

5-2019

# Taking a Breath: Understanding the Interrelationship of Breath in Dance/Movement Therapy and Everyday Life

Nicole Grigonis

*Sarah Lawrence College*, [ngrigonis@gmail.com](mailto:ngrigonis@gmail.com)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.slac.edu/dmt\\_etd](https://digitalcommons.slac.edu/dmt_etd)



Part of the [Dance Movement Therapy Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Grigonis, Nicole, "Taking a Breath: Understanding the Interrelationship of Breath in Dance/Movement Therapy and Everyday Life" (2019). *Dance/Movement Therapy Theses*. 49.  
[https://digitalcommons.slac.edu/dmt\\_etd/49](https://digitalcommons.slac.edu/dmt_etd/49)

This Thesis - Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Dance/Movement Therapy Graduate Program at DigitalCommons@SarahLawrence. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dance/Movement Therapy Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@SarahLawrence. For more information, please contact [alester@sarahlawrence.edu](mailto:alester@sarahlawrence.edu).

Taking a Breath: Understanding the Interrelationship of Breath in Dance/Movement Therapy and  
Everyday Life

Taking a Breath: Understanding the Interrelationship of Breath in Dance/Movement Therapy and

Everyday Life

Nicole Grigonis

Submitted in partial completion of the

Master of Science Degree at Sarah Lawrence College

May 2019

This thesis is dedicated to those who believed in me, encouraged me, supported me, and reminded me to take many deep breaths throughout this process. Your love, your gentleness, your patience, and your guidance speak measures. I could not have done this without you.

Eternally grateful. Eternally thankful.

M.C.D.J.K.S.

### Abstract

The integration of breath throughout contexts within dance/movement therapy and daily life can empower an able body-minded individual to explore awareness, which can ultimately achieve a greater sense of overall well-being. This thesis attempts to consider ways in which the breath can be used in both dance/movement therapy and in everyday life. Beginning with an introduction that questions ways in which the breath can be integrated more thoroughly in the field of dance/movement therapy and the takeaways that can serve able body-minded individuals in their everyday lives, it then transitions into the review of literature in physiological contexts, breath and the body-mind-emotion interrelationship, breath awareness in everyday life, and breath in the role of dance/movement therapy. The author also writes about her personal experiences with breath and the information it has provided her as an able body-minded human being and dance/movement therapist.

*Keywords:* dance-movement therapy, breath, awareness, body-mind-emotion interrelationship, everyday life, able body-minded people, well-being

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
Literature Review.....	7
Physiological Contexts.....	7
Breath and the Body-Mind-Emotion Interrelationship.....	11
Breath Awareness in Everyday Life.....	16
Breath Awareness for the Dance/Movement Therapist.....	18
Breath Awareness Within the Therapeutic Relationship.....	21
Methodology: A Qualitative Design and Approach.....	27
Theme 1: Bodily Disconnection.....	28
Theme 2: Emotional Frustration.....	30
Theme 3: Emotional Stress.....	32
Theme 4: Emotional Anxiety.....	35
Theme 5: Stillness.....	38
Theme 6: Relationships.....	42
Discussion.....	45
References.....	48

## **Taking a Breath: Understanding the Interrelationship of Breath in Dance/Movement Therapy and Everyday Life**

Breathing is an unconscious, ever on-going cycle that all living human beings do. There is no goal to reach, and no targeted task when breathing. All a human being has to do is just 'be', in order to partake in such a primal pattern. From the moment that we are in the womb, until the moment of death, we breathe to keep ourselves alive. It is fascinating to think that in each moment, our system is working to continue this cyclical process beginning from the internal; as the cells receive nourishment, to the external; translating the internal processes to visible inhalation and exhalation. With all that occurs when taking a breath, the individual partaking in the action doesn't even need to be cognizant of it for the cycle to complete and begin again.

There are many different levels and layers of the breath, along with ways in which we can attend to this cycle and how that informs our overall attention to how we go about life. We are aware that our lives depend on this pattern, yet we give it such little thought. The awareness of potentially shaping the breath-mind-emotion cycles to the connection of our well-being is only accessible for able body-minded human beings<sup>1</sup>. The reverse is also true. Some, if not most able body-minded human beings that have the capacity for integration may also experience body-mind-emotion divisiveness and conflict. Listening to and accessing the breath may become difficult, to where the breath often gets lost and not used to its full potential as viable information regarding what is going on in the mind, the body, and the emotions. For example, imagine an individual is walking down a dark alley alone at night and hears footsteps following behind

---

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, the term 'able body-minded human beings' refer to individuals who have full capacity in both their mentality and physicality. Due to the author being an able body-minded human being, she spoke true to her experience in regard to her discoveries with breath as it relates to dance/movement therapy and everyday life.

them. They may start to feel uneasy; their heart may begin to beat at a more rapid pace, their breath may become shorter and shallower, butterflies may appear in their stomach area. This individual may not be able to identify that they may be having anxiety about the situation they are in and are most likely unsure of how to regulate their state of being in that moment to further assist their overall well-being.

Dance/movement therapy recognizes that the body and the state of mind are integral to each other. By becoming more aware of what is typically unconscious, we have more information about the state of our own bodies, minds, and emotions. When having this greater sense of awareness, dance/movement therapists enter the therapeutic relationship with a better understanding of what the breath is conveying and why. Then, the dance/movement therapist can better attune with their clients to grasp a sense of where they are in the presence of their own bodies and minds, to then having the agency to make choices in manipulating and controlling their own thoughts and movements consciously while encouraging others to do the same. What we know to be vital and important in this work stretches beyond to our daily lives of being. As living able body-minded human beings, some are not cognizant enough to practice mindfully how to breathe and how the information that breath gives us informs overall well-being.

How can the breath be explored deeper when pertaining to the body-mind-emotion interrelationship? How can experiences that an able body-minded individual goes through each and every day be supported by the conscious awareness of their breath? By attending to the breath more intently, it can potentially provide insight for able body-minded people both inside and outside the field of dance/movement therapy to be more mindful and aware of their own body-mind-emotion experiences. The breath can serve as an assistant to change in recognizing what supports or doesn't support a specific situation, which in turn can help able body-minded

individuals on a grander scale of their own personal well-being. The literature in dance/movement therapy doesn't mention some of the specific possibilities about the way in which the breath can be integrated more into the therapeutic process. It is stated as important to its effectiveness to create so much change within the work, but without the 'why' factor and the 'how to' factor to support that notion. Detailed information about 'how to' attend to the breath and how it informs us about our feelings, states of being and why it is important to our self-awareness and overall being could be discussed more clearly. This literature review will support the idea of breath through multiple different outlooks such as the physiological contexts, how it benefits able body-minded people in their everyday lives, and the role it plays in dance/movement therapy.

### **Physiological Contexts**

“Respiration links our inner and outer environment in a continuous stream of breath. The breath is thought to carry vital energy. Through the process of breathing, we inspire and expire, draw in energy for new life, and release that life from us into death. Each exhalation is a loss, a letting go, but also a gift to the plant kingdom fed by the carbon dioxide we expel. Each inspiration is a returning gift from the plants that produce the oxygen we need to renew and sustain our life. The interdependence of living systems and the cycles of life, death, and rebirth are reflected in the process of breathing” (Hartley, 1995 p. 201). The cycle of breath is reciprocal between the inner processes and the outside environment. With each inhalation and exhalation, we are giving and receiving, in a continuous pattern that reminds our being that not only are we alive, but we assist in the ongoing life of other systems. Breath is the key to life connections.



What happens inside our bodies as we breathe? Wasser (2017) explains breath in the anatomical sense as a 'tidal' respiratory arrangement. This means that air moves through our lungs through the trachea, the primary bronchi leading to each lung, and the subsequent smaller bronchioles. Air is moved into these tubes and down to the inner reaches of the lungs on inspiration and out again on expiration. In order to inspire, or inhale, we increase the volume of the chest which increases the volume of the lung, since the lung is coupled to the chest wall. Gas then moves from the environment to the inside of the lung, causing us to inhale. Inhalation is the act of contracting the diaphragm. The diaphragm lies between the thorax and abdomen, which serves as a divider separating these two completely. When we inhale, the diaphragm contracts, which causes the diaphragm to shorten and move downwards towards the abdomen. The act of the diaphragm flattening out initiates the ribcage to move outward as an inhale is taken. When inhaling, the filling of the lungs conveys our bodies to expand into a fuller shape because of the internal shifts that are taking place to fulfill this action. In the physiological sense, inhalation is deemed a more active process because it requires the contraction of the diaphragm. The direct opposite occurs during an exhalation, where the volume of the chest is decreased and thus the lung increases pressure inside, to which the gas comes out. When exhaling, the lungs empty, to which our bodies return from expansion to a more neutral, relaxed state. The diaphragm then returns to its original place in the chest cavity. Opposite of inhalation, exhalation is deemed a more passive process as it relies solely on the elastic properties of the lung and the chest wall (Wasser, 2017).

Wasser (2017) also states that ventilation is both voluntary and involuntary regulatory control. When we meditate or bring awareness to our breath, the neural pathways associated with conscious control are being activated, which overrides the typical cycle of the breath pattern

which is considered to be a completely unconscious process. Not all sensory data will come into consciousness, being that breath is one of these typically unconscious processes to begin with. Although sensory information is not always brought to consciousness, it can be accessed by bringing attention to sensory properties of involuntary movement. The sensory information can then be transmitted to other brain structures, influencing a person's experience and interaction with this internal movement (Hindi, 2012).

These processes begin to bring awareness into the autonomic nervous system, as this system regulates the homeostatic function. The two subsystems of the autonomic nervous system; the parasympathetic nervous system and the sympathetic nervous system, represent neural networks that originate in the brainstem and contribute to the regulation of 'target organs', such as the eyes, heart, kidneys, intestines, and lungs, to name a few. Specifically, the parasympathetic nervous system promotes functions associated with a growth and restorative system, while the sympathetic nervous system promotes increased metabolic output to deal with challenges occurring outside the body (Porges, 2011). "The sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system are reciprocally innervated, and their responses are coordinated to provide the appropriate internal state to meet shifts in both internal and external demands" (Porges, 2011 p.64). "The parasympathetic nervous system is modulated primarily by internal changes in the viscera while the sympathetic nervous system is primarily activated by exteroceptive impulses via somatic afferent fibers in response to changes in the external environment" (Porges, 2011, p.64). The two systems work hand in hand in assimilating what is happening in the external to notify the internal to react appropriately to the response.

As the possibility of manipulating or reshaping the breath, the process is available to able body-minded people as long as they are alive. Conscious manipulation of the breath as it

pertains to able body-minded people and their daily lives can be recognized by using what is already accessible to them using a different perspective. This can assist in change throughout events that occur each and every day. The changes in our breath can offer information we are receiving from our mental state, such as the fight, flight, or freeze notion explained in correlation with the polyvagal theory discovered by Stephen Porges. “The detection of a person as safe or in danger triggers neurobiologically determined prosocial or defensive behaviors. Even though we may not be aware of danger on a cognitive level, on a neurophysiological level, our body has already started a sequence of neural processes that would facilitate adaptive defense behaviors such as fight, flight, or freeze” (Porges, 2011 p.11). The nervous system continues to assess risk by processing the information that is taken from the environment through the senses (Porges, 2011). Although not all stimuli in the environment pose a risk, our internal workings are a few steps ahead of our conscious thoughts when it comes to certain situations and our reactions to them. The breath plays a part as one of these ‘senses’ in assessing risk or safety. Noticing a quick and shallow breath that remains in the upper chest cavity may indicate apprehension of a dangerous situation, while on the reverse, feeling the breath travel evenly throughout the upper body may indicate a sense of comfort, release, and safety in an environment. Breath is seen and used as a central element that is affected by experience (Mehling et al., 2011).

Telles et al. (2011) believes that attention is improved when becoming aware of the breath, which may influence sympathetic modulation. In a study curated for stressed children, the practice of health *qigong* uses deep belly breathing as one of their modes for de-stressing. The practice gears the individuals to take in a long, deep inhalation, followed by a short period of holding while focusing on the abdomen, which then leads to expelling a long exhalation. The research suggests that this rhythmic and diaphragmatic breathing practice introduces temporary

relaxation responses by activating the parasympathetic pulmonary neural receptors (Wang, Seo, Geib, 2016). The research also suggests that this mode of breathing potentially serves as an autonomic or endocrine training, which improves overall mood stabilization, including homeostasis and reducing stress and anxiety (Wang, Seo, Geib, 2016). Caldwell recognizes that autonomic movement is tied to mood, perception, cognitive schema, and reflective thought, which brings us to the notion that autonomic movement may be the equivalent of our core sense of self, the part of us below conscious awareness and intention that motivates our basic life force (Caldwell, 2004). When we bring awareness to the breath specifically, there is an ability to understand on a cognitive level the cycle that the breath is taking and why.

### **Breath and the Body-Mind-Emotion Interrelationship**

Not only is breath a part of our physiology, it also brings attention to our emotions and feelings when we are more consciously aware. There are different ways that an individual can attend to the breath through the physical, mental, and emotional level of our beings, as each individual is unique in their own experiences. Although the breath has the ability to attend to each part of the self in these separate parts, the greater awareness and integration of the breath by incorporating all of these parts together encourages unity when looking at the whole self, allowing the individual to be clearly integrated through the mind-body-emotion interrelationship (Mehling et al., 2011). By having a conscious awareness of the breath, it creates more space for the able body-minded human being to tap into what is felt on a body level in correlation to what is happening in their emotional or mental state. Leventhal (2016) believes that the conscious use of breath can involve the whole body and inform us about conforming to the states of our emotions and thoughts. Mehling et al. (2011) states that a breath experience which comes and goes on its own can connect to a resource within that may be seeking a balanced state of being.

When able body-minded people are reminded to practice and integrate breath awareness and learn about what a breath experience has to offer, the development of the breath within the felt body experience has the capacity to clear and integrate patterns of resistance within the body-mind-emotion interrelationship (Mehling et al., 2011).

There is a reciprocal relationship between the breath and our state of being. The body-mind-emotion interrelationship offers information about reactions to outside stimuli and inner impulses as they arise. Hackney (2002) names breath as “the key to life, movement and rhythm” (p. 51). Although we breathe automatically and unconsciously, breath can be influenced by our thoughts, feelings and changes in consciousness. As able body-minded human beings, we have the potential resources to notice differences in our breath patterns and what our breath may be telling us about our external environment or inner feelings. We also have the potential access to consciously alter our breath to affect our feelings, thoughts, and patterns of moving (Hackney, 2002). Caldwell (2004) states that by focusing on both conscious movement and conscious stillness, the body begins to recognize this state as a tone by being attuned to both the inner and outer experiences (Caldwell, 2004). Motivation for movement exists on a continuum of internal and external sensations, so, what we feel in the inner impulses can be expressed in the outer form. The reverse is also true, in that the outer world can also influence our inner experiences. The reciprocal relationship between the inner and the outer continues, and awareness of these experiences motivates where action may be originating (Acolin, 2016). In becoming more aware of the state of being, noticing patterns of attention and making a conscious choice to focus occurs through sensing and feeling, and attending wholeheartedly to what is noticed can in turn help us learn to label our emotions, moods, and states (Hindi, 2012).

According to Mikulas (2015), mindfulness practices are based off of two fundamentals: awareness and concentration. Awareness is the act of maximizing the range and clarity of what is being attended to. When thinking about awareness, it is the fact of simply noticing whatever arises into consciousness, while minimizing getting 'lost' in related thoughts and reactions. Awareness is about embodying a state that allows all cognitive processes to be withheld, while simultaneously attempting to rid of judgments that may arise. Directly being aware of these processes can assist in facilitating self-control of the body, behaviors, feelings, and mind (Mikulas, 2015). Christine Caldwell created the Moving Cycle as a step by step creative movement process in assisting the physical healing of individuals. The initial stage of the Moving Cycle, *awareness*, asserts the ability to acknowledge what we feel, or what we aren't letting ourselves feel. This starts on a very physical level, beginning with tracking and describing the sensations in the body in order to pinpoint these feelings in the first place. The breath typically serves as the container in this process, even before beginning to sense and feel what may come up. By acknowledging the felt experiences of what is happening in the body, tuning in and being aware of the breath specifically creates the possibility to surrender to discoveries across the span of feelings, sensations, memories, and fears (Caldwell, 1996).

Concentration, then, is the learned control of the focus of attention. Concentration is often seen as developing control of attention on a grander scale, eventually leading to more control of the contents of the mind and the ability to disassociate with objects that may not be the main focal point (Mikulas, 2015). Having the breath function as a stable ground throughout mindfulness practices can direct the attention of solely honing-in to the breath as an object of concentration to hold the focus, while becoming more aware of the body and thoughts that may come into play while practicing. In breathwork workshops, individuals can learn how to

conceptually and experientially use the fundamentals of awareness and concentration to understand the nature of a complete breath, and how to use controlled breathing as a technique to reduce stress and unwanted emotions (Mikulas, 2015).

The ideas of both awareness and concentration while breathing generate the possibility of attaining a clearer mental state. By becoming more aware of the cycles in which the breath takes, there is agency to choose how to breathe in response to our emotions, thoughts, and patterns of movement. It may become easier to notice sensations, thoughts, and feelings as they occur in actual immediacy when the breath is used as a source of enlightenment. This happens by having a desire to understand what it means to notice and grasping a sense of how noticing throughout different scenarios that occur within the self ideally integrates the ability to attend to oneself in a more meaningful way (Mehling et al., 2011). For example, when feelings of agitation arise and alert the body to facilitate change in response to this feeling, tapping into the breath can be a way to diffuse the feelings all together, or maybe offer insight as to why the feeling is arising in the first place. Tuning into the breath in relation to the feeling can also offer the choice of finding ways to self-regulate by re-centering the body-mind-emotion interrelationship. The breath may be conveying that there may be another way to act upon the feeling most suited for the situation after checking in with the self, which could relieve the feeling altogether. When an individual is feeling pressures from external stressors, the rhythmic phrasing of the breath allows for release of these unwanted tensions, ultimately finding a moment to self-regulate.

The biological process of exhalation relates to this idea as each out breath is “removing waste from every cell” (Hackney, 2002 p.54). Having an awareness of inner judgments could lead to the mind wandering in negative thought processes, which contributes to the negative

cycles of stress and the way in which we react (Solhaug et al., 2016). Solhaug et al. (2016) speaks of metacognitive awareness, or a broadened state of awareness, as a shift of perspective to attend to experiences in a more accepting manner. By having this awareness, it facilitates the ability to contain strong emotions and negative thought processes to respond more flexibly when in stressful situations. This also assists in a decrease of reactivity and more potential for regulation (Solhaug et al., 2016). In mindfulness breathing, specifically, breathing in and out deeply can relax the physical body, which can ultimately rid one of negative judgments.

When the internal attention is heightened, learning to control the breath and letting go of controlling the thoughts may lead to a greater understanding of what we think and why (Solhaug et al., 2016). Therefore, this full attention to the breath can lead us to cultivate a more awakened state in relation to perception (Shonin-Gordon, 2016). As these mindfulness practices become more ingrained, it may become easier to handle the emotional piece. Although emotions are never fully dissipated, they can become less pervasive, and easier to contain. As this notion is practiced even further, it may become easier to continue to contain unwanted emotions to which self-containment follows. Other individuals and stimuli in the environment can then also be contained, to the point where the wholeness achieved in oneself can lead to feeling closer and more present with others (Solhaug et al., 2016). The breath has the potential to offer an individual the experience of moments of relaxation, caused by a shift in attention from immersion in the mental activity to becoming increasingly aware of the sensory perception (Solhaug et al., 2016). This permits the breath to act as a support in detecting what is happening in the body more so than what is happening in the thoughts, which can bring a different attention to noticing; leading to moments of relaxation and a quieting of the cognitive processes. The breath is a reliable aspect for each able body-minded human being in providing an opportunity to



sense and synthesize felt experiences while also facilitating mobility and functionality throughout the whole person.

### **Breath Awareness in Everyday Life**

When speaking about able body-minded human beings and their everyday lives, breath can facilitate cognitive insights in service of others. Being able to synthesize what was felt, done, and how it created change in the states of overall well-being can support others to tap into the breath as information to better themselves. This notion is linking insights into action. Emphasizing the experience that an individual may feel through the process of breath, maybe by encouraging a dialogue to speak to after a breath experience, can help the individual partaking in the experience and others further decipher how they are sensing and comprehending what is happening with their breath specifically and begin to become comfortable speaking out loud about their findings (Mehling et al., 2011). The fact that breath awareness is available to all able body-minded human beings shows that these people have the ability to have cognitive insights reflective of their individual experience, while also having the agency to compare their experiences with others and offering information that may not be known or understood by someone else.

Hackney (2002) references Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen in stating, “wherever the breathing is blocked in the body, future patterns will be blocked; wherever the breathing is free, the future patterns will develop efficiently” (p.52). Although people naturally develop into embodied beings in their own ways of developmental patterning and understanding, some may also get stuck or disrupted in their development (Mehling et al., 2011). Re-integration of the body and the mind can be a tedious process which involves fine tuning and breaking down processes to attend to nuanced and various components of internal experiences (Mehling et al., 2011).

Exploring consciously the basic pattern of breath, which is available to all able body-minded human beings, can be a beginning step in gaining knowledge and understanding of this pattern first before moving on to others in the Bartenieff Fundamentals system.

For a person in their own experience, there may have been physiological, relational, traumatic, or inner emotional awareness experiences that may not have been cognizant of in the time of occurrence which could have affected the way in which an individual attends to their breath specifically. When becoming more aware of the breath and being receptive to other's experiences, an individual that may have experienced these matters may possibly open up the option to explore developmental processes that may have been missed, concealed, or restricted earlier in the individual's life. The integration of the breath, or lack thereof, during early developmental phases speaks to how an individual may attend to their life later on. In tracing back to these early developmental patterns, re-integrating the breath with newfound insight can assist in becoming a more connected being while grasping a better understanding of themselves and the way in which their bodies move throughout their daily lives. The Bartenieff Fundamentals, an approach to basic body training which deals with patterning connections in the body in accordance to principles of efficient movement, encourages personal expression and full psychophysical involvement to facilitate an interplay between inner connectivity and outer expressivity (Hackney, 2002). This system, created by Irmgard Bartenieff, serves as an experience for individuals to become more in tune with total body connectivity (Hackney, 2002). As breath is the first developmental pattern for the infant and the first fundamental of the basic six taught within this system; breath is the foundation for all other patterns to follow. By integrating the breath more consciously within body-mind-emotion experiences, the breath can potentially act as a guide in finding nuances that may have been missed in the earlier

developmental process in the way in which we feel, react, or think. With a clearer intention of the awareness of breath, there is a possibility to refer to the psychophysical states within the present self with more clarity.

The awareness of breath also has the potential to stabilize us in the present moment. When we are fully aware of the breath, it can only be assessed in the here and now, never in the past or in the future (Dhiman, 2018). Hackney (2002) encourages all living human beings to tune in to their breath for numerous reasons. When feelings of exhaustion arise, she suggests that the breath brings out a sense of liveliness that may be lacking in that moment. When an individual is feeling far away from themselves, Hackney suggests using the breath as a link to locating where they are in the physical moment and getting in touch with the individual internal state (Hackney, 2002). Tuning into the breath is a reminder that renewal is occurring through each inhalation and exhalation, therefore opening up more options to attend differently in the future. This allows for a greater sense of overall awareness and well-being.

### **Breath Awareness for the Dance/Movement Therapist**

In dance/movement therapy, the breath is used throughout many different pieces of the therapeutic relationship. As the dance/movement therapist, it is beneficial to understand the relationship with breath on individual terms, as it relates to the communication with the individual body and perceiving more information that is normally inaccessible in typical states of awareness. Noticing what the breath means in an individual sense may translate differently as it pertains to one's clients. Clients may be able to recognize and access their breath differently than the dance/movement therapist when it comes to their own breath experience. As the dance/movement therapist, it seems important to have access to and understand the breath in typical states of awareness, while also having the option to experience breath in deeper, more

intuitive practices. This may provide the dance/movement therapist with a greater awareness of their breath through different experiences; which may help differentiate how tuning into the breath when having different intentions informs us of different body-mind-emotion experiences.

When assisting others, the dance/movement therapist may have more information to share with their clients by offering different approaches in terms of the breath experience, which can serve in assisting potential for their clients to gain access to this as well. When thinking about the role of the dance/movement therapist, an overall body awareness is important, as it clarifies the ability to recognize the subtle body cues and sensations that may emerge in a session (Mehling et al., 2011). This body awareness is emphasized to include every level: the physical, the breath, the mind, the personality, and the emotions, where body awareness is inseparable from its functions and all aspects of self-awareness in general (Mehling et al., 2011).

After being in tune with the breath for some time, there is potential to also bring an understanding to the cognitive processes that other internal cycles are happening simultaneously, which may help maintain a greater awareness in the body-mind connection. When a more established body-mind connection is in relationship with one another, the breath can serve as a reciprocal action happening both internally and externally, which promotes an overall greater sense of awareness of the body-mind-emotion interrelationship (Mehling et al., 2011). Having this considerable sense of connectedness and awareness as a dance/movement therapist can serve in the work when it comes time to offer these tools to clients. Some may find that connecting with cellular breathing, which is a deeper, more intuitive way to tune into the breath, can help integrate the whole physical body more thoroughly. Cellular breathing is a process in which the individual invested in the practice must be patient and open to the possibility of understanding and sensing their breath through a process curated by the use of imagery. Therefore, by

integrating this practice into dance/movement therapy, the client may be offered the possibility to bring back early memories, while also being another outlet to explore themselves on a deeper level (Hackney, 2002).

By simply just ‘being’ and listening to the body, clients may begin to understand the process of cellular breathing by acknowledging that their whole body is breathing throughout each and every cell, rather than just categorizing the lungs as the only source of inhalation and exhalation. Having this idea be facilitated by the use of guided imagery may create better understanding during the cellular breathing experience. By imagining different areas of the body expanding and shrinking through each inhale and exhale, such as the bottoms of the feet, as an example, the idea of cellular breathing may become easier to invest in. Though the concept of cellular breathing can be abstract and may take several sessions of practice, the process can possibly help the client understand the breath differently and more deeply. Having an inordinate sense of what cellular breathing may offer to an individual, there is opportunity to use this deep way of breathing to assist in ample change. For example, there may be a part of the body that feels tense. With the knowledge of cellular breathing, there is potential to think about ‘sending’ the breath to this area of the body to bring more attention to it by using the body-mind interrelationship through the use of imagery. Becoming cognizant about the breath moving into that area allows the potential for the individual to sense expansion or release for a moment. Depending on the intention of the experience, there is potential to invest the mind and the body during a cellular experience to understand the body and its relationship with the breath on an intuitive level, which is too subtle an experience to grasp with our conscious minds alone. When finding this connection within ourselves by using the breath, we have the possibility to potentially perceive more information that is normally ‘inaccessible’ in ordinary states of

awareness, thus imaginably making an individual more clearly integrated throughout the body and the mind (Hartley, 1995).

### **Breath Awareness Within the Therapeutic Relationship**

When meeting the client, it is imperative that the dance/movement therapist prepares more presence for what they have to offer as the individual who is in the role of assisting change. Having more information about the breath and how it relates to the dance/movement therapist's body and states of being can inform how the dance/movement therapist goes about meeting their clients where they are. When thinking about meeting a client through the breath, it may be helpful to notice that the breath process is already happening unconsciously within each individual. In beginning to warm-up interactions and awareness of one another, noticing the way that the breath sounds or is visibly seen can begin to bring more awareness to the other person. Translating what is felt into communicable language, dance/movement therapists, specifically, encourage their clients to express their unique experiences through movement, verbal language, and/or sound (Hindi, 2012). Recognizing that these processes are happening simultaneously on an individual level allows for the dance/movement therapist and the client to relate to one another through something that is shared and accessible through both bodies.

As awareness becomes clearer, there may be opportunities to attune to one another through the breath cycles, which serves as a sense of autonomy for the individual, while allowing themselves to be seen by another. The breath may serve as one of the first indicators in recognizing that the processes are individualistic and unique to each individual, while also considering other situations where developing the therapeutic relationship might begin on a more external level, such as mirroring one another or giving and receiving eye contact. Regardless of how the therapeutic relationship is fostered, it is beneficial for the dance/movement therapist to

have a greater sense of their own being to allow for a more comfortable experience in sharing with one another and creating an interpersonal relationship. With this knowing of meeting one another where they are at and portraying a desire for empathic connection, the breath can be a reminder in recognizing where the client and dance/movement therapist are in that process and how it may evolve.

Breath is seen as a central connector between the body and mind, which serves as a tool for the dance/movement therapist to use with the client. Integrity of self and embodiment find articulation in all aspects of the work between client and therapist (Mehling et al., 2011). With this also comes the idea of self-compassion in the recognition process with the self, as having the capacity to resonate with others with empathic concern (Solhaug et al., 2016). When there is an informed attention to interoception; the process of sensing the internal state of the body, it may correlate with an increase of self-awareness and emotional regulation through embodied and conceptual channels. Dance/movement therapists could incorporate this attention to interoception as one of the first steps in preparing clients to work with them, especially when working through personal challenges (Hindi, 2012). The breath is insight to the epitome of self-existing wisdom (Shonin-Gordon, 2016).

As dance/movement therapists work with their clients more and more, a rapport begins to build. The type of sharing that is experienced between the dance/movement therapist and a client can enhance the ability to sustain relational moments with one another in the therapeutic context. This connects to the idea of empathy. Shonin-Gordon (2016) says, “breathing in, I see that there is self in other. Breathing out, I see that there is other in self.” (p.1245). From spending time with one another, the dance/movement therapist can become kinesthetically aware and attune to the client by using the breath as a first step. Tuning into someone else’s breathing

means you are able to be with that person on a foundational level. Usually, building this rapport happens unconsciously, but there is also value in being able to choose when to be in synchrony with another being through the breath (Hackney, 2002). But, when we choose to join one another through the breath, the unique breath patterns also remind the dance/movement therapist and the client that they are separate beings involved in their own separate processes but can come together when awareness and empathic feelings come forward in sharing moments with one another. This notion is important for the dance/movement therapist to remember, that they don't have to give up themselves to be with someone else wholeheartedly. Developing this sense of trust with one another reflects on the innate tendencies that the individual being is capable of reaching to sustain self-organization and wholeness. Integrity of self allows different aspects of the person to be in contact with others (Mehling et al., 2011). This trust begins to manifest throughout the body, and as Blanche Evan, a pioneer of dance/movement therapy states, the object of the therapeutic relationship is to not change the body of the client, but to let the client become freer through each experience in exposing the body that they have (Evan & Rifkin-Gainer, 1982).

When being mindful in our bodies and in the presence of others, there is more control over our being and situations we encounter simply because we see what is happening in front of us more clearly. When mindfulness develops with emotional intelligence, you can then resonate with yourself and create resonance with others (Dhiman, 2018). Mindfulness may also offer the opportunity for increased emotional exploration and containment, which is important for the dance/movement therapist in relation to empathy and overall therapeutic alliance (Solhaug et al., 2016). The cultivation of awareness of breath is a grounding factor in the client and dance/movement therapist relationship, because it can help increase embodiment by assisting



others to get in touch with their internal state by using the breath as a link to their proprioceptive self (Roberts, 2016). Clients can then feel comfortable exploring the rhythm of their breath as it manifests throughout their bodies and possibly uncover ways to name where the breath may be held, for example. From cultivating this level of awareness, clients can then become more attuned to how their breath affects and is reflective of their feelings and thoughts, which ultimately connects the body-mind-emotion integration. This overall awareness can support the process of change (Roberts, 2016). Similarly, the breath can be used in preparing the mind and body as situations arise. By identifying and tracking the physical sensations felt, dance/movement therapists could support the client's exploration of sensory information by observing their breathing and the frequency and dimensionality that it takes. This initial tracking could then expand throughout the entire body, benefitting the client to bring attention to different areas of the body, specific sensations, or areas where sensations may be lacking (Hindi, 2012).

As the body-mind-emotion integration has been discussed throughout this review, the importance of these parts working as a whole is imperative in the client to therapist relationship when it comes to understanding the self and working towards the emerging self. The use of breath may create an opportunity for the conscious connection between the mind, the body, and the emotions. Our breath has the capacity to inform us of what is going on within, which can be translated to complete awareness. Since breath is always readily available to us, it can be used as a conscious object for concentration and growth (Dhiman, 2018). Dance/movement therapy impacts the implicit neurological processes that underlies consciousness, which is the core of self-agency (Homann, 2017). Blanche Evan states that dance/movement therapy can achieve reunion of the segmented self, but only with an awareness and understanding of the mind-body-emotion connection and the use of breath as an indicator in sensing how they are reciprocal

(Evan & Rifkin-Gainer, 1982). Dance/movement therapists have used movement as an integration tool between the emotional, cognitive, social, and physical pieces of an individual (Acolin, 2016), therefore stressing the importance of these parts working together to complete the whole person. An overall body awareness focuses attention not only on internal body sensations, but also exploring awareness of how body movement is manifested externally. Able-bodied human beings may be interested with the aspects of the inner body sensations, that although we are influenced and reminded of external stimuli, the two are distinguishable and are relevant in truly understanding the mind-body connection in its totality (Mehling et al., 2011). As these inner body sensations relate to the breath, understanding that the link that breath provides between the physical body, the creative mind, and the emotions is an imperative tool in achieving total body-mind-emotion unity.

Blanche Evan incorporated verbal processing after sessions with her clients as a way to tap into the memory and the psychosocial interpretations and associations that occurred as a way to bring the unconscious into the conscious realm. Evan states, in an interview with Iris Rifkin-Gainer (1982), that being able to verbalize about what was explored develops strength to make the statement in the first place. By doing this, there is support in the arrival of self-choice of one's independent identity (Evan & Rifkin-Gainer, 1982). This kind of growth in an individual leads the client to eventual self-therapy, in concretizing their sense of self and building the courage in transforming insight into action, which in turn renews the sense of totality in a person (Evan & Rifkin-Gainer, 1982). Similarly, Alma Hawkins, another early dance/movement therapist, often referred to the breath as a sense of stability throughout her sessions. Hawkins facilitated verbal processing after movement experiences by bringing the unconscious to a conscious state by having her clients speak out loud about their findings (Levy, 2005). Hawkins

also used guided movement experiences in her sessions that helped her clients focus their attention and broaden their explorations. The breath was used as a focal point throughout these explorations, which assisted her clients to enter a space of relaxation and calmness (Levy, 2005). By doing this, her clients then had the ability to expand their choices for the remainder of the session. Being able to advocate for oneself creates a whole new adventure for exploration. The breath is used in this sense as empowering the individual to make these choices and speak about them amidst feelings of vulnerability.

The following sections of this paper will reflect my personal experiences with breath through the use of qualitative data. I felt it was important for me to understand my own breath experiences through different situations that arose throughout my life, and how I was able to regulate, transform, or recognize my being throughout each scenario. I wanted to fully understand my own unique breath and how it has informed me through each experience highlighted below. By doing this, I feel that I have become clearer about my intentions in using my breath and how the knowledge of my findings has guided me in approaching both dance/movement therapy practices and my own daily life. The discoveries I have found in light of my experiences will be cultivated in a discussion about how each experience has shaped me as an able body-minded human being going through everyday life, as well as a new dance/movement therapist. I will also discuss what I have learned within myself to eventually assist my own clients by providing them with ways in which their breath experience can be integrated in both dance/movement therapy sessions and applying their knowledge of their experiences to their everyday lives as well.

### **Methodology: A Qualitative Approach and Design**

Qualitative research focuses on a humanistic approach in understanding an element of inquiry. This approach is typically used to understand an individual's beliefs, personal experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions (Pathak, Jena, Kalra, 2013). As my thesis was inspired by my curiosity of breath and its impact on the field of dance/movement therapy, I knew that my findings within my work would lead me to producing qualitative data of my own. Much different than quantitative data, qualitative data is recognized for its addition to interventional studies that cannot be obtained through numeric data alone (Pathak, Jena, Kalra, 2013).

In recognizing my ontology, or 'world-view' beliefs, I noticed that constructivism is where my interests lie. Constructivism is described as no absolute reality, but the reality is constructed by those experiencing it. There is no 'truth' to be explained, but an idea of how individuals makes sense of their reality through experiences that they share with others (Forinash, 2012). With finding my ontology, I was then able to recognize my research methodology. I identified my findings with breath to be first person research based, meaning that I gathered the data from myself, using processes such as self-observation, self-reflection, self-inquiry, retrospection, and introspection (Forinash, 2012). These modes of observation and collection led me to engage fully in experiences with myself. I found that incorporating a greater self-awareness to what I was attending to, journaling vigorously about what I was finding within my experiences and trying my findings through different perspectives was the best way to record my data. Each of these methodological inquires will follow the same qualitative structure: Initial Body-Mind State of Awareness, Intentional Changes in Breath Patterns, and the Results and Outcomes. Though I know that my journey with breath is neither comprehensive nor complete, the experiences presented below are inspired by my awareness of the potential of my breath and

ways in which my explorations have informed me further about my approach in this work as a new dance/movement therapist.

### **Theme 1: Bodily Disconnection**

Initial Body-Mind State of Awareness: I have been feeling outside of my body lately, almost as if I have ventured into outer space and felt like I was freely drifting through the galaxy. These moments also feel as if I can watch my body from across a room as my mind and emotions are engaging in experiences elsewhere. There is a sense of nothingness and confusion that encapsulates my being, to which I wonder how I will get myself back to be an interconnected human being again. In bringing my awareness to my breath, I noticed that when in this undesired state, my breath is absent. My mind feels unable to signal my body in what to do and how to do it. It is almost as if the relationship between my mind and body are disconnected from one another.

Intentional Changes in Breath Patterns: In wanting to change this undesired state and before doing anything else, I allow myself the time to close my eyes and to really focus on how my breath feels throughout my body, without judgment. Where am I feeling the breath travel? Asking myself questions about what I am noticing in the moment helps me regain a sense of mind and body connection once again. I notice that I feel the breath first in my upper body, beginning in the crevices of my collar bone and ending all the way through my pelvic floor. I take a long enough inhale to feel it reach and fill my belly, envisioning an image of a balloon being filled and then deflated on the exhale. Sometimes, I find that I place my hand on any area of the belly to help me not only envision, but physically feel the breath expanding and deflating in that area.

After going through a few cycles of this similar breath pattern, I then open my eyes when I feel ready, and watch my belly expand and release through each inhale and exhale. When I feel I need more stability, specifically by acknowledging a place where I desire more clarity and confirmation in my being, I plant my feet firmly on the floor and imagine myself breathing through different dimensions of space, such as horizontally; by feeling and imagining the breath travel side to side widely throughout my abdomen, vertically; such as imagining myself breathing from the crown of my head and through the bottoms of my feet and envisioning myself feeling tall, and sagittal; imagining myself filling my abdomen with air that expands both in front of and behind me. Sometimes, the tactile feedback provided by the placement of my hand in watching the growing and expansion of my abdomen (if that is the body part I choose to touch) through the inhale, witnessing it fill fully, to then witnessing shrinking and hollowing of the abdomen throughout the exhale, has helped me practice further the breath traveling through these different dimensions of space. By doing this, I have found it as valuable information for me to sense and feel the breath more deeply. Focusing on not the action of the breath itself as an inhale and exhale is taken, but the way that it fills and empties in a cyclical rhythm throughout my upper body helps me recognize that I am a living being that is in this present moment, and that what I am giving and receiving in the world is valid.

Results and Outcomes: The result of this breath pattern has helped me find myself one piece at a time. It begins by naming that feeling lost is an unwanted state of mine. By making the very first choice of closing my eyes, I am alerting my mind to focus in. I am already achieving some sense of body-mind-emotion interrelatedness in wanting the option for change without being fully aware of it yet. Then, in asking myself questions about my breath and where I can localize it in my body, I have found that it helps me hone-in on my physical being and the

potential I have to change what I was previously feeling. The images that arise, such as an inflating and deflating balloon, assist me in envisioning the way that my breath can fill and empty throughout my entire vessel. The placement of my hand also helps me physically see the ride that my hand takes as the breath travels throughout. By naming, feeling, seeing, questioning, and imagining the cycles in which my breath takes as these feelings arise and my desire for change, I feel much more whole.

### **Theme 2: Emotional Frustration**

Initial Body-Mind State of Awareness: There have been many moments where I have felt enraged with frustration at the onset, such as experiences during my commute to and from school. These experiences are usually unwarranted and seem silly when thinking about all of the energy I exerted when letting my frustration out, but in the moment, these feelings are valid and impossible to fight off. Driving home in rush hour traffic is where I have found it occurring the most. The thought of wanting to be home quickly after a long day is usually unrealistic, but such a deep desire of mine that I know I can't fully change or control. What I do know is that I can control my breath in circumstances where I feel frustration brewing. In these moments, my body alerts my mind that frustration is arising. I usually feel it in my face as it begins to feel flushed, and my heartrate quickens to where I feel it beating out of my chest. My palms become sweaty, and my eyes and brows narrow. I begin to notice that my breath feels as if it is stuck in my throat, unable to move. The held breath feels suffocating and constricting, and a disservice to myself when thinking about my potential access for change. In feeling uncomfortable and immobile, I quickly make a change in my breath before allowing myself to completely spiral out of a control with rage in a way that wouldn't suit me for the remainder of my commute.

Intentional Changes in Breath Patterns: I take an inhale that begins through my nose and transitions to my mouth midway through. This helps me sustain a fuller, deeper breath while also helping me imagine that my breath feeling stuck in my throat has the ability to move throughout to different places in my body. I usually feel the breath expand horizontally, as if it is traveling widely from side to side, specifically near my ribcage. I hold the breath for about a second once the filling feels as it reaches its capacity. The inhale is followed by a quick exhale that is verbal, usually a large sigh while my exhale is being expelled.

Results and Outcomes: These breaths make me feel as if I am ridding myself of my frustrations and offering myself a moment to reset and let go, rather than holding the frustration within. Sometimes these breaths feel unwarranted and selfish, as I don't want to let silly frustrations such as those I encounter on the road take over my emotions the way that they do sometimes. But, when allowing myself to feel that frustration and then rid it quickly through the use of my breath, I am able to acknowledge it and move past it quicker than if I was to hold onto it and let the feelings of rage build within.

The way in which frustration manifests throughout my body feels rigid, and not something I enjoy holding onto. I have tried on this breath cycle throughout different frustrations that arise specifically on my drive home and found that the level of frustration is impacted by the way that the breath feels afterward. I find that this cycle of breath usually only happens once, in that the verbal expelling of my breath feels like a completion in that moment. But I have found that this is situational. The result of trying on this breath during emotional frustration has allowed me to recognize what I may need in a given moment, and there may not be just one way to help myself in these moments. There have been times where I feel more at ease after completing this breath pattern once, and other times where I feel I need to complete



this breath pattern more than once to feel less tense. I find on most occasions, if I were to do this breath cycle more than once I would feel as if the frustration would reside longer within my body rather than being quickly taken in through an inhale and expelled through an exhale. But there have been circumstances where I have felt frustration coming up several times within a short time span. Sometimes, engaging in this breath cycle once, and then starting the cycle over again a minute or two later can feel helpful in remaining aware that there is a possibility that my frustrations will come and go. So, rather than having to feel my frustration come up on a body level every time, being more aware in my mind-body-emotion interrelationship in knowing that it can happen again has me feeling more prepared.

### **Theme 3: Emotional Stress**

Initial Body-Mind State of Awareness: The second year of graduate school comes with many demands, and with these many demands comes many moments of testing my ability to ‘take it all in and take it all on’. I never thought that the experience of graduate school would be a walk in the park, but sometimes it feels as if I am hiking Mount Kilimanjaro, which seems unattainable. The voice of self-doubt speaks to me loudly inside my head, constantly questioning the choices that I make and telling me I am not able to do all that I need to in order to succeed. Internship and school specifically can sometimes feel impossible to tackle simultaneously. With that, I feel as if I need to maintain a personal life and make sure that I work on the side, too. I tend to have such high expectations of myself, and when I feel that these expectations are not being met in regard to my personal agenda, I feel that I need to take on some more and step up, even if it’s more than I can handle. But no matter what; deadlines, expectations from others, personal expectations, maintaining and regulating my own emotions

and desires, taking on more than I can handle, and attending to other obligations that life demands brings on an additional layer of stress that is unwarranted, but very much present.

There are times where I feel that my stress seems like I am trekking through thick molasses that keeps encapsulating me through every step, leaving me feeling stuck. I have felt that this stress has begun to create tension in some of my personal relationships, which has piled on additional stress. This leads me to feel overwhelmed and unable to prioritize what I need to address first. With so much going on and so much to do in such a short span of time, I have been trying to remind myself that I have access to my breath, which can create some room for me to maneuver some time to take care of myself, even if that's only for a few minutes.

I recognize my stress manifesting through my emotions and thoughts first. My brain feels scattered, as if I can't grasp all that I need to complete. I find that my mind is the culprit in keeping the stress going, in that I feel as if I can't turn it off and have it stop processing and bringing up things that I need to attend to in a moment. This makes me feel as if I am a ticking time bomb waiting to go off. When there is a lot on my mind, I noticed that each thought and task flash before my eyes in a rapid motion. My body reacts to what my mind rambles off, in having to shift through these motions of flexibility and restriction, feeling unsettled. The feeling of constantly shifting between what needs to be done and when it can be done begins to build up unwanted tension that starts in my belly and travels up to my throat. I notice that the breath mirrors the rapidness that I am experiencing in my thoughts. Each inhalation and exhalation is short and shallow, almost as if I am drowning and gasping for air. This feeling is not fulfilling, which typically leads to more unwanted tension that begins to manifest throughout my entire body, which feels bound and jittery simultaneously. Instead of allowing myself a minute to re-group, I then stress about how I will obtain a clearer mind and focus on one thing at a time. The

stress is exhausting, to where I finally come to a point where I need to center myself in order to complete what I want to. This moment usually comes right after the stress has pushed me to a point of breaking down into tears and feeling helpless.

Intentional Changes in Breath Patterns: I attempt to change my mindset to imagine seeing myself from another perspective and recognizing how jumbled I may look or seem. This forces me to take a moment to consider my well-being, to which I first recognize my breath. The way that the breath cycles in and out feels unsettling and not helpful to my state of being. This is when I recognize that creating change in the breath may help me maintain a moment of peace. I noticed that when it is time to help myself in these moments, I take a similar breath pattern as I do when I am feeling frustrated. The difference between the two for me is that the breath cycles taken when feeling frustrated have a different intention than the breath cycles I take when I am feeling stressed. Stress tends to override my body in a way that feels different from frustration, meaning that my frustration comes and goes but stress can reside for long periods of time. I begin by inhaling through my mouth, to where the exhalation exits through my nose. This allows me to take in as much air as I can, and slowly channel the air through my nose in a steadier exhale. I always come back to the idea of filling my abdomen, and in this pattern specifically, the air feels as if it begins to fill first in my chest, and then continues to expand throughout my ribcage and pelvic floor. There is a feeling through the completion of my inhalation as if a wave has taken over, and when the wave has reached its peak, there is a short pause before exhaling, which feels organic in the process of finding a moment to reflect and be still. I have found it helpful to sometimes count how long the exhalation lasts for, without judgment or a prescribed goal, so I can focus my mind more on the action of my breath rather

than everything else that may be coming up. I fulfill this pattern for as many times as I may need, depending on how stressed I am feeling.

Results and Outcomes: In these moments of embodying this breath cycle, I feel that my sense of time has been diminished, and all I need to accomplish in this moment is the totality of my breath and the gratitude I feel for myself in being able to fulfill this after moments of distress.

I find that the shift in the way in which my inhalation and exhalation are taken in these situations allows me to pause and control my breathing in a way that may not come so naturally to me. So, breathing in this way permits me to really tune in to my breath, while telling my mind to focus on the way that I am inhaling and exhaling differently than I normally would. When I have these moments to myself to really tune in and take time to think about the wave within me as each cycle of breath is taken, I find that I am more aware of myself on a body-mind-emotion level and sometimes, have a little less self-doubt and stress than I did before I began. There is a sense of renewal and starting again, in having a clearer mindset to attend to things and a reminder to be gentle with myself.

#### **Theme 4: Emotional Anxiety**

Initial Body-Mind State of Awareness: Anxiety takes over my being as stress does, but anxiety for me has always been a part of who I am. There have been times where I have been able to cope with my anxiety, and other times where I let it engulf me into darkness. Both of these instances are places that I don't prefer to be, which leads to me force myself into finding ways to ignore it. Often times when my anxiety comes up, I find that I must distract myself in order to keep it quiet. I hardly allow myself to fully settle in with my anxiety, as I am afraid I will get lost in it.

Since I have been dealing with anxiety for years, it has shown up differently depending on what I am dealing with personally. Sometimes, my anxiety can lead me to overthink so intensely that it feels impossible to do anything other than anticipate the future; specifically, the choices that I will make and how that will impact what I am doing. This type of anxiety completely takes me out of the present moment. I have experienced this type of anxiety at my internship, when I think so intently days before leading a dance/movement therapy group, planning strategically and anticipating the outcome, which usually never works in the present moment. When this happens, my mind completely blanks, and my body is totally still, feeling unable to shift and unsure of what to do next. I feel as if all that I have learned and experienced in the past is out of my reach, and I am totally stuck in this moment of not knowing. This is a scary place for me. It has felt as if I am alone and unable to ask for help, which forces me to continue on with stubbornness that my planned ideas have to work. This has led me to miss out on a lot that is going on right in front of me.

The power that my anxiety has on a body level has made me feel uncomfortable in my own skin. I feel that there are times that my mind and body are in a constant battle with one another when my anxiety comes up, and I am unable to self-regulate. Although it seems hard to grasp myself in these situations, I can always name where my anxiety is beginning and how it is manifesting throughout my being on a body level. The anxiety usually starts in my upper body, specifically in the area right below my diaphragm and above my navel. When the anxious feelings arise, I sense a tingling in this area that is similar to nausea. My palms begin to sweat, my breath begins to become more rapid, the space around me becomes more confined. I feel my voice softening, my affect changing to a flatter tone, and my ears ringing. The breath in these moments is one of the only things I feel I have any sense of control over.

Intentional Changes in Breath Patterns: I have been told by friends who also have anxiety that I should partake in a breath pattern that comprises of inhaling while counting to six, holding my breath while counting to five, and exhaling while counting to eight. Whenever these body level feelings arise, I know that it is time for me to complete this breath patterns for as long as I need to. The first few cycles usually feel rigid, as I am still feeling far away from myself, but attempting to get a hold of my emotions. As I continue, the breath becomes more fluid and connected, rather than forced. With each cycle, I notice how the breath feels deeper and more fulfilled. I focus in on the counting, so that I can shift my mind into completing this task in that moment rather than anticipating the future. When I feel assured that my mind is with me, which is usually when I forget about what I was anxious about in the first place and find myself just counting, I often give myself deep squeezes on various parts of my body, affirming that I am here, and I am present. By doing this, I feel that I am also reuniting my mind and my body, which also helps me feel more intact.

Results and Outcomes: The result of this breath in these moments is staple for me in regaining my sense of self. I find that focusing my attention on the counting and giving myself a task to achieve somewhat ‘forces’ me to be in the present moment, because I have to continue to count and think about my breath cycle through each inhale and exhale. There is a specific task for my mind, as well as my body to follow. By doing this, I also feel that I am pertaining only to myself, and what I need in the moment. When the breath pattern begins to feel comfortable and natural, I am able to solidify my being and abilities, which makes me feel less sporadic and much calmer. I feel more able to focus on the present moment, rather than planning and questioning my destiny in the future.

**Theme 5: Stillness**

Initial Body-Mind State of Awareness: The following two experiences about stillness emanate from the classroom. Stillness can be a concept that I find myself shifting back and forth between comfortability and apprehension. There are moments where I feel that I don't allow myself the time to settle into a moment of stillness before becoming anxious or uncomfortable. I feel that in these moments, I am not fully allowing myself to be with others or with myself, which in turn builds up these feelings of having to shift gears quickly or contemplate my next move. There seems to be a disconnect between my mind and body when these feelings override me, which leads me to feel as if I need to get out of the moment to find myself elsewhere. Other times, I find that stillness comes organically in a moment when I am truly present and accepting. Sometimes, it just feels right to pause. When it happens, it feels like it was meant to happen. When I am in that space, I find that I could indulge in that forever. I look back on experiences where moments of stillness have come up for me, and how integrated I feel once the moment is over. I often forget how important it is to take time to pause.

In one of my classes, I had an experience with stillness as a classmate was leading. She began her session by checking in verbally, to which most of my classmates, myself included, spoke of the feelings of anxiety and stress arising due to juggling a lot all at once. With everyone seeming to be in the same place, the facilitator moved on to having us work with a piece of paper through instruction and visual demonstration. At first, I felt vacant in my mind while feeling anxious in my body. I was wondering what we were doing and why. But as I allowed myself to focus my tired body and mind into the room, I began to become curious about what we were creating and the detailed instruction that was given to us to achieve this end product. Feeling

more alert, but also still the slightest bit hazy, she transitioned our contextual experience into a movement experience.

Intentional Changes in the Breath Patterns: We began with the breath, taking an inhale together as a cohort, and an exhale on our own time. I immediately closed my eyes, as I wanted to luxuriate in this in-breath as fully as I could. She gave us a prompt to feel the breath traveling down the abdomen, to which I found myself making a connection to the balloon imagery of inflating and deflating throughout this area of my body. Once this image arose in my mind's eye, I recognized that the balloon image often comes up when I am feeling lost and need stability, as I explained earlier in my discoveries. The imagery of the balloon led me to an even deeper breath experience, to where my inhale felt endless, as did my exhale. Each cycle after this felt deeper and deeper, and each exhalation expelled felt longer and longer. I was particularly fascinated in which my out-breath felt everlasting. I usually find myself feeling out of breath after attempting to accomplish a long out-breath. But this time, it felt as if I was spewing out all the oxygen my body had until I found a moment of stillness once it was complete. There were no feelings of discomfort due to the exertion of extra energy that is usually felt.

Results and Outcomes: Typically, breath experiences this indulgent bring me into an internal state. But in this instance, I knew that I was not alone, and I was aware of that. It was comforting to hear one of my classmates sitting next to me, inhaling and exhaling as deeply and elongated as I was. There were moments in our inhalations and exhalations that felt in synchrony, without changing my breath to intentionally do so. My eyes remained closed the whole time, but I felt a sense of deep connection by hearing her and sensing her investment in the process alongside of me. By just noticing this, I felt my body feel more secure and complete in the space. I felt the pause between each exhalation and inhalation become longer within me,



and then shorter with time through each cycle of these deep breaths. I didn't even think to change my experience to make it something different, because I was so invested in the potential of my breath and my ability to tune in with myself and others simultaneously just by accessing the resources I have within myself, like breathing and noticing. I opened my eyes once my breath began to change from deep cycles to more typical cycles and felt myself totally still in the space. My body was at peace, my mind was at peace, and my breath continued to inform me of all that I am capable of achieving. Before moving on, I acknowledged that taking a moment to tune-in and allow myself to indulge in a moment was just what I needed to continue forward. I felt a sense of completion and wholeness. The stillness created within me felt like a true pause; a moment to reflect before beginning again.

Initial Body-Mind State of Awareness: In another class experience, I discovered my breath through a prescribed meditative experience. I remember coming into the space feeling anxious, but unable to pinpoint what exactly it was that was making me feel this way and why. Self-doubt and questioning myself has been coming up for me lately, so the feelings of anxiety and worry continue to be an underlying factor in most of my days, with some days being extremely overwhelming. My expectation of myself for this meditative experience was that it was going to turn my day around and my anxieties would be gone once we were finished. Trying to settle into the place I chose in the room, my breath was the first thing I tapped into. I was feeling particularly confident that my breath was going to do great things for me in this meditative practice. But to my surprise, I noticed that my breath was feeling short and shallow, when I really wanted it to be deep and indulgent. I was placing a multitude of self judgement on the way that my breath was flowing, and began to feel distressed and preoccupied by getting what I wanted instead of allowing myself to settle in. I alerted my mind that I wanted a change,

but in attempting to make this change happen for myself, my breath felt stuck in my chest and not fulfilling whatsoever. I recognized that my body started to feel tense, my eyes flickering between open and closed, and my mindset so focused on changing an experience for myself that didn't seem completely possible in that moment. I remember thinking, 'that's it. It's over' and feeling defeated that I didn't accomplish what my expectations were telling me to. Since there seemed to be so much time left in the meditation experience, I wondered what I could do for myself, even if it happened in the very last moments.

Intentional Changes in the Breath Patterns: I began to shift my positioning on the floor and close my eyes once more. I tuned in to my breath, without judgment this time, and slowly began to feel my expectations dissipate. I began to allow the breath that was happening to just be, without trying to make any changes or trying to 'fix it'. Allowing this shift in my experience began to bring up more awareness and solidity in my body. I began to feel myself drift away from a negative, anxious mindset to a place of nothingness. I continued to make constant shifts in my body to find a place of comfort, which then allowed me to become more aware of which body parts were touching the floor, what felt more rigid and what felt freer, and noticed how my breath changed in the slightest bit. As the meditation continued, my breath felt like it had finally settled into a comfortable pattern. Although not entirely deep and indulgent as I had wished, my breath felt more synced with what I was noticing through the shifts I had made in my body.

Results and Outcomes: Although this meditation experience didn't feel like my best because of the interference of my mind, allowing what was happening with my breath and overall experience instead of feeling like it needed to be something different led me to some state of comfort and inner peace. The result of just allowing myself to be where I was in that moment was a reminder that not all experiences are going to be what I had hoped they would be. But, by

trying to change things for myself when it doesn't seem possible or authentic, I am doing myself a disservice in attempting to acknowledge where I am and what my breath is communicating with me through both felt experiences on a body level and what was coming up for me in my thoughts and emotions. By shifting my mindset in 'allowing' and 'being', I was able to obtain an experience for myself that wouldn't have been possible at all if I kept judging myself. This experience reminded me of times where stillness may not always feel so great, but there can be a slight moment within an exploration that can teach me more about myself and my ability to appreciate a moment for what it is.

### **Theme 6: Relationships**

Initial Body-Mind State of Awareness: My cohort in graduate school engages in many experiences with one another both in verbal conversation and sharing movement experiences with one another. I find that during my engagement in both these experiences with my classmates, I am constantly using my breath as a way to connect and allow others to see that I am with them on a nonverbal level. In specific difficult conversations, I find that there is a specific tightness that resides in my body which makes me feel as if I need to reset and loosen up.

Intentional Changes in Breath Patterns: I recognize that in our verbal discussions, some that can sometimes be difficult to process through words, I have noticed that I often unconsciously take a deep inhale and exhale. I have found that there is not one prescribed way that I attend to these breaths during these moments, but rather notice what happens organically as my response to what we are discussing. Sometimes taking an inhale through the mouth and exhaling through the nose allows me to take in more air and channel the exhalation steadily, as I do when I am emotionally stressed. But there are other times where I will take a deep inhale through my nose and allow it to travel out through my mouth, as a way to become more aware of

my own processes. I usually feel myself wanting to engage in a deep breath cycle due to contractions and tensions that I feel throughout my body, so depending on what we may be discussing, the breath that feels most natural to me will occur.

Results and Outcomes: I find that whatever breath cycle arises I follow through with wholeheartedly, which helps me feel more comfortable and allows me to fully invest in the conversation with more ease. When these breaths occur, they remind me to check in with myself and where I am at during a difficult conversation, while also nonverbally showing others that I am listening, I am with them, and I am empathizing. The result of becoming aware of my breath has helped me realize that regardless of the conversation topic, the use of my breath allows me to become even more present. When offering this piece of myself to others, there is a place created for further reflection of self and other, and recognizing these two parts as separate, but also cohesive. There is a greater understanding of my own way in self-regulating, as it also reflects on my ability to listen, receive, and synthesize on both an individual level and as an individual showcasing the desire to connect.

Initial Body-Mind State of Awareness: In movement experiences, I have noticed that I often use my breath to first recognize where I am and how my body and mind are adjusting to the movement, to then opening up the possibility to connect with others in letting them know that I am seeing them, and that we can share an experience with one another through an inhale, exhale, or both.

Intentional Changes in Breath Patterns: I notice that I tend to emphasize the movement of my body expanding when I am taking a breath, so others can physically see my intention and the way that my breath moves me and join in with me if they feel inclined. When doing this, I am first indulging in what feels good to me, which can then be received by others as an openness to

share. I find that my breath feels free when moving throughout the space and complements the way in which I chose to move on a given day. In allowing my body to become flexible to who is around me, what they are portraying, and how I may intervene, my breath is the steady factor in joining me throughout each choice I make in moving with others. I have found that some of my classmates have responded in this interplay between breath as a nonverbal connector between us. The breath may be more of a driving force or underlying tool when moving throughout the space, but there are moments that I find I am sensible when recognizing another's breath and wanting to mirror the process through my own body, which could be exciting to explore. I find myself doing this in moments where I am curious of others and their movements and begin with wondering what their intention of breath is in a moment, if any. The curiosity tends to spark more interaction and offer new ways in approaching a relationship nonverbally.

Results and Outcomes: The result of using the breath in movement experiences has been important for me in sensing others without having to verbalize or use touch. I have found that I can be in far spatial proximity from a classmate but seeing one another on a body level and noticing a shared breath when it occurs is not only comforting but also makes me feel validated and seen by them. In other occasions, the use of breath has also allowed me to understand that some of my classmates may need extra time in wanting to connect. Having an openness to check in with myself and my own breath while noticing others is information to me about how their breath is informing them and their willingness and comfortability to connect in a moment. I have found that using my breath and showing others my comfortability with my breath through my movement has allowed for more trust and openness to share with one another, even if it's a short moment.

### Discussion

These different experiences that I have shaped, discovered, or stumbled upon throughout the practice of my breath have informed me of my capability to identify moments where I needed to create change or allow myself to settle in. By breaking down the process of describing an experience for myself in detail, describing the presence or absence of my breath in an undesired or desired state, the involvement or influence of my mind, the breath intervention practiced, and the result of what was felt, I was able to have a greater sense of awareness throughout my entire being and recognize the process in which my body, mind, and emotions were interconnected in working together to help me find ways to attend to a situation to ultimately achieve a greater sense of well-being.

The experiences with my breath have helped me look further within and have encouraged me to be more present not just with myself, but with others as well. By tuning into my breath, I found myself to become more curious about the potential that my own breath can take in a moment, and how challenging or allowing the breath cycles that I have practiced has generated different outcomes depending on the situation, the state, the intensity of the state, etc. I have learned to understand that my experiences within my work as a dance/movement therapist and a human being going through everyday life will be ever changing and evolving. This led to my curiosity of the uniqueness of my own breath and the different cycles it may take, and my interests in the uniqueness of other's breath and their own individual cycles within this same idea.

In the individual sense, my breath practices have created outlets for me to self-regulate, when in past experiences I would often find myself feeling stuck and discouraged. I have been able to validate my own feelings and experiences as important and integral to my learning of

who I am and what I am capable of. I have been able to fully trust my breath, which instilled a greater confidence in my being and a greater sense of unity within my body-mind-emotion interrelationship. The awareness of the inter-relationship of body-mind-emotion can empower an individual. I intend to be an advocate for this and continue to practice my belief in the influence of the breath both individually and interpersonally within my work as a dance/movement therapist.

I wish to invite others to become comfortable with their breath and what it may mean to them as I continue to practice experiences with my own breath. As the dance/movement therapist, I hope to provide my own experiences in collaboration with others of how the breath can be an indicator of what may be brewing on a deeper level. I intend to enlighten others about what I may know about my own breath experiences as it relates to my personal states of being and emotions to guide others in using their own breath experience in these ways and what that may be conveying for them. On the reverse, I intend to continuously learn from others and their own breath discoveries as my curiosity with breath in general continues. I sense that this open curiosity will keep me invested in my work as a dance/movement therapist and my desire to facilitate change for others.

I am interested in using what I have found to be essential through my own breath experiences to find ways to enter the therapeutic relationship. By allowing the time and space a client may need to build trust, just by noticing and relating to one another through the breath can offer feelings of being seen and validated in a moment. I am interested in the way in which the breath alone can say so much about a person, and how together as the dance/movement therapist and client can grow in empathy and self-acceptance using this shared action with one another through different experiences. I wish to remind other able body-minded human beings that their

breath is accessible to them and has the ability to construct change within their lives, both in and out of the therapeutic relationship.

By understanding how the breath has related to my own experiences, I have become more open to the possibility for change. I have become more aware of my own self, and my ability to attune to another through something as primal as breathing in and out. I am more comfortable in recognizing my autonomy, which in turn can empower those that I work with to find that within themselves by just 'being' through the use of breath. The breath has been my greatest teacher in deciphering who I am as an individual going through everyday life with my own emotions, body experiences, and states of being, while simultaneously being a dance/movement therapist who can highlight these moments, understand them on a body-mind-emotion level, and practice what I have experienced through my own breath discoveries to foster change and comfortability for others.



## References

- Acolin, J. (2016). *The Mind-Body Connection in Dance/Movement Therapy: Theory and Empirical Support*. American Journal of Dance Therapy (38) 311-333
- Caldwell, C. (1996). *Getting Our Bodies Back: Recovery, Healing, and Transformation through Body-Centered Psychotherapy*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, Inc.
- Caldwell, C. (2004). *American Dance Therapy Association 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference Keynote Address: The Power of Stillness, the Glory of Motion*. American Journal of Dance Therapy Vol. 26, No. 1
- Dhiman, S. (2018). *Mindfulness in the Workplace: Meaning, Role, and Applications*. In: Dhiman, S., Roberts, G., Crossman, J. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Workplace Spirituality and Fulfillment*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. Springer Nature.
- Evan, B., & Rifkin-Gainer, I. (1982). *An Interview with Blanche Evan*. American Journal of Dance Therapy (5) 5-17.
- Forinash, M. (2012). Qualitative Research Methods, Data Collection, and Analysis: Interviews, Observations, and Content Analysis In R.F. Cruz, C.F. Berrol (Eds.), *Dance/Movement Therapists in Action: A Working Guide to Research Options. Second Edition*. (144-166). Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas.
- Hackney, P. (2002). *Making Connections Total Body Integration Through Bartenieff Fundamentals*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hartley, L. (1995). *Wisdom of the Body Moving: An Introduction to Body-Mind Centering*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.
- Hindi, F. (2012). *How Attention to Interoception Can Inform Dance/Movement Therapy*. American Journal of Dance Therapy (34) 129-140.

Homann, K. (2017). *Engaging the Dynamic Equilibrium of the Mind through Dance/Movement Therapy*. *American Journal of Dance Therapy* (39) 39-42.

Leventhal, M., Wilson Cathcart, J., Chaiklin, S., Chodorow, J., DiPalma, E., Koch, N., Rifkin-Gainer, I., Queyquep White, E., Harris, D. (2016).

*Embodied Proteges: Second Generation Dance/Movement Therapists on Mentorships with Founders*. *American Journal of Dance Therapy* (38) 164-182.

Levy, F. J. (2005). *Dance movement therapy: A healing art*. Reston, VA: National Dance Association an Association of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance.

Mehling, W., Wrubel, J., Daubenmier, J., Price, C., Kerr, C., Silow, T., Gopisetty, V., Stewart, A. (2011). *Body Awareness: A phenomenological inquiry into the common ground of body-mind therapies*. *Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine*. 6:6.

<https://peh-med.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1747-5341-6-6>

Mikulas, W. (2015). *Cultivating Mindfulness: A Comprehensive Approach*. New York: Springer Science + Business Media.

Pathak, V., Jena, B., Kalra, S. (2013). Qualitative Research. *Perspectives in Clinical Research*, 4(3), 192. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3757586/>

Porges, S. (2011). *The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological foundations of emotions, attachment, communication, self-regulation*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Telles, S., Singh, N., Balkrishna, A. (2011). *Heart rate variability changes during high frequency yoga breathing and breath awareness*. *Biopsychosocial Medicine*. 5:4.

<https://bpsmedicine.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1751-0759-5-4>

- Roberts, N. (2016). *Embodying Self: A Dance/Movement Therapy Approach to Working with Concealable Stigmas*. *American Journal of Dance Therapy* (38) 63-80.
- Shonin, E., Gordon, W. (2016). *Experiencing the Universal Breath: A Guided Meditation*. *Mindfulness* (7) 1243-1245. New York: Springer Science + Business Media.
- Solhaug, I., Eriksen, T., de Vibe, M., Haavind, H., Friberg, O., Sorlie, T., Rosenvinge, J. (2016). *Medical and Psychology Students Experience in Learning Mindfulness: Benefits, Paradoxes, and Pitfalls*. *Mindfulness* (7) 838-850. Springer Link.
- Wang, C., Seo, D., Geib, R. (2016). *Developing a body-mind exercise programme for stressed children*. *Health Education Journal* Vol 76(2) 131-144.
- Wasser, J. (2017). *Every breath you take: physiology and the ecology of knowing in meditative practice*. *International Journal of Dharma Studies*. 5:2. Springer Open.