LUNCHTIME DANCE CLASS: THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF DANCE ON SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN

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For the degree of Master of Arts in Education, Educational Psychology

By

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents. Thank you for always believing in me and pushing me to be the best I can be. Without your support and encouragement I would not have been able to accomplish this goal. Mom, you are the strongest woman I know and my inspiration. You have showed me that no obstacle is too great and that it is possible to overcome anything that may come my way. Dad, you have taught me that hard work and dedication are the keys to success. Thank you for continuing to be my biggest fans. I love you.
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ABSTRACT

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Dance Academy was a project developed to give children an opportunity to experience dance as an extracurricular activity imbedded into their school day. This six-week program involved a group of twenty 2nd grade students that met twice a week, on Tuesday and Thursday, during the forty-five minute lunch period. During this time students were introduced to different genres of music and dance.

Anecdotal notes, video documentation, and surveys were used to measure the success of this project. The data suggests that while attending Dance Academy, classroom teachers noticed an improvement in students’ behaviors as well as their motivation to work hard and behave as model students in their classrooms and school community. Dance Academy also provided an opportunity for students to socialize with students beyond their own classrooms and with whom they shared a common interest in dance. Moreover, by participating in dance students were provided with a form of physical activity that has variety and can be enjoyable throughout their lives.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Statement of Need

In today’s economy, many families may find it difficult to enroll their children in extracurricular activities to introduce their children to the arts. Financial issues, scheduling conflicts, and a lack of transportation are just some of the many reasons families may not be able to enroll their children in extracurricular activities, such as music or dance. Additionally, in most schools, visual and performing arts are not a top priority. For these reasons, and many more, it difficult for children to be exposed to the benefits of the arts.

Although the visual and performing arts are part of the California State Standards, without state testing, there is little incentive for teachers who are already hard pressed to increase math and language skills to include them on a regular basis during class time. For example, the California Alliance for Arts education reported that in 2005, California’s Governor Schwarzenegger eliminated the Arts Work grant, a $6 million endowment that was administered by the California Department of Education from 1999 to 2004. The elimination of this grant left California with no state funding for visual or performing arts education (Posnick-Goodwin, 2005).

In a 2007 research study conducted by the Center on Education Policy documenting the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act, found a shift in instructional time, dedicating more time to English language arts and mathematics and less time to other subjects such as science, social studies, art and music, and physical education (Center of Education Policy, 2008). Data showed that the minutes per week decreased by
35% in both the arts and physical education. On average, the minutes per week in the arts were reduced by 57 minutes; the minutes per week in physical education were reduced by 40 minutes (Center of Education Policy, 2008).

In addition to a lack of the arts in education, physical education is also a subject that is being neglected in schools. It is recommended by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that children participate in a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) to gain health benefits such as a “decreased likelihood of developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and obesity” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010, p. 1). In a study done by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009) it was reported that on average, “one in four adolescents do not engage in 60 minutes of physical activity on any days of the week” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010, p. 1).

While some schools do have physical education programs, their effectiveness is questionable. According to the HHS, students should be engaged in MVPA for 50 percent of the time they spend in a physical education class. The HHS documented nine different studies that show in a typical PE class, students are engaged in MVPA for less than 50% of the instructed time. Additionally, it was discovered that some PE teachers use an extensive amount of class time for administrative and classroom management tasks such as attendance and announcements in which cases students MVPA rates are lowest (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010, p. 1).

The lack of physical activity is related to increasingly obesity in the United States. In the 2009 Los Angeles Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 14 percent of children were considered obese. This means that 14 percent of the children included in this survey had
a body mass index that was greater than or equal to the 95th percentile for their age and gender (Center for Disease Control, 2009).

**Purpose of the Project**

Dance Academy is a project that was developed to allow school-aged children the chance to experience an extracurricular during their typical school day, specifically during lunchtime. The specific goals of the project include helping students to learn

1. How to find the beat and rhythms of different genres of music
2. How to use musical instruments.
3. How to observe and practice dance steps and choreography to various forms of dance such as jazz, hip-hop, and salsa.
4. Experience new social grouping: with four children from each of the five 2nd grade classes.
5. To participate in a physical activity that offers variety and that is fun and enjoyable.

Dance Academy will give children whose families may be unable to enroll their children in afterschool programs the opportunity to experience an extracurricular activity that taught them rhythm, movement, sequence and creativity through dance while also allowing them to interact with peers in a socially inclusive and engaging way.

**Terminology**

The art of dance involves terminology that can be interpreted or defined in various ways. For the purpose of this project, I used terms and their definitions from the *Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools: Prekindergarten Through Grade Twelve* (California Department of Education, 2001).
The California State Standards describe the “skills, knowledge, and abilities” (California Department of Education, 2001, p. ix) that all students should be able to perform at each particular grade level for. Below are the terms and definitions from both dance and music, which were used for this project.

**Balance:** A state of equilibrium referring to the balance of weight or the spatial arrangement of bodies. Designs may be balanced on both sides of center (symmetrical) or balanced off center (asymmetrical) (CDE, 2001, p. 36).

**Beat:** Unit of measure of rhythmic time (CDE, 2001, p. 76).

**Choreography:** The creation and composition of dances by arranging or inventing steps, movements, and patterns of movements (CDE, 2001, p. 36).

**Dance:** Movement selected and organized for aesthetic purposes or as a medium of expression rather than for its function as work or play (CDE, 2001, p. 37).

**Genre:** A particular kind of style of dance, such as ballet, jazz, modern, folk, tap (CDE, 2001, p. 37). Type or kind of musical work (e.g., opera, jazz, mariachi) (CDE, 2001, p. 77).

**Jazz dance:** Dance marked by movement isolations and complex, propulsive polyrhythms. It is an outgrowth of African-American ragtime, jazz, spirituals, blues, work songs, and so forth and is considered an American dance style (CDE, 2001, p. 37).

**Rhythm:** A structure of movement patterns in time; a movement with a regular succession of strong and weak elements; the patter produced by emphasis an duration of notes in music (CDE, 2001, p. 38).
The Thesis at a Glance

In order to better understand the importance of dance and its impact on the development of children it is important to review previous research and studies that focus on dance and its effects on children. These research studies will be presented in Chapter Two, the literature review. Following the literature review, the development and implementation of the project will be discussed in detail. Chapter Four will present results from the three data sources to evaluate the project. These data sources will include anecdotal notes, video documentation, and parent and student surveys. Finally, Chapter Five will include a discussion of data results and interesting findings and well as concluding remarks about the project.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

While many articles from advocacy groups (e.g., Arts for LA, National Art Education Association) can be found with the goals of persuading individuals to fund the arts and make them a higher priority in schools and education, there is limited research that describes the positive effects that the performing arts, more specifically dance, has on children. Although research is limited, there are some relevant research studies that examine dance and its effects on language development, reading, behavior, and social competencies; these studies will be reviewed in this chapter. To begin, the importance of having performing arts available in the school setting will be explained. Next, studies documenting how dance can improve reading competencies, social competence, and cognition will be presented.

The Importance of Performing Arts

The arts continue to lie on the outskirts of education. Many times the arts are “the last to be added and the first to be dropped in times of strained budgets and shifting priorities” (Ruppert, 2006, p. 17). While the arts may not be a part of traditional core curriculum, they provide children with a variety of ways “to experience playful exploration, self-expression, creativity, and the joy of learning” (California Department of Education, 2010, p. 1). Many times the arts, such as dance, involve social interaction and social relationships as children work together. Additionally, children can build language skills as they “make, respond to, and think about art” (California Department of Education, 2010, p. 3).
Furthermore, the arts foster a willingness to learn by “emphasizing active engagement, disciplined and sustained attention, and persistence and risk taking” (Ruppert, 2006, p. 14). They provide students with a positive and supportive environment that promotes constructive criticism allowing children to feel safe to take risks and try new things. Additionally, many students find the arts exciting and often more motivated to go to school to participate in their arts program. In this way, the arts can provide students with a reason for staying in school (Ruppert, 2006).

Reading Through Dance

In Basic Reading Through Dance Program: The Impact on First-Grade Students’ Basic Reading Skills, McMahon, Rose, and Parks (2003) evaluated the effectiveness of an arts-based educational program, Basic Reading Through Dance. The curriculum for Basic Reading Through Dance (BRD) was created “building on imagery, memory, and reading research” (McMahon et al., 2003, p. 107). The program focused on phonetic abilities through the use of visual and kinesthetic imagery. During the BRD program, children were taught visual strategies, such as “physically representing the alphabet symbols for sound combinations” (McMahon et al., 2003, p. 107). The main objective of the BRD program was to “use dance as a tool to improve students’ earliest reading skills with a focus on their ability to link visual cues (letters) with the sounds they represent” (McMahon et al., 2003, p. 108). Moreover, by approaching reading acquisition in a creative, active, and fun way, it was hoped that children would be more inclined to take part in reading related activities (McMahon et al., 2003).
Method

Basic Reading Through Dance program was a 20-session dance-based reading curriculum, which focused on improving decoding and phoneme-grapheme relationships. In these sessions, students used their bodies to represent alphabet symbols for different sounds and combinations of sounds in the English Language. In order to physically represent each sound students would have to “visualize the appropriate symbols (letters) for spoken sounds” as well as “recreate these images physically using their bodies” (McMahone et al., 2003, p. 110).

Recruitment and participants. The Basic Reading Through Dance program included 16 first-grade classes from 6 Chicago public schools. The population of these schools was predominantly African American from poverty-level families. Nine other Chicago based schools were selected as control groups and their previous achievement reading scores and racial demographics matched those of the experimental-group student population (McMahone et al., 2003).

The study included 721 participants from first-grade classes. The experimental group included 328 students while the control group included 293. At the time of the posttest, 630 students were assessed, 293 from the experimental group and 337 from the control group. A drop in participants from the pretest to the posttest was due to students transferring out of the classroom or being absent (McMahone et al. 2003).

Procedure. The Basic Reading Through Dance program was implemented in the first-grade classrooms twice a week for 10 weeks by one of the three artists. Each session was 40 minutes long. Therefore, during the course of the program, participants were exposed to 13.3 hours of dance-based reading instruction. The sessions involved
students using their bodies to create letter shapes to represent sounds. For instance, “standing straight up and extending both arms at 90-degree angles would represent the sound of the letter t” (McMahone et al., 2003, p. 112). Each session of the BRD program built on the previous session. In the beginning of the program sessions focused only on learning consonants and vowels. As the sessions progressed, “more advanced lessons focused on adjacent consonant letter combinations such as bl and more difficult vowel combinations such as oo” (McMahone et al., 2003, p. 112).

**Assessments.** The Read America’s PhonoGraphix Test was used as pre and posttest to evaluate the BRD program the effect dance has on basic reading skills. The PhonoGraphix Test is a performance assessment that measures four main areas of early reading skills. These areas include code knowledge, phoneme segmentation, blending, and phoneme manipulation. The standardized tests were given individually and were scored objectively by the proctor immediately following administration (McMahone et al., 2003, p. 112).

The core knowledge portion of the PhonoGraphix test is a 50-item scale that measures a students’ ability to identify consonants, vowels, and digraphs. It includes all of the vowels in the Roman alphabet as well as 20 consonants and 24 digraphs. The phoneme segmentation section consists of 18 items, which measure the participants’ ability to verbally segment a word (McMahone et al., 2003).

**Results**

The BRD program and its effects on reading skills were examined and evaluated using the PhonoGraphix Test. Improvements in early reading skills such as consonant and vowel sounds and phoneme segmentation were compared to the improvements of
students who did not participate in the BRD program. Results from the PhonoGraphix test on consonant sound recognition showed a “significantly greater improvement” (McMahone et al., 2003, p. 118) in the experimental students than in the control students. Students who participated in the BRD program “were able to improve their scores by 27 points (out of a total possible of 100 points) from pretest to posttest, compared to an increase on 10 points in the student scores in the control group” (McMahone et al., 2003, p. 118). Significant improvements were also seen in the experimental group in the area of vowel recognition. Students that participated in the BRD program were able to improve their scores by 30 points whereas control students improved their scores by 19 points. Finally, in the area of phoneme segmentation, scores improved by 28 points for students in the BRD group, significantly more than the control students who improved their scores by 15 points (McMahone et al., 2003).

Discussion

This study had exceptionally positive results concerning the BRD program and reading abilities of first-grade students. Students in the BRD program started out lower than the control students; however, they performed better than the control students on posttests. The BRD program took “low performing readers and turned them into significantly better readers” (McMahone et al., 2003, p. 119) in just three months. At the conclusion of the study, BRD students’ ability to relate written consonants to the spoken sounds for those letters, relate written vowels to the spoken sounds for those letters, and segment phonemes from spoken words improved far more than the students in the control group. The control classrooms used teaching techniques that were commonly used in the Chicago public school system. Therefore, the results of the study suggest that the
methods used in the BRD program produce more positive results than they standard teaching strategies (McMahone et al., 2003).

**Effects of Creative Dance and Movement on Preschoolers Social Competence**

In *The Effects of a Creative Dance and Movement Program on the Social Competence of Head Start Preschoolers*, Lobo and Winsler (2006) evaluated the gains in social competence and improvements in behavior in at-risk children attending a Head Start preschool program. Children who grow up in poverty are more at risk to develop behavioral, social and academic problems than children from more affluent families. Examples of this can be seen as early as preschool. Therefore, an early intervention program for maximizing poor children’s social competence is imperative (Lobo & Winsler, 2006). The Head Start program used for this study was located in the mid-Atlantic region of the USA. The center served 246 children, all of whom came from families below the poverty line (Lobo & Winsler, 2006).

**Participants**

The study included 40 full time preschool children between the ages of 39 to 62 months old. Participants’ ethnicities were as follows: 67 percent Hispanic/Latino, 16 percent African American/Black, 5 percent Asian, 7 percent Arabic, and 5 percent Caucasian. Twelve percent of the children were born in the USA. Additionally, 5 percent were identified with speech or language delays. Spanish was the primary language spoken among the participants; 56 percent of participants and their families spoke Spanish. Additionally, 17 percent spoke English, 12 percent Arabic, 5 percent Vietnamese, and 10 percent spoke a combination of both English and Spanish. The
average age of the participants’ parents was 28 years old and 18 percent were unemployed (Lobo & Winsler, 2006).

**Procedure**

Three classrooms from the same school site, each containing roughly 17 children and two teachers, were chosen to participate in this study. Consent forms were sent home to all 52 families from the three classroom and 43 were returned. These 43 children were assigned at random to the dance group or the control group, however, three children moved out of the area before the start of the study, which left only 40 participants. The experimental group had a total of 21 children and the control group had 19 children (Lobo & Winsler, 2006).

Parent and teacher surveys were sent home before and after the study. Parent surveys were sent home in both English and Spanish and teacher surveys were distributed in English only. After a few reminders, and the administration of a few replacement surveys, “100 percent of the surveys were completed by the parents and teachers at both pre test and posttest” (Lobo & Winsler, 2006, p. 506).

**Sessions**

**Control group.** Children of both the experiment and control groups participated in a 35-minute session, twice a week, for eight weeks. The sessions took place in the mornings in a room separate from their preschool classroom at the Head Start center. During the sessions, the control group played with puzzles, games, blocks, balls, manipulatives, and other activities and toys that are typically used in the preschool setting. During the control group sessions the experimenter stayed in the room to “observe, assist and play together with the children and toys, as desired by the children”
(Lobo & Winsler, 2006, p. 507). While some children did get physical activity while playing catch or soccer with some of the soft balls that were present in the classroom, none of the control group children received exposure to music or dance (Lobo & Winsler, 2006).

**Experimental group.** Children in the experimental group participated in a dance program designed to appropriately meet the developmental level of the children and provide them with “structured movement opportunities that allowed the children to continuously invent movements according to their personal preferences” (Lobo & Winsler, 2006, p. 507). The children were introduced to six different dance concepts and they were embedded into the weekly session. These concepts included body parts, shapes, locomotor movement, space, time, and force (energy, weight, and flow) (Lobo & Winsler, 2006).

Each dance session was structured and included five sections. The class began with a greeting, followed by a warm-up and stretching; both done in a circle. Next, the children participated in a center activity that included jumping, skipping, and other “high-energy exercises” (Lobo & Winsler, 2006, p. 508). Following the center activity, the experimenter guided the children in the short-story and dance improvisation section. In this section, “the experimenter either read a story or poem from a book or told a free standing story, and then all would do a dance improvisation based on the story” (Lobo & Winsler, 2006, p. 508). Finally, the goodbye dance and cool down section was the conclusion to the class. At this time, the children were allowed to move around freely to calm, relaxing music, without invading other’s personal space (Lobo & Winsler, 2006).
Throughout the eight-week program, children were given the opportunity to use a variety of instruments, props and music to enhance the concepts they were working on that week. For example, when learning about rhythm and speed the groups were given musical instruments such as tambourines, xylophones and triangles. When learning about movement pathways (moving in curved, zigzag, and straight directions), children were allowed to use scarves and butterfly wings to accentuate movements (Lobo & Winsler, 2006).

Measures

Before and after the program parents and teachers completed the Social Competence Behavior Evaluation: Preschool Edition (SCBE). This evaluation contains 80-items with 6-point response scales ranging from “almost never occurs” to “almost always occurs” and provides measurements for “overall social competence, internalizing behavior problems and externalizing behavior problems” (Lobo & Winsler, 2006, p. 508). The results from the SCBE revealed that the children from the experimental group improved greatly from pre test to post test in all three areas when compared with the children from the control group. For this study test scores are reversed, thus bigger numbers reflect better functioning and fewer problems. Both parent and teacher scores increased from the pre test to the post test in both the experimental and the control group, however, the scores from the experimental group increased significantly more than the control group (Lobo & Winsler, 2006).

In addition to the results from the SCBE evaluation, the observations from the experimenter also provided evidence that shows the positive effects dance had on the children in the experiment group. The experimenter reported that she observed an
increase in self-confidence in the children throughout the course of the program. For example, in the beginning, “many in the class were reluctant to do the exercises, but after one to two weeks they became more confident and began to express themselves verbally and physically” (Lobo & Winsler, 2006, p. 512).

**Dancing Thoughts**

In *Dancing Thoughts: An Examination of Children’s Cognition and Creative Process in Dance*, Giguerre (2011) conducted a study to determine whether or not children use thinking strategies and/or cognitive processes when choreographing dances. This study was developed as “an effort to add to our current knowledge of the nature of children’s thinking during the creative process in dance” (Giguerre, 2011, p. 6).

**Participants**

The study was conducted at a K-6 school in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The school’s population at the time of the study was 950 students. All students at the school participated in a school wide assembly and one movement workshop. Additionally, sixteen self-selected fifth graders participated in 10 additional daily movement workshops with the objective to perform for the school at the end of the program. The sixteen fifth-graders were the participants in the study. The workshops for this study took place in conjunction with an artist-in-residence program, which allows “professional artists in a variety of artistic disciplines in the visual and performing arts to integrate with school curriculum” (Giguerre, 2011, p. 10).

The sixteen fifth-grade participants consisted of 12 girls and 4 boys; 12 Caucasian and 4 African American. Two of the students attended resource support for low academic performance and three were in the gifted program. Five participants stated that
they had previous dance experience, one previously took part in ethnic dance, and one other had a background in musical theater (Giguerre, 2011).

Setting

The participants of the study were divided into four groups; two groups of four, one group of three, and one group of five. All four groups worked in the same space and the movement workshops were primarily spent in “open choreographic time” (Giguerre, 2011, p. 10). During this time, students were given the task of creating their own dances. They were not given any direction or guidance in the actual process of creating their dance. At times the researcher would ask how the groups how they were doing but did not become involved in the actual choreographic process (Giguerre, 2011).

On day eight of the study, students were diverted from their choreographic time to watch and critique their dances that were videotaped the day before. The students were the only participants in the critique, while the researcher remained neutral and did not interact or provide feedback (Giguerre, 2011). A percussionist attended sessions nine and ten to play live music to complement the children’s dances if they wanted it. Dancers were able to choose whether or not they wanted music as well as for which parts of their dance. At the conclusion of the study the students performed their choreography for the entire campus in two assembly programs (Giguerre, 2011).

Data

Four sources were used as data for this study. These data sources included videotapes of the ten study sessions, interviews with study participants, children’s daily journal entries and brainstorming sheets created on days one and two of the study (Giguerre, 2011, p. 11). The videotapes of the ten workshops were transcribed
documenting children’s movement, children’s communication, and the
costicipant/researcher observations. Interviews were done both individually and in dance
groups. In the interviews, the participants were asked to describe the process they used to
create their dances. Journaling was done at the end of each session where students would
reflect on their experience and document how they felt, what they did during the sessions,
as well as anything else they wanted to document. Finally, the brainstorming sheets were
analyzed from the first two days of the program. During the two brainstorming sessions
students wrote, drew, or discussed how they were going to create their dances (Giguerre,
2011).

Findings

In Giguerre’s (2011) study of children’s cognition and creative process in dance,
three observations emerged based on the data compilation of the journal writings,
videotapes, and interviews. First, “cognition is recognizable in the process of creating
dances” (Giguerre, 2011, p. 22). Data showed students using several different ways to
generate, develop, and organize movement such as improvisation, observations,
repetition, and imitation. Dancers were also observed using imagery as a means for
choreographing their dance. When asked in an interview why the students had someone
tapping each person before they moved, one student responded with, “Oh- we figured it
would kind of look weird if we just un-froze, so maybe we could like, you know like an
alarm clock, you can like turn it on and it goes and then you turn it off and it stops”
(Giguerre, 2011, p. 14). This is also an example of the second summary observation,
which states “specific cognitive strategies can be identified that describe the creative
process in dance as seen in the children in this study” (Giguerre, 2011, p. 22).
While creating their dances, children organized their dances and gave them structure in a variety of ways. Two of the four groups began structuring and organizing their dances on the first day of brainstorming, before any movement or choreography was made. These groups paid close attention to structure throughout the entire process; before movement, during movement, and even right before their performances. They would be seen revising their dances by adding new movements or making adjustments to their choreography to meet the needs of their environment (Giguerre, 2011).

Finally, the study found that when choreographing dances, both individual and group cognitive strategies are evident (Giguerre, 2011). For example, while the dancers worked in their groups, several roles were observed. These roles included the facilitator/organizer, the compliant follower, the critic, and the loner. While these roles were seen often, “these were fluid roles that a student would take on for periods of time” (Giguerre, 2011, p. 17).

**Dance and the Brain**

In *Dance and the Brain*, Grafton and Cross (2008) examine the hypothesized overlap of cognitive mechanisms for observational and physical learning with the use of neuroimaging and behavioral procedures. Participants of this study performed dances on a dance pad that was connected to a computer with various degrees of exposure. First, participants performed three dance sequences that they had rehearsed (observed and imitated movements) over the course of a week. The participants observed these sequences and they also imitated and practiced the movements. Next, the participants performed three dance sequences that they observed only. With this set of dance sequences, participants were not allowed to practice or imitate the movements.
Additionally, participants performed three dance sequences where they had heard the music but were not able to view the choreography. Finally the participants performed three novel sequences were they were not exposed to music or movements. Data from neuroimaging showed that participants performed the sequences they were able to both imitate and observe best (Grafton & Cross, 2008).

The results of this study suggest that at the neural level, there is a strong link between learning by observing in conjunction with physical learning resonance thus indicating that “early exposure to dance might enhance this link, through consistencies between the training methods” (Grafton & Cross, 2008, p. 66). This is to say that at the neural level, learning through physical movement and observing are both beneficial and promote the link between learning and doing (Grafton & Cross, 2008).

**Effects of Dance on Creative Thinking Skills**

In *Assessment of High School Students’ Creative Thinking Skills: A Comparison of the Effects of Dance and Non-dance Classes*, Minton (2000) evaluates the effects of dance on students’ creative thinking skills. Two hundred and eighty-six high school students with the average age of 15 years old were enrolled in either dance or non-dance classes. Students who participated in the dance classes were used as the experimental group, while the students in the non-dance classes were used as the control group. Students in the dance classes spent five to eight hours a week studying dance both in and out of school during the course of one semester. Students in the non-dance classes attended classes in business accounting, English, health, interpersonal communications and psychology (Minton, 2000, as cited in Hetland, 2002)
All subjects were given a pre and posttest using Form A of the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT). This test uses “picture construction, picture completion, and creation of recognizable objects” (Hetland, 2002, p. 8) to assess five factors: “fluency (number of ideas), originality (novelty of ideas), abstractness of titles (imaginative titling that captures the essence of a drawing), elaboration (detail identification), and resistance to premature closure (completing figures in non-simplistic ways)” (Hetland, 2002, p. 8).

As a result of the TTCT pre and posttests, “elaboration, originality, and abstractness of titles” (Hetland, 2002, p. 8) showed a relationship with higher levels of dance experience. Additionally, the results of the study show that students were better able to consider multiple perspectives, which could be useful in a variety of disciplines. For example, students can develop their creative thinking skills, such as originality and abstract thinking, by participating in dance classes or activities (Hetland, 2002).

**Dance in Academics**

In *Using Movement to Teach Academics: An Outline for Success*, Minton (2003) describes various ways to use dance and movement in the classroom. Minton (2003) states that using dance and movement as a teaching strategy is a form of “active learning” that can act as a “hook to help students remember concepts and ideas” (p. 36). Using dance as a form of “active learning” can help to promote student involvement by engaging students and increasing their eagerness to participate. Active learning provides students with a detailed understanding while allowing them to actively process what they are learning through things like performances or demonstrations (Minton, 2003).
Incorporating Dance in Academic Concepts

Minton (2003) explains some ideas of ways to use dance as a form of “active learning” to teach academic concepts. When teaching about climatic differences around the world students can use movements to represent different weather climates. For example, “small, restricted, and protective” movements could represent the cold arctic climate while “more open, relaxed, and languorous movements” (Minton, 2003, p. 37) would suggest a more tropical climate. As another example, when introducing the concept of electricity, students can use dance movements to demonstrate the flow of electricity. Students can stop their movements to show the effects of moving a switch to the “off” position and stopping the flow of electricity (Minton, 2003).

Movement and rhythm can also be used to teach the concept of fractions. As Minton (2003) describes, students can move or clap to an underlying beat while a second group of students “claps or moves on every fourth pulse beat to represent one-fourth of the total number of beats” (p. 39). The same can be done on every second beat to represent one-half. This is the least clear study – was it really empirical research or was it just initial thoughts/ideas about dance?

Conclusion

In conclusion, the review of the literature shows that dance can serve as a way to help children develop their cognitive and problem solving skills. Moreover, dance can help children develop academic skills such as reading and cognition. Thus, it is important to provide children the opportunity to experience the arts during their school day. In the following chapters, the design and development, administration, and evaluation of Dance Academy will be discussed.
CHAPTER THREE
PROJECT AUDIENCE AND IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

This project was developed to give school-aged children the opportunity to experience dance as an extracurricular activity imbedded into the typical school day – during lunch. Dance Academy provided children whose families may not be able to enroll their children in extracurricular activities due to financial issues or scheduling conflicts, a chance to participate in something that taught rhythm, movement, sequence, and creativity while interacting with peers, in a lively and dynamic way. This chapter will describe the development of Dance Academy, the intended audience, the personal qualification of the researcher and those who might implement such a project in the future as well as the environment and equipment required for this project.

Development of Dance Academy

Overview

Dance Academy was held at Ivy Academia, a charter school located in Woodland Hills, California, where I, the researcher, teach second grade. Ivy Academia Charter School is a kindergarten through twelfth grade school that has the grade levels spread across several different locations. Second and third grade are the only grade levels located on the campus where Dance Academy was held. Each grade level has a different lunchtime; therefore, the program was only made available to the second grade students.

Dance Academy began with the goal to expose young children to the art of dance. The first “step” (pun intended) in creating Dance Academy was to construct a curriculum plan. This plan consisted of a six-week program focusing on different music patterns
such as eight counts and waltz, and different genres of dance such as jazz, hip-hop, swing, and ballroom.

Meeting Times

Dance Academy included twenty children who met twice a week, on Tuesday and Thursday, during the forty-five minute lunch period over a six-week timeframe. Students spent the first fifteen minutes eating their lunch while learning about music and instruments. When students finished their lunch they would meet in my classroom where Dance Academy was held. The remaining time would be spent using instruments to identify rhythms in music as well as learning dance steps and choreography.

Music and Movement

Dance Academy exposed children to music and movement and, more specifically, how music relates to dance. In the early stages of the program, students were given musical instruments, which were used to explore rhythm patterns and tempos in various genres of music. As the program developed, the children were then taught how rhythm and tempo relate to dance and choreography. They began to observe that identifying the patterns in music helps individuals integrate movement and choreography as well as help dancers stay in sync with each other.

Participants

The Children

Twenty students participated in Dance Academy; 7 boys and 13 girls. Due to limited space and because each week of Dance Academy was built on the previous session, participants remained the same throughout the course of the project. Students were not able to attend Dance Academy if they were absent from school for the day.
Recruitment and Registration. The target audience of this project was both male and female students in second grade at Ivy Academia Charter School. The students participating in the project could be of any ethnicity or race. Because this project dealt solely with music and movement, language proficiency was not a factor in qualifying for the project. Additionally, students did not have to pay to participate in Dance Academy so families’ socio-economic status was not a factor. Dance experience did not have a factor when choosing students to participate in the project.

Dance Academy was administered twice, once as a pilot and once for the final project. The first session of Dance Academy began in December of 2009. However, for the purpose of this project I will be using the most recent session, which took place in December of 2010. Registration forms (Appendix A) were sent home to all second graders at Ivy Academia Charter School so that the program could begin when the students returned from winter break. In choosing to register for Dance Academy parents also gave permission for their child to be photographed and videotaped. The response to the program was much greater than anticipated; therefore, names were pulled at random out of a lottery to determine which students would participate. There are five second
grade classes at Ivy Academia. Four students from each of the five classes were chosen to participate giving a total of 20 students.

The Teacher

As a child I grew up dancing at Carousel Dance Studio in Woodland Hills, California. I danced from the age of three until I graduated high school studying ballet, tap, jazz, musical theater, lyrical, hip-hop, and pointe. By the age of sixteen I was teaching ballet and tap to three- to five-year-olds and jazz to children five- to seven-years old. Growing up, my dance studio was my second home and dance became my life. Looking back at my experiences I realize that dance has played such an important part of my life and helped me develop physically, emotionally, and socially.

The experiences I had growing up with dance in my life have truly turned me into the person that I am today. Dance Academy was created as a way for me to pass some of these experiences onto my students.

Procedure

To fully implement Dance Academy a particular environment and specific equipments was required. The program required a location with enough open space so the participants could move around freely while dancing. There also needed to be enough room so students could spread their arms out to their sides without bumping into the children next to them so they would not bump into anyone while they were dancing. Moreover, an area where students could sit and play instruments or clap their hands to rhythms and music was important.

For this project a second grade classroom was used. Chairs and desks were moved to the side of the room to create a wide-open space for dance and movement. The
carpet area was used as an area where students were able to sit and play with musical instruments and explore music.

**Equipment**

In order for participants to understand music and rhythm they need to be given the opportunity to explore sounds and beats, making musical instruments a crucial piece of equipment for this project. Rhythm sticks, tambourines, drums, cymbals, and maracas were all tools that were used in Dance Academy to help students recognize and create rhythms. These instruments were purchased with grant money that I received from the Southern California Kindergarten Conference Teacher Award. In addition to the musical instruments, students also clapped their hands and tapped their legs to explore rhythms.

It was important to have and use a variety of music. Different genres of music were necessary for music exploration as well as dance and choreography. Music from different cultures served as a great way for students to explore rhythms. When choosing music, I focused on different genres such as jazz, hip-hop, and salsa, but also tried to incorporate music that the children would be familiar with. I found my music on iTunes and loaded it onto an iPod. In addition, it was necessary to have a good, functioning stereo to play the music. Both the iPod and the stereo were also purchased with grant money. I was able to find a stereo that played MP3 files, CD’s, and radio, and it served as a fantastic tool for this project. Finally, a video camera was an extremely useful piece of equipment to help document and monitor the project. Using my video camera, I was able to have a volunteer record some of the project. This allowed me to go back and reflect on student’s progress throughout Dance Academy physically, socially, and emotionally.
Project Outline

Table 3.2 below provides an outline of the Dance Academy project by week. The focus, goals, content and number of participants are included.

Table 3.2

*Dance Academy Project Outline*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Week 1: Rules     | 1. Understand rules and expectations  
                    2. Review dress code | 1. Introduce different music and dance genres  
                    2. Watch videos of different forms of dance | Tuesday: 20  
                    Thursday: 20 |
| Introduction to Dance |                                                                  |                                                                         |                    |
| Week 2: Music     | 1. Play instruments to the rhythm and beat of the music               | 1. Teach eight count  
                    2. Teach waltz ¾ count  
                    3. Play instruments to the rhythm of the music | Tuesday: 20  
                    Thursday: 20 |
| Week 3: Jazz      | 1. Learn basic dance jazz steps and movements  
                    2. Perform movements in sync with music  
                    3. Put movements together to make a dance | 1. Introduce students to jazz dance steps without music  
                    2. Have students practice dance steps with the music  
                    3. Teach jazz dance choreography and practice both with and without music | Tuesday: 19  
                    Thursday: 20 |
| Week 4: Hip-Hop   | 1. Learn basic hip-hop steps and movements  
                    2. Perform movements in sync with music  
                    3. Put movements together to make a dance | 1. Introduce students to hip-hop dance steps without music  
                    2. Have students practice dance steps with the music  
                    3. Teach jazz dance choreography and practice both with and without music | Tuesday: 20  
                    Thursday: 20 |
### Week 5: Salsa

- 1. Learn basic salsa steps and movements
- 2. Perform movements in sync with music
- 3. Put movements together to make a dance

### Week 6: Review and Performance

- 1. Perform favorite dance for audience

### Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Week 5: Salsa</th>
<th>Week 6: Review and Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>1. Introduce students to salsa dance steps without music</td>
<td>1. In groups students practice their favorite dance that they learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Have students practice dance steps with the music</td>
<td>2. Students will invite friends to be an audience and watch them perform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Week One

During the first week of Dance Academy students were instructed on the rules and expectations of being participants of the program. They were told to wear proper clothes and shoes that allow for movement and dancing. They were also given rules such as respecting others, keeping their hands and feet to themselves, and raising their hand to speak to help maintain classroom management throughout the program.

Students were also exposed to different genres of music and dance the first week. They listened to jazz, salsa, waltz, and classical music, as well as music from different cultures such as African and Native American music. In addition to different genres of music, the students were also introduced to different genres of dance. They watched video clips of classical ballet, jazz, and tap as well as famous dance performances like Stomp and River Dance.
Week Two

In the second week of Dance Academy students were taught how to listen for the rhythm and beats in music. They were taught how to count music using the eight count. They were also taught how to count and find the rhythm to waltz music using the \( \frac{3}{4} \) count.

After students were taught how to count music, they were given various instruments such as rhythm sticks, tambourines, drums, cymbals, and maracas. Students used these instruments to explore the different types of music. They were instructed to play their instruments to the tempos and rhythms of the music they heard.

Week Three

In week three students were introduced to jazz dance. First, the students learned various dance steps and movements that are common with this particular genre. Once children were familiar with the name of the dance steps and their corresponding movements they began executing the steps with the music. Next, students were taught the choreography to a jazz dance. Students practiced the dance first without the music and then with it. Once the choreography was taught, the students took turns practicing the dance in small groups. This provided them with more space to move and perform and also gave them a chance to watch their peers.

Week Four

During the fourth week of Dance Academy students were introduced to hip-hop dance. Students learned various dance steps and movements that are common to hip-hop. In addition, we discussed the difference between jazz movements and hip-hop
movements noting that hip-hop movements were more fluid and loose as opposed to jazz
dance, which has more structure and needs to be more precise.

After learning the names of the hip-hop steps and the movements that
accompanied them, students were given a chance to practice the steps with the music.
Finally, students were taught the choreography to a hip-hop dance. After practicing the
dance without the music students were given a chance to listen to the music and then
practice coordinating the movements with the rhythm of the music. Finally, students
took turns practicing the dance in small groups to provide adequate space.

**Week Five**

In week five students were introduced to salsa dance. Before learning dance steps
and movements we discussed some of the characteristics of salsa dance. We spoke about
how salsa dance uses not just arm and leg movement, but salsa dance also incorporates
movement of the hips. Students were then taught the names of dance steps and
movements as well as their movements. Next, choreography to a salsa dance was taught
and practiced both with and without music. Salsa dancing is usually performed with a
partner however; in this case the children performed the steps and choreography solo.
Once students seemed to grasp the choreography, they took turns practicing the dance in
small groups.

**Week Six**

During week six Dance Academy participants were able to choose one of the
three dances they learned throughout the session to perform for their friends. The
students spent the last week practicing the dances with their peers. I also observed them
practicing their dances during recess and lunch when Dance Academy was not in session.
Additionally, members of Dance Academy were given a CD with all of the songs used during the six-week session allowing them to practice their dances at home. After reviewing and practicing the choreography, the students were allowed to invite their friends that did not participate in Dance Academy and their parents to come and watch them perform their favorite dance. The children were very excited to share what they have learned with their audience

**Data and Evaluation**

Three forms of data analysis were used to evaluate Dance Academy and its effect on the children who participated. Anecdotal notes, video footage, and surveys were used throughout the course of the program. This data was used to show strengths of the program, areas for improvement, and its impact on children.

**Anecdotal Notes**

Throughout the course of the project, anecdotal notes were taken both during Dance Academy sessions as well as throughout the school day. These notes reflected how students were impacted by their experience in Dance Academy not just in the sessions, but also in the classroom, on the playground, and in social interactions with their peers.

**Video Documentation**

The last form of data used to analyze Dance Academy was the use of video. The initial plan was to do weekly video documentation, however, only 3 ½ weeks were filmed. Teaching the student dance movements and choreography required me to be in the front of the room moving with the students which made it difficult for me to video tape on my own. Since Dance Academy was held during the lunch hour and it was
difficult to find volunteers to donate their time during their lunch break. Fortunately, one of my colleagues was willing to lend me a helping hand and helped to document as much of the program as possible.

Although I would like to have more video documentation, the footage that I do have is very helpful in observing many characteristics of the program. The video shows growth in children’s gross motor skills through movement as well as improvements in their ability to pick up dance steps and choreography.

**Surveys**

Both a parent survey (Appendix B) and a student survey (Appendix C) were administered at the end of Dance Academy. The parent survey was sent out to 20 parents however, only eight were returned. The student survey was sent out to 20 children and nine were returned. These surveys were used to assess the effectiveness and satisfaction of the program from both parents and students.

In the parent survey, parents were asked a series of four questions. First, parents were asked if their child ever came home and discussed Dance Academy. If they answered yes, they were asked to elaborate and share some of the things they talked about with their child. Next, they were asked to use a Likert scale of 1-5, five being the greatest, to rate how much their child enjoyed being a part of Dance Academy. Finally, parents were asked in an open-ended question why they chose to have their child participate in the project.

In the student survey, students were also asked a series of four questions. First, students were asked to use a Likert scale of 1-5, five being the greatest, to rate how much they enjoyed participating in Dance Academy. Next, students were given two open-
ended questions. They were asked to describe their favorite part of Dance Academy and were also asked to share what they learned from the project. Lastly, students were asked if they would participate in Dance Academy again if it were offered in the future.

The results of these sources of data are described in the following chapter, Results, Chapter Four.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

Dance Academy was designed to provide dance as an extracurricular activity during lunch time to afford children the opportunity to participate in an activity where they interact with their peers, express themselves creatively, and have fun during school hours in a creative and unconventional way. Three sources of data were used to document and evaluate this project: results from home surveys (child and parent), anecdotal notes, and video documentation. Anecdotal notes will be the first data source presented in this chapter. These notes were taken not only during Dance Academy, but also throughout the school day to document student interaction and behavior, which may have been influenced by the project. Next, the results from the video documentation will be shared and evaluated. Finally, results of the surveys from both parents and students will be presented. The surveys were used as an evaluation of the success and satisfaction of the project from both the parent and child’s perspective.

Anecdotal Notes

The anecdotal notes that were taken throughout the project are not a week-by-week reflection of the activities. Instead, they are a reflection on how the students were impacted by their experience in Dance Academy as evidenced by their comments or improved behavior. In addition to my own observations, I also noted comments that were made by other teachers and parents. There were many common themes that were documented including students’ eagerness to attend, increased socialization,
improvements in classroom behavior, increased confidence, and the spill over extending Dance Academy out of the classroom.

**Eagerness to Attend**

The children’s eagerness to attend Dance Academy was apparent in several ways. Dance Academy was held every Tuesday and Thursday during lunchtime for six weeks. The students had 20 minutes to eat their lunch. After the children finished their lunch, participants met in my classroom where tables and chairs were pushed to the side to leave adequate room for dance and movement. Often the children would rush into the classroom five or ten minutes after lunch had started, hurrying through their lunch so they would not miss a minute of Dance Academy.

Students seemed very eager to attend Dance Academy each session. Often I would have students stop by my classroom from coming into the classroom at lunch on days that Dance Academy was not held asking, “is Dance Academy today?” and “when do we get to have Dance Academy again?” Many times I would hear students say, “I wish Dance Academy was every day!”

**Increased Socialization**

Given that Dance Academy included four students from each of the five 2nd grade classrooms children were allowed an opportunity to interact with peers that they may not have had a chance to see on an average school day. As the project progressed it appeared that many students who did not know each other very well at the beginning were able to get to know each other and develop new or stronger friendships. By the end of Dance Academy students who participated were seen eating lunch together, playing together on
the playground, and even dancing and practicing at recess and lunch on days that Dance Academy was not held.

**Improvements in Classroom Behavior**

When the sign-up sheets went home for Dance Academy, an overwhelming number of them were returned and a lottery was held to choose which students were to participate; children knew that being a part of Dance Academy was a privilege. In our first session, the students and I spoke about how they were chosen for the program while many other children wanted to participate but could not because of a restricted classroom size. Students expressed what they could do to show the other students that they deserved to be there such as being a good citizen, working hard in class, and following school and classroom rules. They spoke about the importance of being a model student and setting good examples for their peers.

In addition, I noticed that many of the teachers used Dance Academy to help motivate students to be on their best behavior reminding them that being a part of Dance Academy was a special opportunity. For example, one teacher whose student was not completing her work in a timely manner informed the child that she did not work quietly and focus to get the work done, she would not be able to attend Dance Academy that day. The student quickly got to work and finished the assignment.

**Increased Self-Confidence**

Most students participating in Dance Academy had little or no dance experience. In the beginning, most students crowded to the back of the room and keep their movements small and confined. It was thrilling to see that as the project progressed many students became more comfortable and confident migrating out from the back of
the class to a more forward position. Movements became bigger and more defined. Faces changed from nervous and uncomfortable to bubbly and full of smiles. By the sixth week, students were fighting for a spot in the front row.

**Dance Academy Outside of Dance Academy**

Each week students learned new dance steps and choreography in Dance Academy. As the children became more familiar with the movements and dances they began to extend Dance Academy beyond the original Tuesday and Thursday meetings. Many of the children would get together at recess, lunch, and before and after school and practice their newest moves as well as the several dances they learned. The children even began teaching dance to some of their peers that were not members of Dance Academy. During recess and lunch when children were practicing the dances from Dance Academy sessions, students who were not participants of the project would come by and ask to participate. Students who attended Dance Academy would then teach them the choreography and they would dance together.

**Video Documentation**

Video documentation was also used as a way to document Dance Academy. While the initial plan was to do weekly video recordings, I was only able to document about three and a half weeks of the project. This was the result of the timing of Dance Academy: It was held during the student/teacher lunch hour and it was difficult to find people to videotape during their prep time. Although I did not get as much video documentation as I would have liked, after reviewing the footage, I was able to observe many themes that occurred during the course of the project. These themes included students’ eagerness to attend and participate, improvement in finding rhythms and beats
in music, development and growth of gross motor skills and proprioceptive awareness, and the children’s ability to combine dance and movement with music.

**So Many Smiles**

One of the most common themes in all of the video clips was the eagerness and excitement seen in the children. The participants are constantly smiling and giggling as they listened to music, learned new movements and choreography, and participated in the dancing itself. In addition, the children appeared eager to participate. For example, often we worked in small groups so that students had more room to move. Each time the students changed groups the next group would rush to the center of the room and they would all try to get a front row spot. Also, when one group would be dancing to the music or learning movements, the children in the other group would stand to the side. Rather than standing or sitting on the sides watching their peers, the children would practice the movements or dances. There were no passive times; when others were performing others were practicing and vice versa. This was not something that I recommended but something that emerged on its own, spontaneously.

**Proprioceptive Awareness and Gross Motor Skills**

As mentioned earlier, the Dance Academy was held in a regular classroom filled with tables and chairs, which needed to be moved for each session, however, space was still limited. The restricted space encouraged children to build on their proprioceptive awareness (the sense of relative position and movement: special orientation). It required them to be aware of their surroundings and how their body needed to move through space to prevent them from bumping in to tables, chairs, or other children. For example, students that were dancing close to the tables and chairs can be observed carefully
watching the furniture as they danced to ensure they would not bump into it. Some students would make the movements smaller well others would move to another area in the room with more space.

Additionally, learning new movements helped children improve their gross motor skills. When first introduced to new movements, many of the participants seemed to be falling, stumbling, and holding on to tables and chairs around them for balance. For example, one student could not spin around without holding onto the table behind her. Another student had difficulty balancing when they had to cross one foot in front of the other. As they continued to practice and learn new movements, students were observed to be experimenting and trying new things to help stabilize them and keep them on their feet. For example, the student who had difficulty spinning around without falling tried things like putting her hands out to the side or on her waste to try to keep her balance. The student who had trouble balancing with one foot crossed in front of the other did something similar; holding his arms out to the side and moving them in an airplane motion to help keep him steady on his feet. As the children practiced and improved on dance movements, their proprioceptive awareness and coordination visually improved as well.

At the beginning of Dance Academy when the students were first introduced to the dance steps and movements they were observed falling, bumping into furniture and other people around them, and having great difficulty keeping steady on their feet. As the program progressed, students were seen trying to find ways to improve these skills, often times through trial and error. At the end of Dance Academy, a tremendous improvement in gross motor skills and proprioceptive awareness was observed.
Rhythm and Movement

In the first sessions of Dance Academy the students were introduced to rhythm and music. With the use of instruments (rhythm sticks, tambourines, maracas, cymbals, and drums) students were taught how to count music as well as how to find the beats (measure of rhythmic time) and rhythm (pattern produced by emphasis of notes in music). The first time the students were given instruments and asked to play them to the rhythm of the music students were off beat and out of sync. The students seemed to be enjoying the opportunity to play an instrument but were not focused on listening for the rhythm or beat of the music.

The students were instructed on how to listen for the rhythm and beat of the music by listening for the strongest or loudest note. Additionally, students watched as I played an instrument with them. As the group was playing the instruments I would walk around and emphasize my movements, especially for those who were struggling. This allowed students to connect my striking of the instrument to the music and helped them find the beat. The video documentation showed that after being taught how to listen for rhythms and beats the children’s ability to play the instruments in sync with the music improved greatly. For example, in one video clip when students began playing their instruments to the music they were all playing to a different beat and many were not playing with the music. After listening to the music carefully the students were able to pick up the rhythm. By the middle of the third song, students were playing their instruments in sync with the music without guidance. At the end of the lesson, out of 20 students, 17 (85%) seemed to be playing the instruments with the music independently.
Just as it was difficult for the children to initially play their instruments to the rhythm and beat of the music, it was also difficult for them to connect their dance steps and movements to the music. When students were taught the choreography, they were introduced to dance steps in small sections. This allowed them to practice the dance steps to a short piece of music before putting everything together. For example, first the students would learn the first step (step-back-step-clap, step-back-step-clap). After the students learned the step, they would practice performing the step with the music. Once the students mastered performing the step with the rhythm of the music, they were introduced the next step (step-back-step-clap, step-back-step-clap, bend down, jump up, shake head). This method was used to teach the choreography for each dance the students learned.

In the video, when students were first taught new movements they were unable to execute the dance steps to the beat of the music. One student began jumping up and down but did not seem to pay attention to the rhythm or beat of the song. Another student executed the dance steps correctly but without regard to the music. Some students paused for several seconds before they began dancing. It appeared as though they were trying to find the beat before they began moving. However, after the students practiced and became comfortable with the steps, it became easier for them to connect movement and music. As seen in various video clips, by the end of the project children were not only able to connect dance movements with music, but they were also able to perform choreography and move in sync as a group with the rhythm of the music.
Survey

Surveys were sent home to assess the experiences for both students and parents of students that participated in Dance Academy. The surveys were used to evaluate the satisfaction and effectiveness of the project as well as what the students and their parents were able to take away from this experience.

Parent Survey

Parent surveys were sent out to the families of all 20 students who participated in the project one week after the conclusion of Dance Academy. The surveys were anonymous and were sent home and returned in the students’ homework folders. Eight of the surveys were returned (return rate: 40%). The first question asked was “Did your child ever come home and talk to you about Dance Academy?” Seven of the eight parents reported yes” to this question. This was followed by an open-ended question asking, “if so, what did he/she say.” Five of the seven parents who responded, “yes” to the first question said that their child would show them the dance moves and choreography that they learned that day. Others reported that their children would express how much they enjoyed Dance Academy (n= 8). Another parent indicated in the survey that her daughter “talked about doing it with her friends. She loves music and would sometimes sing the songs from Dance academy and show us the dances she learned.”

Next, parents were asked to use a Likert scale of 1-5, five being the greatest, to rate how much their child enjoyed Dance Academy. All eight parents rated Dance Academy as a five on the Likert scale. Finally, parents were asked, “Why did you choose to have your child be a part of Dance Academy?” Five parents reported that they choose
to sign their child up for the project because they love to dance and two parents brought
fact that it would be good exercise. Others reported that they were eager to have their
child try something new and be a part of a group. One parent responded:

She wanted to do it even though she had no dance experience…I knew it would
be a great experience for my child. I also thought it might help her improve her
motor skills that she has been having some problems with. I also thought it would
be good for her to be a part of a group because she sometimes as trouble finding
kids to play with and make friends.

In another response a parent wrote:

She loves to dance. I also thought that her disability (she has a prosthetic leg)
might bring an interesting aspect to the class by showing other kids that nothing
has to stop you from doing what you love.

**Student Survey**

Student surveys were sent home with all 20 children that participated in Dance
Academy, nine were returned. The first question asked students to use a Likert scale of
1-5, five being the greatest, to rate how much they enjoyed being a part of Dance
Academy. Eight students rated the project a 5 while one student felt it was a 4. Next,
students were given an open-ended question where they were asked, “What was your
favorite part of Dance Academy?” Six students stated that dancing was their favorite
part. Another student reported that “learning hip-hop moves” was his favorite. One
participant reported that her favorite part was “having fun during lunch” while another
student said that his favorite part of Dance Academy was “when we danced because we
got to move around and learn new moves.”
Question three asked, “What did you learn in Dance Academy?” Five students reported that they learned new moves and how to dance to the music. Another student stated, “I learned how to play musical instruments and have fun with my classmates.” Two students commented on learning to count music and learning “how many beats you have in music.” Another student shared that he learned “that dance is really fun!” Finally, students were asked if they would participate in Dance Academy again. All nine students who participated in the survey reported that they would participate in Dance Academy again. One student reported, “yes, because it is one of my favorite subjects in school!”

In the next chapter, the results of the findings will be discussed. The themes that emerged will be explained in detail, and suggestions for future research will be presented.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Summary

Dance Academy gave children an opportunity to experience dance as an extracurricular activity imbedded into their school day. This six-week program involved a group of twenty 2nd grade students that met twice a week, on Tuesday and Thursday, during the forty-five minute lunch period. During this time students were introduced to music and dance of different genres.

Discussion

The success of this project was measured in several different ways. First, anecdotal notes were taken throughout the project. These notes were not just taken during Dance Academy, but also throughout the school day to document student behavior that may have been influenced by the project. Next, video documentation was used to document the project and to observe student progress. Finally, surveys collected from both parents and students were used to measure the success and satisfaction of the project.

Anecdotal Notes

The anecdotal notes taken by the researcher were taken throughout the course of the project documenting not only things that occurred during the Tuesday and Thursday sessions, but also observations that occurred outside of Dance Academy. The anecdotal notes are a reflection of how students were impacted by their experience in Dance Academy as well as teacher and parent comments in informal ways. After reviewing the data, it was noted that several themes, or topics, emerged. These topics included an
eagerness to attend Dance Academy, increased positive socialization among peers, improvements in classroom behavior, increased self-confidence, and dancing beyond the Tuesday and Thursday sessions.

**Eagerness to attend.** Dance Academy was held on Tuesday and Thursday during regularly scheduled lunch for six weeks. During that time and for several weeks after the conclusion of the project students would stop by my classroom asking, “is Dance Academy today?” and “When do we get to have Dance Academy again?” Students would also say that they wished they had Dance Academy every day. This demonstrated the eagerness students had to attend Dance Academy. The fact that children would miss their lunch break to attend a program that, although fun, had structure, rules, and a curriculum, shows that they probably truly enjoyed being there and having the opportunity to learn how to dance and express themselves in a new way.

**Increased socialization.** Dance Academy included four students from each of the five 2nd grade classrooms. At the beginning of the project many students clustered together sitting next to or dancing close to only students that were in their class. By the third week, students began to socialize with children from other classes. By the end of Dance Academy students were not only seen interacting with children from other classes during the weekly sessions, but they were also seen eating lunch, playing together on the playground, and even dancing and practicing at recess and lunch on days that Dance Academy was not held. Having this opportunity to meet new friends and share a common interest allowed children to develop new friendships and/or create stronger relationships with their existing friends.
**Improvements in classroom behavior.** Twenty students were chosen from a lottery to attend Dance Academy. During the first session, we discussed how they were chosen to attend while many other students were not able to. Students discussed different ways they could demonstrate that they deserved to be a part of the program such as following classroom and school rules, doing their best work in class, and being a good citizen. Some of the teachers whose students were participated in Dance Academy used this as a way to help motivate students to be on their best behavior.

Many students did their best to set good examples for their school community. When a member of Dance Academy was not following the rules or not doing his or her best work, another member would remind that student to set a good example. The children had something to work for which provided them motivation to be their best. They knew that if they did not follow rules or get their work done they would not be able to participate in Dance Academy. Through my own observation as well as the observations of other teachers, it appears that Dance Academy provided an incentive to students, which helped them, both in and out of the classroom, as far as work ethic and behavior.

**Increased self-confidence.** This project gave children the opportunity to build their self-confidence. Many students came into Dance Academy with little or no background in dance. At the onset, many students fought for a place in the back of the room, and their movements were small and confined. As the weeks progressed, student began fighting for a place in the front of the room. Not only did their movements become bigger and more defined, but also their faces changed from nervous to eager and excited.
Image 1. Nervous student. This is a still image pulled from the video documentation showing a student in one of the first sessions of dance academy moving from the front of the room to the back.

Image 2. A more confident student. This is a second image pulled from the video documentation showing the same student in a session towards the end of Dance Academy. Here the student is dancing in the front of the room using big and defined movements.
Soon the students’ faces became bubbly and full of smiles as they fought for a front row spot as they became more comfortable with their movements, demonstrating developmental growth in many different areas. First, the children became more comfortable and confident with themselves. They were able to express themselves in front of their peers without feeling self-conscious. Next, students were able to partake in something that their smiling and bubbly faces indicated they felt was fun and exciting. Even better, they were able to do this with their current friends as well as while they were making new friends helping to develop their social skills. Finally, as the children became more comfortable and more confident, they were able to carry out movements and choreography helping to develop their gross motor skills.

**Video Documentation**

Video documentation was also used to document Dance Academy. While reviewing the data, I was able to observe many themes that became evident during the six-week project. Eagerness to attend and participate, improvement in finding rhythms and beats in music, development and growth of gross motor skills and proprioceptive awareness, and the children’s ability to combine dance and movement with music are all themes that were evident in the documentation.

**Smiling faces.** A reoccurring theme in all of the video clips was the eagerness and excitement seen in the children. While listening to music, learning new movements and choreography, and dancing, students were constantly seen smiling and giggling. Additionally, when working in small groups, rather than standing or sitting on the sides watching their peers, children would practice the movements or dances. Moreover, each time children switched groups, the group waiting on the side would rush to the center of
the room and they would all try to get a spot in the front row. For example, while group one was performing the choreography, students in group two would have to wait on the sides of the room until it was their turn to dance. Instead of just standing around waiting, students are seen practicing the movements to the dance. This is evidence that children not only enjoy but also thrive on the opportunity to move and dance.

**Proprioceptive awareness and gross motor skills.** Dance Academy was held in a 2nd grade classroom. While tables and chairs were moved to the sides to make room for the moving children, space was limited. In some of the early video footage, students are seen struggling to perform movements and dances without bumping into tables or their peers. In addition, some students used the tables around them as support to help them balance as they learned and practices new movements. As weeks progressed, the children were observed becoming more conscious of their surroundings. Their ability to judge the distance between themselves and the furniture and people around them improved. This shows that the children’s proprioceptive awareness improved and developed with practice and through the use of dance and movement.

In addition to developing proprioceptive awareness, the students’ gross motor skills and coordination were enhanced throughout the course of the program. When first introduced to new movements, the students were observed to be falling, stumbling, and holding onto furniture around them for balance. As they continued to practice their gross motor skills and coordination improved. Student experimented and tried new things such as shifting their body weight, holding their arms out for balance, and focusing on a particular spot in the room to help stabilize themselves and keep them on their feet.
Although not surprising, as their gross motor skills and coordination improved, they also became more confident.

**Rhythm and movement.** In Dance Academy students learned about rhythm and music. They were taught how to count the measures of music and find music patterns with the use of musical instruments. The video documentation showed the progress the students made throughout the course of the project. At the beginning, students had difficulty finding the rhythm of the music and were playing their instruments off beat and out of sync. However, as the weeks progressed, they were able to find the rhythm to various types of music as well as play their instruments in sync and on beat. In Dance Academy students were able to develop the skills necessary to listen to the music to find patterns and to determine the rhythm. Additionally, the students developed their ability to listen to the rhythm of the music and reproduce it with the use of instruments.

Students learned how to connect the sounds they heard from the music to the sounds they were playing with their instruments. For example, in the video one student was seen using rhythm sticks to play to the rhythm of the music. In the beginning the student is seen playing her rhythm sticks off beat. At one point, when she realizes she is not playing to the right tempo, the student is seen closing her eyes. It appears that she is doing this to help her focus and hear the music better. Shortly after closing her eyes, she finds the rhythm and plays her instruments with the beat of the music.
Image 3. Listening closely. This image is a still frame taken from the video documentation. Here you can see the student closing her eyes, listening closely to the music.

In the same way that it was difficult for students to connect playing their instruments with the rhythm of the music, it was also difficult for them to perform dance movements and choreography with the music. In the beginning of the program, students were seen executing dance movements off beat and out of sync with the music that was being played. However, as the children developed their listening skills and became better at finding rhythms and patterns, they also became more comfortable with the dance steps. They were not only able to connect dance movements with the music, but they were able to perform choreography as a group.

While learning how to listen for rhythms and beats and executing movements to the music, students were also learning about patterns in both music and movement. Additionally, the children were developing their listening skills. When a new music genre was introduced they had to focus and listen carefully to determine the rhythm and beat of the music so that they would be able to play their instruments or perform their movements appropriately.
Survey Results Highlights

Surveys were distributed to both Dance Academy students and their parents. The surveys were used to determine their satisfaction with the program as well as areas of strength and areas for improvement. In addition, the surveys were used to assess the effectiveness of the project as well as what the students and parents were able to take away from this experience.

Parent survey. The parent surveys were sent out to the families of all 20 students that participated in Dance Academy. Eight of the surveys were returned. In the survey, parents were asked if their child every came home and spoke with them about Dance Academy. Seven of the eight parents responded “yes”. When asked what the students spoke about one parent responded by saying that her daughter “talked about doing it with her friends. She loves music and would sometimes sing the songs from Dance Academy and show us the dances she learned.” Five of the seven parents who said “yes” reported that their child would show them the dances that they learned. Others said that their children would talk about how much they enjoyed Dance Academy. Responses to this question show that many of the children truly enjoyed the experience. The children appeared to enjoy the opportunity to express themselves through movement so much so that they brought what they learned home with them to share to their parents.

In the survey parents were also asked why they chose to have their child participate in Dance Academy. Over half of the respondents said that they signed their child up because they themselves love to dance. Two parents reported that they signed their child up because it would be good exercise and would help them stay healthy and fit. Others were eager to have their child try something new and be a part of a group,
allowing them to do something that they love while promoting socialization and team building.

While all of the reasons stated above explaining why parents signed their children up are very important there were two particularly remarkable responses. One parent wrote:

She wanted to do it even though she had no experience…I knew it would be a great experience for my child. I also thought it might help her improve her motor skills that she has been having some problems with. I also thought it would be good for her to be a part of a group because she sometimes has trouble finding kids to play with and make friends.

This parent chose to have her child participate in Dance Academy to guide and help development in gross motor and coordination skills as well as socialization. After reading this parent’s response I reviewed the video documentation to see if Dance Academy had provided what this parent had hoped for. At the beginning of the program this particular child was observed stumbling over her own two feet, unable to hold her balance while performing dance steps and movements. As the project progressed, it was apparent that the child’s coordination and gross motor skills improved dramatically. By the end of the program she was dancing away and was able to stabilize herself while performing. In addition, she was also seen interacting with her peers, smiling and giggling and practicing dance steps with the children around her.

In another response to the same question a parent wrote:
She loves to dance. I also thought that her disability (she has a prosthetic leg) might bring an interesting aspect to the class by showing other kids that nothing has to stop you from doing what you love.

Here, the parent chose to include her child in Dance Academy not just because her child loves to dance, but also to show other children that they can do whatever they want to do regardless of challenges that might get in their way.

**Student survey.** Student surveys were sent home with each of the 20 participants, nine of which were returned. The survey asked students to rate the program using a Likert scale of 1-5, five being the greatest, to describe their favorite part of the program, and to share what they learned during Dance Academy. Eight students rated the program a 5 while one student felt it was a 4. Students stated that their favorite part of the program was dancing, learning new moves, learning hip-hop, and having fun during lunch. How to play musical instruments, have fun with peers, and how to count beats in music are things students described having learned in Dance Academy. Finally, all nine surveys reported that the students would participate in Dance Academy in the future.

The results from the student survey revealed that although the students were either unaware or could not articulate of all of the concepts they were learning and all of the developmental benefits of Dance Academy, they were having a great time. The students seemed to greatly enjoy having an opportunity to play with musical instruments and dance and move with their friends.

**Future Research**

In future implementations of Dance Academy, there are several things I will do to enhance the program. First, instead of doing one round of the program, I will hold Dance
Academy once a quarter. This will allow the program to run four times, providing more children with the opportunity to experience dance. Next, I will work with my schools administrators to plan a school wide assembly, rather than just invite parents and friends of the participants, and put on a short performance featuring the dances learned in Dance Academy. I will add a seventh week where we can work and brainstorm on costumes and props to use in the performance. In addition, I will ask for parent volunteers to help videotape all session of Dance Academy. This will provide me with more accurate data and will allow me to better evaluate and improve on the program. Additionally, I would find professional dancers in the community and invite them to come and visit our program to share their experiences. I would also organize a field trip or a Saturday visit to see a live dance performance.

In the future, it would be ideal to have a larger space to hold Dance Academy such as the school auditorium or multipurpose room. Mirrors would also be beneficial so students can watch themselves as well as have a better view of their surroundings. Also, more props such as scarves, costumes, canes, fans, etc. would help to enhance movements and create choreography and routines for different genres.

In future studies on the impacts of dance researchers should take pre-tests of children’s academics, classroom behaviors, and current exposure to fitness and exercise. After pre-tests are collected, Dance Academy can be promoted and implemented. At the end of the program a posttest should be administered and results compared to the pre-test baselines. In this way, future research can more precisely document the outcomes from offering Dance Academy.
Conclusion

In conclusion, overall Dance Academy was very successful. The goal of the project was to give school-aged children the opportunity to experience dance as an extracurricular activity during the school day. The results of observations and surveys indicate that students enjoyed participating in Dance Academy. They enjoyed having the opportunity of learning how to dance and expressing themselves through movement with their friends.

In addition to enjoying the program there were many other positive outcomes. While attending Dance Academy, classroom teachers noticed an improvement in students’ behaviors as well as their motivation to work hard and be model students in their classrooms and school community. Dance Academy also provided an opportunity for students to socialize with students that may or may not be in their classroom. The students were given a time and place where they could interact with students that share the same interests as them and get to know each other better. Moreover, by participating in dance students were provided with a form of physical activity that has variety and that is enjoyable.

In an era when the arts are cut from curriculum and when physical education is left to teachers’ haphazard attempts, Dance Academy can provide a way to reintroduce music, movement, and physical health into the school day. This effort did not require funding, though equipment such as a video camera and boom box were needed. Opportunities for teachers to find ways to integrate the arts and physical development can be found and leveraged to the best interest of children’s learning and development.
REFERENCES


**Dance Academy**

Dear Parents/Guardians,

My name is Ms. Cohen and I am a first grade teacher at Ivy Academia. I am currently doing research for my thesis project on the effect of dance and movement on retention and academic success.

To further my research, I will be holding a six-week dance academy during lunch on Tuesdays and Thursdays. We will use the first 15 minutes of lunch to eat while we discuss vocabulary and different genres of dance. The remainder of the lunch period will be spent on our feet dancing away!

If you are interested in having your child attend the dance academy please fill out the sign up sheet below by Monday, April 26th, 2010. There are 20 spots available and I will be picking participants through a lottery.

*If you would like your child to attend the academy you will need to grant permission for them to be video taped and photographed.

If you have any questions please feel free to e-mail me at:
cohenk@ivyacademia.com

Warmly,

Ms. Cohen

Please fill out the information below if you are interested in having your child attend the dance academy.

Student Name ________________________________

Classroom Teacher ______________________________

☐ I give permission for my son/daughter to be video taped and/or photographed for the use of education.

☐ I do not give permission for my son/daughter to be videotaped and/or photographed for the use of education.

Parent Signature ________________________________
Dear Parents/Guardians,

Thank you so much for allowing your child to participate in Dance Academy this year. Below is a survey with two parts: one side is for you to fill out and one side is for you to help your child fill out. I really appreciate you taking the time to provide feedback of your child’s experience in Dance Academy. Please return the survey to school when it is completed.

Warmly,
Ms. Cohen

PARENT SURVEY

1. Did your child ever come home and talk to you about Dance Academy?
   Yes _____   No _____

2. If so, what did he/she day?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

3. On a scale of 1-5 (5 being the greatest) how well do you think your child enjoyed being a part of Dance Academy?
   
   1   2   3   4   5

4. Why did you choose to have your child be a part of Dance Academy?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
APPENDIX C
Student Survey

CHILD SURVEY

1. On a scale of 1-5 (5 being the greatest) how much did you like Dance Academy?

   1    2    3    4    5

2. What was your favorite part of Dance Academy?

   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

3. What did you learn in Dance Academy?

   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

4. Would you participate in Dance Academy again?

   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________