography, and acting. I interviewed seven females at Huntington who ranged from grades 10-12; Harmonie, Hillary, Jordan, Lauralie, Chantel, Giselle, and Monique. They all enrolled in dance as an elective although they already received PE credit in the required freshman, sport-based PE class. All seven girls were active growing up. Each of them took dance class along with participating in other activities such as gymnastics, ice skating, soccer, basketball, and cheerleading.

**Cultural relevance.** In the first interview I asked the participants if they thought the dance-based PE class would be similar or different than the sport-based PE class. They unanimously agreed dance-based PE would be different because of several reasons such as their

enjoyment of dance, it was more motivating, the teacher cared about students and got to know them, and everyone in class had a common interest. Hillary reported, “I actually like dance and I like the way she [the teacher] gets us moving with music. But maybe it’s because I like this class better and I take dance more serious than I did gym.” When I followed up with the same question during a later round of interviews, the females agreed it was tremendously different than their past experiences in PE because they participated and learned more material, were motivated to improve and expand technique, and found it more enjoyable overall. Harmonie stated,

I knew it was going to be different. It was different because the warm-ups are different. Ms. B makes sure you get your heart rate up and you stretch, makes sure you are prepared to do the work and you do not get injured. In sports, we didn’t do a warm-up. Maybe we would do like five push-ups and that would be it. If you can’t do those five push-ups, they don’t push you at all. That’s it. Ms. B would encourage you to do 100 push-ups (laughs), well no but, I liked the change in the dance class because you are getting pushed to do what you can do.

The participants agreed sport PE was repetitive and they have been introduced to the same sports and activities since grade school. Giselle commented, “I like this dance class better because there’s more you can do. For gym it’s just gonna be the same sports over and over again that we’ve been doing since elementary school and for dance we can change the choreography.” They said they enjoyed the challenge and constant new material dance had to offer at Huntington.

Throughout the semester Ms. Banker covered typical dance content such as, dance concepts, vocabulary, and performance qualities. She also focused on injury prevention and nutrition, proper technique, and life-long healthy lifestyles. Jordan indicated, Besides dance, she talks about nutrition. She’s informing us of stuff that is not really good to be putting into your



body whether you're a dancer or not. She also does a lot of Pilates type stuff to help strengthen us." Monique added, "The things we are learning in class can definitely help your future...and I have learned time management with this class, getting to class on time so you can be ready to jump in." When asked how Ms. Banker made content relevant to their lives, Lauralie replied, "She's constantly making real-life applications, always relating things back to why we need it and about working with each other; she gives us a lot of lessons. It's [content] definitely connected to us; absolutely she considers us."

The participants seemed to agree the most interesting component included throughout the semester came from Ms. Banker's true devotion and care for her students; their future. She reiterated the importance of grades, responsibility, time management, jobs, and college. Jordan explained,

She teaches about responsibility. Especially to her seniors because she will ask how we are going to be on our own if we aren't responsible and she knows we are going to be on our own so we need to learn discipline and learn to do our best. I think everything she teaches, not just dance, but when she gives her lectures, it will help in the future. Especially working with others and how to. Being responsible and having discipline. She says everyone needs to follow the rules instead of coming up with their own rules just because they feel that's how it should be or how it should be done. We know what she's saying is right. She says we need to follow directions and do it correctly.

Harmony added,

I agree with Jordan. Ms. B is a cool person in general and she teaches about college. Last semester she pulled me to the side and we looked at different colleges on her laptop cause she knows I'm in honors and knows all my grades. I have amazing grades so she was looking at different colleges for honors and which are better for me.

Not only were students thankful for all they learned aside from dance, they were excited to come to class. Chantel said, "I get excited when I come to dance because I get away from my other classes, like the pressure of the other classes, like French and stuff like that." Monique

agreeably added, “I really enjoy this class. I look forward to coming to it.” Students expressed that they wanted to participate in daily activities knowing each day would be novel and exciting. Chantel also explained, “I like how when we walk into the dance studio how we feel so free after sitting in your chair all day and you walk into the dance studio and you are finally able to stand up and just dance.” Overall, based on their feedback and my observations, students truly enjoyed coming to this dance-based PE class, learning from and having a relationship with the teacher, and found relevance to their current and future lives.

Furthermore, most participants said dance was relevant to their AA culture because they felt connected to music and dance as AA’s and explained the tradition of dancing at most family events. Giselle commented on her AA culture, “My family is African and we are always dancing like whenever we go to functions there is always music playing at any party we go to and people are dancing. It’s an uplifting thing. I’ve grown up with it.” Monique expressed her family’s connection to dance and music as well. She added, “Definitely, family reunions and stuff we turn on music and everybody lines up and dances. It doesn’t matter how old you are, everybody’s dancing; all ages.” Hillary expressed her love for dance as well as the connection to the AA culture. She stated,

I like dance and you are constantly moving. It’s a good way to let out energy...To my culture, back in our ancestor’s day, they used dance a lot when they were having hard times to express that but even every day. It keeps our culture going, and depends on what dance you do, gives us a sense of culture in our everyday life while we can still have fun. It’s kind of like bringing the old generations and our generation together.

About the relevance of dance, Lauralie added,

I think it’s very relevant to me because the African culture is very beautiful, very strong and I feel like so is dance. When I think of an African American female I think of a strong woman. I consider African Americans to be really rhythmic so when I’m here I get to express that part of me and I think that’s really cool.

Finally, participants described how dance was relevant to pop culture, such as television and radio, and their personal PA backgrounds, including church. Those who watched television watched popular dance shows such as *So You Think You Can Dance* and *Bring It On*. Furthermore, Chantel said, “I like songs that make me want to dance. My dad has a lot of music on his computer so a lot is dance music. And when we watched the Super Bowl, the entire halftime performance, we all watched the backup dancers and how the singers could dance.”

Monique added, “A lot of songs that are out now, there’s a dance that goes with it and the music video. If you see the music video you want to learn the dance they are doing in it.” Besides having a connection to dance through television and radio, all these females participated in one or more dance classes in their past and they found fun and benefits of this activity. Hillary reported, “Dance works your entire body and I appreciate and like that so much. I like the gracefulness of dancers and how they have to use every muscle including your back. I like dance because it’s a full body workout and it has a lot of cardio in it.”

The girls did not think of dance necessarily as a workout but more of something physically active, which was enjoyable and helped them in other PA in life. Collectively, since the semester began, they agreed this dance class had more value in it overall. In addition to enjoying dance with her family, Monique found value in dance at church as well. She explained,

It’s very relevant because most of my family members do some type of dance or some type of movement and my mom is in her late 40’s and she does ballroom every weekend. I’ll probably carry it on when I’m older and still do some type of dance. Also culturally, when I go to church, we have a dance group at church, lyrical dance. It’s all ages so it’s very relevant.

According to the participants, they found many uses for dance such as their own enjoyment, personal background, family and friends, physical activity, and sharing their knowledge with others.

In addition to the relevant content implemented in dance PE, participants commented on their relationship with Ms. Banker, which continued to thrive and appeared quite contrasting to their relationship with the sport teacher. They described her as welcoming, someone who had conversations and got to know students; participated in life discussions aside from dance; and most important, was considered “motherly”. Jordan explained, “Ms. B takes an interest in each of us individually. She’s kind of like a second mom. If you do something that is not right she will tell you and if you do something good she will tell you, ‘you did good.’”

Ms. Banker was the type of teacher who encouraged everyone to work together, get along, and feel welcomed in her dance studio. Daily, I watched her as she greeted students with a smile and explained her agenda. Hillary explained how Ms. Banker motivated her classes with encouraging words such as, ‘you can do this, get up, push those muscles, let’s keep going.’ Hillary enjoyed the motivational strategies and explained the atmosphere, “It is positive. We laugh. It’s fun and we keep going.”

In addition to Ms. Banker being “motherly” to the girls, she was kind, caring, strict, and developed structure in her classroom. She expressed high expectations for her students, demonstrated respect for them, and provided much knowledge for students to be successful. I observed a welcoming environment that promoted friendly relationships among peers and between students and teacher. Chantel thought highly of the way Ms. Banker treated her students and wished all her teachers would portray similar characteristics. She commented, “I

think when students walk into a class the teacher needs to make them feel comfortable.” Lauralie felt she would learn better from teachers if they had a connection with her. She reported, “I feel like it absolutely affects your learning when you have a better relationship with your teacher.” And Giselle elaborated, “I feel like if you know them it makes you want to do something for you and also for them; being a teacher there are so many kids that are just not connected.”

**Autonomy.** The female participants in Ms. Banker’s class said they really enjoyed the autonomous environment which allowed for independence when choreographing, liberty to make choices, and freedom to voice their opinions. They also appreciated the structure of the class because it allowed them to learn and grow as students and dancers. Students were given the freedom to create choreography in order to tell their story through movement and emotion. Lauralie added, “She gave us a poem at the beginning and told us to do what we want. We used the words to make our movements. I think everybody’s movements are in there and she put other things in there and what other people brought to the table.”

Hillary added,

Even though she has us doing specific things, like for this dance we are working on, she gave us each a poem and we had to make up movement that goes with it and we were put in groups. So I like that we have choice but yet she comes back and adds her decisions and advice into it so it’s both. It’s not just her. It’s us and her, both equal. That’s what I love about this class; some choice, some structure, a little bit of both.

Students enjoyed times when they were given autonomy in this class because it built self-confidence as well. For example, Harmony commented, “I like it because you feel like you are a part of it because you know you did this part of the choreography and you feel proud of it.”

Jordan added, “It shows different people’s strengths.”

**Competence.** Furthermore, I watched Ms. Banker constantly provide specific explanations and demonstrate precise techniques of movements. She was direct with students and wanted them to be successful so she constantly provided feedback on ways they could improve. Students expressed how competent and confident they felt with movements performed in this class. Lauralie explained, “I would say I feel successful because when I first came in I had never done dance before except for musicals. This was my first formal dance class and I didn’t know what I was doing and now I feel I’ve learned a lot so that is definitely success.” Hillary added, “Ms. B gives a lot of feedback on how we are doing and if it’s bad or wrong and how to fix it. She will tell me to go work on it and what to do to improve it so I feel like I’m successful in this class.”

After Ms. Banker explained and demonstrated movements, she also provided ample practice time during class. During one observation I listened to her tell the class what she was looking for, demonstrate an example of what the movement could look like, and ask them to create their own in groups previously assigned. She encouraged students to work together as well as ask her questions. She walked around the room and offered corrections or physically fixed their bodies so they felt the correct positions. When participants felt unsuccessful they persevered until they could perform the choreography correctly. Chantel said, “Sometimes when I don’t feel comfortable with it. I still work through it; just to try to make it better!” I witnessed these students practice with a lot of determination and personal motivation. Hillary excitedly explained, “It makes me feel like I just need to try harder. I feel like being unsuccessful is not really a thing as long as you try. If I’m not good at it, I’ll even stay after and ask Ms. B how I can do it the right way. So I feel like if I’m unsuccessful it pushes me to work harder.” The

dance studio felt like a truly supportive environment where students helped one another and the teacher was available and willing to help her students at all times.

**Relatedness.** Within this supportive environment I felt a strong connection and sense of relatedness amongst students and between teacher and students. Participants expressed a sense of belonging to something such as a team or group. Jordan commented, “I’m kind of a shy person so I don’t really talk to people, but I feel part of the group in dance.” Hillary agreed with Jordan and felt dance class felt like they were all a team. Giselle explained how everyone in dance was really friendly and easy to talk to. And Harmony elaborated with an explanation about working with people she did not really know. She stated, “She pairs us up on purpose with people we don’t necessarily get along with. We are starting to work together and we talk to each other. We need to work on it to make the movement look better and we can do it to help each other.”

Likewise, the relationships between students and Ms. Banker seemed to continue to grow strong throughout the semester because of the effort she made to get to know her students and help them feel competent in class. Jordan felt she and Ms. Banker were as close as a teacher and student could be and enjoyed Ms. Banker’s efforts to know all their names early in the semester. She also said, “She knows you and you can tell that she cares about her students.” And Giselle was surprised when Ms. Banker remembered her involvement in after-school activities. She smiled and explained, “Like the other day, Ms. B asked how the musical was going when I maybe only mentioned it once or twice. It’s nice.” Her connection with students provided a safe and supportive environment where students wanted to be involved. Hillary explained,

I feel like the dance teacher relates to me because she understands. She’s been here and she has gone through what we are going through. She was a senior so she knows all the

troubles we have. And she was a dancer herself. She's been through different dance teachers. She can come over and help us if we need it; help us overcome things. Or help us put our anger and thoughts into our dancing.

The other participants agreed with Hillary. Lauralie said Ms. Banker recognizes when she needs someone to talk to and Jordan expressed gratitude because Ms. Banker was extremely understanding. She said, "She cares about us girls. I am comfortable with her."

### **AA Females' Perspectives of Sport-based PE.**

All students were required to take the mandatory introduction to PE class at Huntington High School and pass it in order to graduate. Ideally, students were to enroll as freshmen but some did not take it until they were upperclassmen. Other classes offered for PE credit could be taken as electives but not in place of the introductory class. This class was primarily team sport based, included swimming, and was taught primarily by Mr. Bender. Sometimes he co-taught the class with another teacher, Ms. Prezi. Other PE classes offered were weight training, advanced team sports, Yoga and Pilates, and dance.

**Cultural relevance.** At Huntington High School students had to change clothes and participate in activities in order to earn a passing grade. Participants agreed they felt forced to participate because they did not want to earn a bad grade, which would affect their overall grade point average (GPA). Monique said, "High school, the mandatory class, I hated it because it felt like more of a chore, it wasn't fun." Harmony added, "The class is based on participation. If you sit down and do nothing at all you pretty much fail the class."

In general, participants felt there were not properly introduced to sports such as volleyball, basketball, dodge ball, hockey, soccer, and swimming. During lessons, they said Mr. Bender introduced the basics of games and expected students to play without much guidance or



feedback; unless they were talented at that specific sport. Monique explained, “If you were good at the sport or knew how to play it then you had more advanced technique and he would tell them to do it this way or that way.” Mr. Bender expected students to know these games and provided brief demonstrations when introducing a new sport. Giselle explained, “It was more like, here are the rules. Your goal is to get from here to there or get the ball in the hoop and then we just did it. We had to make it up ourselves, like the strategies and stuff like that.”

During one observation, I witnessed both PE teachers ‘lead’ students through a series of exercises and stretches. However, at no time was exact instruction given such as correct placement or what they should feel while performing these exercises. Although irrelevant to his freshmen sport PE class, Mr. Bender was also a varsity swim coach. Aside from specific instruction and one-on-one teaching during the swimming portion of the semester, I never observed any exact instruction where he explained skill technique, game rules, or strategies.

Furthermore, they truly disliked the Pacer test including how it was implemented and assessed. Chantel explained, “But the whole running thing [Pacer test] we got graded on how fast you ran across the gym and I didn’t like that.” Harmony added, “The Pacer test I absolutely hated because nobody could really pass that test. Doing 62 laps to get an A in the class, I don’t think that’s fair.” Overall they did not seem enthusiastic about attending the mandatory, sport-based PE class. They said it would have been beneficial if Mr. Bender taught more about the body, injury prevention techniques, proper skills technique, and provided more feedback.

The gymnasium environment was not clearly defined by participants. They said it was not intimidating per se but it was not warm and welcoming either. Monique reported, “The environment was pretty good. I had friends in the class so when I got in the class we were

together so it wasn't like a cold environment. But it wasn't the happiest place either." Giselle added, "It was a standard, expected gym environment." Participants also agreed the environment was competitive and if they made a mistake people would get angry with them. Therefore, as expected, it tended to get loud when students became heated over games. Chantel commented, "If the ball came straight at me and I hit it the wrong way people would fuss and say, 'man, you could have hit that.'" It was particularly competitive among varsity athletes and athletic boys. Jordan claimed a lot of smack talk happened on the courts and field. Overall, participants established they were not interested in being in the gym, did not want to participate because the content was only sport-based, and the environment felt like a 'regular gym class.'

Aside from sports however, students found learning how to work together and cooperate with others beneficial for college or a job environment. Jordan said, "And teamwork, there are class projects, living in a dorm with someone else and learning how to get along with them." However, I never actually observed Mr. Bender explain how to work together nor did he provide strategies for communication and cooperation. When I asked what the participants thought, Lauralie replied, "Not specifically like sitting down and talking about it but I know we had to learn how to work better with people we did not particularly care for. We had to communicate too." They felt they learned to be responsible because they had to get to the locker room on time, remember to bring workout clothes, memorize their locker combination, and report to the gym within five minutes of the bell. Finally, they said they had to learn conflict resolution in case there was a problem during a sport or with peers. However, during a volleyball lesson I observed two teams yelling at each another, unable to come to a solution. A few girls walked off the court and disappeared into the hallway leaving the teams short of players. All of a sudden,

the volleyball lesson ended and a group of boys started playing basketball. Mr. Bender did not intervene.

Mr. Bender was described as a normal but awkward and weird teacher who did not seem to develop relationships and connections with students. He was not known to say hi to his students daily or get to know them on a personal level. Each visit I watched him silently take attendance, dismiss students to change, and then yell out to them to begin running as they re-entered the gym. Giselle stated, “He was normal but kind of weird. He’s just a strange person. He was weird interacting with people.” Monique said her relationship was a basic ‘teacher-student’ relationship.’ She reported, “I barely talked to him so it was like attendance and I would say here and that was it.” Mr. Bender did not seem to favor any one specific type of student and did not try to build relationships with students either. I mainly observed students approach him when they had an issue such as needing ice or sitting out.

When asked to discuss the relevance between sports and AA culture, participants were not convinced the two were directly connected. Even though Chantel, Hillary, and Jordan said they had family members who played sports, they did not connect the interest of sports with being AA. Regarding cultural relevance, Jordan replied, “Sports, no. I would just mess around with sports with my family, maybe just for fun. At picnics we will throw the ball and catch it.” Hillary added, “We [family] talk about sports and we exercise and dance so it’s in our family culture. But in the African roots, probably no.” Chantel added, “Well, my family is pretty sporty. The guys play at family reunions. They get together and play basketball, so yeah.” Adding to their feelings of indifference, Monique who was a varsity basketball player, still felt there was only a slight possibility she would engage in sports elsewhere. She explained,

“Culturally, well my church has an annual basketball game.., so I guess it’s kinda relevant. I might play in it. I don’t know.” Conversely, Lauralie did not think the content was relevant whatsoever. Shrugging her shoulders and rolling her eyes, she exclaimed, “Not relevant at all! It wasn’t relevant because it was very military-like. It made me stronger and I felt stronger but then it wasn’t very culture – ful.”

With regard to future use, in general, participants thought they would use weight-training skills and knowledge about the use of weight machines at a gym. Chantel thought learning about machines in the weight room would help her live a healthier lifestyle and Giselle expressed interest in building muscular strength and endurance by use of items in the weight room as well. She commented, “It was a way for me to exercise during school. I think that’s it.” Monique added, “I guess the weight room part. It was nice to know how to use the equipment.”

Obviously, participants did not feel connected to these lessons and felt they were irrelevant. Chantel reported, “Basically what he did was he had a list to do throughout the semester and that was for every gym class. We did each one for several weeks and then he checked it off and we moved on and then he checked it off and moved on.”

Harmony was not happy with the content whatsoever and blatantly exclaimed, “Nothing is relevant to my future!” Participants felt if there was a personal connection between the students and teacher they could have suggested activities to include in the curriculum. However, Mr. Bender did not get to know his students so he was unaware of their interests. Chantel commented,

Gym is a requirement so pretty much all we cared about was getting through gym and passing it so we really didn’t talk much about our background. Now, he assumed the boys in our class liked basketball so he would put out basketballs. Pretty much with the girls it was different.

As a whole, participants did not find relevance in this class and most likely will not use sport in their future.

**Autonomy.** Unfortunately for his students, Mr. Bender did not create an autonomous environment. Occasionally, he offered minimal choices, which were extremely limited and did not seem to promote participation. If anything, I watched more students sit out during these choice days. Monique said, “The teacher would just tell us what to do and then walk away.” He tended to offer options between two different sports and on Fridays he offered a “free day” where students could go into the weight room or participate in one of several sports. Apathetically, Monique explained, “Sometimes we would have a free day where we could play basketball, soccer, badminton, so yeah, sometimes we had a free day so we could go in the weight room. Other days we had specific instructions.” Participants wished they had more autonomy during sport PE because the opportunity to make choices could add variety and expose them to new activities. Harmony reported, “It was pretty boring because for the entire week we did the same thing.”

Chantel enjoyed teachers who gave her choices because she felt they were more open-minded and allowed students to have a voice and a sense of ownership in the class. In this class she felt discouraged, “It made me feel like we were forced to do something that we didn’t want to do.” Intermittently throughout the semester students were able to choose their own partners and teams. Other times Mr. Bender elected student captains to choose teams. Students explained they did not mind working with new people because it gave them the opportunity to get to know other people in class. However, they preferred to work with their friends because it

made class more enjoyable. When asked if she liked working with her friends, Monique happily replied, “Yes. It made it so much better!”

**Competence.** Participants agreed the environment was extremely competitive. As mentioned above, it was especially competitive amongst varsity athletes and athletic boys. Participants said this environment caused feelings of incompetence and reinforced skill inability for those who were not good at sports. Hillary said she would disengage when it came to sports, “In the sports I would or if you keep failing at something it makes me not want to do it so I would say failing made me disengage. It turns anyone off. If you keep failing you think you’re not good.”

Giselle added, “For gym I think most of the time I wasn’t really engaged because I wasn’t interested in the material.” A few participants felt partially successful at a few sports or agreed they gained knowledge in some areas. Conversely, most felt unsuccessful and non-athletic. Giselle did not feel competent or successful during sports and explained, “I didn’t because I’m not athletic so I wouldn’t really do all the stuff that everybody else could do.” Harmony added, “No, I didn’t feel successful at all because it’s not something I like to do. I wasn’t successful because for one, you don’t know how to play it.”

Adding to students’ lack of competence, Mr. Bender did not offer ample instruction or practice time after introducing daily lessons. Jordan explained, “My dislike in sports would have to be not a lot of guidance how to do them. They would just show you once and that was it.” Chantel stated, “No, we didn’t have time to practice it, we just jumped right into it.” Furthermore, participants said he did not provide constructive feedback on skill technique or whether or not students were playing by the correct rules. Monique explained, “Not really. He

walked around a lot and observed. He didn't really say a lot unless we were off task." Giselle commented, "There wasn't any full attention on us. It wasn't really forced upon me so I probably would have done more work if I was told to a lot." Participants felt they could have been more competent and confident if they received praise and encouragement from other teammates. Also, they wished they received constructive criticism and positive feedback from the Mr. Bender. Hillary remarked, "I think critiques make people successful. Like I said how Ms. Banker does it. That's what a lot of PE teachers don't do. They will just watch and be like, that's good, that's fine, you're okay." Well, I want to know what I did wrong and how can I make it good." Lauralie, Giselle, and Jordan agreed with Hillary. Monique wished she had more practice time when she did not grasp a skill, "Maybe working on it; if I didn't get it then I didn't care. Maybe going over it more I guess."

**Relatedness.** Although the environment did not allow a lot of autonomy or ensure competence, participants felt there was plenty of time to connect and build relationships with peers. They got to know others in the locker room, sitting in squads during attendance, and during games because they had to communicate and work together. During warm-ups I watched the girls pair off and group up with their friends. They typically skipped and danced around the perimeter of the gym versus running with the rest of the class. Although several participants mentioned they did not have many friends in the class initially, they had a chance to get to know people throughout the semester. Typically, students remained friends during the class itself but once the semester ended, so did their relationship. Harmony said, "I did not have friends in that class. I got to know people. I always make it an effort to get to know someone cause you have to work with them. We only stayed friends during that class." Jordan added, "I did have friends

in there and I got to know new people in class. I was never really close to them.” These relationships were temporary and did not continue after the class ended. However, they were friendly to one another when they saw each other in the hallways.

Unlike the relationships they were able to build with peers, they were unable to build with the teacher. As mentioned above, students claimed Mr. Bender did not make an effort to get to know his students. In fact, he was quite distant. Chantel explained, “It was not really a good relationship. He was just the teacher who would give us work and we would just do it. If I needed help I would just go and ask for help but he didn’t just help.”

Giselle agreed, “I would say it was non-existent other than the fact that he was my teacher.” Others said it was a normal student-teacher relationship which to them meant they were not close and they did not speak unless necessary. Monique added, “He knew my name but other than that there wasn’t any type of relationship. If I saw him in the hall I wouldn’t say hi or anything.” Chantel exclaimed, “He was just a teacher, a regular teacher I could go up to if I hurt myself and he would tell me to go get an ice pack.” I watched this behavior between Mr. Bender and his students and it seemed clear Mr. Bender was not particularly interested in personal connections with his students, which most likely affected their overall feelings toward the sport-based PE class.

## **Conclusion**

**Cultural relevance.** The findings and observations truly demonstrate the connection between teacher and students at Huntington High School. Ms. Banker claimed she implemented a culturally relevant curriculum full of variety, structure and discipline, connection to students, ability to use elements of dance outside of class, and relevance to personal culture. Participants



agreed with Ms. Banker and were excited to come to class to learn new material, feel challenged, acquire real-life experiences, and connect with their teacher. Ms. Banker connected content to the community, culture, and future. Students expressed use for content after graduation in a college or job environment, church situations, and to live a healthy lifestyle. They felt dance connected to their AA backgrounds and explained they danced at family reunions, picnics, and with friends. Students did not waste any time as they entered the studio with enthusiasm and began moving immediately. Because Ms. Banker was described as motherly, these participants said they enjoyed talking with her about college, family, and personal issues. They knew they could trust her and she would provide guidance. The dance environment felt extremely safe and free. One participant mentioned her ability to ignore her more unappealing parts of her body because she did not feel judged; just comfortable and free to explore. They all expressed feelings of being part of something, similar to being on a team.

Conversely, these females were not as excited about the sport PE environment. They strongly agreed they would not use the content outside of class and did not feel it was not relevant to their AA culture; besides using some activities, such as basketball or catch, at picnics. They described the sport class as repetitive because they had been doing the same sports since elementary school. Participants agreed there was minimal instruction with little guidance and almost no feedback. They thought the environment was competitive and felt intimidated to play after failing attempts time after time. The connection and relationship with the teacher was lacking. He was not openly friendly with students and did not take the time to get to know them. Students only approached him when they needed something. Furthermore, the only reason they claimed to participate in sport PE was that it was a graduation requirement they had to pass.

**Autonomy.** Ms. Banker explained her motivation to create an autonomous environment. She wanted her students to learn independence early in life because eventually, they would go on to become adults and have jobs or go to school. She provided choices, freedom, and the ability to demonstrate self-expression. She said she gave fewer restrictions so they would feel ownership over their choreography and feel comfortable creating. Participants said they liked being involved in the choreography process. They explained how Ms. Banker used everyone's ideas and different strengths. They felt part of the process and proud of the end result. However, in sport PE they were given limited choices which all revolved around sports. At times, they could use the weight room, but for the most part, options were sport-related; basketball, volleyball, and dodge ball. Participants described their participation in the sport class as they were "forced to do it."

**Competence.** In the dance environment I observed what felt like a lot of success and competence. Ms. Banker provided detailed instructions and used a variety of teaching strategies to ensure each student was able to do the movements. First, she taught the movement with specific instructions and demonstrations. She used a part-to-whole method and then chunked the material together during reviews. She allowed individual, partner, and group practice time as well as feedback the entire time. She used encouragement to keep students moving yet explained what was incorrect and how to fix it. She used a variety of cueing methods while teaching such as directional, verbal, and anticipatory cues to introduce the next move in advance. Ms. Banker taught respect and worked with students on self and peer-assessment. Students said they enjoyed her thoroughness when teacher and really benefitted from her feedback. They explained how they wanted to practice and work through movements until they were competent. They tried

hard and respected Ms. Banker and said they did not want to let her down. During sport PE, students reported a lot of disengagement. They told me they were not interested in, not athletic enough, and do not know how to play sports. They disengaged when they failed and did not feel competent. Participants explained Mr. Bender did not pay attention to them and did not provide feedback for improvement. He often provided brief explanations of the day's plan and then walked away.

**Relatedness.** According to Ms. Banker and participants, she was extremely involved in the lives of her students. She said she wanted to build relationships with students and get to know their backgrounds. During one interview Ms. Banker explained how she asked students how they were each day and inquired about other activities they were involved in the school. At times participants were shocked at her memory as they may have only mentioned their extracurricular activity once to her. They were happy she took the time to get to know their names and interests. They said she could relate to them because she was once in the same position herself; teenager and dancer. In addition to the relationship students developed with their teacher, they said they had close relationships with students in the class as well. Ms. Banker encouraged group work and explained she enjoyed watching friendships develop. Participants reported a friendly environment where they all get along and help each other. They said there is a sense of belonging in the class and they felt part of something. However, in the sport class, there was no connection with the teacher. One participant described her relationship with Mr. Bender as “non-existent.” There was definitely ample time to get to know their peers in the class but participants said they would only connect with a few people. Friendships never

really extended past the semester they were in the class. They felt they had more in common with those in the dance PE class.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine AA high school girls' perceptions of dance-based PE in relation to their past experiences in sport-based PE. Two theories guided this study: CRPE (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011) and SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The principal finding to this study was, according to AA female adolescents, when provided an autonomous environment which encouraged competence and relatedness in addition to caring about students, building relationships in and out of the classroom, and offering relevant content, AA females enjoyed participating in PA. Dance-based PE teachers who provided these supportive environments, tended to allow students to have a voice in class, make critical choices creating ownership, and build relationships among peers as well as with the instructor. These qualities were less likely in sport-based PE environments. In this chapter I will describe 1) similarities and differences between cases with relation to ways teachers promoted CRPE and SDT and ways students resonated with those positive aspects, 2) implications for AA girls and urban PE with relation to relevant content and teacher pedagogy, 3) implications for PETE professors to educate pre-service teachers how to teach AA girls and urban PE, and 4) directions for future research.

### Similarities and Differences across Cases

#### Cultural Relevance

According to Flory and McCaughtry (2011), CRPE teachers in diverse urban settings need to enact a cultural relevance cycle with three parts: 1) having adequate knowledge of the students they teach (i.e. personal background, home lives, extracurricular activities), 2) knowing how the dynamics of students' lives are likely to impact their learning, and 3) creating and

implementing strategies that connect knowledge of students with the content and pedagogy in the classroom.

**Knowing the public served (students).** In all three cases of this study, dance PE teachers built relationships with students. According to Timken and Watson (2015), a better connection and understanding of students will evolve the more teachers get to know them. Dance PE teachers familiarized themselves with students' backgrounds, family and home lives, and community they lived. They demonstrated care for students by connecting through personal conversations, hosting parent-teacher meetings, and learning about students' extracurricular involvement. For example, each semester Mr. Smythe held parent meetings to familiarize parents with the dance program, upcoming events, and expectations. He openly communicated with them via email and letters sent home. Learning about students' home lives and making a connection to parents could inform teachers how much home support students receive (Timken & Watson, 2015). Likewise, Ms. Burnett was well-acquainted with parents and students in her program. She was genuinely concerned about students' health issues and took time to speak with them individually to ensure proper care when dancing. According to Ennis and McCauley (2002), when PE teachers genuinely get to know students, they create a more trusting environment. At Huntington High School, Ms. Banker asked her students about extracurricular activities they participated in and several students were shocked by this question; they had no idea she knew they were involved. She was very curious when it came to her students so she inquired around school to find out what students were involved in, carefully read IEPs, discussed issues with counseling staff, and exchanged information with other teachers. Ms. Banker familiarized herself with the community surrounding the school and where most students lived.

She currently lived in the high school's neighborhood but it was not the same as the urban, inner-city area she grew up. According to Casey et al. (2013), it is important for teachers to understand the community of the students and educate them so they can be successful within that community. Ms. Banker knew what was available for students to get involved in after school and encouraged them in the direction best suited for each individual.

Although there was a connection and relationship between students and dance PE teachers, each location had its unique situation. Specifically, at Denver High School, a few of the participants felt they were not as close as they would like to be with Ms. Burnett. Because half of them had to repeat the course as juniors, they felt they were treated differently and wished they got more attention from her. However, the other half felt as if it was another chance to improve their technique and performance qualities and did not allow it to negatively affect their relationship with her, but allowed them to grow closer. In this case, it was imperative Ms. Burnett recognized her behaviors and how it could affect her teaching strategies (McCaughtry & Ferry, accepted). Likewise, it was important for her to identify students' emotions, interpret what they meant, and learn how to cope with them so she could have created a deeper connection to the few who felt a lack of attention.

Unfortunately, in all three cases, sport PE teachers did not portray these positive characteristics. Overall, students reported sport PE teachers did not attempt to converse with them or build meaningful teacher-student relationships; therefore, led to less active participants in the gym and minimal positive academic achievement for students. As noted in the literature, teachers who demonstrate care and respect for students tended to have higher participation in classes (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011). Regrettably, sport PE teachers were disconnected to

students' personal lives and backgrounds, family members, and community dynamics. Unfortunately, many students might come from single parent homes or places full of crime and violence. These teachers might be the most stable adults in students' lives and they are looking for teachers to care about their well-being (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011). Participants in this study mentioned how sport PE teachers rarely greeted them or asked how they were doing. At Huntington, Mr. Bender waited for students to sit in squads, took attendance, explained the daily lesson, and dismissed them to change. When they returned, he instructed them to warm up, minimally demonstrated a few skills or rules, and sent them to a playing area. Then, he disappeared. Most sport PE teachers imitated this behavior; they took attendance, explained the lesson, and then left the playing area to take care of other, unrelated business. However, according to Streat (2009), students enjoyed when "the instructors were caring, involved, present, fair, and individualized" (p. 213). Unfortunately, these characteristics do not describe most of the sport PE teachers in this study. Coach Witten truly made a negative impact on his students. He had poor attendance, rarely enforced rules, did not teach any specific curriculum, and spent whatever little time he was there taking care of coaching duties.

Although most sport PE teachers and students did not have close relationships across cases, Coach O'Connor was usually present and students described her as fun, enthusiastic, and participatory in activities with them. Because of her engagement, she developed relationships with students; unlike the rest of the sport PE teachers at Carter. She made jokes, had side conversations, and made students feel welcome. In addition to her heavy sport-based curriculum, she included some introductory level Yoga and taught students how to breathe and relieve stress during these lessons. Coach O'Connor was organized, had a plan, and was aware of



students' interests, therefore, implemented novel activities and increased PA in her classes. Specifically, she planned activities to reach males and females' interests, generated a fair playing field for all, and created "welcoming and encouraging physical education contexts" (Azzarito et al., 2006, p. 238). Similarly, Mr. Decker at Denver High School, demonstrated care by greeting his students each morning, asking how they were, and encouraging them to jump into the activity. He carefully explained sport skills in detail, provided feedback, participated with students, and implemented a variety of sports and activities including a week of hip hop dance and a week of Yoga. As stated in the literature, female adolescents enjoy dance, aerobics, and other fun activities with music and are more likely to participate if incorporated into their PE classes (Cothran & Ennis, 1999; Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010). Furthermore, student participation rates will increase which could have positive influences on PA levels in their future (CDC, 2014; Chen & Ennis, 2004).

**Knowing how the dynamics of students' lives are likely to impact their learning.**

Dance PE teachers felt getting to know their students would impact their learning in the classroom. All three teachers reported caring about their students' futures and felt if they knew their backgrounds (i.e. family, community, extracurricular activities), they could incorporate lessons to help enhance their future directions. According to Morrison et al (2008), using knowledge of students' home lives and community in the classroom would signify the importance of lessons and increase CR. For example, Mr. Smythe explained, whatever students learned in his class, they could apply to other classes as well as the outside world. He encouraged strong posture, personal hygiene, and proper behavior and etiquette in dance and the real world. He knew some students were not taught simple life-lessons at home and felt it was

his responsibility to implement them in his everyday lessons. Ms. Banker knew many students wanted to go to college but did not necessarily have the support at home to help them find the right one and apply; therefore, she often helped individuals look for the appropriate school. During one interview, she explained the importance of her discussions with students about college, work, and responsibility. She said many students come to her before or after school and during her prep period to discuss their future. Extra time spent on students' successes demonstrated positive teacher support and built trusting relationships (Morrison et al., 2008). Ms. Burnett was extremely familiar with students' financial status and helped by exposing them to opportunities after high school. She used her resources to help students, as a teacher once did for her when she was young. In addition, she created a cooperative and nurturing environment, which included field trips, guest choreographers, and student engaging activities (Morrison et al., 2008). Likewise, Mr. Smythe was aware of his students' financial status. Knowing this information helped him understand where students were coming from when they did not have their costume on time or were not wearing the correct leotard. He often offered to help students in financial disarray with the notion they would pay him back. Like Ms. Burnett, he also included field trips, guest choreographers, and activities that encouraged student engagement with one another.

All three dance PE teachers appeared to align with their desire for students to succeed. According to Morrison et al. (2008), teachers can support students by "investing in and taking personal responsibility for students' successes" inside and outside school (p. 438). Dance PE teachers knew about extracurricular activities students were involved in and knew they could enhance their performances by incorporating different elements of those activities into the dance

class. According to Azzarito and Ennis (2003), it is necessary to extend and relate students' experiences in PE to their outside, extracurricular PA's. This strategy enhances meaning to what students are learning and connections to what they are involved in outside of school. Additionally, all three teachers implemented fitness lessons, proper stretching techniques, and overall healthy living. They unanimously agreed students could benefit from these lessons now and in the future to live a healthy, physically active lifestyle.

Furthermore, dance PE teachers were extremely familiar with students' cultural background and the importance of culture to them and their families. This information might have been the most prominent as it led to a diverse and CR curriculum in the dance studio. According to Corneille et al (2005), "In order to understand the behavior of a group of people, it is essential to understand their culture" (p. 39). The dance PE teachers' awareness and recognition of AA youth and popular culture positively impacted female students when they attended dance PE classes. Dance PE teachers spent ample time truly learning about and understanding what female students enjoyed, found meaningful, and wanted to learn in order to increase interest and participation during class. Teachers learned about new dance shows on television, popular line dances, cultural dances, and Top 40 music. With that knowledge, they created a CR curriculum that encouraged and motivated AA females to participate. Introducing students to cultural activities such as liturgical, hip hop, and pop culture line dances, helped increase cultural knowledge. Ethnic identity occurs when AA females feel connected and a sense of belonging to their culture (Corneille et al., 2005). This ethnic identity builds self-esteem which leads to higher participation in PA. All three dance PE teachers introduced cultural activities to increase cultural knowledge.

In contrast, students reported sport PE teachers to be the opposite of dance PE teachers. They did not tend to get to know students' background, family, community, or extracurricular activities. Therefore, their curriculum did not cater to their needs or interests. Typically, the class revolved around competitive team sports or possibly activities they felt competent rather than the cultural background of students or popular youth culture. As Tinning and Fitzclarence (1992) stated, PE teachers failed to recognize social and cultural shifts happening outside the classroom, therefore, were not making changes in their daily agendas. This misfortune is still occurring today; as observed in this study. Additionally, these teachers were not making connections in their lessons to students' outside interests (Azzarito & Ennis, 2003; Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1992). If teachers knew what other activities students were involved in after school, they might implement exercises to potentially increase ability levels of students in those specific activities or sports.

Unfortunately, because sport PE teachers were not familiar with the community where students lived, they did not appear to know their financial status either; unless they made assumptions or coached them in an after-school sport. This information about the community and home lives could help teachers understand why students might act out, do not have appropriate PE attire, or simply do not care to participate (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011). Generally, sport PE teachers did not necessarily demonstrate care for students' academic success as the dance PE teachers did. For example, sport PE teachers did not introduce students to available after-school activities or jobs, take them on field trips, expose them to community events, spend time helping them look for jobs or colleges, nor offer to help in any way. The

main type of care I observed from sport PE teachers was their concern for whether or not students were dressed, on time, and participating.

**Strategies to bridge cultural distance.** While dance PE teachers were able to use their relationships and knowledge of the community where each school was located to build relevant content, the same action was not taking place in sport PE classes. Dance PE teachers brought urban community members into the school to share knowledge and passion for dance as well as brought students into the community. Teachers used real-life struggles to inspire choreography and encourage student expression, emotion, and feelings regarding these issues. According to Koff (2000), offering opportunities to choreograph and explore the mind and body benefits students overall and further optimizes learning in the classroom. Stinson (1997) found including dance in the general PE setting was a great way to have fun, relieve stress, learn about and express oneself, and create movement that was meaningful to students. Conversely, in sport PE, participants complained about the repetition of sports and length of time spent on each. If sport PE teachers included opportunities to create games and explore other avenues, students might find value in class. However, according to Cothran and Ennis (1999), students perceived sport PE to lack relevance and meaning in their lives.

Although Mr. Decker and Coach O'Connor tried to implement a variety of activities, participation was not high and most often female students sat out. However, participation was not an issue in dance PE. Dance PE teachers used their knowledge about students and relationships with them to implement CR content and promote academic achievements, which led to active participants in class (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

At Denver High School, for example, Ms. Burnett explained her gratitude for her high school dance PE experience and felt she needed to provide the same opportunities for her students. Although Ms. Burnett was AA and grew up in the same urban, inner-city area as the school location, she knew it was important to recognize other differences within the same culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995). She knew many students came from lower SES backgrounds, were not given the opportunity to enroll in dance classes outside of school, and did not have the resources to see dance performances in the community. Therefore, she brought outside choreographers into the school to expose students to other dance genres, took field trips to dance shows in the city, and encouraged students to audition for the all-city dance concert which was composed of students from all over the district. Furthermore, Ms. Burnett incorporated dance genres, which students could use outside school with family and friends (Hastie, et al., 2006).

As previously mentioned, Mr. Decker was friendly toward his students and seemed to care about their well-being as he would greet them daily and ask how they were doing. However, he did not take what he knew about his students to provide a CR curriculum. During interviews, participants stated he had his own daily agenda and was not willing to change. He was a White male who taught primarily AA students. Mr. Decker seemed to make assumptions about students' behaviors instead of truly understanding them (Obidah, 2008). For example, students were often late to first period, and he did not understand why they could not get there on time. As a visitor, it was not my place to discuss issues such as transportation logistics or potential lack of support at home. Mr. Decker often made comments about his students such as, lack of participation, not changing clothes, or poor eating habits. The assumptions he made

could have put students at a disadvantage because he automatically created a negative perception when some of the problems might have been out of their control (Obidah, 2008).

Similar to Ms. Burnett, Ms. Banker used her knowledge and connection with students to implement relevant content to keep students engaged and participatory. She learned her students were primarily from one suburban area; however, due to a school-of-choice policy, others commuted from inner-city areas. Through casual conversations and one-on-one time with students, Ms. Banker familiarized herself with their backgrounds and used her knowledge in the classroom. For example, she recognized everyday struggles students experienced at home, school, and work. She used knowledge of those struggles and asked students to express them through movement. Dance provides an avenue to explore the mind and body, learn about oneself, interpret feelings, and express through movement while releasing energy (Koff 2000; Stinson, 1997). Ms. Banker also connected content with students' personal interests. For example, she incorporated fitness and proper stretching techniques for all who were interested in PA in general. She applied daily lessons to life outside of school such as, time management, proper dress code, responsibility, and life after high school (i.e. college, work). She explored numerous ways to help students before and after school and developed a curriculum to provide support whenever possible (Corneille, et al., 2005; Farr, 1997).

Similarly, Mr. Smythe took the time to learn about his students and implement relevant lessons in his classroom. He taught discipline, poise, etiquette, hygiene and many other daily life lessons in his dance PE classes. He was described as a caring individual who would do anything for his students. His students enjoyed exposure to proper etiquette and how to act in public. Also, like Ms. Burnett, he knew many students did not have the resources or parental support to

learn about dance opportunities outside of school. Therefore, he exposed his students to community events, dance shows, outside choreographers, and the all-city dance concert. Aside from the main foundation of dance, ballet, Mr. Smythe included a variety of genres students could use outside of school because dance is a popular pastime in AA culture (Farr, 1997). He knew his AA female students enjoyed music videos so he introduced jazz and hip hop dance as well as popular social dances. Many females were involved in liturgical dance at church so he incorporated lyrical and modern dance to enhance their abilities when they left his class. According to Corneille et al. (2005), dance, music, and poetry are used to enhance Afrocentric values and beliefs. Mr. Smythe exposed students to a large variety of music and explained the connection between music and dance. Then, he allowed them to work together to create movements to the music of their choice.

Although Coach O'Connor was enthusiastic, participated with students, and spoke with them individually, she did not use her knowledge to implement a CR curriculum in sport PE. As for the rest of the sport PE teachers, they were either absent often, disappeared when students played games, or did not learn about students' interests. Therefore, they did not create relevant content to keep students engaged. Basically, sport PE teachers had a curriculum designed around competitive team sports, which typically engaged the already skilled athletes, leaving the rest to disengage (Carlson, 1995). According to Enright and O'Sullivan (2010), teachers should create a more diverse curriculum, which includes personal/social skills, leadership roles, and sociocultural contexts of students' lives; much like the dance PE teachers did in their classes.

Across all three cases, AA adolescent females enjoyed dance PE compared to sport PE. They found meaning and relevance between dance PE class, lessons taught, and their current and



future lives. According to Farr (1997), AA's use dance as a primary language of expression. They use it to demonstrate a range of emotions and feel it has significance to their lives. Participants expressed enjoyment dancing with friends, at family reunions, and for fun. Much of the literature explains adolescent females disengage from sport PE due to opposite reasons such as, lack of relevance to their lives (Cothran & Ennis, 1999).

**Autonomy.** According to Standage et al. (2005), it is recommended PE teachers increase students' opportunities for choice, allow student input, and encourage and create peer-learning groups. Similar to findings from Quested (2011), participants in this study found the dance PE environment to be an autonomy supportive atmosphere. For example, students were provided opportunities to make decisions, give input to class activities, be creative, demonstrate self-expression, and feel ownership and meaning when dances were complete (Amado et al., 2014; Quested, 2011). Unfortunately, participants felt the sport PE environment allowed minimal choice, provided no opportunities for creativity and ownership, and permitted students to rarely choose groups or partners. According to Sun and Chen (2010), less motivated behaviors are portrayed when students do not feel a strong sense of choice or decision-making. Additionally, one study suggested ways to increase motivation in PE is through physical expression by students and teachers; which essentially means to implement dance forms into general PE classes (Amado et al., 2014). According to Quested and Duda (2010), when one adopts an authoritarian style of teaching and implements specific daily agendas, as sport PE teachers did in this study, students feel less motivation and no autonomy support. In contrast, dance PE teachers provided choice, encouraged creativity, and provided autonomy support, which motivated participants to engage during class.

Dance PE teachers described their classroom environments as autonomous because they offered freedom, independence, and choice; provided opportunities to explore, create, and express; and allowed plenty of ownership and control with daily lessons. Participants at Carter said they felt dance PE had more value and meaning than sport PE because they were able to create movement to express feelings, which in turn gave them ownership of their work. They craved this same opportunity in sport PE but were only given the chance to choose between competitive team sports. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), providing an autonomous-supportive environment, such as choice, exploration of feelings, and prospects for self-direction, facilitates intrinsic motivation, hence, allowing students to feel autonomous. Likewise, at Denver, students really enjoyed freedom to learn through their best strategy. For example, if they needed extra practice time, they asked Ms. Burnett and usually she granted them extra time. They were allowed to work individually, with a partner, or group; whichever suited them best. Students did not mind when Ms. Burnett led class because they loved learning new, fun dances; however, enjoyed the chance to create, express, and share their final products with the rest of the class. During sport PE, Mr. Decker tried to include a variety of activities but students wished they had more say in daily lessons. They were given the choice of fitness activities when they were in the weight room but other than that, they were to do what he had planned. Participants agreed these lessons did not influence them to participate in sports in their future. PE teachers who provide meaningful activities, recognize and respect students' suggestions to lessons, and provide activities that allow for choice or other alternatives will most likely have more participatory students (Shen et al., 2009a; Shen et al., 2009b). Dance PE at Huntington looked much like the others. Participants were given plenty of opportunities to create and express, voice

their opinions, and show off their final product. They said they enjoyed working together as well as with the teacher who listened to them and incorporated everyone's ideas into the dance. This teaching strategy aligns with Standage et al. (2005), who suggested PE teachers should increase opportunities for students to choose, allow input to lessons, and establish peer-learning groups. Ms. Banker gave parameters to follow when creating a dance, and plenty of advice, but allowed students to demonstrate individual strengths. At the end of each project, students were proud of the final piece and knew they took part in creating it. Conversely, in sport PE, they often felt they were "forced" to participate so they could pass the class, one of the two main student goals discovered by McCaughtry et al (2008). Sport choices were limited and choice was non-existent unless there was a free day; they could choose between teacher-designated sports.

**Competence.** High levels of participation in dance PE were often driven by the teachers who provided detailed instructions, thorough demonstrations, positive and constructive feedback, and awareness of students' needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Shen et al., 2010). According to these authors, when teachers pay attention and provide feedback, students feel more competent. Participants in dance PE felt confident and competent performing movements in class, and on stage, because teachers paid attention to them, provided suggestions to improve, and spent one-on-one time to enhance technique and abilities. For example, during observations, I witnessed all three dance PE teachers provide detailed instructions; demonstrate proper technique and movements; and offer feedback, reassurance, and solutions. Participants at Carter said they felt competent during dance PE because Mr. Smythe provided positive and constructive feedback. When giving constructive feedback, he offered solutions how to correct the movement or spent one-on-one time, working with students, to successfully gain proper technique. They explained

his feedback and personal time boosted their confidence. During observations, I witnessed everyone in his class engaging in the lesson, moving their bodies, and working on a variety of dance forms. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), positive feedback could enhance intrinsic motivation, which in turn encourages students to participate during lessons. Ms. Burnett approached her classes in a similar fashion. She thoroughly explained each movement, demonstrated specifically from head-to-toe, and provided feedback. She also encouraged students to work together and provide peer feedback as well. Participants felt supported by Ms. Burnett and their peers and embraced feedback from both. During class, Ms. Burnett gave students clear instructions, time to practice skills, and the opportunity to use different resources to help them achieve the final outcome. Together, students were given time to practice and individual feedback, which eventually increased students' sense of competence (Amado et al., 2014). Furthermore, Ms. Banker's strategies to promote student's success aligned with the other two cases. She gave specific instructions and demonstrations, along with positive and constructive feedback. However, Ms. Banker included several teaching strategies such as the part-to-whole method as well as numerous cueing methods. In addition to her feedback, she encouraged peer and self-assessment so students could learn multiple forms of receiving feedback. Participants explained their motivation to participate in dance PE but more importantly, their desire to try hard and improve. Shen et al. (2008) found female urban adolescents develop perceived autonomy and perceived competence simultaneously making them more apt to participate in activities in PE when both increase. In all three cases, dance PE offered a sense of autonomy within their classrooms and teachers enhanced competence using many techniques.

Conversely, in sport PE, teachers often did not explain rules, provide demonstrations, or offer feedback. According to participants, sport PE teachers introduced the sport for the day, assigned teams, and either walked around the gym barely observing or disappeared to do other, non-related work. When teachers do not provide feedback, motivation diminishes and students find no reason to participate (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Participants at Carter expressed lack of competence, feelings of being unsuccessful, and not good at sports. They said sport PE teachers did not offer instruction, demonstration, feedback, or practice time. Had there been time to practice new skills, competence levels could have increased (Amado et al., 2014). Due to lack of learning, students did not feel competent and did not enjoy being put on display for others to view their lack of abilities (Olafson, 2002). Although Coach O'Connor at Carter and Mr. Decker at Denver provided demonstrations, practice time, and feedback, participants did not feel confident whatsoever. They said they did not understand a lot of the sports, did not know how to play them, and the sports were too difficult and competitive. Therefore, students were not motivated to participate during sport PE the way they were motivated in dance PE. Similar to the findings by Shen et al (2009b), teachers who create autonomy-supportive learning environments, with a variety of activities and less competition, increase students' motivation to participate in PE. Unfortunately, these strategies were not implemented in the gymnasium. Participants at Huntington High School expressed similar concerns. They often disengaged in sport PE because they were not interested in the lessons, did not feel athletic, and expressed failure during sports. On several occasions, participants mentioned Mr. Bender's lack of presence during class. I typically observed him walking around the gym but not engaging with

students or providing feedback. Participants said they did not like sport PE and did not feel competent; therefore, would not participate in sports in their future.

**Relatedness.** As previously mentioned, dance PE teachers enacted three parts of the CR cycle, including knowledge and care for their students, which built strong connections and relationships between dance PE teachers and students. These relationships created a CR environment as well met one of the three needs of SDT. Participants felt truly cared for and enjoyed the strong relationships and connections with dance PE teachers as well as other peers in class. They felt the environment was welcoming and friendly and teachers demonstrated sincerity and affection toward students.

Relatedness between students and dance PE teachers developed because teachers spent time talking and participating with them. They listened to and used suggestions, incorporated relevant ideas, and used real-life issues to connect through movement and expression. Teachers repeatedly explained their desire to get to know students, build rapport with family members, and spend one-on-one time with students when able. Students expressed their enjoyment being cared for by dance PE teachers and wanted that connection (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Participants at Carter explained Mr. Smythe made students feel comfortable because he was kind and funny. They said they could go to him for help if needed and they appreciated his detailed ways of teaching. He was present and made connections with students. Teachers who were more involved with students, listened to them, and demonstrated support, had higher participation rates in class (Tessier et al., 2010). Although participants said Ms. Burnett cared about her students, a few thought she could get to know them more. I observed her have several conversations with students as well as ask personal questions such as how an injury was healing or how a family

member was doing. Participants said Ms. Burnett was always very cordial and they felt comfortable going to her for personal problems. Participants at Huntington were thankful Ms. Banker knew all their names because in sport PE, Mr. Bender did not. They expressed their gratitude toward her because she was very helpful guiding them to make appropriate decisions toward their futures. Also, participants explained Ms. Banker knew what they were going through because she was once a student, dancer, and senior in high school; therefore, she “got them.” According to Shen et al. (2012), urban high school girls who felt a stronger sense of relatedness with PE teachers were more likely to participate and show enthusiasm versus those who felt neglected or unimportant.

Unfortunately, in sport PE, teachers often did not know students’ names, provide a welcoming environment, or allow time to socialize with peers. Participants at Carter felt many sport PE teachers knew the names of student athletes and found time to connect with them. But, if one was not an athlete, more than likely the sport teacher was not going to chat with them. On several occasions I observed sport PE teachers chatting with students. Eventually, I figured out they were mostly students who played on the team they coached or were involved with another after-school sport.

According to Niemiec & Ryan (2009), students have a desire to feel connected to others. Teachers are the ideal avenue to make these connections happen in class. They can demonstrate genuine care for students by talking with them, learning about backgrounds and interests, and providing relevant content. Regrettably, sport PE teachers were not satisfying the need to connect with students, therefore, negatively influencing motivation to participate in sport activities. Participants at Denver said Mr. Decker was friendly but they would not approach him

about anything personal, only if they had a class-related question or injury. At Carter, three of the four teachers were not present enough for students to build a rapport with them. Coach Witten was either absent or working on football duties. Mr. Fister and Ms. James were often late, ran class like a military camp, and seemed to only know the names of athletes. At Huntington, participants said Mr. Bender was not approachable and they would only ask for help if necessary.

In addition to positive relationships between students and teachers in dance PE, there was a strong bond among students in the dance PE classes across cases as well. There was ample time allotted to build relationships among students before, during, and after class, and students felt they had more in common with peers in dance PE versus sport PE. All three dance PE teachers allowed time to connect and socialize with peers as well as opportunities to work together to create and express. They felt closer and more connected to peers in dance PE than sport PE. Participants expressed feelings of belonging when they were in dance PE. They said they felt part of a team or a group who had a common goal. They reported a safe, warm, and welcoming environment in the dance studio in comparison to a loud, competitive, and less welcoming environment in the gymnasium. These behaviors enhanced relationships and provided social support, which led to motivated students (Deci & Ryan, 2000). They felt comfortable participating with peers in dance PE versus sport PE because they learned to use teamwork, cooperation, and respect for one another while working toward a common goal. By using these communication tools, students developed relationships with others in class, which increased overall motivation. According to Hellison's Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) model, the use of teamwork and cooperation help youth develop intrinsic



motivation to plan and manage their time, set short and long-term goals, and complete tasks (Escarti, Gutierrez, Pascual, & Llopis, 2010). This safe environment allowed students to get to know one another and work together. Furthermore, participants said they built friendships with many students in dance PE and they tended to do things together outside of school such as go to school dances together or attend one another's birthday parties.

According to McCaughtry et al. (2008), students have two goals in mind for PE classes: socializing with peers and passing the course. According to Niemic and Ryan (2009), PE teachers can allow time to work with peers and get to know one another. Unfortunately, in sport PE, students felt they did not typically know other students in class, did not feel connected to them, or were not given ample time to socialize or become acquainted. Therefore, not only were these students not given the opportunity to socialize, but they were not motivated to complete tasks which could have potentially led to failing the course. However, several participants in this study said they did what they had to do to pass the course and not affect their overall GPA.

### **Intersectionality between CRPE and SDT**

Based on the findings of this study, it is clear to see ways in which dance PE teachers' pedagogies and curricula were culturally relevant. First, they demonstrated two types of care, discussed in chapter two: global care and discipline-specific care. According to Flory and McCaughtry (2011), global care is caring about the student's general well-being, happiness, and safety. Dance PE teachers showed global care by learning about family structure, community, and rates of violence and crime in their neighborhoods. Discipline-specific care is ensuring mastery of content and overall academic success. Dance PE teachers made sure content related to everyday life and participated with students while dancing, demonstrating proper technique

for students to follow. Dance PE teachers established respect for students by listening and learning about each individual and communicated with students to build relationships. Furthermore, dance PE teachers provided curricula that interested students' current and future lives. They implemented current social/line dances, dance styles that could be used in church, and lifetime physical fitness activities to benefit overall health.

In addition, dance PE teachers met the three basic needs of SDT: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. They encouraged student voice and opinions, offered numerous choices, and allowed ownership and control over lessons and choreography. Dance PE teachers provided detailed instructions and demonstrations when introducing new techniques and choreography, which enhanced students' success when learning new skills. Also, they provided positive and constructive feedback to inform students when they were performing movement correctly or what needed to be done to improve. Finally, dance PE teachers formed strong student-teacher relationships as well as relationships among students. They allowed and encouraged socializing with peers to problem-solve and utilized group work to develop communication and team-building skills. Dance PE teachers explained, by working with others, students developed new connections and friendships. Students reported these new friendships during interviews as well as to their teachers.

Based on these findings, when PE teachers created an environment that allowed them to meet the three basic needs of SDT, as all three dance PE teachers did, they also created a CR curriculum. For example, female participants expressed the need for meaningful, valuable, and useful lessons to be taught in PE. They wanted teachers to get to know them, their interests, backgrounds, and community, and apply that knowledge in the gymnasium through a variety of

activities. When teachers provided these types of lessons in dance, it created a more autonomous, motivational environment. For example, Ms. Banks used community and real-life struggles as a means to choreograph a final performance piece. Students reported this activity meaningful because there were many ways they could connect with struggling issues or situations in their own lives. Furthermore, although as challenging as choreographing can be for beginner dancers, each student was able to provide input to the choreography and portray personal feelings through those movements. Therefore, dance PE teachers were providing autonomy in many ways while utilizing cultural knowledge in daily lessons.

According to Gillison et al (2012), when female students find meaningful challenges in PA, their level of competence increases. Competent students typically equal higher participation rates in PE and intentions to engage in PA (Taylor, Ntoumanis, Standage, & Spray, 2010). Furthermore, PE teachers who care about their students' success provide detailed instructions, physical demonstrations of skills, and feedback, which in turn creates higher competence in students as well. In dance PE, students reported ample practice time after learning new skills and receiving feedback. They had time to apply corrections and ask the teacher or their peers for help if needed. Students explained dance PE teachers taught a skill, reviewed the skill, and provided time to practice before moving to the next one. Teachers generally used a part-to-whole approach to piece each movement together, review, and add-on. Additionally, when students needed extra practice time, they felt comfortable asking for it and teachers often granted the time. According to Amado et al (2014), perceived competence and skill improvement comes from increased practice time. Unfortunately, students noted there was almost no practice time

allotted in sport PE. Typically, in sports, teachers introduced a game or activity, assumed students knew how to play, and sent them to the playing field without skill practice.

Because physical competencies are put on display, those who felt they lacked sport skill ability did not want to participate in sport PE; therefore, minimizing motivation in that particular class (Standage et al., 2010). Conversely, dance PE teachers genuinely cared about students and demonstrated discipline-specific care in the classroom, wanting them to master skills to the best of their ability. As a result, students' competence levels increased because dance PE teachers spent time specifically teaching and reviewing skills, allowing practice time alone or with peers, and moving about the studio providing feedback and solutions for improvement.

The notion of creating a CR curriculum comes from the level of care teachers impinge on their students. In other words, care comes from ways teachers create connections, build relationships, and use that knowledge to implement into daily lessons. Furthermore, it is about the time students spend working with peers as well as the relationships they build. Likewise, relatedness, the last construct of SDT, is the need to connect and socialize with others. Teachers who provide opportunities to work with friends create a stronger sense of connection or relatedness among students (Shen et al., 2012).

As already concisely discussed, dance PE teachers spent a lot of time and energy building relationships with students, whereas sport PE teachers did not. In addition to their own relationships, dance PE teachers encouraged partner and group work, socialization, and team-building. According to McCaughtry et al (2008), students who are able to socialize with friends are more willing to participate during PE lessons. As mentioned, participation was at an all-time high in dance PE. Unfortunately, it was not the same during the sports class. Sport PE teachers

did not assign projects where students could work together, create a game or strategy, or practice team-building initiatives. They were often put into teams and sent out to play against another team. However, female students desired to socialize and build friendships, which would boost their motivation to participate (Shen et al., 2012). During warm-ups, they were usually asked to stay quiet and follow along with the students who led the stretching exercises. It was frowned upon to talk during this time. However, because so many students were not interested in playing the chosen sport, they were often standing in the outfield or on the sidelines trying to chat with friends until they were yelled at by the teacher.

Unlike dance PE, lack of CR in sport PE classes did not allow teachers to meet the three basic needs of SDT. This unfortunate situation occurred in most of the sport classes in this study with the minor exceptions of Mr. Decker and Coach O'Brien. Although they made few attempts to familiarize themselves with students and implement a range of activities, there was still minimal participation among AA female students in their classes. Overall, AA female students were neither competent nor interested in the sport-based curriculum offered at these schools.

### **Implications for AA girls and Urban PE**

This study clearly demonstrates the unique population of AA urban females and their interests in PA. As stated in chapter one, the greatest increases in the prevalence of obesity is in adolescent females; specifically, AA, urban, adolescent females (Fryer et al., 2012; Huh et al., 2012). Unfortunately, due to uncontrollable circumstances, such as neighborhood violence, safety concerns, or financial concerns, PA is often limited leading to sedentary lifestyles and increased obesity levels.

Therefore, high school PE is an ideal venue to reach AA female students and help engage them in PA. However, it is important PE teachers note what is important, meaningful, valuable, and relevant to female students. Similar to past research (Cothran & Ennis, 1999; Enright & O’Sullivan, 2010), AA female participants in this study absolutely enjoyed engaging in dance as well as aerobics, Zumba, and other movement activities with music. Dance is a sociocultural interest and an important part of AA females’ lives. According to Emery (as cited in Farr, 1997), currently, and for many centuries, the AA culture values dance as a popular pastime. It has been used in religious ceremonies, celebrations, and self-expression. Some dances have also been passed down from generation to generation. Therefore, AA female students deserve to be exposed to dance in the context of general PE as it is extremely important and relevant to their lives. Forcing AA female students to solely take sport PE is an issue of equity as it denies them the opportunity to learn skills and content that is directly relevant to their lives.

Although all students were required to take the required freshman sport-based PE class, schools in this study were fortunate to also offer dance for PE credit as a separate entity from the sport classes. However, not all schools will have this fortunate situation due to non-qualified teachers or budget limits. Therefore, it is important for general PE teachers to implement dance into their PE classes in order to create a CR and diverse curriculum. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), it is necessary to use the culture of the students to implement in class versus only teaching the culture of the teacher. For example, they can teach warm-up routines to music by simply incorporating music during every day stretching routines. Additionally, they can introduce group fitness routines to music (i.e. Zumba, aerobics) via video, personal knowledge, or use of outside sources. Also, teaching current social/line dances will help engage many

students because choreography can be used at school dances as well as family parties and events. To increase autonomy, teachers can allow students to create their own warm-up routines and dances in order to feel a sense of ownership in lessons and pride in what they have created. According to Standage, Duda, and Ntoumanis (2003), students feel more competent and related when they have a more autonomous-environment with few controlling factors. These opportunities can lead to higher levels of competence as well as the opportunity to build relationships among students.

Furthermore, connecting dance content with girls' culture, family, and friends could potentially promote future healthy lifestyles. Based on the results of this study, AA females are more likely to use concepts from dance PE in their everyday lives versus what they are exposed to in sport PE. They enjoy dancing with friends and family members, at family reunions and parties, and during religious events or celebrations. AA females explained they are not as connected to sport in their outside lives as they are connected to dance which aligns with past findings (Spencer-Cavaliere & Rintoul, 2012). They felt less relevance to sport because they did not feel the content was useful or meaningful to their lives. Furthermore, and similar to past findings by Spencer-Cavaliere and Rintoul (2012) as well, AA participants claimed to lack skill ability and had lower competence in sport than dance, leading them to withdrawal from the activity all together.

However, although AA female students enjoyed dance, their entire experience was not defined solely by dance content; content alone is not enough. It must be matched with strong pedagogy. As past literature has found, the importance of appropriate pedagogy is equally as important, as it has not always been a strong suit of PE teachers (Spencer-Cavaliere & Rintoul,

2012). According to Ennis (2000), although teachers want to change their teaching strategies to reach lower skilled and ethnically diverse students, it is not that simple. After many years, teachers tend to lose the energy, motivation, and commitment to making these changes, resulting in the higher skilled athletes dominating each class, limiting playing opportunities for the less-skilled students. In this study, Coach O'Brien tried to stay enthusiastic, motivating students to join in and play while she joyfully played alongside them. Additionally, Mr. Decker attempted to teach skills with proper demonstrations and specific instructions. Unfortunately, these strategies were minor attempts at engaging all students and did not necessarily make for high participation. However, these two teachers might have engaged a few more students than the rest of the sport PE teachers in this study. Conversely, dance PE teachers constantly changed their teaching strategies, including peer teaching and assessment, group collaboration, and of course, direct instruction with adequate, constant feedback. This variety of teaching strategies proved higher participation in dance PE. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), CR pedagogy includes caring for and attending to students' academic success, which means teachers need to figure out what students need as individuals in order to reach their success. Furthermore, relationships between teachers and students and among students matter just as much to promote engagement in class. Students desire their teachers to get to know them and demonstrate care (Flory & McCaughy, 2011). Essentially, relationships build connections and trust which lead to an interest in participating. Additionally, students need time to socialize with peers and build connections as well. They should be taught how to peer teach and assess, cooperate and work together. Eventually, these strategies can help build trust and respect among one another and potential enjoyment in PE.



Essentially, good pedagogy should promote CR, autonomy, competence, and relatedness. It is interesting to think how AA female participants would have reacted and experienced sport PE had those teachers practiced the same types of pedagogy the dance PE teachers practiced. Perhaps their sport PE experience would not have been so meaningless or irrelevant. In general, it makes sense to assume the answer to engaging all students is a well-rounded curriculum where students have the opportunity to learn multiple movement forms through empowering pedagogy that promotes relevance and self-determination. Dance alone is not the answer, and neither is sport. But, as this study shows, dance must be part of the curriculum for AA urban females. Furthermore, regardless of PE content, it has to be taught well in order to be meaningful.

**Implications for Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) Programs (to teach pre-service teachers):**

**Implementing CR in PETE programs.** Findings from this study suggest dance PE teachers created a CR curriculum for their students. They demonstrated care by getting to know students, family members, extracurricular activities, and personal interests. They cared about their students' overall well-being as well as their academic success inside and outside their classes (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011). Therefore, students valued dance PE more than sport PE because those teachers gathered important information and used what they knew about their students to connect content to them. For that reason, there are many ways PETE programs need to improve to better prepare pre-service teachers.

Results suggest many PE teachers were not strongly familiar with CRPE. They did not seem to know how to connect and care for students or how to create an environment with relevant activities for them. The few PE teachers who attempted to build rapport with students or offer different activities did not tend to follow the three steps of the CR cycle; therefore,

missing the full connection. Based on this specific finding, I recommend the following strategies to help prepare pre-service teachers prior to student teaching.

First, PETE programs should offer a class regarding sociocultural issues, such as race, SES, sexuality, gender, obesity, and other sensitive issues, to introduce the variety of students who might be in their future PE classes. Most likely, they will work with students from different backgrounds than themselves and should have previous knowledge. According to Howard (2003), teachers should have knowledge of culture and cultural capital as well as how it could affect their classroom. Sometimes, students' beliefs and ideas they bring to school are not the "norm" or mainstream of that school culture. Pre-service teachers should be exposed to literature regarding these issues in PE and class discussions should further their knowledge. In addition, this type of class should provide knowledge of and discuss the importance of CRPE. Then, according to the literature, introduce the CR cycle, along with the importance, benefits, and findings when implemented in the gymnasium (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011). Furthermore, during class time, case studies involving different issues could be created asking pre-service teachers how they would apply this theory during a specific situation and what they perceive might happen when they demonstrate care, apply it, and make connections between students and content. Without this coursework, pre-service teachers only have their background and assumptions to draw from as they teach a potential diverse group of students.

Second, university PETE programs should provide pre-service teachers with authentic experiences to work with and teach secondary students; specifically AA girls in urban settings. Lessons should be well-planned by pre-service teachers and should apply the CR theory and concepts when planning and teaching lessons to outside students. However, simply planning and

delivering lessons will not be enough to truly enact the CR cycle. Pre-service teachers will need to learn about the community where students live, their interests and backgrounds, and create relevant lessons. If possible, this experience should happen before any student teaching occurs.

**Implementing SDT in PE.** Similarly, findings from this study suggest dance PE teachers met the three needs of SDT; therefore, AA female students enjoyed dance PE more than sport. They enjoyed autonomous environments that offered choice, freedom, expression, and exploration. AA female students wanted to feel competent, and when they did, they were more willing to participate. Their competence was increased by dance PE teachers through feedback, detailed instructions, and physical demonstrations. Finally, they felt the need to connect with teachers and peers. Dance PE teachers spent time getting to know students, acknowledged and knew their name, and called them by their first names. Additionally, they provided time for students to socialize and make connections with other peers. Unfortunately, these needs were not typically met in the sport PE classes. Based on this finding, I recommend the following strategies to improve knowledge and implementation of SDT in PE.

Similar to the above recommendation, PETE programs should have classes that introduce and discuss different theories. SDT could potentially be introduced in the class discussed above, throughout the program, or during methods courses. Pre-service teachers should be exposed to a variety of ways to create autonomous environments in order to create a more positive, motivational learning climate (Li, Rukavina, & Foster, 2013). During peer-teaching, or when teaching outside students, pre-service teachers should enforce autonomy through the many ways discussed in the results. For example, they might challenge students to create lessons that demonstrate autonomy or provide choices that encompass a range of activities; not just sport.

Pre-service teachers need to understand what past literature has found; not all students know how to perform skills or play every sport, but through thorough explanations, they feel cared for and more confident participating (Li et al., 2013). Therefore, they need to be encouraged to teach their students basic skills and rules to games, as well as pay attention to students' technique and provide feedback. Finally, throughout PETE classes, pre-service teachers should be taught ways to create a positive social environment where students can get to know their peers and teachers. Again, only hearing about these ideas will not miraculously make better PE teachers. Pre-service teachers need opportunities to peer-teach and work with other children in order to apply these concepts. As a PETE professor, it is necessary to encourage these concepts and provide meaningful feedback to pre-service teachers so they can improve their pedagogies.

**Implementing dance in PE.** In addition to creating a warm, welcoming, positive, and participatory environment, pre-service teachers need to learn ways to improve their comfort levels when implementing dance into PE programs. Based on previous research, PE teachers do not always feel competent teaching dance because they had minimal exposure to dance, did not receive adequate guidelines to creating dance lessons, or were not given an opportunity to practice teaching dance lessons (Amado et al., 2014).

Based on the findings of this study, and my personal experience, it is important for PETE programs to require all PE majors participate in at minimum of one movement/rhythms class that introduces movement concepts such as locomotor movements, choreography skills (i.e. choreographing, creating movements with music), and several genres of dance (i.e. ballet, jazz, and modern). These classes should also include a wide range of dance forms, such as social,

cultural, recreational, and creative dance. PETE students should achieve proficiency in a variety of fundamental dance skills and basic teaching strategies.

It is completely necessary to provide *more* opportunities for PETE students to familiarize themselves with dance. For example, pre-service teachers should have the opportunity to peer-teach during the dance class itself, but additional opportunities such as during methods courses. Having authentic experiences, whether it is to their peers or students from outside programs, is a critical step in creating comfort and building competence in pre-service teachers. Furthermore, they could visit local schools, attend before- or after-school programs, or ask local schools to bringing groups of students to campus.

### **Directions for Future Research**

One of the main ideas I was searching for in this study was whether or not AA adolescent females were motivated and enjoyed participating in PE. I wanted to know whether or not motivation to participate was connected to the individual teacher, content, delivery of content, or peer and teacher relationships. I wanted to discover key findings that aligned with the already existing literature, but with something more powerful to add. I believe the key findings of this study state AA females enjoyed participating in dance-based PE; however, were not particularly delighted to participate in sport-based PE. Reasons they enjoyed dance PE are aligned with CRPE and SDT such as, teacher care, relevant content, content delivery, autonomous environments, competence, teacher-student relationships, and student-student relationships. The key findings of this study strongly connected the components of CRPE and SDT.

Based on existing literature, authors report teachers who care have better overall classes (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011). For example, teachers can demonstrate care by getting to know

their students, community, and backgrounds and use what they know to develop trust and a solid rapport with them. Then, using this information, teachers implement relevant content. When students trust and feel acknowledged by teachers, as well as enjoy lessons, they are more apt to participate. Additionally, teachers who demonstrate care want students to be successful. They explore ways in which each student can develop the necessary skills to improve academically and gain confidence. With this knowledge, I believe more research should be done with secondary PE teachers to investigate their knowledge of CRPE and whether or not they are implementing it. If they are not familiar with this concept, it is important to learn why college PETE programs are not properly informing teacher candidates. It is necessary to reach college programs to ensure their candidates are getting the education they need to be successful teachers who will be able to pass that success on to their own, future students.

The current literature base informs us females' participation levels decline as they become adolescents and the decline is more prevalent in AA females than their Caucasian counterparts (Kimm et al., 2002; Lopez & Hynes, 2006). In addition, the literature states females do not care to participate in traditional sport PE classes (Olafson, 2002; Oliver et al, 2009). Participants in this study confirmed past findings. They were not interested in the repetition of competitive team sports, which they did not feel connected to or competent playing. They wanted time to socialize with friends and be recognized by their sport PE teacher. However, it is not that AA female participants disliked PA. In fact, they enjoyed it; but only when it was relevant to their lives and future lifestyles. In this case, participants enjoyed dance PE because they felt connected to lessons, music, and freedom to explore and express themselves. In order to expand this research, it is important to study a broader population of adolescent females; not

only AA females. Researchers should investigate adolescent females' preferences regarding dance PE and potentially other PE classes that offer movement to music (i.e. aerobics or Zumba). Then, utilize the findings to reach out to future teachers and PETE programs to enhance all programs. It will be necessary to emphasize that it is not just about content, but strong pedagogy to complement it.

This study specifically defines how dance PE teachers met the three needs of SDT. For example, dance PE teachers implemented autonomous environments where students could choose, explore, create, and acquire ownership. Their voices were heard and opinions mattered. Dance PE teachers ensured student competence by providing positive, complimentary feedback as well as constructive criticism with solutions to the problems. They offered detailed instructions with physical demonstrations for students to imitate. And, dance PE teachers created relatedness between themselves and students as well as among students. They took time to get to know their students, allowed students to socialize and work together during class, and built connections.

Unfortunately, this study also found how most sport PE teachers did not meet the three needs of SDT. They did not provide much autonomy, and when they did, it was generally the choice to participate in one sport or another. They did not allow time for creativity or listen to students' opinions. Because sport PE teachers assumed students knew how to play each sport, there were usually minimal to no explanations or demonstrations. Furthermore, sport PE teachers often disappeared during game play, lacking any feedback to students. It was clearly stated sport PE teachers did not engage with students or get to know them, therefore, did not implement content relevant to them. They did not generally allow for socializing with friends

but students would drift to the corners or outfield to find ways to gossip. In order to move forward making improvements in our field, create stronger teacher candidates, and gain greater levels of adolescent female participation, researchers need to find out specifically *why* sport PE teachers do not implement strategies to meet these needs in order to increase participation levels among female students. Future research around these concerns might focus specifically on the teachers.

Finally, it is important these findings be recognized for AA females of all ages. Some research has focused on after-school elementary programs for girls with a focus on dance but could be expanded to elementary PE as well (Robinson et al., 2003). By implementing a CR curriculum that also meets the needs of SDT, we could potentially see lifelong changes in PA among AA, urban females.

### **Study Limitations**

Although this study provides significant contributions to the study of AA females' perspectives of two PE environments, it is essential to note the limitations of this study as well. First, it is important to understand relationships I had with many of the teachers at all three schools. These unique relationships could be viewed as a limitation because it may have made it easier for me to gain admittance into their classrooms. Furthermore, it could be viewed that I was biased, in a positive or negative way, to those I knew beforehand. However, I do not feel my relationships were strong enough with any individual teacher to skew my data collection.

Second, although the AA female participants in this study made strong cases for their enjoyment in dance PE, it must be cautioned to the reader that findings cannot be generalized to all females in terms of dance-based PE. Dance is a popular pastime in the AA culture and they



used dance with friends and family before they took classes at the high school. Because the participants' demographics were similar, a more diverse population of SES, race, and gender could provide more varying perspectives of dance versus sport PE.

Finally, participants in this study seemed to have dance PE teachers who truly cared about them, developed positive relationships with them and among students, and provided CR curriculum with strong pedagogies. Conversely, the relationships with the sport teachers were the opposite, content was irrelevant, and pedagogies were weak. These teacher characteristics could be a limitation as the results might have been different had the roles been reversed. We cannot assume all dance PE teachers are caring, provide relevant content, and enact a variety of teaching strategies while sport PE teachers do not.

**APPENDIX A**

## Observation Guide – Dance and Sport PE

Date:

School:

Teacher:

Class:

Time:

Number of Students:

Setting during first few visits:

Overall school environment:

Studio Room or Gymnasium:

Equipment/Resources:

Hallways:

Cafeteria:

Focus of the Lesson (i.e., cultural relevance to the lesson, care demonstrated by the teacher, do students make choices, do they demonstrate competency in the lesson):

Teacher Presentation of the Lesson:

How are students interacting with one another?

How are students interacting with their teacher?

How are AA females engaging in the activities (i.e. peer relationships, characteristics, ability, participation, behavior, etc.)?

Researcher participant perspectives:

Other relevant events:

## APPENDIX B

### Student Interview Guide

Domains for interview questions:

Demographics/Background

Content

Teacher Relationships

Peer Relationships

Attitudes toward PA

Appendix B: Sample Student Interview Guides

I am interested in learning about how high school girls feel about PE; specifically dance PE versus sport PE. I am guessing you have a lot of insight and experiences in both classes that would help me better understand your likes, dislikes, and overall impression of the classes. Each interview will be audio recorded. All the information is confidential and will not affect your grade in this class. No one else will be able to hear your answers and I will never use your real name.

### Student Interview Guide #1

1. First, I am going to ask some questions about you and your background in school and PE.
  - a. Tell me the types of PE classes you have had up until this point (i.e. sports, aerobics, etc.)
  - a. Have you ever had a dance PE class prior to the one you are currently enrolled in?
  - b. Is this class an elective or were you placed in this class for other reasons such as scheduling, etc...? Explain.
  - c. Tell me about some of the electives available to students. (If applicable ask...) So why did you choose dance when you have all those other options?
  - d. What are some of the different classes to choose from for PE credit?
  
2. Can you describe your elementary, middle, and high school PE classes? (ask about each separately)
  - a. Attendance and participation policy
  - b. Locker room/changing rules
  - c. PE Instructor(s) – gender, personal characteristics, teaching style
  - d. Location (gymnasium, cafeteria, other)
  - e. General activities/lessons taught
  - f. Overall feelings/comments
  
3. In the most recent high school sport PE class, were your friends in the same class as you? What types of peer relationships did you develop during PE (become closer with your

friends? get to know people you did not know?) At any time, did the opposite relationship develop (loss of friendships, arguments, fights)?

4. In the most recent high school sport PE class, what type of relationship did you have with your PE teacher?
  - a. Did he/she say hi to you each day?
  - b. Warm and welcoming or stand-offish?
  - c. Positive and encouraging or demeaning/unsupportive?
  - d. Did he/she demonstrate care (try to get to know you, your family, interests, etc.)?
5. Do you anticipate this dance PE class to be similar or different than your past PE experiences? Explain.
6. What type of relationship do you think you will develop with the dance PE teacher?
  - a. Would you like to get to know your teacher?
  - b. What characteristics do you think are important for a teacher to have?
  - c. In what ways can teachers become more involved in students' lives?
  - d. In what ways could knowing your teacher better affect your learning?
7. What would you like to see different in this class compared to your past PE experiences?
8. Physical activity is any type of movement that gets your heart rate up and makes you sweat.
  - a. Do you like PA?
  - b. If so, what types of PA do you like to do outside of school?
  - c. Are any of the activities you mentioned included in your PE classes?
  - d. Would you like the activities you mentioned to be included in your PE classes?
  - e. Have you ever used activities learned in PE outside of school?

### Student Interview Guide #2

1. Think back to the first interview when I asked about the most recent sport PE class that you took during high school.
  - a. How often did class meet each week and for how long each day?
  - b. Remind me what types of sports and/or activities you did all semester?
  - c. What types of choices/options were you given in this class? Or were you provided specific instructions that could not be changed?
  - d. Describe the environment (gym, weight room, outdoor fields/track). What did it look like? How did it sound? Was it warm and welcoming? Intimidating? What was your overall feeling while you were participating in this class?
2. During sport PE, did you get to make any choices? If so, in what ways?
  - a. How did it make you feel when you were/were not given choices?
  - b. Why do you think you felt this way?

- c. What would change the way you felt?
  - d. Did the environment feel competitive? If so, how?
  - e. What types of social skills were you taught (responsibility, conflict resolution, cooperation, respect...)?
3. During sport PE, did you feel successful at sports/activities? Why or why not?
  - a. Did the instructor deliver exact instructions to skills and games?
  - b. Were you given time to practice skills before playing the game?
  - c. Did the instructor provide feedback (positive or constructive)?
  - d. If you were unsuccessful at skills or games, how did that make you feel?
  - e. What might have helped you feel successful?
4. During sport PE, were you given the opportunity to work with your friends?
  - a. Were you able to choose teams/groups? If not, who chose teams/groups?
  - b. Did you like working with your friends?
  - c. How did it feel when you were not able to work with your friends?
  - d. Was there time to develop relationships with peers (make friends, become closer to people you were already friends with)?
5. Describe the relationships/connections in sport PE:
  - a. What was the relationship between you and the teacher?
  - b. What was the relationship between you and other students (peers) in class?
  - c. What was the relationship between you and other students (peers) beyond the class environment? In other words, did anything in this class bring you to get along better with others b/c of what you may have learned, or vice versa... did it lead to animosity or disagreements outside of class?
  - d. Did you feel as though you were always a part of what was going on during class...you felt part of the lessons? Or, did you feel you were left out during lessons? Explain why or why not.
6. Now let's discuss the current dance PE class that you are enrolled in.
  - a. How often does class meet per week and for how long each day?
  - b. What types of activities do you do all semester (different styles of dance, combinations, stretches, etc.)?
  - c. Do you have choices/options each day or are you provided specific instructions that could not be changed?
  - d. Describe the environment (gym, dance studio, wrestling room, other). What did it look like? How did it sound? Was it warm and welcoming? Intimidating? What is your overall feeling?
7. So far, in dance PE, have you been able to make any choices? If so, in what ways?
  - a. How does it make you feel when you are/are not given choices?
  - b. Why do you think you feel this way?
  - c. What would change the way you feel?

- d. Does the environment feel competitive? If so, how?
  - e. What types of social skills are you taught (responsibility, conflict resolution, cooperation, respect...)?
8. So far, in dance PE, do you feel successful at skills/technique/combinations? Why or why not?
- a. Does the instructor deliver exact instructions to skills/technique/combinations?
  - b. Are you given time to practice the skills/tech/combinations before demonstrating to the instructor/class/on stage?
  - c. Does the instructor provide feedback (positive or constructive)?
  - d. If you were unsuccessful at a skill/movement/combination, how did that make you feel?
  - e. What might have helped you feel successful?
9. So far, in dance PE, are you given the opportunity to work with your friends?
- a. Are you able to choose groups? If not, who chooses groups?
  - b. Do you like working with your friends?
  - c. How does it feel when you are not able to work with your friends?
  - d. Is there time to develop relationships with peers (make friends, become closer to people you were already friends with)?
10. Describe the relationships/connections in dance PE:
- a. What is the relationship between you and the teacher?
  - b. What is the relationship between you and other students (peers) in class?
  - c. What is the relationship between you and other students (peers) beyond the class environment? In other words, does anything in this class bring you to get along better with others b/c of what you may have learned, or vice versa... does it lead to animosity or disagreements outside of class?
  - d. Do you feel as though you are always a part of what is going on during class...you feel part of the lessons? Or, do you feel you are left out during lessons? Explain why or why not.
11. Can you share a time in either sport or dance PE when you felt left out of the activity or sport?
- a. How did it make you feel?
  - b. What triggers might make you think about that time again?
  - c. Have you changed any behaviors since that incident occurred? Explain.
12. Can you share a time in either sport or dance PE when a friend or peer felt left out of class?
- a. Could you tell they felt left out or was this information shared with you?
  - b. How did the person feel? Or what did it seem like they were feeling?
  - c. Have you changed any behaviors since that incident occurred? Explain.

13. Is there anything else you would like to share about your PE experiences at this time?

### Student Interview Guide #3

1. Now that you are at the end of the semester and have a clearer picture of what this dance class is all about, tell me about the content taught in this class.
  - a. Are there any life benefits to what you were taught in this class? Explain.
  - b. Is what you learned useful in the future (in other contexts)? In other words, will you be able to use “dance” in your future? What aspects of the dance class will be useful?
  - c. (Define cultural relevance to students) – How relevant is this content to your life and lifestyle? Explain.
  - d. What is the number one most positive thing you learned in this class?
  
2. Looking back at the sport-based PE class, let me ask you similar questions about the content of the class:
  - a. Are there any life benefits to what you learned in the sport class? Explain.
  - b. Is what you learned useful in the future (in other contexts)? In other words, will you be able to use “sport” in your future? What aspects of the sport class will be useful?
  - c. (Define cultural relevance to students) – How relevant is this content to your life and lifestyle? Explain.
  - d. What is the number one most positive thing you learned in this class?
  
3. Based on what you told me about the dance PE class and what you remember about the sport PE class you took, describe the following:
  - a. Likes and dislikes
  - b. Similarities and differences
  - c. Difficulty level (why?)
  - d. Ability level (why?)
  - e. Peer relationships
  - f. Teacher relationships
  
4. In the first interview I asked if you anticipated this PE class to be similar or different than your past PE experience. Does this class meet that expectation? How? Do you like the change or would you rather it is like your last sport PE class? Why or why not?
  
5. How did your sport PE teacher relate to you?
  - a. Did he/she know your background and demonstrate respect toward you? Explain.
  - b. Were students respectful to one another in this class?
  - c. How do you think their (gender, ethnicity/race, beliefs) affected your relationship with one another?
  - d. How did they connect class content to best suit all students, specifically you?

6. How does your dance PE teacher relate to you?
  - a. Does he/she know your background and demonstrate respect toward you? Explain.
  - b. Are students respectful to one another in this class?
  - c. How do you think their (gender, ethnicity/race, beliefs) affects your relationship with one another?
  - d. How do they connect class content to best suit all students, specifically you?
  
7. If you were to give advice to future PE teachers about the ideal PE class, what would you tell them? (Prompts: activities, knowing/connecting with students, options to choose, work with friends, etc...)

### Focus Group Interview Guide #1

Similar to your individual interview, I am going to ask questions to better understand your experiences in sport and dance PE classes. This interview will be recorded and the discussion will be kept confidential. I will not share this information with your teachers, parents, principal, or other peers. I encourage everyone to participate; all ideas are equally valid as there is no right or wrong answer; and each persons' view should be heard and respected.

1. First, let's talk about any activities that you were involved in growing up, including now (soccer, gymnastics, etc.). Walk me through your childhood; for example, when you started, why you got involved in it, and how it led you to where you are today.
  - a. How did you get involved in (activity)?
  - b. Did your parents or any siblings do that activity? Did you start this activity b/c you had friends in it?
  - c. Tell me what you liked most about the activity. If you are no longer involved in (activity), what made you stop doing it?
  
2. Let's talk about your PE experiences in elementary, middle, and high school (ask the group about each level separately).
  - a. Were you excited to go to PE? If not, how did you feel when you knew you had PE?
  - b. What types of activities were taught in PE?
  - c. Did you like to participate in the games and activities that were offered? Why or why not?
  - d. What was your most/least favorite memory of PE?
  
3. Let's talk about the sport PE teachers.
  - a. How did they treat students?
  - b. Did they recognize differences among students (race, gender, culture, SES)?
  - c. What did they do to make the class more cohesive? (Group work, partners, form teams)



- d. Do you feel like they offered a variety of activities?
  - e. Were the activities relevant to your current lives? Future lifestyles?
  - f. What would you change about your sport class?
4. Using your most recent high school sport PE class, tell me about all the things that stand out in your mind about PE. These items could be fun, meaningful, embarrassing, frustrating, etc...
    - a. Which of those items seem to be most important to you? Least important? Somewhere in the middle or neutral?
    - b. What made X important? Less important? Neutral?
    - c. Ranking activity (on a sheet of paper, take the top five things that stand out and rank them from most important to least important)
  5. Now let's talk about the dance PE class that you are enrolled in currently.
    - a. Are you excited to come to this class? If not, how do you feel each day knowing you have to come here?
    - b. What types of activities are taught in this class?
    - c. Do you like to participate in the activities in class? Why or why not?
    - d. What is your most/least favorite part of this class?
  6. Let's talk about the dance PE teacher.
    - a. How does he/she treat students?
    - b. Does he/she recognize differences among students (race, gender, culture, SES)?
    - c. Do you feel like he/she offers a variety of activities?
    - d. Are the lessons relevant to your current lives? Future lifestyles?
    - e. So far, what would you change about this class?
  7. Using this recent high school dance PE class, tell me about all the things that stand out in your mind about PE. These items could be fun, meaningful, embarrassing, frustrating, etc...
    - a. Which of those items seem to be most important to you? Least important? Somewhere in the middle or neutral?
    - b. What made X important? Less important? Neutral?
    - c. Ranking activity (on a sheet of paper, take the top five things that stand out and rank them from most important to least important)
  8. What would you like to see in this class that you did not experience in any other PE classes? Explain.
  9. Based on your overall background (race, gender, culture, SES – and I am not asking you to necessarily share your background), what can you tell me about yourself, personally, and what PA means to you (likes, dislikes, level of importance, level of necessity, future use, etc...)?

## Focus Group Interview Guide #2

After conducting the first round of student interviews, teacher interviews, and FGIs, I feel I will be able to create this guide based on what themes might develop or information I am missing...

Do students tend to respect one another in the gymnasium during sport PE? In the dance studio during dance PE?

Do students demonstrate negative behaviors in sport PE? In what ways? Why do you think they (or you) act portray these behaviors? What about in dance PE?

As an adult, do you think you could join group fitness classes such as step aerobics, Tae Bo, Zumba, etc.? Adult sport leagues or intra-mural teams? Why or why not? Does your answer have anything to do with what you learned in high school PE?

## Teacher Interview Guide #1

Thank you for agreeing to this interview. I am hoping you will help me better understand your AA female students and their perspectives of different PE classes. They shared some information with me in their individual interviews that will remain confidential. Some questions I ask you will help validate what they are telling me.

1. First, I would like you to tell me about yourself and your background.
  - a. How long have you been teaching? Here? Other?
  - b. What subjects are you certified?
  - c. Of those certifications, what subjects have you taught?
  - d. How did you decide to become a teacher? What led you here?
  - e. What is your primary role at this school?
  - f. What is your teaching philosophy?
2. What other classes are offered here for PE credit? Currently, do you teach any of them? Have you ever taught them in the past? What are your thoughts regarding the entire PE program, in general (not one specific part of it), at this school?
3. Describe the sport PE program at this school.
  - a. What do you know about the classes?
  - b. What are your thoughts about the content offered to students?
  - c. In what ways do you think the content is relevant to students' lives and lifestyles? Why or why not?
  - d. Is there cultural relevance or connection to students' lives?
  - e. Do students benefit from traditional sport PE classes in a sense they can use what they learned in their futures?
  - f. How can sport PE classes be improved to provide opportunities for students to be active after school AND in the future?
4. Have students openly discussed their sport PE experiences? What have you heard that you can share with me? Positives or negatives.

5. How do you feel the dance PE class differs from sport PE (aside from the obvious)?
6. Describe the dance PE program at this school.
  - a. What content do you cover in your class?
  - b. What are your thoughts about the content you provide to students?
  - c. In what ways do you think the content is relevant to students' lives and lifestyles? Why or why not?
  - d. Is there cultural relevance or connection to students' lives?
  - e. Can students benefit from dance PE in a sense they can use what they learned in their futures?
  - f. How can dance PE be improved to provide opportunities for students to be active after school AND in the future?
7. Have students openly discussed their dance PE experiences? What have you heard that you can share with me? Positives or negatives.
8. How do you think your AA female students feel about both PE classes? Do you feel as though they prefer one over the other? Why or why not?
9. Do you have any other comments, perspectives, etc. that you can share with me about dance versus sport PE classes.

### Teacher Interview Guide #2

1. Describe the overall dance program (levels, performance policy, grading, assessment, etc.).
2. Please share with me some of the instructional strategies you use to teach dance. What types of motivational strategies do you use to get your students participating?
3. What is your rapport with the students? Do you know their background and/or home lives? Do you feel a connection with your students? All or some? How/why? How does your cultural background affect the way you connect to your students?
4. Do students work with partners? In groups?
  - a. Do you work with students one-on-one?
  - b. Who chooses the partners/groups – you or the students?
  - c. What are the benefits of students working together in your class?
  - d. Do you think students build friendships/connections with one another in this class? How or what makes you feel that way?
5. How do you ensure students feel competent with skills and combinations?
  - a. Do you provide feedback (whether positive or constructive) to students? Do you encourage peer assessment? Self-assessment?

6. Do you provide choice during class? In what ways?
  - a. Are students able to choose music?
  - b. Are students able to lead warm up?
  - c. Are students able to choreograph combinations?
  - d. Are students able to choreograph dances?
  - e. By allowing students choice and opportunities to design their own dynamics, what benefits do you think they are getting?
7. What strategies do you use to initiate and maintain interests in your class? Do you think your strategies work? Why or why not? Are these strategies intended to motivate students or are they “your way” of teaching?
8. Do you know or think students use what you teach them outside of school? In what ways?
9. It is my understanding girls in your class really enjoy dance. What do you think makes them enjoy this class so much?
10. If you were giving advice to future PE teachers, what could you tell them in order to provide an ideal class, environment, content, etc...?

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**ABSTRACT****AFRICAN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS' PERCEPTIONS OF DANCE-BASED PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT-BASED PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

by

**KIMBERLY MALJAK****August 2016****Advisor:** Dr. Nathan McCaughtry**Major:** Kinesiology**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2013), over the last 30 years childhood obesity has doubled in youth ages 6-11 and tripled in those ages 12-19. Furthermore, obesity trends are higher among minority females, specifically African American (AA) adolescent females. Lack of daily physical activity (PA) among youth is a key factor in rising obesity rates (National Institutes of Health [NIH], 2013; National Physical Activity Plan [NPAP], 2014), with a significant decline in PA among the AA female population (Kimm et al., 2002). Given what is known about the decline in PA among AA adolescent females, (Ennis, 1999; Kimm et al., 2002), it is logical physical education (PE) programs would make changes to accommodate students of varying skill levels and interests. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine AA high school girls' perceptions of dance-based PE in relation to their past experiences in sport-based PE. Two theoretical frameworks were used to guide this study: culturally relevant physical education framework (CRPE, Flory & McCaughtry, 2011) and self-determination theory (SDT, Ryan & Deci, 2000). Three teachers who taught dance PE and 19



AA adolescent females were observed and interviewed for one semester at three different high schools. In addition, six teachers who taught sport PE were observed during this time.

The main findings from this study suggest in order to engage AA adolescent females during PE, teachers need to demonstrate care and provide a CR curriculum that includes a variety of activities; specifically dance. In addition, to maximize participation and meet the three needs of SDT, PE teachers should create an autonomous environment, build competence, and create relationships with and among students.

### **AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT**

Kimberly Maljak completed her PhD in Kinesiology in the College of Education at Wayne State University in 2016. She completed her Bachelor's degree in dance and French from Oakland University in 1998. As a post-baccalaureate, Kimberly completed her secondary education certification in dance and health from Wayne State University in 2000. Prior to pursuing a Master's degree, she taught secondary dance and health in a diverse, suburban school district. She received her Master's in Kinesiology Pedagogy from Wayne State University in 2009. During the doctorate program, Kimberly worked as a graduate research assistant on two large-scale grant programs: Detroit Healthy Youth Initiative (DHYI) and Building Healthy Communities (BHC). These programs focused on increasing physical activity (PA) before, during, and after school.

Kimberly's research interests focus on cultural relevance and motivation in physical education (PE) and PA. More specifically, she is interested in understanding how to increase PA levels in adolescent females during PE and how teachers and the environment influence this participation. She is currently an active member in the Society of Health and Physical Education (SHAPE), Illinois Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (IAHPERD), and American Educational Research Association (AERA).

Kimberly is currently an instructor at Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) in Chicago, IL where she teaches courses, conducts scholarly research, and provides service to her university, field, and community.