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Dance Education in an Urban Kindergarten Classroom

Anna M. Veelman
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Dance Education in an Urban Kindergarten Classroom

Anna Veelman

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Signature Sheet

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the

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Anna Veelman   May 1, 2017
Candidate   Date

Madalienne F. Peters, Ed.D.   May 1, 2017
Thesis Advisor   Date
Program Chair, Master of Science in Education

Robin Gayle, MDIV, MFT, PhD   May 1, 2017
Acting Dean   Date
School of Education and Counseling Psychology

Acknowledgements

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Abstract

Incorporating arts education can be a valuable intervention for students in an urban setting. Teaching through the arts can act as an initial, Tier One intervention, for students who exhibit disruptive behaviors in the classroom, due to trauma, as well as benefit the overall classroom culture. The arts curriculum has a restorative power that allows students to learn social-emotional regulation skills, bodily-awareness, and expression.

This study examines dance as an art form. Dance is a form of art that allows students to express their emotions and release energy to support positive behavior in the classroom. Data were collected on 25 kindergarten students, with a sub group of four students who exhibit disruptive behaviors in the classroom. Whole class behavioral data were collected prior to and during the art block. Students filled out an emotional self-evaluation before and after each dance class. The researcher also collected data from pre and post intervention interviews with four students identified for the case studies. Researcher observations were also noted in the data. The process of examining data from several sources, triangulation, was instrumental in creating a balanced picture of the impact of dance on students.

Findings indicated that dance instruction for this population has mixed results. The case study students that exhibit disruptive behaviors appeared reluctant to participate in dance lessons. It was noted that some students became interested in learning about the classroom teacher's background in dance. This led to an increase in student social contact and extended communication with the teacher. Overall behavioral reflections and referrals were lowered during implementation of the dance intervention.

Keywords: arts education, urban education, disruptive behavior, dance, Tier One intervention

Chapter 1 Dance in Arts Education

Introduction

While teaching in an urban setting in the San Francisco Bay area, I noticed a consistent lack of arts experiences in the customary and usual standards-based curriculum. Some students come to school, particularly in an urban environment, coping with traumatic experiences. The reality of their daily lives may have an affect on them, emotionally and socially. Art education may serve as an outlet for emotional expression by helping students learn how to self-regulate. Emotions from trauma may surface in the classroom as disruptive behaviors such as defiance, self-harm, elopement, that is, running away from their classroom or school setting, or aggression. The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of dance education on the emotional well being of students in an urban setting.

Research Questions

Specific research questions were designed to elicit qualitative responses regarding the impact of dance instruction for young children in an urban setting. I, as the researcher, served as the instructor of these students. The following research questions formed the framework for the instructor's own reflection on the impact of dance in an urban setting. The instructor used these questions throughout the data collection timeframe.

1. How may dance be used as a Tier One intervention in the classroom?

2. In what ways does dance education benefit students on a social-emotional level?

3. How does this transfer to their overall classroom engagement in school?

Definition of Terms

Dance education is the teaching of movement and its history through the lens of different styles such as ballet, tap, modern, hip-hop, and improvisation. It is the teaching of movement qualities and bodily awareness.

Social-emotional level is a student's ability to name and express his or her individual needs and feelings, as well as the student's ability to interact appropriately with others.

Tier One intervention is a strategy used by teachers in a general education classroom to support students who often have experienced trauma and are exhibiting disruptive behaviors. These strategies are used to support student learning in the classroom and are minimally intrusive. The strategies benefit the whole class and can support all students' success.

Disruptive Behaviors are when a student causes distraction for their peers and the teacher. They are usually exhibited in the form of self-harm, elopement, that is, running away, aggression, verbal outbursts, defiance, or any other unexpected behavior.

Theoretical Rationale

The framework that best supports the content of this research is Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Helding, 2009). Gardner's theory is based on the idea that all children learn differently and students who might struggle in math or language arts exhibit talents in other domains. There are seven domains that form the Theory of Multiple Intelligences: Linguistic Intelligence, Logical-Mathematical Intelligence, Spatial Intelligence, Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence, Interpersonal Intelligence, Intrapersonal Intelligence, and Musical Intelligence (Helding, 2009). Gardner's theory included Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence and Musical Intelligence, two aspects that are important in dance and often missing from the school curriculum particularly in urban settings.

Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence is described as the ability to skillfully use ones body for self-expression or communication (Helding, 2009). Typically, educational leaders do not understand the importance of promoting Bodily-Kinesthetic movement for young children. Musical Intelligence is defined as the ability to understand and create music. Students explore their Musical Intelligence through learning to count and create rhythms with their bodies through movement. Many teachers are trained to be aware of multiple intelligences and learning styles within their teaching practice. Teaching dance allows students to access and explore intelligences that may not otherwise be part of a typical academic school day.

Assumptions

Dance as arts education supports students in the development of their social-emotional skills. Dance serves not only as an outlet for self-expression but also teaches students bodily awareness, self-control, and can provide a release of internal stress. Another assumption is this research may contribute to a decrease in referral rates for disruptive behavior and may increase the students' engagement in school.

Background and Need

Arts education, particularly dance, is often excluded from public education, especially in urban settings. Dance education began within the area of physical education but gained recognition as a fine art when collegiate physical education programs were no longer separated by gender. During this time dance was offered in more collegiate programs than in K-12 school settings. However this shifted when the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed in 1965, which required teachers, administrators, and arts educators to collaborate and begin thinking about the government's role in arts education (as cited in Bonbright, 2007). The National Endowments for Arts (NEA) allowed schools to include federally funded programs,

such as Artists-in-Schools, as a part of their curricular activities (as cited in Bonbright, 2007).

The NEA is now typically established at a state and local level.

 In 1994, the Educate America Act passed, which helped dance education by declaring

arts education equally important to a student's education as core curricula (as cited in Bonbright,

2007). California maintains standards in the arts that includes dance which are based on the

National Standards in Arts Education. Dance and arts standards are generally ignored or poorly

taught in urban settings. Students in these settings may benefit from dance and art experiences.

Many researchers have studied the benefits of incorporating dance and arts in public

education (Eiser, 1998; Fanelli & Kilippel, 2001; Sowden & Clements, 2015). This research

builds on the importance of dance education to support the social-emotional growth and

development of students in urban settings. The dance instructor in this study utilized the

California dance standards, which focus on artistic perception, motor skills, creative expression,

response to sound, historical context, aesthetic values, and connections. The most recent version

of the standards was published in 2016 by the California Department of Education. The full form

of these standards can be found in Appendix I.

Summary

This research study builds on dance as a part of arts education in public schools. Dance

allows students to explore bodily-kinesthetic and musical learning styles. Dance has been on the

political agenda by way of arts reforms; however, it frequently is overlooked or included briefly

within a physical education unit. This research builds on how dance can be utilized as a Tier

One intervention for students who exhibit disruptive behaviors in the general education

classroom.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Introduction

This section examines current literature on Tier One interventions for disruptive behavior, arts education, and dance education. There is a gap in current research on the efficacy of using dance as a Tier One intervention in urban school settings. Literature on Tier One disruptive behavior, the importance of arts education in urban settings as well as the use of dance as a behavioral intervention was reviewed. Information was gathered from academic library searches using online resources and books. Research information is organized in the following categories: Historical Context, Review of Academic Literature, and an Interview with an Expert.

Historical Context

Historically, arts education is cut from school budgets in urban school districts (Creedon, 2011). Public schools have limited resources and a majority of their money is used for necessities, such as books and classroom supplies. Typically, enrichment classes are low priority for school budgeting. Teachers may also be limited in their knowledge or ability to implement arts during the school day. Many Title One or low-income schools have attempted to include arts education through volunteer organizations and after school programs. My School in Motion, which began in 2009, is a program that includes movement at the beginning of each school day. The programs which supports common core state standards was designed to support students self-esteem and overall wellbeing (My School in Motion Inc ©, 2017). A school or district typically adopts the program for added physical education (PE) minutes. The PE teacher stands on a platform in front of the whole school and teaches simple movement routines to music

thoroughout the year. This activity is typically scheduled during the first fifteen minutes of school. My School in Motion captures the power of movement, music, learning, and community.

Meekum (2008) explored dance as a social-emotional intervention for individual students within schools, but not as a Tier One classroom intervention. Other charter schools, such as Gabriella Charter School in Los Angeles, incorporate dance as a daily core subject due to the success of it in an after school program (n.d.). There are also many educators who use movement breaks frequently to give students releases throughout the day, but do not always incorporate specific dance-art related activities following published standards.

Review of the Academic Literature

Disruptive Behavior in Urban Education

According to the National Health Policy Forum, "one in five children suffer from a community's criteria for a diagnosable emotional disorder" (Koppleman, 2004, p. 2). These children have a harder than average time trying to enjoy life, excel in school, and form meaningful relationships with others. Disorders range from mild to severe, and their effect on children, if left untreated, can be harmful.

Students living in urban communities are more likely to experience trauma due to violence, death, neglect, poverty, and abuse. Children may respond to these traumatic experiences in the form of disruptive behaviors in the classroom. Students who suffer from trauma or behavior disorders are likely to exhibit severe behaviors such as violence, disruption, self-harm, and defiance within the classroom (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010).

Students who exhibit these types of disruptive behaviors may be put on a behavior plan or be referred for an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for Emotional Disturbance or will miss academics due to being suspended from the classroom. Many of these students are boys of

color, which causes an increase in the over-representation of this demographic within special

education, and also aids in the continuation of systems such as the "school to prison pipeline"

and achievement gap (Wilson, 2014). This project looks deeper into trauma-based behaviors and

strategies for teachers to use within the classroom in order to best support students who exhibit

these types of behaviors.

There are two disorders that are commonly used to define disruptive behavior in the

classroom: Emotional Behavioral Disturbance (EBD) and Oppositional Defiant Disorder. EBD

is a general term that includes anxiety disorders, manic-depressive disorder, oppositional defiant

disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, reactive attachment disorder as well as many more.

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), children with emotional

and behavioral disorders exhibit one or more of these five characteristics:

> (1) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory,
>
> or health factors, (2) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory
>
> interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers. (3) Inappropriate
>
> types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances. (4) A general
>
> pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression. (5) A tendency to develop
>
> physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems
>
> (Salkind, 2004, p. 42).

Students with these disorders may exhibit behaviors such as running away, commonly

referred to as eloping, screaming, self-harm, tantrums, violence, and destruction of the

environment. Triggers in the general education classroom may not easily be noticeable or

preventable. These types of severe and disruptive behaviors affect everyone in the classroom.

According to a recent study comparing the aggressive disruptive behaviors of first graders in both high-poverty and middle-class areas, disruptive behaviors are 65% more prevalent within Title I schools than in suburban public schools (Thomas, Thompson, & Power, 2008, p. 517). They found students from urban schools to be twice as likely to be living in poverty and to have witnessed violence within their communities. These factors can cause trauma, which then transfers to the classroom through disruptive behavior.

Children in urban schools have additional challenges with disruptive behavior that may be trauma based, and exhibited in the classroom. It is further found that due to commonly existing zero tolerance laws now popular in schools, this amount of disruption relating to trauma, EBD, or Oppositional Defiant behaviors contribute to the achievement gap.

The achievement gap refers to the observed, persistent disparity of educational measures between the performance of groups of students, especially groups defined by socioeconomic status (SES), race/ethnicity, and gender (Wilson, 2014). When students exhibit these types of behaviors in the classroom, they are frequently sent out of the classroom causing them to miss academic instruction and fall behind in school, which leads to the achievement gap. This unfortunate downfall is caused by a zero tolerance policy for disruptive behaviors such as those exhibited by students with EBD.

According to a longitudinal study, using hazard modeling, a statistical technique used in medicine, a high proportion of African American boys have been identified with EBD within the field of Special Education. The study found that African American males are twice as likely to be diagnosed and receive an Individualized Education Plan for EBD than their white counterparts (Ridgard, Laracy, Depaul, Shapiro, & Power, 2015). Additionally, this reality relates to the growing number of youth being incarcerated in the juvenile system. Between 60

and 70 percent of children in the juvenile justice system have a psychiatric disorder (Koppleman, 2004).

The American Civil Liberties Union explains that the "school-to-prison pipeline" refers to the policies and practices that push our nation's most at-risk students, out of classrooms and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Furthermore, the pipeline shows the nation's prioritization of imprisonment over education (ACLU, 2016).

Tier One Classroom Strategies for Students with Disruptive Behavior

It is important to keep students diagnosed with EBD or students who display disruptive behaviors in the general education classroom. The following researched based strategies for students with EBD can be implemented within the general education classroom: (a) forming strong relationships, (b) implementing social/emotional curricula, (c) yoga and meditation, (d) behavioral graphic organizers, and (e) art.

According to Fecser (2015), one of the best things teachers can do for these students is to build a trusting relationship between the adult and the student. Along with relationship building, Fecser suggests many other classroom strategies such as keeping a predictable schedule, providing choice, movement breaks, teaching children about their brains, and utilizing logical consequences for behavior (Fecser, 2015). Many of these factors go along with good teaching strategies, but will also assist in keeping things consistent for an easily triggered student. Dr. Fecser also mentions the importance of the teacher maintaining a calm and confident demeanor and really stresses the significance of staying as consistent as possible. Traumatized and oppositional students often have difficulty building attachment; therefore, it is important to become a safe and trusted person in the eye of the student.

The Schlein, Taft, and Tucker-Blackwell (2013) narrative inquiry-based study examined teachers' experiences with classroom management with students diagnosed with EBD. This study included interview accounts from three female teachers in an urban school setting that worked with an African American male student diagnosed with EBD. Of these three teachers, two are experienced African American women and one is a Teach for America (TFA) first year teacher.

This study found that it is very important for teachers to know the neighborhood and home life of the student of concern, maintain the behaviors within the classroom, be culturally understanding, and focus on the students' academics more than their behaviors (Schlein, et al., 2013). The importance of relationship building was stressed through systems such as 'check-in check-out' and 'lunch bunch'. Check-in, check-out is a system in which students are acknowledged and supported at the start of every morning and throughout the day. It allows teachers to see how the student is feeling and if their basic needs are being met. 'Lunch bunch' is another relationship building strategy in which the student is able to eat lunch with a group of his or her friends and the teacher. In both of these studies it is very clear that the teacher's behavior affects that of the students.

Another classroom strategy for teachers in the general education classroom includes implementing social emotional curriculum as a strategy to support EBD students. A pilot implementation of the Cool Tool, a social-skills strategy curriculum, found success in the added curriculum. It studied ten disruptive third and fourth grade urban elementary school students. Teachers directly taught social skills and gave opportunities for students to have direct practice in using them. The curriculum included two main rules with subcategories:

(1) Be respectful of others and self; do your best, follow and listen to directions,

remembering respect in all you do.

(2) Be safe- hands and feet to self, walking at all times (Utley, Greenwood, &

Douglas, 2010, p. 180).

The findings in the study reflect that student on task performance increased for the target

population, and the occurrence of disruptive behaviors decreased. Results also indicated that the

level of teacher praise for those students increased by ten percent, which may have had an impact

on improving student performance (Utley, Greenwood, & Douglas, 2010).

Toolbox is another social emotional curriculum that teaches twelve tools a student can

use for self-soothing and as an approach to resolving conflict with peers. Toolbox is a relatively

new curriculum implemented at many urban schools across the United States. In 2010, a brief

study was completed on toolbox in partnership with WestED, a leading educational research and

development organization. The research included a pre-test and post-test for students, teachers

and parents upon the implementation of Toolbox in the classroom.

The findings of the study reflect improvement in the school climate and connectedness

for children, teachers, and staff documenting improved communication between school and

home (WestED, 2010). Toolbox effectiveness is under ongoing investigation through the

University of California, Berkeley. Results indicate social emotional curriculum can support the

overall classroom culture and further support students with EBD to learn emotional coping

strategies and appropriate social skills.

Yoga and meditation are also strategies a general education teacher can implement into

the classroom to support EBD and disruptive students. Steiner, Sidhu, Pop, Frenette, and Perrin

(2012) studied 37 children with ED at an urban elementary school. Students completed yoga in

small groups of 7 to 10 students, twice a week for 3 months. Teachers reported improved

attention in the classroom, adaptive skills, and reduced depressive symptoms, behavioral

symptoms, and internalizing symptoms. A study of 5 different fourth and fifth grade classes

conducted by Bishop, found that mindfulness training that lasted for 12 weeks reduced the

amount of problematic behavior within the classroom and involuntary responses to social stress.

Behavioral Graphic Organizers are also proven helpful to support students with EBD in

the general education classroom. The use of an Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence Graphic

Organizer (ABC-GO) was implemented to support three kindergarten aged African American

male students with ED to prevent their removal from the classroom. When a student exhibited a

behavior they were given time to cool down, and then they wrote or drew (a) what triggered

them, (b) what their reaction was, and (c) what their consequence should be (McDaniel & Flower,

2015). The study found that the ABC-GOs reduced the amount of time students spent outside of

the classroom and helped the students become more aware of their triggers. The graphic

organizer is a strategy that not only allows students to think deeply about their reactions and

triggers, but also gives them the ability to have choice in their consequences.

Benefits of Arts Education

Fanelli and Klippel (2001) closely examined the importance of arts education for urban

youth. The authors studied the intrapersonal qualities that arts education develops within

students that transfer into academic areas and social-emotional wellbeing. The study took place

in 1998-1999 at an inner city school in New Jersey. They created an after school program with a

team of artists in residence. The focus was on third grade students. Artists included a

dancer/choreographer and musician. Students participated in many arts exercises and at the end

were provided a questionnaire about their work. The authors tracked specific students and their

intrapersonal development over the course of the study. Students who participated in this

program gained a heightened sense of self worth. Findings included reports that qualities of self-

esteem, self-knowledge, cooperation, and trust improved through participation in the arts

program.

Creedon (2011) had a similar study, which included arts education for students in an

urban setting. This article also takes a socio-emotional stance on the importance of art education

for inner-city communities. Creedon stated that stress is bad for students and that growing up in

an inner-city community can be damaging to children. She also articulated that high stress levels

reduce one's ability to learn. She questions the ethical level of denying children growing up in

urban schools the access to arts and music education. Students growing up in these areas are

often subjected to poverty, violence, and death on a daily basis. Arts and music education can

act as a preventive pediatric medicine that benefits a child's mental and physical needs.

Creedon examined types of art and classified them for specific purposes. She found that

visual arts help with stress, creativity, reading, and writing. Music can improve a child's mood

and support growth in literacy. Her closing statement was a striking reflection of the importance

of this research.

We should not wait until our children are emotionally disturbed or incarcerated

before we offer them the positive cognition, social, medical, and emotional

benefits of a well-rounded arts education. To deny urban children arts education

is societal child abuse (Creedon, 2011, p. 36).

In the article *Improvisation Facilitates Divergent Thinking and Creativity; Realizing a

Benefit of Primary School Arts Education* researchers Sowden and Clements (2015) explored the

benefits of arts education in elementary schools. These elementary years can be critical ones for

children in developing a foundation for their overall academic success. Arts education sets

standards for creating critical thinkers. Sowder and Clements (2015) studied simple arts based

improvisation activities and how they enhance thinking skills and creativity. In the first

experiment students participate in a dance improvisation task before taking part in a creative toy

design task. In the second experiment students played acting/verbal games before taking a

critical thinking test. In both experiments children showed instances of increased divergent

thinking after the improvisational interventions. Their findings suggest that arts integration

activities can provide a way to increase student creativity and enhance thinking skills. These

simple improvisation skills can transfer to improved academic skills.

Eisner (1998) explored and evaluated the impact of arts education on improving

academic achievement. Eisner reviewed and critiqued academic research studies that assessed

the effect of arts education and academic achievement. Eisner suggested that previous research

was not detailed sufficiently to support a cause-effect link between arts and academic

achievement. The author described the need for academic research to examine emotional

development that arts education brings to students which then translates into academic areas.

The author selected what were in his view, successful studies and formulated the concept of a

convincing study that links arts education to academic success. Motivation, risk taking, and

dedication were identified as components that transfer to benefit academic achievement.

Furthermore, he emphasized that we need to value arts education alone and avoid placing value

based on contributions to other subjects.

Dance as Intervention

Frambaugh, Buelow, and Simpson (2015) identified that dance and drama are

underrepresented in the classroom especially in that of the elementary school environment. This

qualitative study explored how teachers created meaning within literacy in dance and drama. Data collections were in the form of notes, artifacts, and focus group interviews. It explored the domains of learning from each other, learning through dialogue, and learning by doing. The study found that literacy in dance and drama allows students to solidify their knowledge on a subject though expression and movement. Teachers focused on vocabulary in dance and drama as well as aspects of the story.

Dance increases self-esteem and emotional literacy in students. Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) allows students to develop awareness of self-awareness within students, which can lead to emotional literacy. Meekums (2007) analyzed data from surveys students completed pre- and post- tests. The author also evaluated from observations and interviews. Students were gathered from the classroom to have one-on-one DMT sessions that included props (physical objects) and music.

Teachers identified specific goals as the framework for evaluating the result of this study. Goals included increased self-esteem, emotional expression, and social functioning. One teacher recorded deterioration in a student's behavior specifically identified for DMT. Meekums tracked and recorded themes that emerged from the data during DMT sessions. Themes included success, mastery, special and powerful. During DMT students were informed that the key rule included a promise to do no harm to self, others, or space. Meekum noted activities that students created such as hide and seek and rituals of the same movements. One student highlighted in the study referred to DMT for self-harming behavior and harming other children. The teacher set goals for his DMT to stop self-harming, stop harming other children, and say one good thing about himself. Meekum included a detailed account of what occurred in each session with this

student. Data from the teacher indicated that she felt DMT lowered his aggressive behavior.

However more sessions were needed to support the findings of the study.

Interview with an Expert

Gabriella Charter School is a model that uses dance as a fundamental value to the core of

the curriculum. No formal research has been collected on the effect of the dance program on

student academic performance. Liz Vacco, director of dance at Gabriella Charter School, agreed

to an interview to share her knowledge on how dance affects students in the classroom.   Vacco

described that students take dance everyday for an hour. In each grade level they take two styles

of dance as well as an additional class on choreography each year. Gabriella Charter School is

working towards integrating dance into the academic classroom rather than having the two as

separate entities.   They use programs such as Reading in Motion as well as collaboration

between classroom teachers and dance teachers. Dance teachers have pushed into academic

settings as well as classroom teachers have received professional development in using

movement strategies.

Vacco noted that there are many cross over values that dance and academics relate to

each other. Qualities such as connections, collaboration, compassion, flexibility, discipline, to

name a few. She also spoke directly to how dance allows students who are struggling to excel in

a new light. "It gives kinesthetic learners a chance to shine, one student in particular comes to

mind who struggles with reading and is in tears most days, when she comes to dance however

she is a leader. It is great for her to have a space where she feels confident and all of her

classmates can see her in that light" (personal communication). Vacco noted that social-

emotionally students learn to express emotions through movement and physical movement is

great for building neurons and pathways in the brain.

Summary

Teachers experience disruptive behaviors in the classroom in the form of defiance, trauma, or emotional disturbance. There are many researched Tier One strategies for teachers to implement. Art is often excluded from the school curriculum, particularly in most urban settings. Art education studies document the effect on reducing stress. Lastly, literature on dance based interventions for students who exhibit severe behavior were reviewed and selected as part of DMT. This research study uses dance as a Tier One intervention for behaviors in the general education classroom.

Chapter 3 Research Methods

The study used a mixed method approach to research. The behavioral data for whole class and case studies for individual students were tracked, recorded, and analyzed. The teacher-researcher implemented a block of dance class two days per week for a course of five weeks. The behavioral data collected was analyzed and compared to the data collected prior to the implementation. Students were interviewed one on one regarding their opinions and emotions toward the dance block.

Method

Participatory Action Research is the qualitative research methodology that fosters collaboration among participants and researchers. It includes "methods and techniques of observing, documenting, analyzing, and interpreting characteristics, patterns, attributes, and meaning of human phenomena under study" (MacDonald, 2012, p. 34). Participants are engaged in learning and further developing their skills during this research in the form of dance. This approach is used due to the techniques used and the direct affect on the students. The researcher not only collects concrete data during observations and behaviors but also includes the collaboration with the students as participants. MacDonald (2012) stated, "the primary aim of action research is the improvement of teaching practices rather than the production of knowledge" (p. 43). This method allows the researcher to study a deficit within education and explore implementing new techniques to meet the needs of the students.   In this action research the participants are a naturally occurring intact classroom group of students. Case studies were chosen by the teacher-researcher based on social-emotional needs and behaviors in the classroom. "Action research has been found to improve teaching practice by assisting the teacher in

developing a capacity for discrimination and judgment in complicated human situations, unifying

inquiry and assisting in improving performance and professional role development" (MacDonald,

2012, p. 43).

The teacher-researcher holds an elementary teaching credential with a dance endorsement

and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance. The Kindergarten Performing Arts Standards for the state

of California were used to guide dance the lessons.

Ethical Standards

This is a Participant Action Research (PAR) where the instructor is evaluating the impact

of dance education on student behavior in an urban setting. The instructor is the teacher of

record and the school site principal approved her inclusion of dance education into the

curriculum. Therefore no formal application to the Institutional Review Board for Protection of

Human Subjects was required. This study adheres to the ethical standards from the American

Psychological Association (2010) pertaining to the treatment of human subjects in a study.

Additionally, the proposal was reviewed by the advisor and approved.

Sample and Site

Data were collected from a population of kindergarten students at a Title 1 school in the

San Francisco Bay Area. There were twenty-five students in the classroom from diverse ethnic

and cultural backgrounds, including Hispanic, African, African American, Asian, and Bi-Racial.

English Language Learners made up 64% of the total student participants. Thirteen female

students and twelve male students made up the classroom. The instructor identified four students

to develop a case study on their performance. Whole class behavior data as well as individual

case studies of behavior were analyzed.

The four case study students who exhibited disruptive behavior in the classroom stemmed from early childhood trauma. Student A is a male English Language Learner who has a developmental language delay and exhibits aggression in the classroom. Student B is a female student who exhibits behaviors such as noncompliance towards adults, verbal outbursts in the classroom, wandering, and destruction. Student C is a male student who exhibits behaviors such as aggression towards peers and adults as well as destruction of property and eloping. Student D is a male student who aggressively interacts with peers and needs constant teacher reminders.

School Wide Demographics

Latino	Asian-American	Caucasian	African-American	Pacific Islander	Other	SPED	ELL	Free and Reduced Lunch
75%	6%	1%	9%	0%	6%	11%	55%	83%

Classroom Demographics

Female	Male	ELL	Receiving Intervention	Receiving Behavior Intervention
52%	48%	56%	24%	16%

Access and Permission

Permission to conduct this research was obtained from the principal of the school. The study involves students within the teacher-researcher's normal daily practice.

Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher gathered data through interviews, observations, and daily tracking systems. The researcher administered pre and post interviews to the case study students on their feelings toward school and art related activities. Appendix II contains the questions for interviews.

Observation and whole class data on students' emotional state before and after the dance block were collected each day the dance block was implemented. Data were collected through observations and student journals as displayed in Appendix II. Student behavioral data were collected and recorded through a daily classroom behavioral tracker, student reflections, and referrals. Data gathering was based on data collection techniques for educators that include "teachers who undertake action research who have countless opportunities to observe in their own classrooms" (Mills, 2003, p. 52). Active participant observing is also included in the data gathering procedures. The researcher observed as well as engaged in the activities as the teacher, constantly adjusting instruction as needed. Observations were taken anecdotally through the course of the research.

Data Analysis Approach

Analysis was approached from a comparative lens. Behavioral data were compared before and during the dance block implementation. The researcher looked for trends such as decreases or increases in disruptive and off task behavior. Student journals were analyzed in a comparative manner to document trends in feelings that dance can stimulate in the students. Lastly, the individual interviews were compared from before and after the dance implementation. Researcher used this data to notice any trends in individual emotions toward school in relation to the dance block. This type of analysis is called triangulation. Data from three or more sources are compared to notice trends or similarities in the findings. The three sources in this research include interview, observation, and behavioral data.

Chapter 4 Findings

Description of Site and Individuals

The classroom involved in this study was located in an urban subsection of the San Francisco Bay Area. The students involved are all of diverse race and culture. The classroom included a group of twenty-five of kindergarten-aged students. Most of the students are capable of following classroom rules and teacher directions. The classroom is set up with an academic focus on language arts and mathematics. There are many opportunities for students to have a choice in their academic activity through learning stations. Half the class uses computers while the rest participate in small group instruction with the teacher or get to choose from a list of activities. Differentiation is used to meet each student's academic learning needs during small group targeted instruction. Students and teacher have built a strong sense of community with the use of growth mindset, empathy, and equity. Students have been practicing from the beginning of the year how mistakes are made and how they learn and grow. There have been classroom conversations around how everyone has different needs regarding students that require different support from the teacher, such as charts, seating, or use of brain breaks. Students have been shown how to care for each other despite difference, respect one another, and lend a helping hand.

Student A is a male English Language Learner who has a developmental language delay and exhibits aggression in the classroom. This student has difficulty with expressive language in both English and Spanish however is able to understand both languages. This student qualifies for an Individualized Education Plan. Student A had received two referrals due to biting other

children, destruction of classroom materials, and fighting prior to the start of the dance block. Student A was unable to be formally interviewed do to limited language skills.

Student B is a female student who exhibits behaviors such as non-compliance towards adults, verbal outbursts in the classroom, wandering, and destruction of materials. She has experienced early childhood trauma due to death of her mom and abandonment by her father. Student displays symptoms of reactive attachment disorder, which cause defiance towards the teacher as the adult that could abandon her.

Student C is a male student who exhibits behaviors such as aggression towards peers and adults as well as destruction of property and eloping. Student is receiving services and being considered for an evaluation. He has received four referrals due to violence with peers and adults, and destruction of materials. This student has early childhood trauma that includes neglect and suspected drug exposure as a fetus. Student C has a tendency to tell stories or get upset due to things that are not related or in occurrence in the classroom. Student C is on an individualized behavior plan as well as has other positive behavior interventions set up in the classroom.

Student D is a male student who aggressively interacts with peers and needs constant teacher reminders. This student needs extra reminders from the teacher and constant communication with mom. Student D has no father figure at home.

The classroom uses the social emotional curriculum of Toolbox as a Tier One intervention. Different behavior interventions and parent involvement has been set up for individual case study students. The teacher-researcher has targeted support systems for these students already in place in the classroom, such as peer buddies, behavioral graphic organizers, positive phone calls home, and buddy class systems.

Interviews

      Students expressed an overall interest in being at school during the pre-interviews. Many of them expressed that being at school made them feel happy and they liked playing during recess. Some students stated an interest in doing dance at school. They expressed positive emotions towards their teacher and their classroom community.

      Student A was not interviewed due to his deficit in expressive language and a developmental delay. Student B expressed that she enjoyed school and likes to play. After the dance block she shared that she likes to dance with her teacher and with her brother at home. Student B expressed that she would like to learn more dance in the classroom because she likes to have fun. Student C shared he did not like music and he hated dancing prior to the dance intervention. He expressed an overall dislike for school. After the dance intervention student C said that he is good at dancing and demonstrated his favorite dance move. He said that although he still wishes to be at home, he likes dancing with his teacher, especially tap dancing. Student D expressed that he enjoyed school and his friends prior to the dance intervention. After the intervention was implemented student D reported that he likes dancing with his teachers in the classroom and thinks it is cool that she danced before becoming a his teacher. Student D, however, expressed frustration about dance taking away from PE time but that overall it was fun.

      The interview results showed an overall increase in student engagement and connection with the teacher. Each case study student expressed joy towards school in the post-interviews whereas in the pre-interviews one student expressed a dislike for school. Each of the students also expressed an enjoyment of dance and an interest in continuing to learn about dance in the classroom.

Emotional Self Evaluation

Students took part in an emotion-based self-evaluation before and after each dance lesson during the intervention period. They indicated whether they were happy, neutral, or sad, circling a corresponding emoticon. Students did not write their names on the sheets. The researcher averaged the responses from the completed forms to determine the relationship between dance and students' emotions toward school. The table below shows the averaged results from pre- and post- dance class. Before the dance classes 73.5% of the class reported positive feelings, 16.5% reported feeling indifferent, and 10% reported feeling unhappy. Post dance classes results indicated feelings of positive emotions went up 8.5% , indifferent feelings decreased by 3%, and unhappy feelings decreased by 5.5%. These results suggest that incorporating dance can benefit students on a social-emotional level by increasing rates of positive emotions or feelings at school.

Student's Emotional Evaluation Average

Emotion Identified	☺	☺	☹
Pre-Dance Class	73.5%	16.5%	10%
Post-Dance Class	82%	13.5%	4.5%

Observations

The instructor made observations during the dance intervention segment of the day and documented notes in a journal tracking student responses during the duration of the study. Female students participated actively during the dance block when compared with male students. Some male students were reluctant to participate, especially in the ballet portion of the block. They verbally complained and some sat out for a few minutes before being asked to join the group again. The male P.E. teacher began participating in the dance block with the students to provide male incentive for participation. This helped the male students become invested in the dance lessons. The male student investment increased significantly for tap.

Students began asking more questions about dance and asked to view dance videos in the classroom. Students particularly enjoyed watching tap videos and tapping along. Students increased conversation with the teacher around their interests outside of the classroom, such as extra-curricular activities. Ballet was taught as the basis of the dance intervention the first week; from there the teacher started introducing modern, African, and tap. Student participation and enthusiasm improved notably during the African dance and tap portion of the month.

Student B became very interested in participating the last two weeks, while during the first two she appeared more avoidant and observed from the side of the room. Student B showed decent gross motor skills but would typically give up and sit down for a few minutes if she perceived a movement as challenging. Student D participated fully through out the intervention and demonstrated strong gross motor skills. Student A participated partially during the entire month of the intervention. Student A, however, appeared interested in tap and would join the group for short periods of time this part of the dance lesson. Student A had a shorter attention span compared to that of his peers and needed extra support with coordination of movements. Student C had difficulty with the gross motor skills dancing requires and would also only participate partially. He would participate in a few activities with the class then proceed to run in circles in a separate part of the space. Towards the end of the intervention he would join the group at random to practice a routine or free dance in front of the teacher. Student C did not enjoy when the teacher played non-classical music. He would cover his ears and refuse to move. Student C became more likely to participate when the teacher held his hand or provided extra support. He frequently did his own movement rather than teacher instructed movement when with the group.

Behavior Data

Prior to implementation of the dance intervention whole-class data showed a high number of behavioral referrals during the end of November into December 2016, as well as in the beginning of January 2017. Data indicated a drop in referrals in February 2017, for the duration of the dance intervention. The table below shows the number of student referrals and reflections received by the whole class each month. Data for the four individual case study students are presented as well. Student reflections are behavioral graphic organizers used to help them reflect on the undesired behavior. These reflections are based on the ABC-GO intervention described by McDaniel and Flower (2015). This is a positive behavior system that students have practiced since the beginning of the school year to help them identify what prompts their behavior, identify and name their behavior, and understand consequences. This is accomplished by the students themselves who, when they exhibit a disruptive behavior are asked to draw three boxes on a piece of paper. In the first box, they draw what they were doing prior to the behavioral incident. In the second box they draw the action or behavior. In the third box they draw how they are going fix the situation. An example is if they purposefully knocked over boxes of books, they could offer to pick up the books. This approach is an example of the practice of teaching students how to examine their own behavior, and take ownership of the consequences of their choices.

Referrals are required when disruptive behaviors occur in the classroom, such as elopement, aggression, self-harm, destruction, and repeated defiance. These behaviors threaten the safety of the student as well as the others in the classroom and require administrative interference. Usually referrals are accompanied by a phone call home and time spent with the Response To Intervention (RTI) administrator. During this time the student is provided space to express their emotions and calm down before the teacher comes into discuss the behavior. After

8-10 referrals, students may receive suspension, administrative consequences, or a behavioral

analysis from the RTI team.

Monthly Behavior Data (Behavioral Reflections and Referrals)

	November/December	January	February (Month of Dance Block)
Class Total Of Reflections and Referrals	33 Reflections 3 Referrals	49 Reflections 4 Referrals	12 Reflections 1 Referral
Student A	2 Reflection 1 Referral	3 Reflections	0
Student B	6 Reflection	2 Reflection 1 Referral	1 Reflection
Student C	2 Reflections 2 Referrals	10 Reflections 4 Referrals	3 Reflections 1 Referral (at recess not in classroom)
Student D	4 Reflection	7 Reflections	2 Reflections

Data shows improved student behavior during the month of February when the dance

intervention was implemented. Student A's reflection and referral rate dropped to zero. Student

B's behavior data on referrals and reflections dropped to one reflection and zero referrals.

Student C received fewer reflections during class time, however, he received a referral for

aggression at recess, during which time the teacher was not present. Student D received two

reflections for play fighting, which is a decrease from the previous months before intervention.

The following table includes behavioral data for the month during the dance intervention.

It is seen that over the course of the four weeks reflection and referral rates lower. By week four

of the dance intervention, there were no reflections or referrals for any students in the class

including the four case study students. The whole class behavioral data dropped from seven

reflections to zero, showing that all students were following classroom rules and exhibiting

appropriate behaviors at school.

Dance Intervention Weekly Behavior Data

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Whole Class	7 Reflections	5 Reflections	1 Reflection 1 Referral	0 Reflections
Student A	0	0	0	0
Student B	1 Reflection	0	0	0
Student C	2 Reflections	1 Reflection	1 Referral	0
Student D	1 Reflection	0	1 Reflection	0

Themes

Building of Teacher Student Relationships

Student interviews and teacher observations indicated an increased interest in dance and a curiosity about the teacher's dance background. Students were more likely to ask the teacher non-school related questions after the intervention which increased positive interaction with the teacher. Students also began to share their cultural dance styles such as salsa, step, and hip-hop with their teacher and peers. The teacher also learned a few girl students take ballet on the weekends. One student who takes salsa dance class shared her experience and asked to teach it to the class as a part of a movement break. This intervention strengthened teacher student relationship and may have aided with the lowered reflection and referral rates. Particularly, in kindergarten it is of the utmost importance to develop strong and trusting relationships with each student. In addition, an authentic sense of community must be established in the classroom.

Another interesting theme that can be noted is the cultural relevance of the curriculum taught. The last two weeks students studied tap and African dance. Student behavior improved for these last two weeks of intervention. Student demographics are racially diverse, where the teacher-researcher makes up the 1% Caucasian demographic. Given the cultural differences between the teacher and students, it may take longer for the students to develop a sense of trust

and understanding. As a part of the dance intervention the teacher-researcher focused on African American dancers and included multiple styles of dance. Dance is culturally important to many Latino, African American, and Asian cultures. Learning about dance styles from various cultures may have helped students connect with the teacher-researcher despite the difference in ethnicity.

Behavior Improvement

Overall, behavioral rates improved during the dance intervention as students became more comfortable with directed movement and teacher as a dance instructor. The table for the February dance intervention shows a notable decrease in behavior as students acclimated to participating in dance instruction. During the last week of the dance block there are no recorded reflections or referrals for the whole class or any of the case study students. Two of the target students, Student B and Student D, showed drastic improvement during the intervention and have continued to improve as the study ended. Despite the initial resistance to participate exhibited by Student A and Student C their overall behaviors improved for the third and fourth weeks of study. During the post-interview, each case study student verbally expressed an increased interest in school and their relationship with the teacher, suggesting that the intervention supported their increase in positive behavior.

Classroom Engagement

The data also indicates a theme of increased classroom engagement. The emotional self-evaluations showed an increase in mood after the students took dance. Interviews also indicated that students enjoyed taking dance and hoped for it to continue in the classroom. Case study students expressed an increased fondness for school in their post-intervention interviews.

Summary

The main finding from the data indicated that teacher student relationships improved when the teacher shared her passion for dance with the students. This strengthened the development of an authentic relationship with students by providing them with a new perspective of their teacher. Students in this study were able to use movement as a medium to connect with the teacher outside of the academic environment. Whole class and individual student behaviors improved as indicated by the findings in this study. Students expressed an overall increase in their happiness at school both through the emotional self-evaluations and student interviews.

Chapter 5 Discussion/Analysis

Dance in Education

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the research of dance in education, particularly in urban settings for students who have experienced childhood trauma and exhibit disruptive behaviors in the classroom. The research studied the impacts of dance as a Tier One intervention, tracking whole class as well as focusing on individual students who exhibit disruptive behaviors in the classroom. The research aimed to uncover ways that dance is essential to young children's social-emotional learning in an urban school. Research questions included the following:

1. How may dance be used as a Tier One intervention in the classroom?

2. In what ways does dance education benefit students on a social-emotional level?

3. How does this transfer to their overall classroom engagement in school?

Dance Instruction as a Tier One Intervention

The research results indicated that dance can be implemented as a Tier One intervention. The behavior data indicated lower reflection and referral rates over the course of the dance curriculum intervention. The lowering of these rates happened for the entire class, not solely the four children identified as case studies. This indicates that dance can be used successfully because it supports improving whole class culture as well as improving individual student behavior.

Social Emotional Impact

As indicated by the data found in the student emotional self-evaluations, dance can improve student joy at school. This in turn may have an impact on their social-emotional well-being. Students reported being happier at school after participating in dance activities.

Overall Classroom Engagement

The interviews as well as observations indicated an increase in teacher-student relationships. Behavior data indicates that negative behaviors decreased. Overall classroom reflection totals decreased, which indicates students were more engaged in classroom activities.

Limitations

The teacher-researcher is the self-contained classroom teacher. The teacher-research is constantly involved during the implementation. This does not allow for the researcher to be removed from the teaching to observe. Observations were collected ongoing during the dance sessions or recorded in the brief time after the lesson. Behavioral data collected were subjective in nature due to the relationship the teacher-research holds with the students. Teacher-student relationship is a key factor that creates a disadvantage to the authenticity of the research in an attempt to study the impact of dance instruction on student behavior. Teacher-student relationships are of a high value to improve the educational process and implementation of dance intervention may further develop student-teacher relationship.

Another limitation is the authenticity of the dance taught. The researcher has studied dance in a Bachelor of Fine Arts program and trained many years before entering the teaching profession. Many educators do not have the talent or knowledge in dance to effectively teach it in the classroom.

Data collected for this research were limited in support of the research questions. There

were many other Tier One interventions in place to support the class as a whole. Case study

students were already involved in other Tier One, Two, and Three interventions provided by the

school and teacher to keep them safe in their environment.

Similarly to the Movement Dance Therapy study (Meekum, 2008) one month is not a

long enough timeframe to track an effective change in student behavior. This study shows a

decrease in disruptive behavior but does not suggest that this change can be sustained. The time

of year the dance intervention was introduced also creates a limitation to the study. The months

of November and December lead into winter break, which can stimulate anxiety for students

with trauma and spike their disruptive behaviors. The spike in disruptive behaviors recorded for

the month of January may be related to students returning from break and relearning school

routines. Students in kindergarten typically have to relearn school rules and expectations after

returning from an extended time away from school and the teacher. Students with trauma rely on

routine and might not have as much structure at home, which can trigger disruptive behavior at

school upon return from break.

Discussion

Practical implications of this research include the importance of building strong teacher-

student relationships especially with those students who exhibit disruptive behavior. It is

important for teachers working in urban settings to share their life experiences and include

culturally relevant practices when possible to support relationship building. Teachers should

incorporate movement into the classroom even if they are unable to devote full class periods.

This can be done in the form of movement breaks but teachers need to participate with the class.

Classroom community can be built up by sharing of hobbies and passions between teachers and

students. Fecser (2015) stated one of the best things teachers can do for students with trauma is

to build a trusting relationship between the adult and the student. Fecsers (2015) statement was supported in the results of this study with an increase of student interaction and inquiry about the teacher and dance. Dance and movement was the medium in which the trusting relationship was strengthened between the teacher-researcher and students.

Schlein, Taft, and Tucker-Blackwell (2013) mentioned in their narrative inquiry-based study that the teacher should be culturally understanding of students with EBD or disruptive behavior. This was also a finding from the data collected, students are from culturally diverse backgrounds where the teacher is within the 1% Caucasian in the classroom. The dance curriculum included teaching about artists of color as well as included dance styles that have different cultural root. This research allowed for the teacher and students to build relationship and trust that stretched beyond racial background. It allowed the students to see the teacher in a new light. Students began to share more of their outside of school activities and cultures with the teacher among the medium of dance.

Similar to Liz Vacco's knowledge, the dance allowed students who might not always shine in the classroom to shine in dance class. Their peers and teacher were present to see their confidence. Student's mood improved after taking dance class as seen in the emotional self-evaluations and interviews. Students expressed a want to study more dance in the classroom and improved school engagement.

Another practical implication is how movement in the classroom is great for students and teachers. Dance provided a physical outlet for students. In the study many students began to ask for videos or time in class to dance. This is a productive brain break for students and can build community when the teacher joins. It is also something that the class built a shared interest in that can be used as a reward when learning goals for a block had been met. Fecser (2015) also

suggested that providing movement breaks in the classroom is a great intervention for students who have trauma but can benefit the class as a whole.

Suggestions for Further Research

Further research should allow for more time to be invested in seeing the benefits of dance in the urban classroom. Given an academic year to conduct the research and implement the dance program, results would probably be different. Suggestions for teaching dance through the lenses of equity would include a balance of the demographics represented in the classroom, such as: 2 months-Latino dances, 1 month- Asian dance, 1 month- American dances, 2 months- African-American dances and 3 months- K students where students could decide.

Further research on dance education could study schools, such as Gabriella Charter, to see how dance may benefit student's academics and social emotional needs. It is recommended that researchers track students for a longer timeframe.

About the Author

The author was born and raised in Anchorage, Alaska. She received her Bachelor in Fine Arts in Dance from Dominican University in 2010. She continued her education there to receive her Multiple Subject Credential in 2015 and will be receiving her Masters in Education in 2017. She has a passion for education and working with inner-city students.

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Appendix I

California Dance Standards: Last Reviewed in 2016
http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/dakindergarten.asp

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION
>Processing, Analyzing, and Responding to Sensory Information Through the Language and Skills Unique to Dance Students perceive and respond, using the elements of dance. They demonstrate movement skills, process sensory information, and describe movement, using the vocabulary of dance.
>>Development of Motor Skills and Technical Expertise
>>>1.1 Build the range and capacity to move in a variety of ways.
>>>1.2 Perform basic loco motor skills (e.g., walk, run, gallop, jump, hop, and balance).
>>Comprehension and Analysis of Dance Elements
>>>1.3 Understand and respond to a wide range of opposites (e.g., high/low, forward/backward, wiggle/freeze).
>>Development of Dance Vocabulary
>>>1.4 Perform simple movements in response to oral instructions (e.g., walk, turn, reach).

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION
>Creating, Performing, and Participating in Dance Students apply choreographic principles, processes, and skills to create and communicate meaning through the improvisation, composition, and performance of dance.
>>Creation/Invention of Dance Movements
>>>2.1 Create movements that reflect a variety of personal experiences (e.g., recall feeling happy, sad, angry, excited).
>>>2.2 Respond to a variety of stimuli (e.g., sounds, words, songs, props, and images) with original movements.
>>>2.3 Respond spontaneously to different types of music, rhythms, and sounds.

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT
>Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions of Dance Students analyze the function and development of dance in past and present cultures throughout the world, noting human diversity as it relates to dance and dancers.
>>Development of Dance
>>>3.1 Name and perform folk/traditional dances from the United States and other countries.

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING
>Responding to, Analyzing, and Making Judgments About Works of Dance Students critically assess and derive meaning from works of dance, performance of

dancers, and original works according to the elements of dance and aesthetic qualities.

<u>Description, Analysis, and Criticism of Dance</u>

4.1 Explain basic features that distinguish one kind of dance from another (e.g., speed, force/energy use, costume, setting, music).

5.0 CONNECTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, APPLICATIONS

Connecting and Applying What Is Learned in Dance to Learning in Other Art Forms and Subject Areas and to Careers Students apply what they learn in dance to learning across subject areas. They develop competencies and creative skills in problem solving, communication, and management of time and resources that contribute to lifelong learning and career skills. They also learn about careers in and related to dance.

<u>Connections and Applications Across Disciplines</u>

5.1 Give examples of the relationship between everyday movement in school and dance movement.

Appendix II

Interview Questions for Students

1. How do you feel at school?
2. How do you feel at home?
3. What are your favorite things to do at school?
4. What are your favorite things to do at home?
5. What do you think about doing dance and art at school?
6. How does dancing make you feel?
7. How do you feel when you have dance at school?
8. How do you feel after you have dance at school?

Student Dance Block Emotional Self-Evaluation

How are you feeling today?

Color the smile that you relate to in the moment.

☺   ☺   ☹