

Movement Matters: Global Body in Conflict

Middlebury College Dance Department

Statement of Research Question: The primary research question that drove the "Movement Matters: Global Body in Conflict" initiative sought to understand: "How does embodiment and creativity impact our engagement with an issue or complex topic? Could these practices be tools for facilitating understanding across differences, and could the practice of embodiment and creativity generate increased empathy?"

Importance of the Research Question:

- **Addressing a Gap in Existing Research:** Within the dance community there is a lack of interdisciplinary research that systematically investigated how embodiment and creativity could influence conflict transformation. This project aimed to fill this gap by providing empirical evidence and theoretical insights into the mechanisms by which physical engagement and creative processes impacted interpersonal understanding and empathy.
- **Interdisciplinary Relevance:** By exploring the intersection of dance, creativity, and conflict transformation, this research question opened up new avenues for interdisciplinary collaboration. It held implications not just for artists and dancers but for educators, and conflict transformation professionals, offering new tools and methodologies for addressing complex social issues.
- **Enhancing Empathy and Understanding:** The research investigated whether and how embodiment and creativity could serve as powerful mediums for this purpose.
- **Potential for Broader Societal Impact:** By demonstrating the efficacy of embodiment and creativity in fostering empathy and understanding, the findings could inform community engagement, education, contributing to more cohesive and empathetic learning environments.
- **Foundation for Future Research:** Establishing a clear understanding of the impact of embodiment and creativity on conflict transformation not only addressed the current research gap but also laid the groundwork for future investigations. It serves to open the door to further funding and research opportunities that could delve deeper into specific modalities, long-term effects, and broader applications of these findings.

List of collaborators and partners

Project Lead: Lida Winfield

Collaborators: The Middlebury College Dance Department: Christal Brown, Laurel Jenkins, Karima Borni, Meshi Chavez, Bert Crosby, Tiffany Wilbur

Research Assistants: Leigha Francis, Brys Peralta Grant and Hannah Ennis

Dance Artists selected to participate in Movement Matters: Global Body in Conflict grant were: Ishmael Houston-Jones, Makini Makes, Toby MacNutt, Sydnie L. Mosley, INSPIRIT, Tatiana Desardouin

Summary of Research Findings: Our comprehensive research initiative, conducted over six artist residencies, collected 508 voluntary, anonymous surveys, amassing over 3,000 responses that blend qualitative and quantitative insights. A notable finding is that one-third of the participants had never before engaged in dance-related events or courses on campus, highlighting the project's reach beyond the existing dance community. An overwhelming 89% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the workshops facilitated increased empathy or connection with other participants. This is further evidenced by nearly 200 hand-written responses that underscore the significance of connection to others and embodied interactions in enhancing empathy, awareness, and presence. As we continue to analyze the extensive data collected throughout 2023, plans are underway to extend our research

efforts. Participant feedback has been illuminating, with diverse responses reflecting the profound impact of the workshops and events. Highlights from participant quotes include:

- Discovering unexpected personal capabilities and the power of navigating discomfort non-verbally.
- Experiencing a heightened sense of self and community outside of familiar social circles ("the Midd bubble").
- A newfound appreciation for non-visual senses and a deeper bond with peers.
- Recognizing the universality of the human experience and the transformative potential of movement in communication.
- Emphasizing the importance of presence, bodily awareness, and the ability to engage in embodied dialogues.

Participants articulated key takeaways such as the importance of comfort within oneself, the similarities shared with others, the innovative possibilities arising from collective movement, and the role of art in self-transformation. The workshops not only facilitated a greater understanding of personal and interpersonal dynamics but also highlighted the role of discomfort in growth, the capacity for movement to forge deeper connections, and the significance of vulnerability and trust in challenging situations.

Implications for the Study and Practice of Conflict Transformation: By recognizing the intrinsic link between our physical embodiment and our experiences of gender, race, sexuality, culture, and more, we underscore the potential of dance and creative practices in navigating the complexities of conflict and human interaction. This understanding reinforces the idea that creative problem-solving, curiosity, listening, and sharing—all central to dance artists' practice—offer invaluable pathways to transforming conflict.

Our preliminary findings underscore the vital role of embodiment and creativity in fostering the skills necessary for effective conflict transformation, including intercultural communication, empathy, and innovative problem-solving. The integration of these practices into conflict transformation studies and practice not only enriches the toolkit available to practitioners and educators but also aligns with a holistic understanding of human experience and conflict dynamics. As we continue to explore and validate these approaches, the potential for creating more nuanced, compassionate, and effective conflict resolution strategies becomes increasingly apparent.

List of Publications, Performances, Media Coverage, and Other Outputs

Residencies and Performances: Six dance artists conducted four-day residencies at Middlebury College, each offering a range of activities that included:

- Free master classes open to the college and public dance community.
- Lunch sessions with interested students for discussions on art-making and thematic explorations of the artist's work.
- Meetings with faculty and staff focusing on the use of embodied creative problem-solving, listening, and conflict transformation in their work.
- Artist Talks or performances provided insightful perspectives on the intersection of dance, creativity, and social issues.

Departmental Partnerships: Collaborations extended across various departments and programs at Middlebury College. Participating departments included: Dance, Film and Media, Music, English, Political Science, Education Studies, Environmental Studies, Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies, Luso-Hispanic Studies

Media and Publications: Interviews with each artist were conducted to capture their insights and experiences during the residencies. These interviews are available through [links to longer video content](#).

[A Conflict Transformation Podcast](#) featured an interview with Joe Hanlon and Lida Winfield, delving into the intricacies of conflict transformation through the lens of dance and creative expression.

Public Presentations: A significant highlight was the [Movement Matters: Global Body and Conflict Research Presentation](#) by Lida Winfield, Brys Peralta Grant, and Hannah Ennis.