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THE EFFECTS OF DANCE ON PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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A Senior Honors Project in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

Of the Honors Degree Program

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The Effects of Dance on People with Disabilities

Abstract

Dance can be used as therapy and fun for those in the disability community. A quarter of adult Americans live with some form of disability, but there are not many dance programs that include them. This paper looks at an inclusive dance studio in Orlando, FL that serves children and adults and analyzes the benefits gained from participating in an inclusive dance program. To study this, parents of students and paraprofessionals who work with Chance 2 Dance, whether Chance 2 Dance comes to their organization or they recommended students to the studio, were interviewed. These interviews were analyzed thematically. A major benefit to students, parents, and paraprofessionals gained was the development of community and relationships with others who participate in Chance 2 Dance programming. Other benefits include improvements to physical aspects, socializing, self-expression, and enjoyment.

Introduction

In 2019 it was reported that 1 in 4 adults in the United States live with some form of disability. Previous research has investigated the impact of dance on people with disabilities, with an emphasis on children and their development. There has been relatively little research, however, on programs that also accommodate adults and adolescents. Chance 2 Dance is an inclusive dance studio that provides lessons and support for both children and adults. This study interviewed parents of students in the group and performance classes and paraprofessionals who work with Chance 2 Dance. A thematic analysis was done on the interview data. From this analysis, it was shown that various benefits were gained from inclusive dance. Besides being

beneficial to the participants, the process remained enjoyable for students of all ages. The rest of this thesis makes the following contributions:

- An exploration on relationships formed through inclusive dance
- A look at the benefits of dance for all ages, such as:
 - Physical improvements
 - Development of self-confidence
 - Increased capacity for self-expression

In the following literature review, I provide a summary of benefits found and how inclusive dance was implemented in other studies. This provides a context in which this study exists so see the benefits of following Chance 2 Dance's model on inclusive dance.

Literature Review

General Overview of Dance and Programs for Students with Disabilities

According to the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA), Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) is “the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive, and physical integration of the individual, for the purpose of improving health and well-being.” DMT has been used as an alternative to talk therapy for many years (Goodgame 2007). A 2007 panel hosted by the ADTA (Capello 2008), brought together DMT professionals from around the world to discuss its benefits for children. These benefits include improving the development of children and treating children who are victims of violence, war, and torture. This type of therapy can be applied to many different populations, but this paper will focus on its use for the population with disabilities.

Along with the DMT aspects of dance, the nature of dance as a creative art is quite flexible, which allows for adapting the programs to meet the students where they are. (Mason,

Steadly, Thormann 2008) Dance also helps teach new concepts to students who are kinesthetic and other learners due to its memorable experience. (Skoning 2008)

Programs Examples from the Literature

Among all of the literature chosen for this paper, there were many different studies that explored the benefits of dance programming for students with disabilities. I chose four of the more interesting examples to present below.

Noah's Ark is a currently active "government-funded but not government-run" Australian organization that runs a variety of programs and services that support families with a child (0-12) with a disability or other special needs. They have a long-term dance movement therapist, who hosts DMT sessions with groups decided by children's physical mobility rather than developmental issues or needs. There are a variety of therapists who work with the children and families. The therapists demonstrate a certain task to teach caregivers how to handle their children. Over the course of a period of weeks, the caregivers adopt the action and tend to use the action at home. This particular study did note that having DMT along with other types of therapies helped the children show progress in their development. However, a majority of focus was placed on the improvement or detriment of the students based on the caregiver's relationship with and attitude toward their child's disability. The caregivers' adoption of DMT actions at home, were a benefit to the students. This study also showed the opposite, such as a caregiver "helping" a child move before they were ready to move, actually made the action more confusing and distressing for the child. The interventions of the organization help improve the manner in which the caregivers take care of their child. That is why it is important that Noah's Ark focuses a lot of attention on teaching caregivers good ways to interact with and support their child.

(Baum 2013) Similar to Chance 2 Dance, Noah's Ark has their sessions in groups, thus fostering

a sense of community among the caregivers. Unlike Chance 2 Dance, Noah's Ark has caregivers participate in the sessions, various types of therapists, been running for decades, and only supports programming for students ages 0 to 12.

In Estonia, there were a series of five DMT sessions for young people with a range of social, emotional, and behavioral problems. This program helped build social bonds, self-confidence, teamwork while maintaining a fun and enjoyable experience. (Goodgame 2007) This was a much shorter amount of time compared to those who were interviewed from Chance 2 Dance, who have been dancing anywhere from 6 months to 4 years, with the average being about 2 years. The short duration of the program in Estonia shows that the DMT can be helpful even in a short amount of time.

Camp Thunderbird was a Dallas, TX based summer camp implemented for 4-6 weeks in the summers of 2003 to 2008. It was discontinued after running out of funding. It had minority students in special education and students from general education to participate in summer camp programming including dance. Due to its short length it was more vigorous and fast paced learning. Communication was greatly emphasized to create a conducive environment. Some benefits included improved socialization skills and motivation to continue. These motivations were divided into motivation for mastery and for performance. While attaining these benefits, students also enjoyed the program. (Keglon 2011) Similar to Chance 2 Dance, Camp Thunderbird not only used DMT to have fun while improving physical, emotional, and social well-being, but also taught the students dance skills. Chance 2 Dance also has a summer camp program. Unlike Camp Thunderbird, Chance 2 Dance also has the option for year-round programming.

Between January and June 2015, 8 elementary school children with varied disabilities participated in dance programs with lessons integrated into their schools with general education students in Canada. These children experienced peer acceptance, bodily learning, and engaged support. All of these experiences made dance enjoyable for them. (Zitomer 2016) This is similar to how Chance 2 Dance also sends instructors to different organizations to teach lessons in addition to their typical programs.

In summary, Noah's Ark in Australia is the longest running and while they focus on the children, they also take into account the caregiver in the sessions. Both the Estonian and Canadian programs were quite short, but still saw benefits. Camp Thunderbird was longer, but was limited to a certain time of year. Compared to all of these programs, Chance 2 Dance is the most inclusive in terms of age and program availability.

Benefits of Dance Programming for Students with Disabilities

Due to the studies based on different disabilities and different frameworks, there is a record of a variety of benefits gained from DMT. From the literature, various themes emerged, such as the improvement of students' physical nature, social skills, mental well-being, ability for creative expression, and independence. Below is an expansion of those prominent themes.

Dance like most sports helps improve blood circulation, muscle growth, balance, and coordination. It was helpful for students both with and without disabilities to participate in dance programming due to the improved physical ability. (Sekhri 2019) In South Korea, it was found that DMT supports the physical development which contributes to a better sense of self. (Capello 2008) Along with the above mentioned physical improvement, an improvement in awareness of one's own body and self-other awareness were noticed after the participation in DMT. (Koch, Mehl, Sobanski, Sieber, Fuchs 2014) Body awareness is important to knowing how one's body

can move to perform an action, while self-other/spatial awareness is important to know how other people and objects are co-existing in the same area. This allows for one to adjust themselves to fit the situation. (Jobling, Virji-Babul, Nichols 2006)

Due to the often group nature of DMT many students improve their social skills. (Koch, Mehl, Sobanski, Sieber, Fuchs 2014) When working with a team, there is a significant increase in the feeling accepted by the group. (Sekhri 2019) The improvement of social skills and a feeling of acceptance from others leads to increased bonds with society. As students participate in activities with others and express themselves creatively, they become more interested in and interact more with the society around them. (Sekhri 2019). Some of the more prominent bonds formed are with parents and other students. In Japan, mothers attend DMT with their children. By being with their child, they establish trust and strengthen the attachment. (Capello 2008) This helps with the sadness and denial that often comes with having a child with a disability. (Baum 2013) When sharing experiences with others, the students gained feelings of trust, sharing, and a sense of cohesiveness. (Goodgame 2007) Once students bond with other students, whether they or others have a disability or not, they feel acceptance and support which can be difficult to gain for those with disabilities. (Zitomer 2016)

Compared to a control group, students who had DMT compared to not, had a significant increase in mental well-being. (Koch, Mehl, Sobanski, Sieber, Fuchs 2014) This is likely because many students find DMT fun, and happiness releases hormones that improve mental well-being.

Dance is a form of creative expression and allows communication and interaction with others. (Jobling, Virji-Babul, Nichols 2006) This communication is not limited to just self-expression, but also to have opportunities for leadership in classes. Through their participation in the arts, students explore themselves and find their “voice”. Their unique way of communication

and understanding the world. The arts also offer students the opportunity to choose how to express themselves. They can hone their decision-making abilities. This leads them to be more active and gain independence. (Mason, Steedly, Thormann 2008)

Earlier studies found various physical, social, mental well-being, and communicative improvements from children participating in DMT. This helped to highlight certain themes to look out for when the analysis was done on the data on Chance 2 Dance. The previous studies focused on understanding the benefits for children; therefore, it made looking at a program that includes adolescents and adults interesting to see if similar benefits would be found. Most previous studies saw good benefits from short term programs, so it raised the side question and if there would be proportionally increased benefits from participating in a longer running program.

Implementing an Inclusive Dance Program

It is not simply enough to put students in a dance class to gain the benefits. There are certain things that must be implemented to make the dance space inclusive and beneficial instead of harmful. The major component into making an inclusive dance program successful is the instructor. The attitude toward inclusive education, training how to create an inclusive education, and having a welcoming environment are very important.

An instructor's attitude is very important to create an environment where disabled students feel accepted. To help with this, instructors can be trained on how to handle various needs and exposure to a diverse set of students. (Combs, Elliott, Whipple 2010)

Knowing each student's individual needs and greeting them in a welcoming manner helps students feel included and practice social or language skills. (Cone, Cone 2011) Knowing the needs of each student also allows for the ability to accommodate unique needs and give custom encouraging feedback.

In the implementation of an inclusive dance program, the instructors' attitude and creating a welcoming environment are very important for the success of the students. This was kept in mind when looking at how Chance 2 Dance's instructors affected the students.

Chance 2 Dance Context

Chance 2 Dance is an inclusive dance studio in Casselberry, FL that hosts lessons in its studio and sends their dance instructors to various organizations to host lessons. Their instructors are professional dancers who are also certified in inclusion and special needs. In their regular studio, there are both regular lessons, and a performance team.

Chance 2 Dance was founded in May 2016, and they opened their studio in January 2017. They have served 2,300 individuals with various disabilities in the Central Florida area, and are the only sensory friendly dance studio in Florida.

The instructors are all professionally trained dancers with a passion for dance and teaching inclusive dance. A total of seven instructors work at Chance 2 Dance. Five of the seven mentioned that they have been dancing from a young age, often from 5 years old. Four instructors completed a bachelors in dance or dance performance. One instructor was trained vocationally with Chance 2 Dance, and they also have partial deafness, learning disabilities, and are on the autism spectrum. Another instructor has a sibling with autism and found a passion for helping others due to that. While all of the instructors are important to create an inclusive environment, one instructor, who will be called Myra, also helped co-found Chance 2 Dance. She is quite important to the narrative and function of Chance 2 Dance. Before she started Chance 2 Dance, she was a teacher and caregiver for one of the current students, who will be called George. She eventually stopped as she was pursuing dance further, but she did introduce George to dance. After some years, George and his parent were introduced to Chance 2 Dance

from a family friend, and they reunited with Myra. She then informed George's parent that he was a major inspiration to start Chance 2 Dance. This will be expanded upon in a later section on having charismatic leaders.

The studios for Chance 2 Dance have a video set up so that families can watch their children as lessons occur. This setup includes live cameras in the studio and a waiting room where families have a screen to watch their children without distracting others. The students know their families can watch and it fosters a sense of security. There is a color wall so that students have a frame of reference for directions. This helps instructors communicate which direction to face in a clear manner. Like other studios, Chance 2 Dance has bars on the wall to hold onto, wood floors, and one mirror wall.

There are several types of programs that are offered at the Chance 2 Dance studio: an assisted movement program, group lessons, private lessons, and a performance team with lessons. The assisted movement program is a form of group lessons where there is one on one instruction with the students. Like the Noah's Ark program, one caregiver is allowed to participate in the classes to assist their student. This paper focuses on the group and performance team lessons offered at the studio and lessons offered in collaboration with other organizations. The group classes are divided into different age groups and includes dance types such as: jazz, ballet, hip-hop, musical theatre, modern, acrobatics, and tap. While these classes are not one on one like their assisted movement program, the student to teacher ratio is quite small, it is either one instructor to four students or one instructor to five students. There are two types of group lessons. The introductory lessons, which are for students who are new to dance, teach the fundamentals of dances such as jazz, ballet, tap, and acrobatics. There is also a combination dance class program which focuses on two different technical dance styles per class. The

introductory lessons are 45 minutes long and have a maximum of 10 students per class, while the combination dance program has 60 minute long sessions and a 12 student maximum. Any student in these classes has the opportunity to perform on stage during biannual recitals. The performance team is by invitation or audition to join. These students attend combination group classes once a week along with a 90 minute class/rehearsal as a team. These rehearsals have an eight student to one instructor ratio.

Research Questions

This study was created because Chance 2 Dance's model is different from the typical model found in studies. As discussed earlier in the sections on programs found in the literature and the benefits of dance on students with disabilities, other programs focus on children. However, Chance 2 Dance is an inclusive program and while it is important to study the effects of DMT/inclusive dance in children, children grow into adolescents and adults who are not typically served by the other frameworks. The research questions asked were:

RQ1: How did participants in this program build and maintain relations with one another?

sRQ2: What are the benefits found from using this model for the population with disabilities?

Methods

Recruitment of Participants

An announcement of the study came through Chance 2 Dance. Emails with recruitment messaging were sent to parents and paraprofessionals (See Appendix A). Once participants were recruited, they were sent a consent form (See Appendix B).

Data Collection

The data was collected by interviewing three categories of participants: parents of the students in the group class, parents of the students in the performance class, and paraprofessionals whose organizations work with Chance 2 Dance. A total of 24 participants were interviewed, 8 in every category. They were asked questions about the length of their involvement with Chance 2 Dance, the nature of the student's disability, and any changes they observed in regards to physical, mental, and social well-being. These interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The participants' children had various disabilities such as intellectual and physical disabilities. For example, about 7 had autism, 3 had down syndrome, and 1 had mobility issues. These sometimes were in combination with other issues. A first-year course about disability and accessibility helped conduct most of the parent interviews.

There were two in-person sessions where interviews were conducted with the parents in person near the Chance 2 Dance Studio. These interviews were conducted by the class and the student researcher. (See Appendices C & D for interview guides) Paraprofessional interviews were collected over a series of phone interviews with the student researcher. They were recorded on a separate device from the phone. (See Appendix E for interview guide) Questions in the interview guides focused on any changes seen in students after starting dance and how Chance 2 Dance fits into their lives. For the privacy of the participants all names have been replaced with a pseudonym. Once recorded, all interviews were kept in password protected computers

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis of the interview data was conducted. Using NVivo, Word documents, and physical paper, multiple rounds of coding including open, focused, and axial coding were completed to find emerging themes. Initial open codes were created by reading

through all of the interviews one category at a time. A new set of codes were created for every category even if themes overlapped. Then another reading of the interview data was done while keeping in mind existing codes to code snippets that were not initially taken note of during the first round. At the end of open coding, there were many codes that were similarly worded, so they had to be grouped together in focused coding. After finishing open coding for each category, the open codes had to be focused and thus grouped into various themes that emerged. This was done in a Word document for every category. After completing the focused coding, axial coding was done by comparing the documents to one another. From this it was clear that similar themes emerged throughout the data. Then all of the categories' themes and codes were analyzed as a group to find the overlapping themes. The codes were included so that any themes that were not found initially could possibly be discovered. This was done by printing out the codes and themes onto paper and grouping them with similar codes and themes across the entirety of the data.

Results

Two major themes emerged from the thematic analysis: the importance of developing relationships and other benefits that come from inclusive dance.

The Importance of Developing Relationships

A common theme from the interviews was the importance of communicating to develop relationships for the success of the students. Chance 2 Dance is continually developing and helping others develop relationships with those surrounding them. The important parties to note are students, instructors, families, Chance 2 Dance and other organizations within the local area.

Students and Instructors

Consistent with previous works, it is not surprising that the interviews show an important relationship that develops is one between the instructors and the students. Our results show that the conduct of instructors is a key component of successful student-instructor relationships. According to all three groups interviewed, the instructors focus on accommodating the unique needs of each student and making dance fun and accessible for every student to learn. For example, there was a student who really wanted to tap dance, but, as he was in a wheelchair, there were concerns over the wheelchair damaging the studio floors for tap. Myra helped him to acquire wheelchair covers so that he could enter that studio, and his family attached a board to his wheelchair so that he can tap with sound.

The instructors are also very keen to observe each student and make sure to adjust for each individual so everyone can participate. However, this does not mean that the instructors would force the students to do the movements. They would encourage everyone, but they would not physically force the students to do the movements because that is counterproductive. There is a sense of trust that the instructors have the students' best interest in mind, while meeting students where they are at currently. A good example of an instructor's attentiveness is when a paraprofessional's daughter started out, she was very anxious and uncomfortable with the cameras in the room always being on. The Chance 2 Dance turned off the cameras for a few sessions, until she was comfortable and less anxious. This of course was done with the consent and approval from the other parents in the waiting room. Another example of attentiveness from the instructors, is that they will notice when the environment becomes overstimulating and too loud for an individual student and help the student go to a quieter area and have noise reducing headphones. It seems that in every instance of the student being shy, or reluctant, the instructors

are always able to draw them out. Eventually these students become enthusiastic about dance and are more willing to participate and socialize.

Communication and consistency are also important to give the students a sense of stability and transparency of what they are doing. The more that students are around the instructors, the more they know that they can look forward to and rely on dancing and care. Not only are the instructors reliable in class, they and everyone else at the studio take the time to welcome everyone and make sure everyone returns safely, as one performance parent said of the staff:

“from [Receptionist], meeting her at the front desk. She greets everybody by name. When they come in, the instructors always greet each student by name and when they leave they're there making sure that each one is attached to a parent or a caregiver when they leave. So there's a level of care and security and trust in there.”

The instructors are well trained to handle a diverse set of disabilities and create a welcoming environment. Each student is unique and instructors are patient with everyone and do their best to challenge them to improve while still setting goals for success. In one particular case, when a performance student first started at Chance 2 Dance, she had trust issues and did not enjoy talking. Myra helped this student to foster an interest in dance by working with her individually to learn French ballet terms, because it helped the student feel encouraged. Myra and this student would sit together and go over these terms together multiple times and was patient to give the student the time to have the word come out on her own. Within the last year this has led to the student not stuttering and more willing to express her thoughts.

Especially in the case of students who are already adults, there is a sense of respect for the students. Chance 2 Dance is one of those rare programs that still continue to serve students

once they have passed the majority. From those we interviewed, there is a sense that the instructors treat each student in a non-patronizing manner. While encouraging, the instructors do not seem to shower unnecessary praise. Students are also allowed to choose which types of dances/classes they wish to learn/attend. The performance team also participates in competitions that aren't purely for students with disabilities. One performance parent noted that Myra truly wishes to give the performance team a chance to compete, stating:

“She never enters us into competitions as special needs because she knows there is not judging in that—you just do it and then get a participatory something and everyone says ‘yay’. And that’s great, I’m not saying there is anything wrong with that. I just think that she believes that’s not really real or fair and she’s trying to give them as authentic of an experience as possible given their needs. “

Students and Students

As all classes are in groups, it is inevitable that some relationships will develop between the students who work together. They experience struggles and overcome them together. Some of the students have the chance to fulfill leadership roles in their classes. One of the students from the first-year class who helped collect interview data had noticed when they visited that *“some of the ... older kids were like, either in training to become instructors or like were instructors.”* Some of the older students can help assist in classes, and as mentioned earlier, one instructor was a former student who has been trained by Chance 2 Dance. Seeing their peers in positions of leadership also inspire others to believe that they too can do it.

Students get exposed to a wider variety of disabilities because every student at Chance 2 Dance has special needs. This exposure helps them understand that they are not alone with their issues, and that others also have different struggles. As a population that generally feels so

othered, a sense of comradery with their peers is reassuring. The formation of teams with other students is particularly evident in the advanced class students. The students form strong bonds and encourage each other. One student, Rose, from the performance class is more social with her dance team. Her parent considers this student quite happy with her team, and had expressed that:

“She’s very comfortable with her dance team ... It kind of feels like her family to her”

Another performance parent, who had noted that a great sense of community was formed by the students and they were attentive to the needs of others, they said that:

“the kids all work together with somebody who's having a rough day or a rough moment. They all kind of bind together and they make it work.”

Students and Families

The physical environment helps both students and families feel at ease knowing that the families can see the students through camera. This gives their children a sense of reassurance that the parents are there while giving the students some independence. This structured independence helps improve the trust between the two parties.

Families feel proud of their children for their accomplishments. Multiple interviewees seemed enthused when talking about the effects Chance 2 Dance has had on their children. One group parent, when asked if they would like to add anything that they thought was important outside of the question set, asked: *“Did I brag about my son?”* They then talked about how they hung up all the photos from recitals and when they saw their son in a magazine. The team and the parent then proceeded to talk about finding the article online to read. From the transcript, it's very easy to see how happy and proud this parent is of their son.

The program also helps students and families become closer because they have a topic that they can both relate on. Some families live further away, and the drive gives them time to talk and further and bond. For example, one performance parent lives 25 minutes away, so the combined time is an hour of driving and time to talk to each other. They remarked:

“You would think it would be less time, but it's created more time. ... it's usually a very good opportunity to have good quality conversations, um, there and back. So, I would say it's, it's been very good for our relationship”

Families and Instructors

A major recurring theme was that the families trusted the instructors due to seeing the instructors interacting with the students in a manner that truly showed that they were instructing “with the right reason”. It is a sense that the instructors truly enjoy what they do, and will genuinely care for the students. This type of attitude creates a very welcoming environment that reassures the families.

The environment that the parents see is also very reassuring. Both security and transparency also play a role in making families comfortable with entrusting their children to the instructors. The cameras allow the parents comfort of observation without being distracting during class times. Due to this observation, they grow to trust the instructors to be able to handle their children in a good manner. The families also mentioned that the location is secure physically. As mentioned earlier in regards to student instructor relationships, instructors make sure that each student leaves with a parent or caregiver. This helps families feel secure that their students will be watched over. There is also a locked door that has a password and someone has to let the parent and student in. This also makes it secure that not just anyone can enter the studio. Besides being secure, the location is well equipped to handle a variety of student needs.

For example, to help with sensory issues there are noise reducing headphones and dimming lights.

Many of the reasons that families trust instructors overlap with the reasons students form relationships with instructors. The families can see that the instructors are observant, well-trained, and show respect to the students. For example, one group parent noted that the team at Chance 2 Dance is very attentive and cautious about sensory issues:

“What sensory issues does your child have?” was actually one of the first things they asked me. ... one of the sensory issues [Student] has is about people touching her feet, and they worked on it and now she actually lets them touch her feet. ... And, she's never tippy toed before and she tippy toes now, and she actually lets [Instructor] touch her feet.”

The instructors work with each student and family individually so that different needs can be met. The families can also see through the television screen that the instructors are always observant of all the students. This is comforting because they know that their child will be taken care of.

Community of Families

The welcoming environment is not only created by the instructors, but also through the families who are already involved. They are welcoming to both new students and their families. There is a lack of competition from the families that one would typically see in a dance studio. As one performance parent notes:

“The one thing that was totally different than Chance 2 Dance is that we don't have any dance moms. We are all parents working together to get each and every child growing and no one's child is better than the other. I never was a dance mom and I love the fact that I still don't have to be one.”

They are open to sharing their experiences with others and helping them to feel connected. Often those with disabilities and their families feel a sense of not fitting in, but the community of parents helps them feel as if they fit in. The community of families are open to speaking about their experience with other families. With a diversity of students of varying ages and disabilities, no one is made to feel alone. As one group parent states:

“It's a blessing for the community or really it's just so nice to go there and just be welcome and I feel semi-normal.”

Having a Charismatic Leader

In almost every interview, Myra was mentioned at least once. Having such a charismatic leader is likely what helped Chance 2 Dance progress to the point it has. As mentioned previously, she had importance in accommodating and including students. Many mentioned her enthusiastic personality and having good motivations as a reason they trust her. An example of Myra's passion for teaching inclusive dance is from a paraprofessional whose organization hosts lessons from Chance 2 Dance. She initially had volunteered as a dance instructor for this charter school for children with autism from pre-k to fifth grade. After volunteering for a semester, the school partnered with her *“for the next upcoming school year where she came in under a contract and all of our students were able to have a dance class once a week.”* Currently, Myra does not teach at this school, but they have maintained a partnership. The paraprofessional representing this school stated that: *“Right now, she sends out two instructors per week, two different days a week and all of our students are able to go to a class for 30 minutes each.”* Stories similar to this were told by multiple participants, even if other instructors are teaching the lessons, the foundation of trust was built by Myra.

Benefits of Dance

In addition to the growth in relationships described in the previous section, participants show benefits that are directly related to their participation in dance programming.

Physical Improvements

Dance is a physical activity that involves both finesse and a good amount of movement. As a side effect, some students have been reported to have lost some weight and improved motor control. Initially there can be some motor challenges, but Chance 2 Dance places a high priority on accommodating all students. For example, at a partner organization there were students who couldn't participate at first but *"by the end of the week they can do what they couldn't"*.

(Interview with Bridgette, a paraprofessional)

After starting at Chance 2 Dance 6 months prior, a group class student is happy to continue dancing and is gaining health benefits from it. As her parent reports:

"So she's actually lost weight since she started dancing. The doctors had told me to get her more physically active, but with her leg I didn't know what we could do to get her more physically active until she started dancing. So that's why I have her twice a week dancing."

Socialization Improvements

As mentioned in the section about student and student relationships, students get exposure to people with other disabilities and possibly obtain leadership roles. Students can also be more social with each other. As mentioned earlier, Rose is more social towards her dance team and considers them like a family. Her parents expressed that *"she's still not like as social as an average child."*, but was happy to note that *"She is more social, especially with her dance team."*

Sometimes students even make their first friends while participating at Chance 2 Dance. For example, one group student, who had only been attending Chance 2 Dance for six months, made a new friend. It was a new experience for both her and her family, as her parent said: *“Now she has a new friend, which is new to us too - for her to have a friend. So her friend is [Student]. She also goes to C2D.”*

Verbalization Improvements

Some participants reported that students became more verbal after attending Chance 2 Dance. They would become more talkative, particularly about dance and their other interests. Thus, becoming more expressive of their desires. As one group parent happily said:

“The verbal is just amazing. He was completely non-verbal until he was six. He did not speak at all, and then we had limited verbal after that. Once he started with dance, it just ..., I mean just expressing himself and the verbal is just amazing. I mean, he's still does his speech therapy for his things, but he just will have actual conversations with people and he's more inclined to ... he interacts better with the people his own age. ... Now he actually interacts with the other kids and talks to them. ... It's just more how he's interacted with other people. ... that has been great just in him being able to verbalize what he wants as opposed to the guessing game that we used to have to play”

Enjoyment and Passion

Both groups of parents express that their children quite enjoy their time with Chance 2 Dance, and they are eager to go back to the studio for more lessons. Many parents have expressed that they can use dance lessons as motivators for their children. For example, one group parents stated:

“I mean, it's the way I can get her to actually do most things. So like "you don't want to go to school today, you can't go to dance". She'll get up and go to school. She never dressed herself until I told her one day," if you don't dress yourself, you're not going to go to dance".”

More than half of the performance parents have described that their children truly love dance, and are happy to do it.

Self Confidence

As mentioned above, students would overcome their shyness and be willing to express their interests more. Along with this self-assurance comes independence, as one performance parent explains:

“He likes also to be independent so I don't stay. I'm told to drop him off and, "Bye mom. See you in a couple of hours." I think that kind of changes us, but that's age, you know, as they get older. He likes his dance time is his dance time and I'm not supposed to be there. That's his”

Along with that one parent, three other performance parents note that their children have gained confidence, and due to this confidence are willing to say their desires more. Self-confidence seems to overlap quite a bit with verbalization and enjoyment.

Discussion

Support for Benefits of DMT

In agreement with previous works, such as the papers from Keglton (2011), Sekhri (2019), and Koch, Mehl, Sobanski, Sieber, Fuchs (2014), it was found that DMT/inclusive dance is beneficial to people with disabilities. Increasing availability of and funding for organizations that

offer these services would benefit not only the people served, but society as a whole. Forging stronger social ties keeps society together and moving forward.

Differences from the Literature

As mentioned earlier, all of the previous literature mentioned above did not look into benefits for adults with disabilities participating in DMT. Typically, these programs end once a person reaches a certain age. However, a person doesn't stop having a disability once they reach adulthood. There are very positive results of DMT/inclusive dance in regards to children, but it is also important to continue to give support to adults because they can also benefit.

The ability to compete with typical peers includes these students in ways that are different to them. People with disabilities often feel happy having peer acceptance and inclusion. (Zitomer 2016 & Sekhri 2019)

In comparison to other studies, Chance 2 Dance offers more consistent contact. Camp Thunderbird (Keglon 2011) was one of the longer running programs and many of its alumni had lasting benefits. Students built relationships with others in all of the other literature; however, most studies focused on the benefits of dance itself instead of the relationships, such as the papers from Jobling et. al. (2015), Koch et. al. (2016), and Sekhri (2011). These papers did find some relationship and social benefits, but did not focus on them.

Improvements that Could Be Made to this Model

When asked about potential improvements to Chance 2 Dance's program, participants offered a number of suggestions for improving the program's logistics and accessibility for families from the broader Orlando area. Some potential improvements expanded upon below are more studios to serve a broader area, larger physical spaces in the studios, increased family input

and communication, more funding to make programming financially feasible for more people, and breaking down dance routines into smaller chunks.

Due to the location of the studio, it can be hard for some families to take the drive or find transportation. There are families who drive 40 minutes to an hour to get to the studio. They find the drive worth it due to the effects they have seen on their children, but have expressed a desire for a location closer to home. One organization mentioned that since their constituents are on the west side of Orlando, it is difficult for them to access Chance 2 Dance as it is on the east side of Orlando, which can take anywhere from 40 minutes to an hour and 20 minutes or more depending on route and traffic.

Multiple participants mentioned that they wish that the studio was bigger so that there is room for diverse types of dance, serve more people, and space for more sensory locations. For a student in a wheelchair, their parent stated: *“When you have somebody in a wheelchair, every space is too small.”* They did note that the new larger studio was certainly an improvement, but it can still be difficult. A performance parent also commented on the space:

“I think the only thing that would make it perfect was if it was a much larger building with more rooms designed for kids that want to do the ribbon silks or, um, if you have a child that needs a timeout, one of those big sensory chairs where they could go sit in the dark.”

One of the paraprofessionals mentioned that they would like to have more frequent feedback on how the students are doing to give to the families. Unlike in the studio, the class is being taught in a school, so the parents do not see the interactions and improvements that their children make in class. One parent also expressed the desire to have more input from families in the decision making process for their child’s needs. This change would make it more similar to

Noah's Ark in Australia. There are both positives and negatives to more familial input. On the positive, the family has a very good understanding of their child and is very attentive. On the negative, sometimes the families push their children too much or incorrectly try to help (Baum 2013). So, it would possibly have to be considered on a more individual basis.

Chance 2 Dance does cost more than a typical dance studio, but they do give financial aid to those who need it. Multiple participants mentioned that they wish that the studio had more funding so that they could increase what the studio offers. The increased funding could help with offering other locations and improving their physical spaces. Upgrading equipment, improving physical spaces, paying instructors, gaining instructors, and training instructors all take more money.

One parent raised a concern that the dance routines could be broken down into smaller portions, so that it could be easier for the students to follow and remember. They were concerned that if students fall behind, the larger portions of choreography would make it difficult for them to catch up.

Expansion and Reaching Other Communities

Based on the positive effects seen from DMT/inclusive dance, Chance 2 Dance's model would help more people and organizations to positively affect the lives of those who participate. If Chance 2 Dance had the opportunity to expand or other dance studios replicate Chance 2 Dance's system, then it could positively affect the disability communities that would have a hard time accessing Chance 2 Dance's current programming. Some of the improvements mentioned above could help Chance 2 Dance reach more people who need their programming, but as of now it can be difficult.

Conclusion

Chance 2 Dance and inclusive dance in general have benefits for the disability community. These benefits include improving providing a space to build relationships, improving verbal or motor abilities, the chance for self-expression and enjoyment. Unfortunately, programs like Chance 2 Dance are difficult to find, often running out of funding, only occurring for short periods at a time, or they are only available for minors. We have learned that this type of programming is effective in relationship and community building and improving other aspects of student lives. It is important to note that DMT/inclusive dance are not only beneficial for children, it is also beneficial for adolescents and adults. Due to this program, relationships and communities were formed by not only students and instructors, but also families and other organizations. The students seemed to love dance and gained physical and verbal abilities. The training and having a charismatic leader were important for the program to be successful. The limitations found were that it can be inaccessible due to location or finances and the physical size of the location can restrict the types of dance taught. While there may not be many programs now for adolescents and adults, if more were to open, it would change their lives for the better as shown by the results of this study.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Tools

Recruitment E-mail

Dear Chance 2 Dance parent,

As you know, Chance 2 Dance is always looking for ways to support people with disabilities and their families. We are particularly interested in learning how we can improve our programming and understand its impact on our students. Chance 2 Dance has teamed up with researchers and students from Rollins College to get a better sense our community's needs. They're hoping you may be interested in participating in their research! They are looking to interview parents of the toddler class and of the advanced/performance class. Interviews will occur in person at a secure location in the Chance 2 Dance studio or nearby at the local Starbucks/Seminole County Public Libray, and typically last between 30 minutes and an hour. If you are interested in participating, please contact Dr. Sarah Parsloe at (407)646-2394 or at sparsloe@rollins.edu for more information.

Best,

The Chance 2 Dance team

Dear Chance 2 Dance community partner,

As you know, Chance 2 Dance is always looking for ways to support people with disabilities and their families. We are particularly interested in learning how we can improve our programming

and understand its impact on our students. Chance 2 Dance has teamed up with researchers and students from Rollins College to get a better sense our community's needs. They're hoping you may be interested in participating in their research! They are looking to interview paraprofessional about their perceptions of Chance 2 Dance's programming and its impact on students. Interviews will occur in person at a secure location in or near the Chance 2 Dance studio or over phone/via a video conferencing software (i.e., Skype, Google Hangouts). They will typically last between 30 minutes and an hour. If you are interested in participating, please contact Dr. Sarah Parsloe at (407)646-2394 or sparsloe@rollins.edu for more information.

Best,

The Chance 2 Dance team

Appendix B

Consent form

Dear potential participant,

We are conducting an interview study to learn more about the affects of dancing programming on students' lives. We are inviting you to participate in this study. To participate, you must be associated with a child in the Chance 2 Dance program (parent, guardian, or paraprofessional) and over the age of 18.

Participation involves engaging in one interview with two student researchers from Rollins College. The interview will last between 30 minutes and 1 hour (approximately 45 minutes). Interviews will be conducted either in-person at or near the Chance 2 Dance studio, or via phone or video conference software (i.e., Skype). You will be asked questions to guide the discussion.

There is minimal risk to you, but there is always the chance talking about your experiences may be uncomfortable at times. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason, without

Your participation is completely voluntary. This means that you can decide whether or not you want to do this project. You may decline to participate at any point; you are not required to answer any questions you don't wish to answer. You may ask the researchers to remove any of your words from the final report at any time. This final report will be emailed to you using the contact information you supplied to sign up for this study.

The broad benefit of your participation is that it would help us to understand the impact of inclusive dance programming. The results from this study might help Chance 2 Dance improve their own programming and to secure future funding and other resources. These results might also encourage support for similar programming in Central Florida and beyond. You might directly benefit from this research by having an opportunity to provide feedback to Chance 2 Dance—feedback that can improve students, families', and community partners' experiences.

Confidentiality will be provided to the extent allowed by law. If you agree to participate, this means that you consent to having your voice recorded on tape. We will make sure that no one can identify you. During the transcription process and in all reporting of data, pseudonyms will be used in place of your name. The audio files will be saved under a pseudonym on a password protected computer, and transcripts will be kept on password protected computers that only we (researchers from Rollins College) can access. Results of this research study may be disseminated to other researchers via conference presentations, journal articles, or book chapters, but your name will not be attached to these results in any way. You will also be given the opportunity to learn about our findings upon completion of the study.

If you have questions about this project, please do not hesitate to contact us by phone or email at the information below.

If you would like to participate, please complete the information below. You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

Sincerely,

Sarah Parsloe, PhD

Email: sparsloe@rollins.edu

Phone: 407-646-2394

Heidi Po, Rollins Honors student

Email: hpo@rollins.edu

Phone: 352-321-7346

Rollins College Institutional Review Board

John Houston, PhD

Email: jhouston@rollins.edu

I have carefully read and/or I have had the terms used in this consent form and their significance explained to me. By signing below, I agree that I am at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in this project.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

_____ Date _____

Signature of Principal Investigator

_____ Date _____

Your signature below indicates that you are giving permission to audiotape your responses.

Signature of Participant

_____ Date _____

Appendix C

Interview Guide for Parents of Students in the Group Class

Hello _____. Thanks again for agreeing to participate in this interview. As you know, we are interested in learning about how Chance 2 Dance programming affects students' lives. We would like to ask you some questions on effects you've seen on your child in the group class. You've read through the consent form, and know that you can decline to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Ok, we'll start with a few basic questions before moving onto more open-ended ones.

1. How many children do you have?
 - a. What are their ages?
 - b. Which of your children participates in a Chance 2 Dance program? (eg. First, middle, youngest, etc.)
 - i. What is your child's gender identity?
 - c. Please describe the nature of your child's disability.

.Can you describe how this condition affects your child? (i.e. verbal abilities, mobility, cognitive processing, etc.)

2. How long has your child been dancing with Chance 2 Dance?
 - . How often does your child come to Chance 2 Dance?
 - a. What type of dance does your child practice at Chance 2 Dance?
 - b. Tell us about your first time walking into Chance 2 Dance.
 - c. Tell us about the first time you saw your child dance.
3. What drew you to bring your child to Chance 2 Dance?

- . Did your child express interest in dance beforehand? And for how long?
- 4. What kind of changes, if any, have you noticed in your child since attending Chance 2 Dance?

. (if not brought up by previous question) Could you tell us about the:

.Social changes?

i.Behavioral changes?

ii.Physical changes?

iii.Emotional changes?

iv.Cognitive changes?

- a. Tell us about the first time you noticed a difference in your child after coming to Chance 2 Dance.

- 5. How did Chance 2 Dance affect your relationship with your child?
- 6. What are some things that have helped your child to become comfortable at Chance 2 Dance?
- 7. What makes you trust Chance 2 Dance with your child's wellbeing?
- 8. Chance 2 Dance talks about the importance of inclusion. What does inclusion mean to you?
- 9. How does Chance 2 Dance's compare with other inclusive activities that your child is involved in?
- 10. If you could make Chance 2 Dance perfect, what would you change?
- 11. Is there anything that makes it difficult for you and your child to access programming?
(i.e. transport, class times, etc.)

12. That's all the questions we have for you about your experiences with Chance 2 Dance, but is there anything else you would like to add?

Demographic

Now, we have a few additional demographic questions

1. How would you describe your family's:
 - a. Ethnicity
 - b. Racial identity
2. I'm going to list some household income levels. Please stop me when I get to the one that describes your household:
 - . Under \$25,000/year
 - a. Between \$25,000 and \$50,000 a year
 - b. Between \$50,000 and \$75,000 a year
 - c. \$75,000 and over
 - d. (Prefer not to answer)
3. In what area are you living?
 - . How far is it from Chance 2 Dance?
4. Do you have access to your own transportation?
 - . How do you get to Chance 2 Dance?
5. We will be using a pseudonym or fake name for you to keep your identity confidential in the final write-up of this research. What would you like your fake name to be?

Conclusion

Those are all the questions we have for you! Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this research. We've learned so much from what you have shared with us.

- Before we end this interview, I want to check if it would be ok for me to contact you again if needed to clarify anything you have said?

Great! You have been extremely helpful. Thank you again for your time.

Appendix D

Interview Guide for Parents of Students in the Performance Team Class

Hello _____. Thanks again for agreeing to participate in this interview. As you know, we are interested in learning about how Chance 2 Dance programming affects students' lives. We would like to ask you some questions on effects you've seen on your child in the advanced class.

You've read through the consent form, and know that you can decline to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Ok, we'll start with a few basic questions before moving onto more open-ended ones.

1. How many children do you have?
 - a. What are their ages?
 - b. Which of your children participates in a Chance 2 Dance program? (eg. First, middle, youngest, etc.)
 - i. What is your child's gender identity?
 - c. Please describe the nature of your child's disability.
.Can you describe how this condition affects your child? (i.e. verbal abilities, mobility, cognitive processing, etc.)
2. How long has your child been dancing with Chance 2 Dance?
 - . How often does your child come to Chance 2 Dance?
 - a. What type of dance does your child practice at Chance 2 Dance?
 - b. Tell us about your first time walking into Chance 2 Dance.
 - c. Tell us about the first time you saw your child dance.
 - d. If your child has performed, can you also tell us about the first time that happened?

3. What drew you to bring your child to Chance 2 Dance?

. Did your child express interest in dance beforehand? And for how long?

4. What kind of changes, if any, have you noticed in your child since attending Chance 2 Dance?

. a. *(if not brought up by previous question)* Could you tell us about the:

.Social changes?

i.Behavioral changes?

ii.Physical changes?

iii.Emotional changes?

iv.Cognitive changes?

a. Tell us about the first time you noticed a difference in your child after coming to Chance 2 Dance.

5. How did Chance 2 Dance affect your relationship with your child?

6. What are some things that have helped your child to become comfortable at Chance 2 Dance?

7. What makes you trust Chance 2 Dance with your child's wellbeing?

8. Chance 2 Dance talks about the importance of inclusion. What does inclusion mean to you?

9. How does Chance 2 Dance's compare with other inclusive activities that your child is involved in?

10. If you could make Chance 2 Dance perfect, what would you change?

11. Is there anything that makes it difficult for you and your child to access programming?
(i.e. transport, class times, etc.)

12. 12. That's all the questions we have for you about your experiences with Chance 2 Dance, but is there anything else you would like to add?

Demographic

Now, we have a few additional demographic questions

1. How would you describe your family's:
 - a. Ethnicity
 - b. Racial identity
2. I'm going to list some household income levels. Please stop me when I get to the one that describes your household:
 - . Under \$25,000/year
 - a. Between \$25,000 and \$50,000 a year
 - b. Between \$50,000 and \$75,000 a year
 - c. \$75,000 and over
 - d. (Prefer not to answer)
3. In what area are you living?
 - . How far is it from Chance 2 Dance?
4. Do you have access to your own transportation?
 - . How do you get to Chance 2 Dance?
5. We will be using a pseudonym or fake name for you to keep your identity confidential in the final write-up of this research. What would you like your fake name to be?

Conclusion

Those are all the questions we have for you! Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this research. We've learned so much from what you have shared with us.

- Before we end this interview, I want to check if it would be ok for me to contact you again if needed to clarify anything you have said?

Great! You have been extremely helpful. Thank you again for your time.

Appendix E

Interview Guide for Paraprofessionals

Hello _____. Thanks again for agreeing to participate in this interview. As you know, we are interested in learning about how Chance 2 Dance programming affects students' lives. We would like to ask you some questions on effects you've seen on those you've recommended to Chance 2 Dance. You've read through the consent form, and know that you can decline to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Ok, we'll start with a few basic questions before moving onto more open-ended ones.

1. What organization do you represent?
2. Tell us a little bit about what your organization does?
3. What is your focus population?
4. Who is enrolled in your organization and how are they approved to join?
5. How did you make the decision to partner with Chance 2 Dance?
6. Is there anything that would keep you from referring someone to Chance 2 Dance?
7. How many members do you have in the program?
 - a. What are their ages?
 - b. How long have they been dancing with Chance 2 Dance?
8. How often do your members come to Chance 2 Dance?

. *Alternatively:* How often does Chance 2 Dance come to your organization?
9. What kind of changes, if any, have you noticed in your members since attending Chance 2 Dance?

. *(if not brought up by previous question)* Could you tell us about the:

i. *Social changes?*

ii. *Behavioral changes?*

iii. *Physical changes?*

iv. *Emotional changes?*

v. *Cognitive changes?*

10. What are some things that help your members become comfortable at Chance 2 Dance?

11. What is the biggest triumph your organization has seen due to a member's participation in Chance 2 Dance?

. What have your members struggled with?

12. Chance 2 Dance talks about the importance of inclusion, what does inclusion mean to you?

13. How does Chance 2 Dance compare with other kinds of programming that your students participate in?

14. What makes you trust Chance 2 Dance with your members' wellbeing?

15. If you could make Chance 2 Dance perfect, what would you change?

. What would be your number one change?

a. Is there anything that makes it difficult for your members to access programming? (i.e. transport, class times, etc.)

16. That's all the questions we have for you about your experiences with Chance 2 Dance, but is there anything else you would like to add?

Demographic

Now, we have a few additional demographic questions

1. How long has your organization been around?
2. I'm going to list some household income levels. Please stop me when I get to the one that describes the average of who is served by your organization:
 - a. Under \$25,000/year
 - b. Between \$25,000 and \$50,000 a year
 - c. Between \$50,000 and \$75,000 a year
 - d. \$75,000 and over
 - e. (Prefer not to answer)
3. In what general areas are your members living?
4. Do your members have access to their own transportation?
 - . How do they get to Chance 2 Dance?
5. We will be using a pseudonym or fake name for you to keep your identity confidential in the final write-up of this research. What would you like your fake name to be?

Conclusion

Those are all the questions we have for you! Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this research. We've learned so much from what you have shared with us.

- Before we end this interview, I want to check if it would be ok for me to contact you again if needed to clarify anything you have said?
- Do you have any colleagues within your organization who might be willing to talk to us?

Great! You have been extremely helpful. Thank you again for your time.

