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The Perspectives of School-Aged Dancers and their Parents on the Developmental Benefits of Participation in Weekly Dance Classes

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**THE PERSPECTIVES OF SCHOOL-AGED DANCERS AND THEIR
PARENTS ON THE DEVELOPMENTAL BENEFITS OF
PARTICIPATION IN WEEKLY DANCE CLASSES**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science, Child Life Studies

By

Maria Elizabeth Jackson

July 2021

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Childhood Education and Family Studies

Missouri State University, July 2021

Master of Science

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ABSTRACT

Weekly dance classes are a popular after school activity for many children in the United States. Although at first glance, one may simply see toddlers bouncing up and down or adolescents engaging in repetitive movements at the ballet barre, there is much more going on than what meets the eye. The purpose of this study was to determine the perspectives of school-aged children and their parents on the developmental benefits of participation in weekly dance classes. This qualitative study gathered data through interviews with students (and their parents) enrolled in a small dance studio located in Springfield, Missouri. This research study ultimately identified developmental benefits in the domains of social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development, as a result of school-aged dancers' participation in weekly dance classes.

KEYWORDS: dance, dance class, cognitive development, developmental benefits, emotional development, physical development, school-aged children, social development

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July 2021

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In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

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CHAPTER I: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Weekly dance classes are a popular after school activity for many children in the United States. Although at first glance, one may simply see toddlers bouncing up and down or adolescents engaging in repetitive movements at the ballet barre, there is much more going on than what meets the eye. During their time in the dance studio each week, children are learning more than just dance moves. Children are learning how to express themselves through using their bodies. They are learning how to function as a team member and how their actions can directly impact others. They are learning how to engage their core to perform movements that the average human is not capable of. The benefits of dance are numerous, in various realms of development. This research study explored the developmental benefits from the perspectives of school-aged dancers and their parents. This first chapter will examine the rationale for the study, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the research design of the study, and the research questions sought to be answered through this study.

Rationale for the Study

Much of the literature written on the benefits of dance and dance therapies relates to research studies conducted with adults (Cain et al., 2015). For the literature that has been written about dance and children, the majority is data collected from studies conducted with either preschool-aged children or adolescent-aged children. Additionally, of the articles reviewed in the second chapter of this thesis, many of the research studies took place in a school setting. This research study sought to close this gap, through examining the developmental benefits of weekly dance classes for school-aged children in a dance studio setting.

As a dance teacher for six plus years, this researcher has witnessed the holistic growth and development that can take place through participation in weekly dance classes. To someday understand the benefits of dance for children with complex developmental and medical backgrounds, in various environments, this researcher first sought to further examine the developmental benefits for typically developing children in the dance studio setting. The perspectives of each group of participants (school-aged dancers and their parents) provided a well-rounded overview of the developmental benefits reaped.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the perspectives of school-aged dancers and their parents on the developmental benefits of participation in weekly dance classes. For the purpose of this study, school-aged children are comprised of children six-years-old through twelve-years-old (School-Aged, n.d.), and development benefits pertains to the gains obtained through the advancement of the various realms of development.

Significance of the Study

This research study addressed the gap in literature of the developmental benefits of participation in weekly studio dance classes for school-aged children. The data collected in this study not only provided insight into the children's perceived benefits, but also examined the perceived benefits observed by these children's parents. This research study has emphasized for students and parents the holistic growth and development that is taking place in the dance studio each week. Additionally, with this information, dance teachers can examine their current studio environment, and find new ways to fold the realms of development into their curriculum. Lastly,

this study has laid the foundation for future research conducted by this researcher, in examining the holistic benefits of dance for children with complex developmental and medical backgrounds, in various environments.

Research Design

The research design for this study utilized a qualitative approach. Qualitative research “involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences” (Bhandari, 2020, ¶ 1). More specifically, this study utilized a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology “is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonalities of a lived experiences within a particular group” (Chambers, 2013, ¶ 1). This study was conducted at a small dance studio in Springfield, Missouri (Studio X). The data collected were the perceptions of the school-aged dancers and their parents on the developmental benefits of dance. Criterion sampling was utilized, as this study specifically examined the perceptions of school-aged children and their parents at Studio X. For this study, the researcher compiled a list of questions for both the school-aged dancers and their parents. Data was collected through Zoom interviews with both groups of participants (the school-aged dancers and their parents).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. From the perspectives of school-aged children, what are the developmental benefits of participation in weekly dance classes?
2. From the perspectives of school-aged children’s parents, what are the developmental benefits of participation in weekly dance classes?

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to determine the perspectives of school-aged dancers and their parents on the developmental benefits of participation in weekly dance classes. This chapter will explore the literature on the already known developmental benefits of dance for children. The purpose of this review of research literature was to examine the impact dance has on various realms of development for children. In the sections that follow, the researcher will examine an overview of the different variables that will define dance for the sake of this literature review, the cited physical benefits of dance for children, the cited social benefits of dance for children, and the cited emotional benefits of dance for children. This chapter will conclude with a summary that recapitulates the impact of dance on the different realms of development, discusses various gaps in the literature, and examines how these gaps relate to the purpose of this qualitative research study.

Defining Dance

The literature proposed several variations of the definition of dance, dependent on the correlating context of each specific study. For the sake of this literature review, the researcher utilized Kourkouta et al.'s, (2014) definition, defining dance as “a type of art that generally involves the movement of the body, often rhythmic and to music” (p. 230).

The literature reviewed examined the benefits of dance programs implemented in various settings, including schools, early learning centers, dance studios, and community centers (Cain et al., 2015; Deans, 2016; Pennington & Nelson, 2020). Additionally, the developmental benefits were examined in relation to a wide variety of styles of dance, some of which include jazz,

ballet, hip-hop, salsa, swing, and creative dance (Cain et al., 2015; Pavlidou et al., 2018). Lastly, the reviewed literature examined studies that implemented programs with children ranging preschool- to adolescence-aged (O’neill et al., 2011; Vintere et al., 2004).

The Physical Benefits of Dance for Children

The literature revealed numerous positive impacts of dance on the physical development of children (Biber, 2016; Kourkouta et al., 2014; Lykesas et al., 2018; O’neill et al., 2011; Pennington & Nelson, 2020). Common themes included the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, the development of structural/motor skills, and various physiological benefits (Biber, 2016; Kourkouta et al., 2014; Lykesas et al., 2018; O’neill et al., 2011; Pennington & Nelson, 2020).

Promotion of a Healthy Lifestyle. Participation in dance programs “contributes to an overall healthy lifestyle” (Cain et al., 2015, p. 1067). Multiple studies acknowledged that dance, as an enjoyable activity, helps to motivate children to engage in, and increase, physical activity (Cain et al., 2015; Doulias, et al., 2005; Kourkouta et al., 2014; Pennington & Nelson, 2020). Additionally, it has been found that dance classes contribute to meeting the recommended amount of physical activity children should engage in per day (O’neill et al., 2011). Pennington and Nelson (2020) found that a pilot dance program, targeting middle schoolers, accounted “for a substantial amount of total daily physical activity contribution” (p. 242). More specifically, O’neill et al. (2011) discovered that the dance classes in their study accounted for 29% of a dancers total weekly Moderate-to-Vigorous Physical Activity.

A study conducted by Lykesas et al. (2018), to determine if participating in dance activities would positively impact fifth and sixth graders Health Related Quality of Life (HRQoL), found that dance activities did indeed positively impact the children’s physical

wellbeing. This, in turn, positively impacted their overall quality of life. Although there were eight different dimensions on the Kidscreen-52 Questionnaire used to examine the data in this study, the dimension in which there was “the most highly statistically significant difference, was found for the ‘Health’ dimension” (Lykesas et al., 2018, p. 96).

Development of Structural/Motor Skills. Dance has been found to teach children how to “use their body in a coordinated and skill-based way” (Tugrul, 1997). A study conducted by Biber (2016) examined the physical effects of folk dance on children in preschool. Biber (2016) concluded that folk dance did indeed positively impact the physical development of these five and six-year olds. More specifically, it was found that folk dance positively affected the development of different structural and motor skills, such as balance, coordination, flexibility, and rhythm. Additionally, Biber (2016) cited that “participating in activities improving small and large muscle groups provides significant benefits” for the development of motor skills (p. 214). Similarly, Lykesas et al., (2018) found dance programs to aid in motor development, as the skills children perform in class are often repeated throughout several classes.

Physiological Benefits. Several physiological benefits were also cited in the literature. In addition to Biber’s (2016) discovery of the developmental benefits stated above, his study also uncovered a correlation between children engaging in dance programs and the development of different physiological factors such as general height, arm span, and leg length.

A different study, conducted by Hogg et al. (2012), cited in Kourkouta et al. (2014), found afterschool dance programs to aid in mitigating “risk factors for heart disease, diabetes and obesity in school children” (p. 231). Other physiological benefits cited have included “bone strengthening, increased flexibility, improvements in balance, and spatial awareness” (Cain et al., 2015, p. 1067).

The Social Benefits of Dance for Children

The literature also acknowledged the contribution of dance to the social development of children (Biber, 2016; Cain et al., 2015; Deans, 2016; Katz, 2008; Kourkouta et al., 2014; Lykesas et al., 2018; Pavlidou et al., 2018; Pennington & Nelson, 2020; Pereira & Marques-Pinto, 2017; Scrantom & McLaughlin, 2019). Common themes included opportunities for social interaction and the development of social skills (Biber, 2016; Cain et al., 2015; Deans, 2016; Katz, 2008; Kourkouta et al., 2014; Lykesas et al., 2018; Pavlidou et al., 2018; Pennington & Nelson, 2020; Pereira & Marques-Pinto, 2017; Scrantom & McLaughlin, 2019).

Opportunities for Social Interaction/Relationships. Several authors noted the opportunities for socialization that dance and dance classes provided (Cain et al., 2015; Kourkouta et al., 2014; Pavlidou et al., 2018). Deans (2016) noted the significant relationships that could be built in dance programs, within the larger learning community. A unique study conducted by Scrantom and McLaughlin (2019) helped to foster cross-community significant relationships, building friendships between children “different from themselves” (p. 305).

The study piloted by Lykesas et al. (2018), as referenced above, not only found the participation in dance activities to positively impact children’s physical well-being, but to positively impact social wellbeing, as well. Two dimensions presenting higher HRQoL on Kidscreen-52 included the categories of ‘friends’ and ‘self and others.’

Katz (2008) examined the perceptions of adolescents on dance, who had participated in the sport for several years. Through interviews, Katz (2008) gained insight into the ways in which the participants perceived dance to impact social development. The students recounted various benefits including building constructive relationships with their teammates, learning to collaborate, solving problems, negotiate multiple social worlds, participating in a

supportive/communal learning environment, building camaraderie, supporting one another's learning and growth, and trusting others.

Development of Social Skills. In addition to the benefit of socialization, several research studies contributed the development of various social skills to participation in dance. In a study conducted by Iordanidou (2012), exploring the psychosocial impact of a Greek dance program on children, it was determined that the program positively affected emotional intelligence, improving factors such as empathy and interpersonal relationships. Similarly, Deans (2016) found that participation in dance programs cultivated the development of empathetic social relationships.

Pennington and Nelson (2020) examined a dance program, The Dancing Classroom, which fostered different factors of social development, including cooperation, respect for differences, and social support. An after-school dance program for school-aged children, entitled Experiencing Emotion, was also found to foster relationship skills and social awareness (Pereira & Marques-Pinto, 2017). Similarly, Von Rosseberg-Gempton et al. (1998), identified the benefits of cooperation, leading/following skills, the ability to be part of a group, and communication, in their study.

Communication, as a social skill, was another common theme among the literature (Biber, 2016; Deans, 2016; Katz, 2008; Pavlidou et al., 2018). Dance programs have been found to promote communication not only verbally, but through movement and dancer's bodies (Pavlidou et al., 2018). Biber (2016) discovered several social improvements after participation in a folk-dance program. For the children in the experimental group, communication increased by 15%, the ability to make friends easily increased by 20%, attempting to understand others through empathy increased by 35%, trying to solve problems with friends increased by 20%, and

willingness to cooperate with others increased by 20%.

Deans (2016) noted that through dance, children “demonstrated their capacities to exercise relationship-based behaviors, such as respecting the personal space of others and engaging in empathetic body-based reflections where individuals embraced the perspectives of their peers by reflecting and responding to their movements and feeling states” (p. 52). Pavlidou et al. (2018) also noted following instructions and respecting others as outcomes of participation in a dance program. In her review of the literature, Pavlidou cited the benefits as “cooperation, responsibility, accepting others, acting in pairs or small groups, sharing in decision making, and taking on different roles” (Bergstein-Dow, 2010; Pickup, 2007).

The Emotional Benefits of Dance for Children

The literature also revealed numerous emotional benefits of dance for children (Biber, 2016; Kourkouta et al., 2014; Lykesas et al., 2018). Common themes included the development of self-directed traits, emotional management, and emotional expression (Biber, 2016; Katz, 2008; Kourkouta et al., 2014; Lykesas et al., 2018).

Self-Directed Traits. The literature brought to light the development of self-directed traits that can occur from a child’s participation in dance. Several researchers identified an increase in self-esteem and self-confidence, resulting from participation in a dance program (Biber, 2016; Katz, 2008; Kourkouta et al., 2014; Lykesas et al., 2018; Scramton & McLaughlin, 2019).

Katz (2008) examined the benefits of dance from the dancers’ perspectives. She conducted interviews, gaining insight into what the girls identified as the positive outcomes. Several of the young women spoke to the emotional development they experienced from

participation in dance class. One young woman “learned self-confidence through dance, becoming more patient with [herself]” (Katz, 2008, p. 15). Similarly, in Scramton and McLaughlin’s (2019) post-interview of their study with participants from their dance program, students stated that they had “gained a sense of self-confidence during rehearsals and performances” (p. 304).

Emotional Management. Various researchers identified emotional management as a benefit resulting from involvement in dance (Biber, 2016; Kourkouta et al., 2014; Pereira & Marques-Pinto, 2017). In his 2016 study examining the benefits of folk dance for preschoolers, Biber found that as a result of participation in the program, “the success of communicating with friends of children in the control group” increased by 10%, “attempting to understand others through empathy” increased by 20%, “understanding of whether someone is happy or sad” increased by 40%, and “trying to solve problems with friends” increased by 30% (p. 221)

In Katz’s study referenced above, a consensus noted by all of the participants was the control over both their bodies and their minds found through dance, resulting in the ability to better monitor their feelings and manage their actions (Katz, 2008). Similarly, Pereira and Marques-Pinto (2017) identified both self-awareness and self-management as developed traits from their Experiencing Emotions program.

Emotional Expression. The opportunity for emotional-/self-expression was yet another benefit cited in the literature (Biber, 2016; Chibbaro, 2013; Deans, 2016; Kourkouta et al., 2014; Tugrul, 1997). Gladding (2006) noted the importance of adolescents having an avenue of physical expression, compared to only verbal expression. She identified how physical expression may be easier for some children, especially when “communicating conflict and/or emotional turmoil” (Chibbaro, 2013, p. 1). Similarly, Deans (2016) identified dance as “powerful non-

verbal semiotic tool for the expression of the young child's voice" (p. 47).

Summary

As the literature corroborated, dance can benefit children in the realms of physical, social, and emotional development. Common themes relating to physical development included the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, the development of structural/motor skills, and various physiological benefits (Biber, 2016; Kourkouta et al., 2014; Lykesas et al., 2018; O'neill et al., 2011; Pennington & Nelson, 2020). Common themes relating to social development included opportunities for social interaction and the development of social skills (Biber, 2016; Cain et al., 2015; Deans, 2016; Katz, 2008; Kourkouta et al., 2014; Lykesas et al., 2018; Pavlidou et al., 2018; Pennington & Nelson, 2020; Pereira & Marques-Pinto, 2017; Scrantom & McLaughlin, 2019). Common themes relating to emotional development included the development of self-directed traits, emotional management, and emotional expression (Biber, 2016; Katz, 2008; Kourkouta et al., 2014; Lykesas et al., 2018).

Much of the literature written on the benefits of dance and dance therapies relates to research studies conducted with adults (Cain et al., 2015). In reference to HRQoL, Lykesas et al. (2018) also identified more studies completed with adults than with children. For the literature that has been written about dance and children, the majority is centered around studies completed with either preschool-aged children or adolescent-aged children. Additionally, of the articles reviewed, many of the research studies took place in a school setting. To help close this gap, this research study examined the developmental benefits of dance for school-aged children, in a dance studio setting.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine the perspectives of school-aged dancers and their parents on the developmental benefits of participation in weekly dance classes. Past studies on the topic have presented as a mix of both qualitative and quantitative research. As this particular research study examined the subjective perspectives of the participants, a qualitative research design was best suited. This research study addressed the gap in literature of the developmental benefits of participation in weekly dance classes for school-aged children, in the dance studio setting. The data collected provided insight into the children's perceived benefits, as well as examined the perceived benefits these children's parents observed in their children. This chapter will discuss the research design of the study, the site of the study, the participants of this study, the ethical considerations of this study, the data collection procedures used for this study, and the data analysis which took place for this study.

Research Design

This study was qualitative (phenomenological) in design. Qualitative research seeks to “collect descriptive – narrative and visual – nonnumerical data in order to gain insights into the phenomena of interest” (Mills & Gay, 2016, p. 545). In the case of this study, the phenomena examined were the perceived developmental benefits of weekly dance classes for school-aged children. The school-aged children and their parents took part in thirty-minute interviews with the researcher, sharing their perspectives on the developmental benefits of weekly dance classes. The justification for this design choice was the data the researcher was aiming to gather –

subjective perspectives from multiple types of participants, providing a holistic view on the matter.

Site of the Study

This study was conducted through a private dance studio residing in Springfield, Missouri. Springfield, Missouri is located in the southwest region of the state and is the third largest city in Missouri. Approximately 168,000 residents live in Springfield, Missouri (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Studio X is home to 338 dancers, with 45 of these dancers holding a spot on the studio's competition team. Of those students on the competition team, 26 of these students fit the criteria of a school-aged child. Of the school-aged children on the competition team, all 26 identified as female. This studio is seven years old and is growing in numbers each year.

Participants

This study qualitatively sampled from Studio X located in Springfield, Missouri. In an effort to select participants with a similar dance background experience, the sample was nonrandom, open to the small pool of school-aged dancers on the competition team at Studio X. All dancers within this subset of participants were given the opportunity to participate. A total of six school-aged dancers on the studio's competition team, along with five dance caregivers (one caregiver of each dancer participating; two of the school-aged dancers were siblings), participated in the study that was conducted throughout March of 2021. At the time the interviews took place, the dancers were eight, nine, twelve, twelve, twelve, and twelve. All five of the caregivers that took part were mothers. As the research design was qualitative, the sample

size remained small, but gave the researcher unique insight and perspectives on the observed developmental benefits from participation in the activity of dance, per each participant group.

Ethical Considerations

This research study was examined through the lens of a dancer and dance instructor. This researcher was a dance instructor at Studio X from 2015 – 2019. Throughout this time, this researcher had a few of the child participants of this study in class. In an effort to minimize bias, the researcher crafted questions that allowed for discussion about both the positive and negative aspects of dance, and included numerous quotes throughout this study to raise the voices of both the parent and child participants.

Participants were asked to voluntarily participate in this research study. Informed consent was collected (see Appendix A and Appendix B), and the participants were informed that they were welcome to leave the study at any time. The researcher was certified to conduct ethical research through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) (see Appendix C). Additionally, the researcher also received Institutional Research Board (IRB) approval (IRB-FY2021-360) on February 12, 2021, prior to the commencement of this research study (see Appendix D). The participants' names will not be used on any publications resulting from this study.

Data Collection Procedures

The owner of Studio X granted permission for this research study to take place via a phone call with the researcher and provided the researcher with the contact information for the parents of each of the eligible dancers. The researcher contacted all eligible students' parents via

email, to purposively target the eligible participants. Ultimately, six school-aged dancers on the studio's competition team, along with five dance caregivers (one caregiver of each dancer participating; two of the school-aged dancers were siblings), participated in the study that was conducted throughout March of 2021. Once the participants were selected, the researcher obtained informed consent (see Appendix A and Appendix B). After consent had been obtained, the researcher scheduled an interview slot with each participant. The researcher conducted interviews, via Zoom, asking questions pertaining to the developmental benefits of dance (see Appendix E and Appendix F). After all interviews had been conducted, the researcher transcribed the interviews, and coded the data to delineate common themes regarding the developmental benefits of dance.

Instrumentation. The researcher conducted interviews with each participant to collect data. A unique set of open-ended questions were created for each participant group: one for parents (see Appendix E) and one for school-aged dancers (see Appendix F). These questions prompted the participants to share their perspectives on the developmental benefits they had observed within themselves, or their children, from participation weekly dance classes. The questions were crafted in a way that clearly prompted answers surrounding the major realms development and were appropriate for those without a background in child development. Additionally, the questions for the school-aged children were developmentally appropriate and crafted in a way that was easy for children to understand. All of the data collected for this study was gathered through the interviews.

Role of the Researcher. The researcher both conducted the interviews and analyzed the data. The researcher ensured informed consent was received from each participant before the interviews took place, and that the research conducted was in accordance with the CITI ethical

research standards. After all of the interviews concluded, the researcher worked to transcribe the interviews and code the data, delineating common themes among the participants' perspectives.

Data Analysis

Following the interviews, the researcher transcribed each interview recording verbatim. Subsequently, the researcher organized, categorized, synthesized, and analyzed the data, to delineate common themes present among the participant responses. Analysis for this qualitative research ultimately amounted to coding the interview responses. Mills and Gay define coding as “the process of categorically marking or referencing units of text with codes and labels as a way to indicate patterns and meaning” (Mills and Gay, 2016, p. 571). The analysis resulted in various categories, bringing to light the perceived developmental benefits of dance for school-aged children. The analysis resulted in new perspectives on the benefits, adding to the literature on the subject.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Through interviews with the six dancers and five parent-participants, numerous developmental benefits of participation in weekly dance classes were identified. These themes were organized into four categories: social, emotional, physical and cognitive development.

Social Development

Social development was the first realm of development in which benefits were identified from school-aged children's participation in weekly dance classes. Through interviews with the six school-aged dancers and five dance parents, five themes were identified within this realm: opportunity for socialization, enhanced peer relationships, opportunity for mentorship/role models, interpersonal and psychosocial. One parent-participant shared how, through dance, her daughter has "learned social behavior and how to perform socially."

Opportunity for Socialization. The first theme identified in this category was the opportunity for socialization that dance class provided. Both dancer- and parent-participants identified dance class as an avenue to make friends and meet new people. All six of the dancers stated that dance class is a place where they make many friends outside of school. One dancer shared how she attends a small school, and her attendance at the dance studio has helped her to "reach out to other friends." Another dancer spoke about how she enjoys "building relationships with new girls that join the company class each year."

Half of the dancer participants shared that they do attend school with some of their dance peers, while the other half shared that they do not. Regardless of this fact, all six of the dancer-participants expressed they enjoy the socialization that dance provides, and the opportunity to see

their friends at dance class each week. One dancer stated that she sees her dance friends “all the time.”

Several parents also identified this social benefit resulting from their dancers’ attendance at the dance studio. One parent shared how the dance studio is an alternative place for her daughter to “make friends outside of the school environment,” and allows her daughter the opportunity to “meet kids from different backgrounds.” Two other parent-participants shared how their daughters do not attend the same schools as any of the other dancers at the studio. Therefore, they appreciate how the studio allows their daughters the opportunity to make friends outside of school. One parent spoke about how she appreciates the fact that her daughter is able to “integrate into a social group outside of school.” This parent also shared that her daughter is in a company group comprised of girls from different schools and of different ages. This dancer is one of the youngest in her company group. Nevertheless, this parent feels that “it is a positive thing” that her daughter is being “exposed to new things” within her dance company group. Another parent shared how her daughter “sees some of her dance friends at school,” but appreciates the fact that her daughter has “different groups of friends in different places.”

Enhanced Peer Relationships. The second theme identified in this category was the enhanced peer relationships that participation in weekly dance classes affords. Both the dancer- and parent-participants alike noted numerous enhanced relationships developed between the dancers and their peers.

One dancer shared how her “favorite parts about dance are friends and the connections [she has] made.” Several dancers stated that they “have great connections with dance friends,” “enjoy being with friends,” and “have close relationships with dance friends.” One parent

expressed that her daughter “always looks forward to hearing about what her dance friends have been up to” when she goes to the studio.

Several dancers reflected on how they have known their dance friends for a long time, and all six of the dancer-participants explained how these friendships extend outside of the dance studio. Two of the parents also reflected on how their daughters have connections/relationships with their dance peers both inside and outside of the dance studio. Additionally, they shared that their daughters often hangout with their dance friends outside of the school and dance studio setting.

When prompting the dancers to go into detail about these dance-peer relationships, one dancer reflected on how her friendships with her dance peers have grown through dance. Another dancer disclosed how she is closer with the “company kids,” than with the “recreational kids.” One of the older dancers shared her observation that the dancers who are in duets, trios, and small groups together often “hangout more with the dancers in those groups, than with other dancers in the company.”

Two parents also provided insight into the peer relationships their daughters have developed through dance. One parent reflected on how if her daughter ever “has issues with her friends at school, she always has her friends at dance” to lean on. Two other parents praised the fact that their daughters dance in a mixed-age group, allowing them the opportunity to have older friends in school, especially once they move up into high school.

Opportunity for Mentorship/Role Models. The third theme identified in this category was the opportunity for the dancers to experience mentorship/role models through the dance studio environment. Both the dancer- and parent-participants reflected on the fact that the dance studio offers several opportunities for the dancers to experience mentorship and role models.

Both the dancers and parents identified the older dancers in the company as role models for the school-aged (and younger) dancers. One dancer shared that she enjoys having the older girls as role models, because they “are more reachable role models, and set examples that are easier to work towards.”

Both the dancer- and parent-participants also identified the instructors as “great female role models” for the dancers. Two dancers spoke about how the dance teachers are “not only role models in dance but are role models in life too.” Another dancer identified the dance teachers as “role models and a goal to help you strive towards.” This dancer stated that, “if you put in the work, you can be like the dance teachers.” One of the parents praised the fact that the dance teachers at the studio are “good people, talented, kind, and goal oriented.”

Several of the dancers also reflected on the good connections and positive relationships they have developed with their dance teachers. One dancer spoke about how she feels that her dance teachers “want to help” her and are constantly “pushing [her] in a good direction.” Another dancer described how she is “closer with the dance teachers [she] has more classes with and spends more time with,” as this allows her more opportunities to “get to know them better.”

Several parents also commented on the good connections and positive relationships their children have built with their dance teachers. One parent spoke about how she feels the dance teachers “truly love the kids,” while another parent expressed how important she feels it is for her daughter to be receiving “genuine investment from another adult.”

Interpersonal. The fourth theme identified in this category was the interpersonal development that takes place through participation in the activity of dance. Several of the parent participants in this study noted this benefit. Two parents spoke about how dance has enhanced their child’s ability to work and communicate with both peers and adults. Another parent praised

the opportunities that dance provides her child in “listening to another adult, non-parent, voice providing feedback.” Other parents spoke about how dance has helped their children in having an easier time meeting people in an outside setting and recognized how the confidence developed through dance has transferred into school, and their children “putting themselves out there.”

One parent spoke to her daughter’s development of a team-mentality, in the context of her child being a part of the competition team. She reflected on how her daughter has “adapted to being part of a group,” and expressed that the “competition team truly develops the children as team members.” This mother mentioned how her daughter “must rely on others in her dance class, while others rely on her,” and feels that participation in weekly dance classes fosters “teamwork and teambuilding.”

Psychosocial. The fifth theme identified in this category was the psychosocial development resulting from participation in the activity of dance. One parent spoke about the benefits of her child feeling a “mastery of her craft,” while another parent noted the mastery her child feels from being “prepared and confident.” Similarly, another parent spoke about how her child “feels good when she gets it right.”

Emotional Development

Emotional development was the second realm of development in which benefits were identified from school-aged children’s participation in weekly dance classes. Through interviews with the six school-aged dancers and five dance parents, three themes were identified within this realm: emotional expression and healthy outlet, emotional awareness, and intrapersonal life-skills.

Emotional Expression and Healthy Outlet. The first theme identified in this category was the opportunity to engage in emotional expression, and the opportunity to use dance as a healthy outlet. Several dancers described how they are able to express themselves through dance. One dancer explicitly stated that her “body feels expressed” through dance. Another dancer spoke about how she is “able to relate other things happening in [her] life to [her] dancing,” and is often able to “dance out any frustration” she is feeling. One dancer elaborated specifically about the dance practice of improvisation (improv) and being able to express her emotions through this dancing modality. This dancer shared how participating in improv helps her to “release any emotions [she is] feeling.” Similarly, an older dancer recounted how she often “channels [her] negative emotions into [her] dancing,” and “expresses all of [her] emotions through dance.” One of the younger dancers reflected on how she enjoys the styles of dance that allow for more opportunities to be expressive and engage in stage presence. One of the parents also agreed that the activity of dance allows her daughter to “express her feelings in a healthy way.”

Several participants also spoke about how the dancers are able to use dance as an outlet. One parent identified dance as an “important outlet for the tween and teen years.” Several dancers recognized dance as “an outlet and an escape,” while one dancer specifically reflected on how dance is an “outlet to help [her] release emotions.” One of the older dancer-participants shared how she is able to “let out her energy and different emotions through dance,” and spoke specifically about how she uses “dance as an outlet to work through the different things [she is] feeling.” Another older dancer shared how dance generally “shifts [her] mood if [she is] having a bad day.” Similarly, another dancer of the same age shared that if she has a bad day at school, she generally will still have a good day at dance, because she “tries [her] best,” and it usually

“makes [her] feel better.” This dancer went on to say that even if she arrives to the studio sad, she usually leaves “completely fine.”

Emotional Awareness. The second theme identified in this category was the emotional awareness developed through dance. This theme became blatantly apparent through the conversations this researcher had with all six of the dancers about how they feel when they are dancing. All six of the dancers were able to identify various emotions and how those related to the different aspects of their dancing. Some of the older dancer-participants reflected that their emotions change frequently throughout dance. One dancer stated that she “feels a wide range of emotions while dancing, depending on the style,” another dancer shared that “the music and choreography have to do with the emotions [she] feels.” Similarly, yet another dancer said that she “feels whatever the music is.” Some of the younger dancers tied particular emotions to specific styles of dance.

Across all six of the dancer-participant interviews, frequent “emotion words” were utilized in relation to the activity of dance in general. These included: “fun,” “happy,” “excited,” “free of worry,” “outgoing,” “energetic,” “pumped up,” “in the zone,” “focused,” and “calming.” One of the younger dancers shared that dance makes her “feel like [she is] on the stage,” while another younger dancer expressed that she likes “to be sassy” when she dances. One of the older dancers reflected that she “does not have to be happy, dance just makes [her] happy.” Some of the specific emotions the younger dancers tied to styles of dance included: tap - happy; jazz - happy, energetic; musical theater - energetic; contemporary - calm, all of the emotions (depending on the music); ballet - calm. One of the older dancers shared that her favorite part about dance is “the way it makes [her] feel.”

Intrapersonal Life-Skills. The third theme identified in this category was the intrapersonal life-skills that are fostered through dance. This theme yielded seven subthemes: self-confidence, initiative, drive, perseverance, character-development, sense-of-self, and purpose. It is worth noting that the parent-participants identified the majority of the intrapersonal life-skills that were perceived to have been developed through dance.

Self-Confidence. The first subtheme identified within this theme was self-confidence. All five of the parent-participants identified confidence/self-confidence as a skill that has developed through their children's participation in dance. Several of the parents spoke about the confidence their children exhibit through their craft, such as when performing and being on stage. Other parents noted how the confidence developed through their craft has translated into other parts of their children's lives. One parent shared that her daughter now has a "willingness to stand up and do other things in front of people, such as singing or speaking," because of her participation in dance. Another parent spoke about how the confidence her daughter has developed through dance has provided her daughter "self-assurance" in doing other things that she loves, that may fall outside of the "social norm." This parent provided the specific example of how, last year, her daughter made the decision to continue in band, as this is what she was good at and enjoyed doing, even though her entire middle school friend group decided to take up choir. This parent feels that if it had not been for the confidence her daughter has developed through dance, she would have succumbed to the peer pressure, and dropped band for choir. Two other parents shared that they felt that participation in dance class has made their daughters "more outgoing."

Initiative. The second subtheme identified within this theme was initiative. Several parents provided insight into the initiative their children take in practicing dance at home, and outside of their regularly scheduled dance classes. Two parents spoke about how their children

independently seek out resources on the internet to improve certain technical skills in dance, while another parent shared how her daughter constantly practices her competition and recital choreography at home. One of the parents, who has two daughters participating in this study, reflected on how her girls practice dance together at home. She shared that the girls often engage in a “show-and-tell-type practice,” providing feedback to each other on different technical skills. Another parent spoke about how dance has encouraged her daughter to engage in goal setting for herself. Her daughter has begun to take initiative in reflecting on what she wants to improve upon, and the steps she needs to take to achieve these goals.

Drive. The third subtheme identified within this theme was drive. Three parents spoke about the different intrapersonal skills they saw developing in their children surrounding this subtheme. One parent explicitly stated how dance helps to “give her daughter drive,” and makes her daughter “strive to be better.” Another parent talked about how dance “makes [her child] work hard,” and “improves [her daughter’s] ability to focus.” The third parent shared how dance has provided her daughter with a “growth mindset,” which has only enhanced her daughter’s “ability to apply criticism,” to be the best dancer she can be.

Perseverance. The fourth subtheme identified within this theme was perseverance. One parent explicitly stated that “dance has taught [her daughter] perseverance,” while this parent’s dancer shared how she often becomes tired in dance, but “keeps going, because it is [her] favorite thing.” Another one of the older dancers spoke about the process of cleaning competition dances, stating that it is “a hard and meticulous process,” but she “always puts in the effort to do this, because [she] knows it will make her dances better.”

Character-Development. The fifth subtheme identified within this theme was character-development. A parent-participant of one of the younger dancers shared her appreciation of the

“life-skills learned through dance,” and feels that her daughter has undergone much “healthy and appropriate character-building,” through her involvement in weekly dance classes. Another parent noted how participation in dance has taught her daughter “humility and how to be humble.” This parent also explained how dance has taught her daughter how to both take and give criticism, with grace.

Sense-of-Self. The sixth subtheme identified within this theme was sense-of-self. A parent of one of the older dancers spoke about how dance has aided her daughter in developing a sense-of-self and feels that this sense-of-self has developed so seamlessly due to the different experiences her daughter has been afforded through dance. She feels that through participation in different dance competitions and dance conventions, her “tween daughter” has taken charge of “adopting her own sense of self.” One specific example this parent-participant provided was how her daughter has learned to express herself through creative avenues, such as dress. She feels that dance has afforded her daughter a “mature understanding of time and place for different types of dress, appropriate for each situation.”

Purpose. The seventh subtheme identified within this theme was purpose. One dancer explicitly stated how dance is “[her] passion.” This dancer’s parent also noted her daughter’s passion for dance and explained to this researcher how she feels that “everybody needs their thing... and dance is definitely [her daughter’s] thing.”

Physical Development

Physical development was the third realm of development in which benefits were identified from school-aged children’s participation in weekly dance classes. Through interviews with the six school-aged dancers and five dance parents, three themes were identified within this

realm: opportunity for kinesthetic movement, physiological advancements, and mind-body connection. Several parents discussed how their dancers have developed physical skills that are transferrable to other aspects of their child's life. One parent noted how dance has developed her daughter's "quick learning and adaptability to other physical activity." Similarly, two other parents also noted how the physical benefits reaped in dance are transferrable to "other sports and physical activities."

Opportunity for Kinesthetic Movement. The first theme identified in this category was the opportunity for kinesthetic movement that dance provides. Both dancer- and parent- participants spoke to how participation in dance class was an opportunity for regular movement of the body. One dancer acknowledged how dance keeps her "active and moving," and shared that she enjoys the "movement aspect" of dance and "doing something active on a regular basis." This dancer also reflected on how dance "helps [her] to not get as tense." Similarly, another dancer identified dance as "an opportunity to be active and move on a regular basis." A younger dancer stated that she likes "moving a lot," and another younger dancer reflected that dance allows her to "get out [her] energy." One parent recognized dance as an opportunity for her daughter to engage in cardio on a regular basis.

Physiological Advancements. The second theme identified in this category were physiological advancements resulting from dance. Throughout the interviews with the participants, conversation around the development of physiological skills was rather prevalent. Ultimately, between the five parent-participants, six physiological skills were mentioned. Three parents noted their child's advancements in flexibility, two about balance, two about strength, two about coordination, two about stamina, and one about muscle building.

Two parents also noted various physiological health benefits resulting from dance. One parent spoke to how dance is “a way for [her] daughter’s body to stay healthy,” while this parent’s daughter also recognized the activity of dance as “good and healthy.” Two other parents provided specific examples of how their daughters have reaped physiological health benefits from participation in dance class. One parent spoke about how her daughter was diagnosed with arthritis at a young age and shared that participation in the activity of dance has allowed her daughter to “move her muscles, body, and joints,” and ultimately transition into remission. Another parent spoke to how her daughter was “later than her peers in hitting various physical developmental milestones,” and has credited dance to helping her daughter “overcome some of these physical developmental delays.”

Mind-Body Connection. The third theme identified in this category was the mind-body connection developed through dance. One parent shared how dance has developed her daughter’s “ability to read and recognize body limits,” “advanced her body knowledge,” and “strengthened her connection to moving her body with auditory instructions.” Another parent identified how dance has aided her daughter in “figuring out new ways to move her body,” “exert more body control,” and engage in “body awareness.” More specifically, this parent praised how dance allows her daughter to know precisely “where her body is in space”, at any time.

Cognitive Development

Cognitive development was the fourth realm of development in which benefits were identified from school-aged children’s participation in weekly dance classes. Through interviews with the six school-aged dancers and five dance parents, four themes were identified within this realm: practical-life skills, learning and memorization, creativity, and intrinsic/extrinsic

motivation. Similar to physical development, multiple parents identified how the cognitive skills their children have developed through dance are easily transferable to school and other activities. One parent specifically noted how the “ability to process and implement feedback is currently transferrable to school and will be transferrable to [her daughter’s] future profession.” Another parent shared how dance has provided her daughter with the ability to “quickly learn,” allowing her daughter to “easily adapt to other physical activity.”

Practical Life-Skills. The first theme identified in this category was practical life-skills fostered through dance. This theme yielded five subthemes: balance, prioritization, time management, responsibility, and organization.

Balance. The first subtheme identified in this category was balance. One of the dancers, and all five of the parents, attested to how balance is a practical life-skill fostered through participation in dance. Several parent participants shared how their children not only balance dance with school and homework, but also with other extracurriculars, on a regular basis. The dancer who identified balance as a developed skill talked about her experience balancing her dance schedule with her rigorous homework assignments.

Prioritization. The second subtheme identified in this category was prioritization. Two of the dancers noted that because of their participation in dance, they often must practice prioritization, to successfully juggle their busy schedules. One of the older dancers reflected that she does not feel that dance “gets in the way of school or homework,” but stated that, “if it does, school always comes first.” Two of the parent-participants also spoke to their children’s development of prioritization skills, resulting from their participation in the activity of dance.

Time Management. The third subtheme identified in this category was time management. Similar to balance and prioritization, both dancers and parents alike identified time management

as a developed practical life-skill. One dancer shared how she feels she has become quite proficient with time management, through balancing dance, schoolwork, and extracurriculars. This dancer's mother also spoke to her daughter's impressive time management skills, as a result of her busy dance schedule. Another parent shared how time management has become important to her young daughter, who often ensures her mother is ready to leave for the studio on time, as this dancer is always very concerned with arriving to dance before classes begin.

Responsibility. The fourth subtheme identified in this category was responsibility. Several parents reflected on how they have seen advancements in the practical life skill of responsibility, as a result of their child's participation in the activity of dance. A parent of one of the younger dancer-participants explained how one of her daughter's dance teachers has each of the dancers in her class keep a notebook, where the dancers take notes of different skills/choreography to practice at home. This mother also shared how her dancer has made it a point to take responsibility of her personal items, such as ensuring to bring a water bottle into dance class each week and confirming that all of her dance shoes always make it back into her dance bag after class, before heading home. Another parent reflected on how she appreciates the responsibility her daughter has acquired as a result of dance, being expected to pay attention each week, in addition to the realistic expectations placed upon her daughter, and the appropriate standards she is held to. These two parents further attested to how dance has taught their daughters the practical life-skill of commitment, resulting from taking part in a competition dance team.

Organization. The fifth subtheme identified in this category was organization development. One parent explicitly spoke about how participation in the activity of dance has helped her dancer to become more organized as an individual. Another parent shared how her

child has developed skills in preparedness, from ensuring she is ready for dance class each week (practicing her dances at home, along with packing her bag for dance class each week). Another parent talked about how dance has taught her daughter “how to get into a routine.”

Learning and Memorization. The second theme identified in this category was the learning and memorization development that took place through dance class. Four dancers reflected on the opportunities for learning that take place through the activity dance, speaking specifically about “learning choreography,” “learning something new,” and “learning how to dance.” One parent identified dance as an activity which allows her daughter to engage in the internal processes of “learning, remembering, and memorization.”

Creativity. The third theme identified in this category was the development of creativity. Two dancers reflected on different creative elements, pertaining to dance, which they enjoy and have developed through their participation in weekly dance classes. One of the older dancers spoke specifically about improv and “being able to put her own spin on the choreography.” Another older dancer shared the reasons she enjoys the style of tap dance, some of which included her ability to “get creative with the musicality” and “the rhythms [she is able to] create with her feet.”

Intrinsic/Extrinsic Motivation. The fourth theme identified in this category was intrinsic/extrinsic motivation development. This subtheme became apparent through this researcher’s conversation about competition and performing with one of the older dancers. This particular dancer shared how her favorite part about dance is performing at both recitals and competitions. This dancer talked about how it is “satisfying to show off the work [she has] been working towards” and how it is also “satisfying to get good scores on [her] dances.” She also identified how it “feels good to see your work put into action.” When asking this dancer about

what is more important to her, performing or receiving high scores, this dancer replied that “both the performing aspect and score aspect are satisfying.” However, this dancer was able to identify that she “cares less about what the judges think and the scores they provide, than the feedback [she] receives from [her] studio dance teachers.”

Additionally, several parents spoke to the way their children feel as a result of different aspects of dance. Many parents used the phrasing of their children “feeling good” when they “get something right” or “do something well.”

Development Through Challenges

Some findings which provided surprising insight into development were what dancers discussed as their least favorite parts of dance, when prompted. Dancers shared various aspects of dance that fell into the realms of social, emotional, and physical development.

One of the younger dancers identified how dance often limits her social schedule, stating that she often “has to tell people no for other things” because of her dance schedule. Similarly, one of the older dancers shared how the “balance of it all can be tricky,” as she often does not have time for homework during the day, because the majority of her evenings are spent in the dance studio. This same dancer also noted the number of hours she spends in dance class each week, along with how late her dance classes go, as her least favorite parts of dance.

Another dancer spoke about how there are some days before dance where she “just does not want to go.” One of the older dancers opened up about how the activity of dance, along with her dance schedule, sometimes feels “overwhelming.” Through further elaboration, this dancer shared that because of dance, she often has “a lack of time to do everything else.” Another aspect this dancer found overwhelming was the high expectations placed upon her, which she explained

as “having to do everything to the best of [her] ability, and always having to try [her] best.” One of the younger dancers noted how she sometimes feels nervous before competitions.

Another dancer shared that dance often makes her tired, while an older dancer-participant reflected that she sometimes “gets less sleep, because [she] has to stay up late after getting home from dance, to do homework.” Other aspects, pertaining to physical development, identified by the dancers, included the “hard physical work” and the “soreness of the body” resulting from dance practice.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Discussion of Results

This research study ultimately identified developmental benefits in the domains of social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development, as a result of school-aged dancers' participation in weekly dance classes. The two realms of development most frequently alluded to throughout the interviews were social and emotional development, while physical and cognitive development did not yield as much discussion. Several of the themes identified within each of the specific realms aligned closely with, and expanded upon, the already existing literature on the topic. Additionally, many parallels appeared between the self-reported developmental benefits and the goals/milestones set forth for school-agers through child development theory.

Social Development. Typically developing children ages six through twelve fall into Erik Erikson's Industry vs Inferiority Stage of Psychosocial Development (Thompson, 2009). In this stage of development, children are generally concerned with fitting in socially, gaining mastery over their endeavors, and feeling competent in all that they do (Thompson, 2009). The preexisting literature regarding social development through dance for children identified dance as an opportunity for social interaction/relationships and an avenue for the development of social skills. This research study confirmed both of these findings, and expanded upon this knowledge, as this study also identified that dance provides an opportunity for socialization, enhanced peer relationships, an opportunity for mentorship/role models, interpersonal development, and psychosocial development. These five acknowledged benefits align closely with the goals identified for optimal social development for school-aged children.

It was surprising to the researcher how the theme of mentorship/role models was not prevalent in any of the previous literature, as this was a popular conversational point in the interviews with both the parent- and child-participants. Dependent on how “serious” a child is about this activity, it is possible for them to spend several hours at the dance studio each week. During this time, they are conscious observers of their dance teachers and older dance peers, who will inevitably help to mold and shape each of the school-aged dancers, throughout their time as a student at the studio. Fortunately, in the interviews for this research study, the dancers and parents of Studio X had only positive things to say about the role models they (or their children) looked up to. Several of the parents expressed gratitude for the examples the dance instructors at Studio X set for their children. This made it apparent that teacher-character is a factor parents should consider when choosing a studio, in order to provide and foster optimal opportunities for social development through mentors/role models.

Emotional Development. The preexisting literature regarding emotional development through dance for children identified the development of self-directed traits, emotional management, and emotional expression. This research study confirmed all three of these findings, and expanded upon this knowledge, as this study also identified dance as an opportunity for emotional expression and as a healthy outlet, an activity that promotes emotional awareness, and an activity that fosters intrapersonal life skills. These three acknowledged benefits align closely with the goals identified for optimal emotional development for school-aged children.

It quickly became apparent to the researcher how self-aware the child-participants were, regarding their emotions. The dancers did a proficient job verbalizing the way that dance makes them feel, and all of the dancers had the ability to relate different styles of dance/music to

different emotions experienced. Additionally, almost all of the dancers interviewed identified dance as an avenue through which they are able to express themselves and their emotions. Emotional intelligence and awareness is generally a skill that develops with time, throughout an individual's childhood. Through these interviews, it appeared that many of the dancers were advanced in this skill, and exceptionally in tune with their emotions and feelings. This researcher's observation of dance is that much is learned through the guidance and instruction of the dance teachers. Dance instructors often engage in lengthy discussions with their dancers about the pieces they perform, encouraging their students to listen to the music, internalize the emotion of the music, and display this emotion through the choreography and movement. It is also worth noting how important it is for children to have a healthy outlet. The school-age years can be full of vast emotions and drama for many children. Several of the parent-participants reflected on how dance provides a healthy and safe outlet for their children. Additionally, many of the dancers had the ability to self-reflect on how they utilize the activity of dance for self-expression and as a constructive outlet.

Physical Development. The preexisting literature regarding physical development through dance for children identified dance to promote a healthy lifestyle, develop structural/motor skills, and provide physiological benefits. This research study confirmed all three of these findings, and expanded upon this knowledge, as this study also identified dance as an opportunity for kinesthetic movement, a place to reap physiological advancements, and an avenue through which dancers can develop mind-body connection. These three acknowledged benefits align closely with the goals identified for optimal physical development for school-aged children.

Participation in the activity of dance has proven to be a great way for children to be active, and develop the structural skills of flexibility, balance, strength, coordination, stamina, muscle building, among others. The researcher was surprised to learn of two stories, shared by parent-participants, regarding the physiological health benefits their children reaped through dance. One parent discussed how dance has helped her daughter transition into remission from arthritis, while another parent spoke about how dance helped her daughter overcome some of the physical developmental delays she experienced at a young age. There is not currently much research on how dance can positively impact children with unique developmental and medical backgrounds, and the researcher seeks to eventually continue research in this area.

Cognitive Development. Typically developing children ages six through twelve are either in the end of Jean Piaget's Preoperational Stage, the middle of his Concrete Operational Stage, or the beginning of his Formal Operational Stage of Cognitive Development (Thompson, 2009). Much cognitive development and change occurs during the school-age years, as children are diminishing in their egocentric tendencies and beginning to welcome the perspectives of others, beginning to think logically about concrete events, and developing the ability to engage in abstract thinking (Thompson, 2009). These skills are developed through participation in dance, as dancers must work as part of a team – leaving behind egocentrism, practicing the skill of reversibility while learning choreography, and engaging in abstract or hypothetical thinking when participating in self-choreography or improvisation. This research study also identified dance as activity which promotes practical life skills, learning and memorization, creativity, and intrinsic/extrinsic motivation. These four acknowledged benefits align closely with the goals identified for optimal cognitive development for school-aged children.

A surprising finding was that one of the older dancers was able to self-reflect on how she has experienced both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation through dance. She shared how she likes receiving awards for her dances. However, she also shared how she experiences joy, simply from being able to put all of her hard work into action. The development of intrinsic motivation is an important skill for children to foster, and this interview showed how dance has allowed for one of the older school-aged children to do just that.

Life-Skills Development. These interviews revealed a large number of perceived life-skills developed through dance, which was an unexpected finding for the researcher. Within the emotional development realm, several intrapersonal life-skills were identified, including self-confidence, initiative, drive, perseverance, character-development, sense-of-self, and purpose. Within the cognitive development realm, several practical life-skills were also identified, including balance, prioritization, time management, responsibility, and organization. This revealed that, in addition to promoting social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development in school-aged children, participation in dance also fosters several life skills in children, which help to prepare them for their futures, and will aid them in thriving throughout adulthood. Additionally, several parents reflected on how the developmental skills their children are developing through dance are transferrable to other areas of their children's lives and will be valuable for their future endeavors as they grow.

Development Through Challenges. Another unexpected finding through these interviews were the various aspects of dance that dancers identified as their least favorite parts of the activity. Although the child-participants labeled these aspects as negative, or their least favorite parts, these aspects of dance can indeed foster typical healthy development, if in appropriate and supported doses.

There were a handful of “negative” examples provided that promoted time management and prioritization for the children, including, a dancer having “to tell people no for other things” because of her dance schedule, and an older dancer’s remarks about how the “balance of it all can be tricky.” One of the older dancers shared how there are some days before dance where she “just does not want to go.” Although she identified this as her least favorite part of dance, in pushing through this negative thought, and attending dance class, she is developing the skills of perseverance and drive. Another example provided was one of the older dancers opening up about how the activity of dance, along with her dance schedule, sometimes feel “overwhelming.” She went on to elaborate about the high expectations placed upon her, which she explained as “having to do everything to the best of [her] ability, and always having to try [her] best.” Although framed in a negative light by the dancer, a healthy dose of overwhelm can be beneficial, helping her to prepare for future overwhelming and stressful situations. Additionally, her experiencing these healthy, high expectations is valuable practice for future performance expectations in whatever career path she chooses. Other “least favorite” variables provided, pertaining to physical development, included the “hard physical work” and the “soreness of the body” resulting from dance practice. Although framed negatively, this hard physical work and soreness of the body are physiological signs of pushing the body and physical development in healthy ways.

Implication. The purpose of this study was to determine the perspectives of school-aged dancers and their parents on the developmental benefits of participation in weekly dance classes. The goals of this study were to address the gap in literature of the developmental benefits of participation in weekly studio dance classes for school-aged children, and to lay the foundation for future research conducted by this researcher, in examining the holistic benefits of dance for

children with complex developmental and medical backgrounds, in various environments. This research study successfully identified various aspects of social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development that takes place through dance for school-aged children. With this information, more information is now known about the developmental benefits of dance for school-aged children in the dance studio setting, and dance teachers can examine their current studio environment, and find new ways to fold these realms of development into their curriculum. Additionally, with a better understanding of the developmental benefits for typically developing school-aged children, this researcher can now expand upon this research, to reach more children. More specifically, this researcher now seeks to understand the benefits of dance for children with complex developmental and medical backgrounds, in various environments.

Limitations

Various limitations were present in this study. The first limitation worth noting was that the participant sample was non-random, resulting in the data not being generalizable. An additional factor impacting the non-generalizability of this study were the similar backgrounds of the dancers, both in dance experience, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The second limitation present was that with only six student- and five parent-participants, only a small perspective of the developmental benefits of dance was uncovered. The third limitation identified was that the data collected was subjective as it was the self-reported perceptions of the school-aged dancers and their parents. The fourth pertinent limitation was that with many of the dancers having started dance at such a young age, it is difficult to definitively say whether the developmental benefits discussed were obtained as a result of participation in dance, or simply obtained through the typical development and age progression of the dancers throughout time.

Future Direction of Research

Research into the developmental benefits of dance should continue to take place with children of all ages. This particular study examined the perspectives of school-aged dancers and their parents. However, perspectives of children from each of the age groups, and their parents, would provide further insight into the various developmental benefits, as it is plausible the benefits will vary per each developmental age-group. Additionally, other perspectives would provide further understanding and insight, such as the perspectives of the dance teachers. It is assumed these dance teachers have a different understanding of the development taking place in children, as they are direct observers in the dance classroom setting.

There are numerous environments where this research should continue to take place. As noted in the literature review, much of the current research has occurred in the school setting. More research should take place in the dance studio setting to learn about the developmental benefits for typically developing children, in each of the realms. Additionally, as more is known about these developmental benefits, this research can continue to expand into other environments, such as the community center setting, and even the hospital setting, to learn about how dance can benefit children of varying backgrounds, in different locations.

Furthermore, this research should continue with children with complex developmental and medical backgrounds, as the benefits of dance for these populations of children has yet to be discovered.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Parent Consent Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Missouri State University
College of Education

The Perspectives of School-Aged Dancers and Their Parents on the Developmental Benefits of Weekly Dance Classes

Introduction

You have been asked to participate in a research study that is part of the requirement for a Master's degree in Child Life Studies for Maria Jackson. Before you agree to participate in this study, it is important that you read about and understand the study and the procedures it involves. If you have any questions about the study or your role in it, please contact the researchers. You may contact the researchers at:

Maria E. Jackson
(660) 441-1670
shull024@live.missouristate.edu

Dr. Lindsey Murphy, PhD, CCLS
(417) 836-4873
lindseymurphy@missouristate.edu

You will need to sign this form giving the researcher your permission to be involved in this study. Taking part in this study is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part, but later change your mind, you may stop at any time. If you decide to stop, you do not need to give a reason and there will be no negative consequences for ending your participation.

Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the perspectives of school-aged children and their parents on the developmental benefits of participation in weekly dance classes. This research study will address the gap in literature of the various developmental benefits of involvement in weekly dance classes, in the dance studio setting, for school-aged children. This research study will lay the foundation for future research examining the holistic benefits of dance in other community settings, such as pediatric hospitals. You have been asked to participate because you fit the criteria of the parent of a school-aged dancer at Studio X.

Description of Procedures

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a thirty-minute Zoom interview with the researcher, sharing your perspective on the developmental benefits of dance for school-aged children.

What are the risks?

It is not anticipated that there will be any risks.

What are the benefits?

It is not anticipated that you will experience any direct benefits from this study. Nevertheless, your participation in this research will help the researcher identify the developmental benefits of enrollment in weekly dance classes. The data you provide will lay the foundation for future research examining the holistic benefits of dance in other community settings, such as pediatric hospitals.

How will my privacy be protected?

The information you share with the researcher will not be visibly tied to your name in anyway. Additionally, you will not be identified by name in any publications that result from this research. Upon the beginning of this research study, your name will be assigned a letter, and only the researcher will have access to the list of corresponding names with letters. The information you provide will be coded. The information gathered will be accessible only by the researcher. All information from this study will be destroyed three years after the study ends.

Consent to Participate

If you wish to participate in this study, you are required to sign below as an indication of your willingness to participate:

I have read and understand the information in this form. I have been encouraged to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have also been informed that I can withdraw from the study at any time. By signing this form, I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Appendix B. Child Consent Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

**Missouri State University
College of Education**

The Perspectives of School-Aged Dancers and Their Parents on the Developmental Benefits of Weekly Dance Classes

Introduction

You have been asked to take part in Miss Maria's research study. This paper will help you to understand what the research study is all about. If you have any questions about anything on this paper, your mom or dad can contact Miss Maria or Dr. Murphy at the numbers below:

Maria E. Jackson
(660) 441-1670
shull024@live.missouristate.edu

Dr. Lindsey Murphy, PhD, CCLS
(417) 836-4873
lindseymurphy@missouristate.edu

If you decide you want to participate, you will need to sign this paper, giving your permission. Taking part in this study is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part, but later change your mind, you may stop at any time. If you decide to stop, you do not need to give a reason and there will be no negative consequences for stopping.

Purpose of This Study

Miss Maria would like to learn more about the benefits kids your age experience from going to dance each week. Miss Maria is going to learn about these benefits by talking to you, your parents, and your friends from dance class! Miss Maria would like to bring dance into the work she does in the hospital with kids your age. Your conversation with Miss Maria will help her to do that someday.

Description of Procedures

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a thirty-minute Zoom call with Miss Maria. Miss Maria will ask you questions about your experience going to dance class each week.

How will my privacy be protected?

Miss Maria will not use your name in any of the papers she writes from her research. Miss Maria will not share your answers with any of your dance teachers or friends in dance class.

Consent to Participate

If you wish to participate in this study, we will need you to sign your name below:

I have read and understand the information in this form. I have been encouraged to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered. I have also been informed that I can quit this study at any time. By signing this form, I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Appendix C. CITI Training Certification

		Completion Date 26-Jan-2019 Expiration Date 25-Jan-2022 Record ID 30039014
This is to certify that:		
Maria Shull		
Has completed the following CITI Program course:		
Human Research	(Curriculum Group)	 Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative
Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers	(Course Learner Group)	
1 - Basic Course	(Stage)	
Under requirements set by:		
Missouri State University		
Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wb723aa4b-5c1e-48ae-8432-1ab3038e090f-30039014		

Appendix D. IRB Approval



To:
Lindsey Murphy
Childhood Ed & Fam Studies

RE: Notice of IRB Approval
Submission Type: Initial
Study #: IRB-FY2021-360
Study Title: The Perspectives Of School-Aged Dancers And Their Parents On The Developmental Benefits of Participation In Weekly Dance Classes
Decision: Approved

Approval Date: February 12, 2021

This submission has been approved by the Missouri State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented. Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB.

This study was reviewed in accordance with federal regulations governing human subjects research, including those found at 45 CFR 46 (Common Rule), 45 CFR 164 (HIPAA), 21 CFR 50 & 56 (FDA), and 40 CFR 26 (EPA), where applicable.

Researchers Associated with this Project:
PI: Lindsey Murphy
Co-PI:
Primary Contact: Maria Jackson
Other Investigators: Maria Jackson

Appendix E. Parent Interview Questions

Section 1: Demographic Questions

- How old is your child?
- How many years has your child danced total?
- How many years has your child danced at Studio X?
- What styles of dance has your child trained in?
- How many hours a week does your dancer currently dance?
- What classes is your child currently enrolled in?

Section 2: Questions About Dance

- Why did you initially enroll your child in the activity of dance?
- Why did you enroll your child in dance specifically at Studio X?
- What changes have you seen in your child since they started dance class?
- Do you feel your child has reaped any physical benefits from participation in weekly dance classes? Tell me more.
- Do you feel your child has reaped any social benefits from participation in weekly dance classes? Tell me more.
- Do you feel your child has reaped any emotional benefits from participation in weekly dance classes? Tell me more.
- Do you feel there have been any negative outcomes of enrolling your child in the activity of dance?
- What is your child's general demeanor on the way to dance class each week?
- What is your child's general demeanor when coming home from dance class each week?
- How does your child talk about dancing or dance class at home?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share about your child's participation in weekly dance classes that I did not ask about?

Appendix F. Student Interview Questions

Section 1: Demographic Questions

- How old are you?
- How many years have you danced total?
- How many years have you danced at Studio X?
- What are all of the styles of dance that you've ever taken a class in?
- How many hours a week do you currently dance?
- What classes are you taking this year?

Section 2: Questions About Dance

- What is your favorite part about going to dance class each week?
- What is your least favorite part about going to dance class each week?
- What is your favorite type of dance? Why?
- What does your body feel like before dance class?
- What does your body feel like after dance class?
- What does your body feel like while you dance?
- Tell me about the relationships and friendships you have made in your dance classes.
- How does dancing make you feel? Please explain.
- Tell me about the emotions you feel when you dance.
- How would you explain dance class to a friend who has never been?
- What is your favorite part about dancing?
- Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about dance that I did not ask?