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Stories in Motion: Integrating Creative Dance in a Language Arts Classroom

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Abstract

As learning gaps have widened in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increased need for research-based strategies to improve student academic achievement and engagement. This study explored the integration of creative dance as a form of storytelling in a kindergarten language arts classroom. Students were introduced to an element of dance and used it to create short dance phrases in a unit on retelling. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected using pre/post tests and student interviews measuring students' engagement and enjoyment. Students involved in this study showed significant growth in their ability to orally retell a story ($p < .05$) and analysis of student interviews suggested that students were highly engaged in the unit.

Key Terms: Arts integration, creative dance, dance integration

Stories in Motion: Integrating Creative Dance in a Language Arts Classroom

While its integration in the public school classroom is relatively new, dance has long been an outlet for personal and artistic expression. Lyall Watson (1991) best illustrates this by sharing that:

Dancing is surely the most basic and relevant of all forms of expression. Nothing else can so effectively give outward form to an inner experience. Poetry and music exist in time. Painting and architecture are a part of space. But only the dance lives at once in both space and time. In it the creator and the thing created, the artist and the expression, are one. Each participates completely in the other. (pg. 205)

Creating and performing dance provides a deep understanding and representation of expression. Integrating creative dance in the classroom can help deepen students' understanding through new forms of content representation.

Statement of the Problem

Student engagement has been continuously researched, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning. As reading and writing scores have nationally fallen over the past several years, teachers, administrators, and school staff have been scrambling to make improvements in student engagement and academic achievement (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2022). In parallel, more research informing best practices in student engagement and reading instruction has been made available; more specifically, a large body of research has emerged on the benefits and approaches of arts integration in the elementary school classroom. These studies suggest that integrating visual arts, theater, music, literature, and dance in daily lessons can boost student engagement and deepen understanding in all content areas (Hardiman et al., 2019). However, relatively little research has focused exclusively on the

integration of dance in the elementary school classroom and the role dance integration plays in language arts, thus leaving several gaps in current research.

Research Purpose

In response to the current needs of students across the nation and gaps in available research, this study sought to investigate the role dance integration plays in student engagement and understanding of content. This study identifies best practices for dance integration in elementary school classrooms and provides a foundation for understanding its impact on student academic success and engagement.

Type of Study and Research Questions

This was a mixed methods study where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from students in a kindergarten classroom. Pre-assessments were collected and students were assessed on content knowledge following a week-long unit integrating dance. Student reflections on enjoyment, engagement, and attitudes toward the content area were also collected at the beginning and end of the unit. This study sought to investigate how the utilization of creative dance as a form of storytelling impacts students' understanding of and engagement in language arts content, specifically retelling, in a kindergarten classroom.

Definition of Terms

This study is centered around arts integration, creative dance, student engagement, and academic achievement. These terms will be referenced throughout the study.

- Arts Integration: the utilization of the arts, including music, dance, visual arts, theater, and literature, as a pedagogical tool in non-arts subjects (Hardiman et al., 2019)
- Creative Dance: the improvisational manipulation of movement to express one's feelings and ideas (Jusslin, 2019; Wulandari et al., 2020)

- Student Engagement: the active involvement of students in various activities and tasks designed for learning (Lei et al., 2018)
- Academic Achievement: progress students make in core content areas including math, reading, science, and social studies (Lei et al., 2018)

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Several education and arts-based theories influenced the creation of this study. First, this research is heavily founded in the experiential learning theory. This theory was developed by David Kolb and requires that students work through a four part cycle including concrete experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Payne & Costas, 2020). Students build knowledge about a given content area through experiential growth in this cycle. The use of creative dance in the classroom allows students to engage in concrete, physical experiences and work toward experimentation. Previous research has identified creative dance as a medium by which experiential learning can take place in the classroom (Payne & Costas, 2020).

Additionally, the theory of constructivism heavily impacted the creation of this study. Constructivism requires that students engage actively in cognitive processes, integrate prior knowledge, and work cooperatively with others to solve problems (Chen, 2001). Previous research has established that the integration of creative dance fits into a constructivist teaching philosophy (Valls et al., 2019). The use of creative dance in language arts follows this model by encouraging critical analysis of dance and literature, using background knowledge, and working in teams and as a class to create phrases that express literary components.

This research is also built on the new materialism theory. This theory argues that knowing and understanding come from direct engagement with the world (Jusslin & Höglund, 2020). It shifts a focus from interaction to intra-action in which the subjects being integrated are

not necessarily autonomous but naturally enmeshed in one another (Jusslin & Höglund, 2020). Prior research using the new materialism theory argues that literature and dance are not two autonomous subjects but enmeshed in one another; dance can be read from the body as words can be read from a page (Jusslin, 2019). In this study, students engaged in transmediation, shifting meaning in literature to a more physical representation through creative dance.

Literature Review

Integration of the arts (including visual arts, literature, dance/creative movement, music, and theater) in academic settings has become increasingly popular. At the same time, a large body of research surrounding the efficacy of arts integrative pedagogies has continued to grow. However, relatively little research has focused on the specific integration of creative dance in the classroom. Despite this, the existing literature has identified several benefits of integrating creative dance in elementary school classrooms. Upon reviewing the available research, several important themes have emerged including, most notably, the positive relationship between creative dance and student academic achievement. Additional themes include using creative dance as a form of experiential learning and the utilization of creative dance as a meaning making tool in the classroom.

Creative Dance and Academic Achievement

Multiple studies support the idea that students do better academically when dance is integrated in the curriculum. These findings are timely considering the stark drop in student test scores as schools begin to reopen and return to normalcy in a post-COVID world (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2022). Recent research has identified dance integration as academically beneficial in most content areas (Temple et al., 2020; Graham et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2016; Sharma et al., 2021).

A majority of dance integration research has focused on integration within mathematics curriculum. One recent study completed a case study model of two preschool classrooms that integrated dance and movement in mathematics content (Temple et al., 2020). Teachers were provided with formal arts integration training and implemented dance integration into units teaching spatial awareness (including understanding of position words) and geometry (to include attributes of shapes). Researchers completed interviews with the teachers, and found that students demonstrated an increase in knowledge of spatial awareness and early geometry concepts (Temple et al., 2020). Students also made more real life connections to math concepts outside of the classroom (Temple et al., 2020). A similar study identified dance integration in second grade mathematics curriculum as beneficial in terms of mathematical information retention and concept consolidation (Leandro et al., 2018).

Existing research has also identified the integration of creative dance in science content to be academically advantageous for students. One study investigated the integration of creative movement in physical science, earth science, and life science in several elementary schools in California (Graham et al., 2017). Students were challenged with performing abstract concepts in more concrete ways using dance. After the dance integration lessons concluded, all students, including those in control groups who did not participate in the dance integration (these students were provided with the same dance integration lessons after the study concluded), completed a science benchmark in physical, earth, and life science (Graham et al., 2017). Students that were involved in the dance integrative units performed significantly better on the benchmarks than students in the control groups. Teacher focus groups were also completed, and teachers reported that students were highly engaged and built deeper understandings of the science content (Graham et al., 2017).

A similar study analyzed the integration of dance into transportation education (a mix of science and social studies content that focuses on global issues such as pollution, etc.) in fifth grade classrooms (LaMotte, 2018). This study utilized a control group and an experimental group. Each completed a pretest and posttest on the transportation unit which focused on modes of transportation, engineering, global warming/climate change, ecosystem change, water pollution, and sea level rise. Students in the experimental group (who received dance integration instruction) performed significantly better than students in the control group (LaMotte, 2018).

Less research has analyzed the role of dance integration in social studies curriculum. One study integrated creative dance in a sixth-grade social studies unit on ancient Egypt (Smith et al., 2016). The control group received only typical instruction (including lectures and Cornell-style notes) while the experimental group received creative dance lessons in addition to typical instruction. Both groups of students completed post-tests following the completion of the unit, and the experimental group (who received creative dance lessons) performed significantly better than the control group (Smith et al., 2016). Students were actively engaged in learning activities and demonstrated a deeper understanding of the social studies content.

Furthermore, there is limited research that has explored the integration of creative dance in language arts classrooms. One recent study integrated creative dance using a six-week program focusing on vocabulary and comprehension in four New Zealand primary schools (Sharma et al., 2021). Students completed a post-test, submitted journal reflections, and participated in focus group interviews after the program concluded. Although students reported a deeper understanding of vocabulary, there was not a significant difference between the experimental group (who received the dance integration) and the control group (who received no

dance integration) in their post-test scores (Sharma et al., 2021). It is clear that more research is needed to identify the role dance integration plays in language arts classrooms.

Although more research is needed to determine the efficacy of dance integration in all content areas, existing research overwhelmingly supports the notion that dance integration is associated with higher academic achievement. Each of the studies that found academic growth following dance integration remarked on the active engagement of students in the learning process and the deepening of their understanding of content. These comments are directly tied to the remaining two themes of the literature: creative dance as experiential learning and creative dance as a meaning making tool. It is possible that these two elements are the reason dance integration equates to academic achievement.

Creative Dance as Experiential Learning

The notion of experiential learning is derived from the experiential learning theory which requires that students work through a four part cycle including concrete experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Payne & Costas, 2020). Several elements of the constructivist approach to education, including authenticity, experimentation, and play, overlap with this theory as well. It is important to note that, for the purpose of this study, experiential learning does not necessarily refer to the theory of experiential learning, but rather learning by doing which includes engaging in authentic problems, reflecting, building concrete and abstract representations, and experimenting through active play. Existing literature has identified experiential learning as incredibly impactful in student academic success (Cheng et al., 2019).

Recent research has identified several facets of creative dance integration that are aligned with experiential learning. One study interviewed teachers at a constructivist elementary school

that integrated creative dance in science curriculum (Valls et al., 2019). These teachers integrated creative dance using Laban's movement analysis, a framework that categorizes types of movement into body, energy, shape, or space, over a five-year period. Researchers analyzed the teachers' interviews and found elements of constructivism including autonomy, interest, co-operation, play, and experimentation (Valls et al., 2019). Several of their findings align with experiential learning. Teachers reported that students were able to communicate knowledge and reflect on their own understandings through the process of creating dances (Valls et al., 2019). Students were able to experiment with movement and explore how to represent a variety of science concepts accurately through creative dance. Teachers reported that this experimentation deepened their understanding of the science content (Valls et al., 2019). In this study, students were able to engage in learning by doing (through creating dances), reflect on what they had learned, build concrete and abstract representations of their content, and experiment with movement. All of these elements are directly connected to experiential learning.

Another study integrated creative dance into the mathematics curriculum (including themes surrounding numbers and operations as well as quantities and measures) for 2nd grade students (Leandro et al., 2018). These researchers integrated several elements of dance including body, space, energy, and relationship into students' math lessons. Students in the experimental group (who participated in creative dance activities) performed significantly better on the posttest than students in the control group, who did not participate in the creative dance lessons (Leandro et al., 2018). Most interestingly, the researchers discuss the advantage the experimental group had in the opportunity to explore abstract mathematical concepts in concrete ways using movement. The utilization of active exploration and the representation of concepts in both abstract and concrete ways aligns directly with elements of experiential learning. Students were

clearly engaged in experiential learning opportunities during this study, and they benefited because of it.

Dance as a Meaning Making Tool

Existing research has identified the integration of creative dance to be a tool in the meaning making process. Students can utilize creative dance to not only reflect on understanding but construct authentic knowledge on a topic. This meaning-making can take many different forms.

One study specifically analyzed the role creative dance plays in remaking meaning in elementary literature classrooms (Jusslin, 2019). This study sought to view literature and dance as interrelated content areas. The researchers argued that students should be able to engage in transmediation and communicate understandings of literature through a bodily performance (Jusslin, 2019). In this study, students analyzed a poem for emotions and worked to create a creative dance representing the poem with a guest dance teacher. The lessons were recorded and students participated in a semi-structured interview. In their analysis of the semi-structured interviews, it was clear that students were forced to challenge and elaborate their literary understandings (Jusslin, 2019). The researchers argue that students' understanding of the literature was not merely reflected in dance, but made and remade into new bodily performances. Because students used dance as a meaning making tool, their understanding of the literature content deepened (Jusslin, 2019).

Another study analyzed the integration of dance in geoscience content for elementary schoolers (Matias et al., 2020). Researchers taught storytelling and narrative elements of dance to engage students in the science content. Students were then able to use storytelling dance

elements to make meaning of what they had learned and communicate their own understandings of the science content (Matias et al., 2020).

Additionally, a third study integrated creative dance in fifth graders' poetry reading and writing (Jusslin & Höglund, 2021). These researchers used a methodology that intentionally blurred the boundaries between students' reading, writing, and dancing. The researchers concluded that students were able to engage in meaning-making processes when the poetry and dance became entangled (Jusslin & Höglund, 2021). This study provided recommendations for utilizing dance as a meaning making tool to deepen students' reading and writing processes. They identified literary text selection, creativity and authorship, timeframes, music and rhythm instruments, discussion and feedback, and props as critical elements for effective meaning making (Jusslin & Höglund, 2021). These studies support the notion that engaging in active meaning making deepens students' understanding of different content areas.

This Study

The existing research highlights the academic benefits of dance integration for students, necessity for experiential learning opportunities within dance integration, and benefits of using dance integration as a meaning making tool. Less research has quantitatively analyzed the impact of dance integration in language arts classrooms, and there is a need for researchers to study all three components of dance integration (including dance and academic achievement, dance as experiential learning, and dance as a meaning making tool). This study sought to identify how the utilization of creative dance as a meaning-making tool impacts academic success and student engagement in experiential learning in an elementary language arts class.

Methodology

This study details a mixed methods action research project that investigated this research question: How does the utilization of creative dance as a form of storytelling impact students' understanding and engagement in language arts content in a kindergarten classroom? Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to measure students' growth and engagement in the language arts and creative dance content.

Participants

This study took place in a diverse suburban district in the Southeast United States. Within the district, 47.8% of students are White, 21.8% are Hispanic, 18.8% are Black, 8.1% identify with multiple races, and 3% are Asian. Additionally, 42.8% of students in the district are considered to be economically disadvantaged, 14.6% are students with disabilities, and 9% are English Language Learners. Specifically, this study took place in a diverse Title I elementary school within the district. This school has a high English Language Learner population (23.2%), and a majority of students are considered economically disadvantaged (62%). This study took place in a kindergarten classroom. Eight students participated in the study (7 female, 1 male). In this group, three were Hispanic (37.5%), two were Black (25%), two were White (25%), and one identified as two or more races (12.5%). Additionally, two students were English Language Learners (25%). This class was selected using convenience sampling because it doubled as a student teaching placement (Patton, 2002). All students who received parental consent to participate in this study were included (Appendix A).

Data Instruments

A variety of instruments were used to collect data on student progress. Rubrics were designed to collect data on students' understanding and application of the body element of dance but were ultimately not used because of a dependence on teacher-guided instruction for dance

(Appendix B). Additionally, transcripts of pre-tests and post-tests conducted in an interview format measuring student understanding of language arts content, specifically retelling, were collected (Appendix C). These assessments were in interview format to allow for students to orally retell the story. Students also utilized graphic organizers which were used in pre and post assessment retelling interviews (Appendix D). Finally, students completed entrance and exit interviews measuring background and interest in dance as well as perceived engagement and enjoyment of both language arts and dance content in the unit (Appendix E).

Procedures and Data Collection

This study integrated creative dance into language arts through a week-long unit on retelling. First, students were introduced to the idea that dance can be used as a form of storytelling. Students learned about the body element of dance which emphasizes the use of the body to create shapes and creating a variety of shapes using the whole body. At the same time, students were introduced to the concept of retelling and practiced retelling the beginning, middle, and end of various stories using a graphic organizer. Students were scaffolded in creating dance phrases using the body element of dance to retell a story. Intentional support was given to help students move from more concrete, imitative forms of movement to abstract, inventive representations of the events, characters, and setting found in the literature. Students were encouraged to explore different ways to represent the same feeling, event, or character in a story.

A variety of data was collected to track student progress. First, students completed a pre-assessment. The class listened to a read-aloud and students used a graphic organizer to draw the beginning, middle and end of a story. Then, in a short interview, students orally retold the story using their graphic organizer to support them. Additionally, students answered questions assessing their background and interest in dance and reading during the short interview.

Throughout the unit, various formative assessments including anecdotal observations of dances and graphic organizers were used to inform subsequent lessons. These formative assessments ensured that students were progressing in their understanding of the dance element and could effectively apply the element when retelling a story. A rubric was designed to score students on the phrases they created to collect data on students' application of the body element of dance and representation of the beginning, middle, and end in the retelling; however, it ultimately was not used because students needed more teacher-guided instruction in applying dance elements. At the end of the unit, students completed a post-assessment via a short interview measuring students' ability to retell a story using beginning, middle, and end. Students also answered questions measuring their perceived engagement and enjoyment of dance and literature in the classroom during their interview. Table 1 contains a timeline of procedures and assessments for this unit.

Data Analysis

Because a variety of data was collected, multiple types of data analysis were completed. First, student interview transcripts that measured their attitudes about dance and literature were analyzed using initial and axial coding to identify themes across student responses (Saldana, 2009). Pre-test and post-test data was analyzed using a paired samples *t*-test to identify if there are significant differences. Descriptive statistics were also calculated using IBM SPSS Statistics.

Timeline

IRB approval and consent/assent were obtained prior to the beginning of this research. Table 1 includes a schedule for this research project including procedures, assessments, and data analysis.

Table 1

Schedule of Procedures, Assessments, and Data Analysis

Date/Deadline	Goal/Action
Early January 2023	IRB approval obtained
Late January 2023	Consent from participants obtained
Mid-February 2023	Administered student interviews including a pre-assessment on retelling and survey questions measuring students' backgrounds and enjoyment of dance and reading
Late February 2023	Unit implementation began <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students were introduced to the body element of dance. Students practiced making shapes with their bodies 2. Students received direct instruction on retelling and were scaffolded in creating a phrase using the body element of dance to represent the beginning, middle, and end of the story. 3. Students practiced retelling stories using a graphic organizer and created short phrases retelling the story.
Early March 2023	Student interviews were administered including a post-assessment on retelling and exit survey questions measuring students' perceived engagement and enjoyment of dance and reading
March-April 2023	Data was analyzed

Results

This mixed methods study sought to investigate how the utilization of creative dance as a form of storytelling impacts students' understanding of and engagement in language arts content, specifically retelling, in a kindergarten classroom. Students were introduced to an element of dance and used it to create short dance phrases in a language arts unit on retelling. Students were given a pre/post assessment on retelling and were interviewed before and after the dance integration unit to gauge students' attitudes about dance and reading. Results have been broken down by pre/post assessment on retelling and student interviews.

Pre/Post Assessment on Retelling

Prior to the unit on retelling, students used pencils and crayons to illustrate the beginning, middle, and end of a story read aloud to them. They then were able to use that graphic organizer to help them answer several questions prompting them to orally retell the story including the beginning, middle, end, characters, and setting (Appendix D). Students were given the same exact assessment at the end of the retelling unit. Students were scored on each item and given an overall score of 1 (does not meet standards), 2 (approaching standards), or 3 (meets standards). Table 2 includes students' pre and post assessment scores.

Table 2

Student Pre and Post Assessment Scores

Student	Pre-assessment Score	Post-assessment Score
1	1	2
2	1	1
3	2	2
4	1	2
5	2	2
6	2	3
7	3	3

8	2	3
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Table 2 includes students' scores on the identical pre and post assessments. Students 2, 3, 5, and 7 did not make significant growth.

A paired samples *t*-test was used to analyze pre-assessment ($M = 1.75, SD = 0.71$) and post-assessment data ($M = 2.25, SD = 0.71$). The results demonstrated that students' performed significantly better after the dance integrated unit on retelling $t(7) = -2.65, p = .03$.

Student Interviews

Each student that participated in this research study met briefly with the teacher before and after the dance integrated unit on retelling to answer questions related to dance and reading. Before the unit, students answered questions about their background in dance and attitudes surrounding dance and reading. After the unit, students answered questions about their enjoyment of dance and reading activities in the unit. Analysis of these interviews suggested two major themes: enjoyment of dance and enjoyment of reading. Table 3 includes data demonstrating students' backgrounds in reading and dance prior to the dance integrated unit on retelling. Table 4 contains quotes from pre and post interviews that support these themes.

Table 3

Student Background in Dance and Reading

Pre-Unit Interview Analysis	
Dance Classes	Five students reported having taken a dance class. One student "took a dance class in flossing," one took an "Encanto class with tap and ballet," and one took "ballet and performed as snow."
Dance at School	Five students reported dancing at school during gym, music class, and

“Pop See Ko” in the classroom.

Dance at Home	Three students reported dancing at home including one student who likes “dancing with [his] brother” and one student who reported enjoying “LOL dance parties” at home.
Reading at Home	Two students reported reading at home including one student who “reads lots of books with [her] siblings” and one who “practices reading at home because it is fun.”

Table 4

Student Interview Analysis: Enjoyment of Dance and Reading

	Pre-Unit Interview	Post-Unit Interview
Enjoyment of Dance	Eight students reported liking dance: two students shared that it was “fun” and one enjoyed “holding onto the barre”	Seven students reported liking dance, students specifically enjoyed: “all the different moves,” “dancing on a stage,” and “that the audience clapped.” One student reported not liking dance because she anticipated a “[dance] party.”
Enjoyment of Reading	Eight students reported liking reading because: “reading makes me smart,” “each time I do it I get	Six students reported liking reading activities because: “stories had animals” and “I liked how [the

better,” and “some words I can spell.”

teacher] read the stories.” One student reported not liking the reading activities because the “stories looked funny.”

Discussion

The findings of this study align closely with the trends suggested by previous research. These findings also support the three themes identified in the literature review: the positive relationship between creative dance and academic achievement, creative dance as a form of experiential learning, and dance as a meaning making tool.

Creative Dance and Academic Achievement

Although less research has analyzed the impact of dance integration on academic achievement in language arts content specifically, prior research has established that the integration of creative dance can significantly improve academic performance (Lamotte, 2018; Smith et al., 2016). In the present study, students completed both a pre and post assessment measuring their ability to orally retell a story including the beginning, middle, end, setting, and characters. Not only did qualitative data suggest an increased depth in understanding, but the results of a paired samples *t*-test suggest that students significantly improved in their ability to orally retell a story. This suggests that the integration of creative dance in the unit on retelling may be related to improved academic performance. Similarly to the research highlighted in the literature review, students also engaged in creative dance as a form of experiential learning and meaning making which may explain the improvement in academic performance.

Creative Dance as Experiential Learning

Students in this study participated in activities to investigate the body element of dance to include making shapes with parts of the body and the whole body. Students applied these understandings in their creation of dance phrases to represent the beginning, middle, and end of a story. Prior research has established that engagement in experiential learning can deepen understanding and improve academic performance (Cheng et al., 2019). Qualitative data suggested that students highly enjoyed participating in dance activities. Students were actively engaged in authentic experimentation, building both concrete and abstract representation, and reflecting on the process of retelling a story all of which are facets of experiential learning.

Dance as a Meaning Making Tool

Available research has suggested that engaging in meaning making experiences deepens student understanding of content and improves communication of understanding (Matias et al., 2020). In the present study, students used creative dance as a form of meaning making to represent the beginning, middle, and end of a story read aloud to them. Similarly to research conducted by Jusslin (2019), students were tasked with remaking meaning in a novel form and representing abstract understandings in a more concrete way. The statistically significant improvement in students' post test scores suggests that their ability to understand and communicate the beginning, middle and end of the story deepened after using in creative dance as a meaning making tool.

Implications

The results of this study suggest that the utilization of creative dance can significantly improve academic performance through its role as a form of experiential learning and a tool for meaning making, specifically in language arts content in early childhood education. Student interviews also suggest that students enjoyed engaging in the creative dance activities and held a

positive perspective of both dance and reading throughout the unit. Educators can use a similar model for a unit in retelling as well as use this research as a foundation for integrating creative dance as a form of experiential learning and meaning making in the classroom.

This study also supports previous research on the positive impacts of dance integration. The findings of this study help fill existing gaps in current literature including the impact of dance integration on academic achievement in language arts and the impact of dance integration in early elementary education. These findings support the use of dance in the elementary classroom.

Limitations

There are several limitations to consider when interpreting the results of this study. First, this study utilized a small sample that was not representative of all students. While the sample did include students from multiple racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, it lacked adequate representation by gender and did not include any students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Additionally, this study did not utilize a control group meaning that the results can only be interpreted as correlational. It is possible that the graphic organizers students used were more impactful than the creative dance integration on improving retelling. Furthermore, dance standards were not assessed in this study which means that students' potential growth in applying the body element of dance was unable to be analyzed. A rubric was initially made to assess students' application of the body element of dance in both the first and final dance phrases created during the unit. However, it was not able to be used with this particular group of kindergarteners because they were dependent on teacher-guided dance creation due to having little experience with creative dance prior to this unit. Finally, the interviews conducted with students were difficult to code. Some of the students struggled with oral communication and

relied on gestures and nodding rather than orally elaborating on their experiences in this unit. Because of this, it is possible that some students did not accurately report their engagement, enjoyment, or background in reading and dance.

Future Research

The findings of this study suggest several directions for future research. First, future research should focus on a larger sample size that is more representative of the entire population. Researchers should work to include students of different genders, students that receive support through IEPs and 504 plans, and students with diverse racial backgrounds.

Additionally, future researchers could continue considering developmentally appropriate tools for assessing dance element application. This study developed a rubric to assess students' application of the body element of dance. The results of this study suggest that it may be beneficial to utilize a paraprofessional to help with assessing students while activities are still more teacher-guided to allow for students to move from teacher-guided to student-guided application. Future studies could utilize this rubric in a similar context to better assess growth in dance.

Furthermore, future research could focus on identifying the impact of creative dance integration in social studies units, an area that also lacked sufficient research. Researchers could consider implementing a causal study to better establish that the integration of creative dance is improving academic scores.

Conclusion

This study sought to better understand the role creative dance integration plays in improving students' academic performance and engagement in language arts. Students that participated in this study completed a week-long unit on the body element of dance while

completing a language arts unit on retelling at the same time. Students were guided in listening to a story, utilizing a graphic organizer to visually retell the story, creating a dance to physically retell the story, and finally orally retell the story. Students in this study showed statistically significant improvement in their ability to retell a story, and their interviews suggested that they carried a positive relationship with dance and reading throughout the unit. Making time and space for the arts in the public school is essential for students' growth. Creating and performing dance in this study allowed students to deepen their understanding of retelling and represent their understandings of stories in new ways.

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Appendix A: Parental Consent Form

PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Brief Description of Research Study

The purpose of this research is to explore how the use of creative dance affects student engagement and academic achievement in language arts. During this study, students will receive instruction on retelling and the elements of dance. Students will complete typical retelling activities such as beginning, middle, end graphic organizers as well as creating dances in response to literary prompts. Students will answer a few questions about their attitudes and thoughts about dance, and I will fill out rubrics grading student dances. There are minimal risks to students in this study, but students could benefit from increased engagement and deepened understanding of retelling. **Please read the rest of this form before deciding if you will allow your child to be in this research study.**

My name is Amira Akam and I am a student at the University of Mary Washington and the teacher in your child's Kindergarten classroom. Because you are the parent or legally authorized representative of a child in this classroom, I am seeking your permission to let your child participate in this research study. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may decide whether to let your child participate or not. I will also ask your child if he or she wants to be in the study, and I will only use the information in my study if both you and your child agree. Before making your decision, please read the information below and ask me any questions that you have about the research; I will be happy to explain anything in greater detail.

Details of the Child's Involvement

Students in your child's class will engage in a week-long language arts unit on retelling. Before the unit begins, students will complete a graphic organizer after reading a story to measure students' understanding of retelling. Students will meet briefly with the teacher to orally retell the story using their graphic organizer. During this meeting, students will also answer some questions asking about their background with dance and their attitudes about dance and language arts (reading).

In this unit, students will be read several different passages/stories and use graphic

organizers to draw the beginning, middle, and end of the story. In parallel, students will receive instruction on an element of dance. This includes using different parts of the body to create different shapes. Students will use this instruction to create short dances or “phrases.”

After reading a story, students will draw and orally explain the beginning, middle, and end using a graphic organizer and work together in groups to create dance phrases that represent the beginning, middle, and end. Students will present the phrases to the class and will engage in an analytical discussion about the shapes they noticed in the phrase and how these shapes helped communicate the beginning, middle, and end of the story. I will use a rubric to assess students’ dance phrases including their use of the body to make shapes as well as their illustration of the beginning, middle, and end of a story.

At the end of the unit, students will complete a post-assessment using the same graphic organizer to measure students’ understanding of retelling. Students will also meet with me briefly to orally retell the story and respond to a few questions asking if they enjoyed the dance activities and reading instruction.

All students in the class will receive the instruction they are entitled to, whether or not they are participants in this study. Even if your child does not take part in my study, he or she will still be able to do the dance activities if they choose and are able, but I will not use any data about them in my study.

Privacy and Confidentiality

This study will take place while children are in their classroom, so they will not have privacy during the dance activities or while being observed. However, to ensure confidentiality I will not reveal any private information about your child to anyone, unless required by law to do so. My rubrics and assessments will be in my possession at all times, and only I will know which assessments go with which child. When my study is complete, I will destroy all of the information I collected that identifies individual students. In any reports I make about this study, I will not use your child’s name or any other information that could be used to identify him or her directly or indirectly.

Risks and Benefits of Participation

The dance activities that children in this study will do have very minimal risks. Students

will be given clear expectations before engaging in dance activities, and the physical classroom environment will be set up to ensure students have adequate space to move. If any children complain of pain during our dance activities, I will ensure they are seen by the school nurse, following the normal school procedure.

There are no rewards or extra credit grades for students who take part in this study, and no penalties of any kind if they do not take part. However, being in this research study might have important educational benefits for your child. Research has demonstrated that the use of dance in the classroom can deepen students' understanding of content and improve information retention. If the results of this study show a positive impact on children's academic achievement and classroom participation, it could improve education for more children in the future.

Participant Rights

You have the right to *ask any questions you have* before, during or after the study, and I encourage you to do so. If you do not want your child to be in this study, there will be no penalties or loss of benefits that he or she is entitled to. If you agree to let your child be in this study and later change your mind, you have the right to take him or her out simply by contacting me at the email address below, and I will destroy any research data collected about your child. This research has been approved by the University of Mary Washington Institutional Review Board, a committee responsible for ensuring that the safety and rights of research participants are protected. For information about your and your child's rights regarding this research, contact the IRB chair, Dr. Rosalyn Cooperman (rcooperm@umw.edu).

Contact Information

For more information about this research before, during or after your child's participation, please contact me (aakam@mail.umw.edu) or my university supervisor, Dr. Wells (mwells@umw.edu). To report any unanticipated problems relating to the research that your child experiences during or following participation, contact my university supervisor, Dr. Wells (mwells@umw.edu). **Please keep a copy of this form for future reference, and return the signed version to me by February 10th, 2023.**

*Before signing this form, please ask me any questions you have
about participation in this study.*

To be Completed by Participant

I have read all of the information on this form, and all of my questions and concerns about the research described above have been addressed. I choose, voluntarily, to permit my child to take part in this research study. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

Print name of child

Print name of parent or legally authorized representative

Signature of parent or legally authorized representative

Date

To be completed by Researcher

I confirm that the legally authorized representative of the child named above has been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked have been answered to the best of my knowledge and ability. A copy of this Consent Form has been provided to the child's legally authorized representative, and I will keep the original at least until the research is completed.

Print name of researcher

Signature of researcher

Date

Appendix B: Dance Phrase Rubric

Dance Rubric

Name _____ Date _____ Phrase: First phrase Final
phrase

	1- Does Not Meet Standards	2- Approaching Standards	3- Meets Standards
Dance K.1 The student will explore how movement communicates meaning.	The student does not participate in creating dance phrases or explore how movement communicates meaning.	The student sometimes participates in creating dance phrases and sometimes explores how movement communicates meaning	The student almost always participates in creating dance phrases and almost always explores how movement communicates meaning.
Dance K.12 The student will recognize and apply skills and concepts of body in dance activities and performance, including: a) Parts of the body.	The student does not use different parts of the body in the dance phrase.	The student uses one specific part of the body in the dance phrase.	The student clearly uses 2+ different parts of the body in the dance phrase.

<p>Dance K.12 The student will recognize and apply skills and concepts of body in dance activities and performance, including:</p> <p>b) Using body positions to create shapes.</p>	<p>The student does not create any shapes in the dance phrase.</p>	<p>The student creates 1 shape in the dance phrase.</p>	<p>The student creates 2+ different shapes in the dance phrase.</p>
<p>ELA K.8 The student will demonstrate comprehension of fictional texts.</p> <p>e) Use story elements of characters, settings, and events to retell stories sequentially using beginning, middle, and end.</p>	<p>The student does not demonstrate the beginning, middle, or end including characters/setting as appropriate in the dance phrase.</p>	<p>The student demonstrates a clear beginning, middle, end, OR characters/setting but not all 4 elements.</p>	<p>The student demonstrates a clear beginning, middle, and end including characters/setting as appropriate in the dance phrase.</p>

Comments:

Appendix C: Oral Retelling Rubric

Retelling rubric

Name _____ Date _____

SOL: K.8 The student will demonstrate comprehension of fictional texts.

e) Use story elements of characters, settings, and events to retell stories sequentially using beginning, middle, and end.

	1- Does Not Meet Standards	2- Approaching Standards	3- Meets Standards
Beginning	The student does not retell the beginning of the story.	The student attempts to retell the beginning of the story but is missing details or is incorrect.	The student correctly retells the beginning of the story with appropriate details.
Middle	The student does not retell the middle of the story.	The student attempts to retell the middle of the story but is missing details or is incorrect.	The student correctly retells the middle of the story with appropriate details.
End	The student does not retell the end of the story.	The student attempts to retell the end of the story but is missing	The student correctly retells the end of the story with appropriate


		details or is incorrect.	details.
Characters/Settings	The student does not include any characters or settings in the retelling.	The student includes some but not all important characters/settings in the retelling.	The student includes all important characters and settings in the retelling.

Comments:

These standards come from the Virginia Standards of Learning (Virginia Department of Education).

Appendix D: Graphic Organizer

Graphic Organizer

Beginning 	Middle 	End 

Appendix E: Student Interview Questions

Student Interview Questions

Retelling Questions

Tell me what happened in the story.

- What happened in the beginning of the story?
- What happened in the middle of the story?
- What happened at the end of the story?
- Who were the characters in the story?
- What was the setting? Where did the story take place?

Intake Student Interview Questions (to be asked during pre-assessment conversation)

Have you ever taken a dance class before?

- What kind of dance class?
- Did you like it? Why or why not?

Have you ever danced at home or at school before?

- What kind of dance?
- Did you like it? Why or why not?

What do you think about reading? Do you like it or not like it?

- Why?

Exit Student Interview Questions (to be asked during post-assessment conversation)

What did you think about the dancing we did this week? Did you like it or dislike it?

- Why?
- What did you like or dislike?

What did you think about the reading we did this week? Did you like it or dislike it?

- Why?
- What did you like or dislike?