

STUDENT TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS TEACHING CREATIVE DANCE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT. Given the benefits of creative dance in children's development, its absence, or near absence, in the elementary school curriculum is a cause for concern. The purpose of this inquiry was to identify student teachers' attitudes towards teaching creative dance and to investigate whether participation in creative dance workshops could change their attitudes. One hundred and twenty-four student teachers completed pre- and post-workshop surveys designed to examine attitudes towards creative dance. Ten of these student teachers also participated in a focus group interview. Findings indicated that prior to participating in the workshops, student teachers did not feel comfortable teaching creative dance due to physical concerns, a lack of practical ideas for integrating creative dance into their teaching, and an inadequate understanding of what creative dance is. To alleviate this discomfort they stated that they needed resources, practical ideas, and exposure to creative dance. Consequently, the workshops were designed to meet these needs. Following the workshops, student teachers reported that they felt more confident and comfortable teaching creative dance and that they intended to integrate creative dance into their teaching practices. They attributed these changes to having a greater understanding of creative dance, gaining a higher level of comfort as a result of the workshops, recognizing the physical and therapeutic benefits of creative dance, and realizing how easy it is to integrate creative dance into the curriculum. The study showed that teacher educators can change student teachers' attitudes towards teaching creative dance by identifying student concerns regarding creative dance, and then designing workshops addressing these concerns. Moreover, the findings support the notion that giving creative dance a greater role in teacher education would enable future teachers to feel more confident teaching it and result in more children being exposed to school programs emphasizing creativity, problem solving, and aesthetic expression.

ATTITUDES DES PROFESSEURS STAGIAIRES À L'ÉGARD DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT DE LA DANSE CRÉATIVE À L'ÉCOLE PRIMAIRE

RÉSUMÉ. Compte tenu des effets positifs de la danse créative sur le développement des enfants, son absence ou sa quasi-absence du programme de l'école primaire donne matière à préoccupation. L'objectif de cette recherche était de cerner les attitudes des professeurs stagiaires à l'égard de l'enseignement de la danse créative et de déterminer si la participation à des ateliers de danse créative est susceptible de modifier ces attitudes. Cent vingt-quatre professeurs stagiaires ont

répondu à des questionnaires pré et post-atelier dont le but était de connaître leurs attitudes à l'égard de la danse créative. Dix de ces professeurs stagiaires ont également pris part à un groupe de discussion. Les résultats révèlent qu'avant d'assister aux ateliers, les professeurs stagiaires se sentaient mal à l'aise à l'idée d'enseigner la danse créative à cause de préoccupations d'ordre physique, d'un manque d'idées pratiques pour intégrer la danse créative dans leur enseignement et d'une connaissance insuffisante de la danse créative. Pour atténuer ce malaise, ils ont affirmé avoir besoin de ressources, d'idées pratiques et d'une exposition à ce type de danse. C'est pourquoi les ateliers ont été conçus pour répondre à ces besoins. À l'issue des ateliers, les professeurs stagiaires ont affirmé qu'ils se sentaient plus confiants à enseigner la danse créative et qu'ils avaient l'intention d'intégrer ce type de danse dans leurs méthodes d'enseignement. Ils ont attribué ces changements d'attitude au fait qu'ils comprenaient mieux la danse créative, qu'ils avaient acquis un plus grand niveau d'assurance grâce aux ateliers, qu'ils reconnaissaient les avantages physiques et thérapeutiques de la danse créative et qu'ils comprenaient combien il était facile d'intégrer ce type de danse dans le programme. L'étude a révélé que les professeurs chargés de la formation des maîtres peuvent modifier les attitudes des professeurs stagiaires à l'égard de l'enseignement de la danse créative en reconnaissant leurs préoccupations au sujet de ce type de danse et en organisant des ateliers pour y répondre. De plus, les conclusions étayaient l'idée que le fait d'attribuer à la danse créative un rôle plus important dans la formation des maîtres devrait permettre aux futurs professeurs d'avoir plus d'assurance à enseigner et pourrait exposer un plus grand nombre d'enfants aux programmes scolaires insistant sur la créativité, la résolution de problèmes et l'expression esthétique.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the positive contributions creative dance can make to children's development, little, if any, creative dance is being taught at the elementary-school level in Canada (Bergmann Drewe, 1996; Courtney & Park, 1981; MacDonald, 1991a; 1992). The limited presence of creative dance within this level of education may be due to its absence in the curriculum of teacher education programs (MacDonald, 1992). All too frequently, student teachers leave their teacher education programs lacking any experience with creative dance and therefore do not feel comfortable integrating it in their classrooms. Furthermore, the diverse roles of creative dance and the benefits associated with it have led to confusion as to the place of creative dance within the curriculum.

Indeed, extant definitions of creative dance vary according to educational perspective and where it is placed in the curriculum. For years educators have argued as to whether creative dance should be placed within the physical education curriculum or within the arts curriculum. Some educators justify the inclusion of creative dance on the basis of its physical benefits. This usually leads creative dance to be incorporated into the physical education program. In such instances, creative dance is viewed as

a uni-dimensional activity which has only physical benefits rather than a multi-dimensional activity with the potential to develop children mentally and emotionally as well as physically.

Conversely, individuals coming from a more therapeutic perspective have advocated that creative dance heightens self-image, self-concept, and emotional expression (Alter, 1984). Others have suggested that creative dance enhances competencies in other curriculum areas, and as such, view creative dance as a vehicle for teaching other subjects and argue that it should be integrated throughout the curriculum (Dimondstein, 1985; MacDonald, 1993). Those with an "art for art's sake" perspective have asserted that creative dance should be taught to develop dance skill and technique and that no justification is needed to include creative dance in the curriculum outside the aesthetic experience itself (Bergmann Drewe, 1996). Diametrically opposed to this view, Bowell (1998) argued that "dance will not fully serve its role within the complex social and political arena of contemporary education unless its practitioners (teachers, performers, writers, critics, and administrators) broaden their vision beyond the immediate concerns of the discipline itself" (p. 76). That is, if creative dance were to be taught for purely aesthetic reasons, it would be difficult to expect non-specialist teachers to integrate creative dance into their teaching. An important point to highlight is that this view does not undermine the aesthetic value of the creative dance experience; rather it states that emphasising only the aesthetic aspect of creative dance may cause those teachers not trained in dance to feel less confident and less eager about teaching it.

In this article, creative dance is defined as "any activity expressed through the medium of the body that focuses on the child's inner thoughts and feelings and enhances the expression of those thoughts and feelings" (MacDonald, 1989, p. 10). Indeed, it is defined from a broad, educational perspective and can be seen as a physical activity that has both physical and therapeutic benefits and enhances learning as well as fostering emotional and social development. Creative dance can be performed to music, to rhythmic sounds, or without any accompaniment, and can take place in any space such as a gym, dance studio, living room, classroom, or outside. Creative dance involves gross and fine motor movements and is enhanced by emotional expression. It is often interpretative and requires knowledge and skill in dance movement concepts to grow and develop. Creative dance is a mechanism for problem solving, co-operation, gaining awareness of culture, building self-esteem, and developing self-expression.

The diverse views of what creative dance is and what role it should take within the curriculum can make it difficult for teachers to implement it into their classrooms. However, Richmond (1991) argued that the focus should not be on what creative dance is, but on how creative dance can be used most worthwhile educationally. In other words, how can creative dance best

develop the mind, body, and feelings, and how can it help develop an understanding of oneself, of others, and of experiences of the world?

THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATIVE DANCE IN THE CURRICULUM

There are many reasons why creative dance should be included in the elementary-school curriculum. Creative dance is an information gathering activity that helps children learn about themselves and their world. Creative dance provides children with an opportunity to explore their views on life issues, on the entire human condition, and on their own condition (Best, 1978). This exploration can in turn deepen their understanding of life's experiences and increase their sensitivity to these experiences. Moreover, creative dance provides a vehicle to celebrate various cultural backgrounds and promote multicultural awareness and respect in the classroom.

Creative dance gives children control of their learning situation, and therefore, the freedom to explore creatively and use their imaginations. Creative dance can help children develop more self-reliance and promote risk-taking in the learning process. Children often concentrate so intensely when involved in this creative process that they become motivated to learn, and this motivation can carry over to other subject areas. While working together on their dances, children discuss their solutions and develop language skills, which in turn can positively affect their academic performance (Gilbert, 1992; MacDonald, 1993).

Creative dance is a good way to bring children with behavioural difficulties into the classroom community, get them involved, and encourage them to participate and co-operate in learning situations (Gilbert, 1992). Stress in children often manifests itself as behavioural problems in the classroom. Creative dance can act as a coping strategy, helping children to manage stress better and reduce their anxiety (Hanna, 1988). Because creative dance involves physical exercise, it may contribute to decreased activity levels during seatwork, thus increasing children's attention span. Children who are relaxed may concentrate better, since inner control is a prerequisite for learning (Omizo, 1980). Creative dance can therefore act as a self-regulatory technique, allowing children to develop more control over their behaviours. Children who develop self-control strategies may behave less impulsively and perform better academically.

In creative dance, the emphasis is on creative problem solving. Children can work as they choose while using their own bodies, ideas, and capabilities to explore and solve problems. All solutions are valid, and success is inherent in the process (Schul-Pfeffer, 1980). Creative dance provides hands-on experience that fosters and develops the creative potential of each child. Children with different intellectual capacities can be challenged to explore and expand their creative, physical, and aesthetic abilities. For children

who may not excel in other subject areas, creative dance provides an alternative method of learning that may offer an opportunity to succeed and demonstrate their strengths and uniqueness.

Given the positive effects of dance, it is unfortunate that the role of creative dance in the educational curriculum is "non-existent at worst and peripheral at best" (Bergmann Drewe, 1996, p.11). Change needs to occur. Indeed, Bowell (1998) suggested that "the world-wide trend toward curriculum reform provides an opportunity to review our practices and philosophy and to determine the direction that dance education might take as we approach the 21st century" (p. 76). In an attempt to develop an understanding as to why teachers were not teaching more creative dance in elementary schools, MacDonald (1992) interviewed 20 teachers about their attitudes and practices regarding creative dance. These teachers noted that it was "lack of confidence, the low priority given to creative dance in the curriculum, lack of time, and their own apathy" (MacDonald, 1992, p. 102) that prevented them from integrating creative dance into their teaching. Furthermore, lack of knowledge regarding how to teach creative dance and how to integrate it throughout the curriculum, along with not knowing the rationale for including it, contributed to teachers' reluctance to teach creative dance. Teachers implied that they would need to be shown how creative dance benefited children in the classroom before they would incorporate it into their own classroom. Concomitantly, they expressed a need to have sufficient ideas, resources, and training in order to make this change and noted that this training would have to be done in such a way as to make them feel competent and confident teaching creative dance. They also suggested that if creative dance could be integrated across the curriculum, they could better justify the time they would be taking away from other disciplines such as math, science, and language arts (MacDonald 1992, 1993).

Consequently, MacDonald (1992) developed a series of creative dance workshops which were designed specifically to address these needs identified by the teachers. After participating in these workshops teachers reported changes in both their attitudes and practices regarding creative dance. Moreover, during a follow-up the teachers said that they had integrated creative dance in their school programs, and that they planned to continue to use creative dance as an educational tool in the future (MacDonald, 1992). The main implication from this study is that the inclusion of training in creative dance in teacher education programs would be likely to contribute to changes in student teachers' attitudes and practices toward creative dance during their subsequent teaching careers.

The purpose of this inquiry was to follow-up on the MacDonald (1992) study by examining student teachers' attitudes toward teaching creative dance in the elementary-school curriculum. Furthermore, changes in student teachers' attitudes as a result of their participation in a series of creative

dance workshops designed to meet the identified needs of student teachers were investigated. It was the intention that by exposing student teachers to the benefits of teaching creative dance to children during their teacher training, the student teachers would be more inclined to teach it when they became teachers. In this way, the children they teach would benefit by being exposed to school programs emphasising creativity, problem solving, and aesthetic expression.

Methodology

The purpose of this inquiry was twofold: (a) To examine student teachers' attitudes toward teaching creative dance in the elementary-school curriculum, and (b) To examine any changes in student teachers' attitudes towards creative dance as a result of their participation in a workshop series on creative dance.

Research design

A qualitative approach was taken in this inquiry, using open-ended surveys and a focus group interview as a means of collecting data. Survey questions were designed to reveal the attitudes of the student teachers towards creative dance both before and after their participation in the creative dance workshop series. Furthermore, the pre-workshop survey was used to identify important issues and areas to target in the workshops. A focus group interview was conducted in order to allow for greater exploration into the student teachers' attitudes towards, and practices of, creative dance. The research team expected that the interaction among the participants within this focus group would yield unprompted and emotional reports that might not arise without the effect of group interaction (Creswell, 1998; Kvale, 1996; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

Participants

All student teachers in a particular year of the primary-junior teacher education program at the University of Ottawa (N=148) were invited to participate in this inquiry. A total of 138 students signed the consent form agreeing to participate. The participants comprised four sections of approximately 37 students each and the workshop attendance averaged 31 students per section. Of the 138 students, 124 (90%) completed both the pre- and post-workshop surveys.

In addition, using purposive sampling, ten student teachers were selected from the overall group to participate in a focus group interview. Participants were chosen from among those who were willing to extend their involvement in the inquiry by participating in the workshop series and an audiotaped post-workshop focus group interview. The focus group participants were selected based on information obtained from the pre-workshop survey

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which identified their experiences, attitudes, and feelings towards creative dance. Selection was further refined with attention to three criteria: (a) representation of both male and female students, (b) inclusion of participants with limited amount of dance experience so change could be identified, and (c) inclusion of participants holding a variety of beliefs about creative dance (e.g., that creative dance is an activity only for girls; that one has to be fit or have experience in dance to teach creative dance; and strong opinions as to whether or not creative dance should be included in the elementary school curriculum).

Workshop series

The workshop series comprised three 90-minute workshops that were integrated into the student teachers' programs. The workshop leader designed the sessions to enhance participants' understanding of creative dance and to address issues, concerns, and needs that emerged from the pre-workshop survey. The workshops included a rationale for why creative dance should be an integral part of the elementary-school curriculum, along with the potential benefits it could contribute to the student teachers' programs. The workshops also provided practical and theoretical information on how to integrate creative dance across the curriculum and practical creative dance skills designed to enhance lessons in mathematics, science, language, and other content areas. During the workshops, participants received resource lists of journal articles, textbooks, and teaching videos that focus on presenting abstract ideas in concrete form.¹ The next section provides examples of how this was actualised.

The workshop series

- The instructor began the workshop series with a discussion about her personal involvement teaching creative dance. She emphasised that a teacher does not have to have a dance background in order to be successful at teaching creative dance. Indeed, the instructor related that she developed the workshop content based on years of trial and error with children, student teachers, and teachers.
- In order to make the student teachers feel more comfortable, during the workshops the instructor described actual experiences of children and teachers who had been involved in creative dance. Furthermore, the manners in which other student teachers and teachers had responded to similar workshops on creative dance were addressed. For example, factors that had made other teachers feel uncomfortable were highlighted and the solutions used to change their situation described.
- The instructor shared research findings on teachers' attitudes and practices towards creative dance. Because student teachers' concerns were often the same as teachers', identifying and recognising these concerns could help

some of the student teachers feel more comfortable about participating in the workshops.

- The instructor used music to create a positive atmosphere and relieve stress.
- The instructor began each workshop in a very structured manner to ensure that the student teachers felt they were in a safe and supportive environment.
- The instructor distributed props to the student teachers so they had something to hold onto which helped them feel more comfortable and less inhibited during the workshops.
- The instructor attempted to immediately absorb the student teachers in creative dance during each workshop by involving them mentally as well as physically. The instructor asked the student teachers questions, therefore requiring them to think, which took some of the focus away from their physical concerns.
- Throughout the workshop, the instructor provided practical ideas to the student teachers and highlighted ways in which she would teach creative dance to children. This helped student teachers focus on learning how to teach creative dance, rather than on learning how to dance.
- The instructor provided practical ideas which could be implemented in the classroom while practice teaching. These ideas could help student teachers to see the usefulness of the workshop material for their own personal teaching situation.

Procedures

The student teachers were informed of this research inquiry during a class and in a letter of information. The research design was described to them as well as their involvement in the inquiry should they decide to participate. All willing participants were asked to sign an informed consent. Participants were then surveyed twice during class time, once before and once after the workshop series. The focus group interview was conducted on-campus once the post-workshop survey was completed and at a time that was convenient for the 10 participants.

SURVEYS. The pre- and post-workshop surveys comprised 10 open-ended questions (Appendix A). Participants were asked to complete the pre-workshop survey in September and the post-workshop survey the following March. The purpose of the first survey (i.e., the pre-workshop survey) was to gain insight into the student teachers' perceptions of, and attitudes toward, teaching creative dance in the elementary-school curriculum. The information gathered in this survey was then used to design the workshop series so it would address the student teachers' concerns and needs. The purpose of the second survey was to identify student teachers' perceptions of, and attitudes towards, creative dance after their participation in the

workshop series. The surveys also helped the researcher to shape the questions for the focus-group interview.

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW. A focus group interview was conducted with ten student teachers in March following the completion of the post-workshop survey. The interview was open-ended, semi-structured, and guided by an interview schedule (Appendix B). The purpose of the focus group was to obtain information about student teachers' understanding of events, their assessment of the workshop series, and their ideas about teaching creative dance. The focus group interview also permitted follow-up on issues that had emerged from the surveys. The interview was audiotaped and then transcribed for analysis. In addition, the moderator took field notes during the interview.

Data analysis

Surveys and interview transcripts were reviewed in order to identify emerging conceptual categories. All data were read and reread repeatedly to ensure that their intent was understood. During the readings a preliminary list of emerging categories was derived. These categories were guided by the purpose of the inquiry, the primary researcher's knowledge and orientation, and the meanings made explicit by the participants (Merriam, 1998). The categories were constructed through the constant comparative method. Patterns, themes, similarities, and differences among the data were sought for. The analysis was regarded as complete when all the categories were deemed exhaustive, mutually exclusive, conceptually congruent, and reflecting the purpose of the research (Merriam, 1998). Direct quotations are used throughout the report in order to preserve the voice of the participants.

FINDINGS

Attitudes pre-workshop

Based on the surveys, it emerged that the student teachers' discomfort with teaching creative dance in the elementary school setting came from three main sources: "physical concerns," "a lack of practical ideas," and "inadequate understanding." The "physical concerns" related to the student teachers' worries about being uncoordinated, overweight, or unfit. Concerns about having "a lack of practical ideas" focused on the student teachers' feelings that they did not have good, concrete practical ideas on how to introduce and teach creative dance in elementary school. Lastly, student teachers noted that they felt uncomfortable teaching creative dance because they did not have an adequate understanding of, enough exposure to, and sufficient experience with creative dance.

Indeed, participants reported that before they had participated in the workshop series in this inquiry, they had felt uncomfortable about teaching

creative dance, noting they felt nervous, hesitant, and unsure due to their lack of experience. They hoped that the creative dance workshop series would remedy this. The following quotations from two of the participants highlight these points:

I was looking forward to the opportunity to learn about this area of study. I was hesitant about participating in a large group and concerned about my lack of creativity. I questioned my own creative talents. I am not thin, fit, or flexible. I worried about feeling embarrassed. (Carla, post-workshop survey)

I was a little apprehensive due to my inexperience and lack of knowledge in this area. Moreover, I was not sure how to get started and begin a lesson or unit on creative dance. (Mike, post-workshop survey)

Many of the student teachers revealed that they were nervous about attending the workshops and commented that they had preconceived notions about what they would be like. Furthermore, the student teachers disclosed that they were worried about being singled out or embarrassed by being asked to perform in front of their peers or dance alone. Two student teachers commented:

I was pretty apprehensive about attending the workshops. I wondered what they would be like. I worried about it during the night. I thought I would be the only uncoordinated person. After the first day I really felt comfortable and I thought, I can use this! (Sandy, focus-group interview)

I thought I would be singled out and everyone would be looking at me and what have you. But I thought I am never going to have an opportunity to learn about creative dance again so I made myself go. I never thought I would use it. And almost right away I felt, "hey this is fun!" By the end of the first workshop we really let loose. It was so crazy. I thought it turned out well. (Debbie, focus-group interview)

Despite the fact that the student teachers admitted that they felt uncomfortable about teaching creative dance, all the participants, both in the pre- and post-workshop surveys, indicated that they felt creative dance should be part of the elementary school curriculum. In many instances, responses were not only positive, but emphatic. For example, one student teacher declared:

Definitely the children love it; when I taught dance this year the children asked me to come back and teach more. (Julia, pre-workshop survey)

The children's enjoyment of creative dance was just one of the reasons student teachers gave for feeling creative dance should be part of the elementary school curriculum. Others included: exercise – it's good exercise; expression – it's a good means of self-expression; and creativity – it's an opportunity to explore and try things in a unique or alternative way. After the workshop series, the student teachers also noted that the fact creative dance can be easily integrated into the elementary school curriculum was another reason that it should be included.

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In the pre-workshop survey, most of the student teachers indicated that they would require “resources,” “practical ideas,” and “exposure to creative dance” in order to help them feel comfortable and confident about teaching it. The types of resources the student teachers wanted included books, articles, and teaching videos on how to initiate, implement, and integrate creative dance in the elementary classroom. The student teachers wanting more practical ideas highlighted a desire for practical workshops that offer fun, motivating ideas which can act as building blocks for integrating creative dance into their teaching. They emphasised that they wanted lesson plans and specific ideas on what and how to teach creative dance. The student teachers who said they needed exposure to creative dance in order to feel comfortable teaching it wanted to experience creative dance themselves. They indicated that they wanted to know what creative dance was and be convinced that creative dance could benefit their programs and the children in them. Some expressed they wanted to watch creative dance being taught to children and be able to observe how children respond to creative dance.

Attitudes post-workshop

Student teachers were asked, both before and after the workshop series: “How do you feel about teaching creative dance in the elementary school?”. Their responses indicated a dramatic change in attitude towards teaching creative dance after participating in the workshop series. These sets of pre- and post-workshop responses from Mikey, Jesse, and Augusta demonstrate the changes in attitude:

ATTITUDE PRE-WORKSHOP	ATTITUDE POST-WORKSHOP
I am a bit hesitant and reluctant to teach creative dance because I do not have much background and knowledge with dance. I need courses which teach me how to teach creative dance. (Mickey)	I feel confident enough to teach creative dance after the workshops. (Mickey)
I would like to teach creative dance but at this time I do not feel comfortable. I would like to learn how to best introduce activities involving creative dance. (Jesse)	I feel much more comfortable now that I have some ideas that are quick and easy to use. These workshops were great! (Jesse)
I feel nervous since this is a very unfamiliar subject for me. I would not really know where to begin. If I knew exactly what I was trying to achieve . . . (Augusta)	I feel positive because students do not have to be good athletes to succeed in this activity. I do feel comfortable. It is invigorating, physical, creative, and intense. I feel it should be part of the curriculum because it can easily be integrated into the various areas, and every child can succeed and enjoy it. (Augusta)

The student teachers also reported changes in their intended practices after the workshop series. Many student teachers said they intended to teach creative dance, with some saying they could not wait to teach it. The following comments made by student teachers after participating in the workshop series underline their change in attitude about teaching creative dance:

Yes! I hope to learn more about creative dance and implement it. Prior to the workshops I was hesitant to do it but I have gained more confidence in this area as a result of the workshop. (George, post-workshop survey)

I think it [creative dance] is extremely important. Creative dance adds so much creativity to the day. Actually, now I feel quite comfortable and motivated [to use it]. (Deanna, post-workshop survey)

I'd love to. I feel much more confident now and more capable. I think I could still use more practice and I'm not sure I'm creative enough but I will try! I now have a clearer idea of what creative dance is and how to approach it. (Suzanne, post-workshop survey)

Despite the fact that the majority of the participants in this inquiry reported positive changes in attitude and intended practice, 2 of the 124 student teachers (1.5%) who completed the post-workshop survey reported they were still too uncomfortable to try to teach creative dance after participating in the workshop series. One student teacher commented:

Unfortunately, since I missed one of the portions of the workshops, my level of comfort and confidence hasn't really changed. (Janie, post-workshop survey)

However, those student teachers who reported a change in attitude towards teaching creative dance, commented that it was due to their participation in the creative dance workshops. Student teachers remarked that the best thing about the workshop series was that it exposed them to many practical ideas that could be implemented into the classroom. Many also commented on how much fun they had during the workshops and how surprised they were to learn what good exercise creative dance was.

Through analysing the surveys and focus group interview, four reasons for the change in student teachers' attitudes towards teaching creative dance emerged: greater understanding, level of comfort, physical and therapeutic benefits, and ease of integration of creative dance. The ensuing sections will examine these further.

Greater understanding.

Student teachers reported that before the workshop series their perception of creative dance involved stereotypes and misconceptions. Many noted that the thought of teaching creative dance used to conjure up feelings of being nervous, apprehensive, embarrassed, singled out, hesitant, and con-

cerned. Indeed, their preconceived notions of what creative dance was, and what the workshop would entail, created feelings of anxiety and stress before the workshop series itself.

Before the workshop series, the majority of the student teachers did not know what creative dance was nor did they understand why or how it would fit into the elementary school curriculum. Participation in the workshop series changed this as the following comments illustrate:

I never had an actual opinion about creative dance in the school. What I needed was the awareness and knowledge to teach dance. My awareness has changed so I will teach creative dance now. (Mary, post-workshop survey)

My understanding of what creative dance is has certainly changed. I realise that it was not that difficult to set up and implement. The practical nature of the workshop and the simplicity of the ideas that were presented helped me develop a quick understanding and a confident attitude. (Helen, post-workshop survey)

The student teachers' confusion about as to what creative dance is and how to teach it, is in line with the literature that states there are many definitions of creative dance which are often conflicting and contradictory (Bergmann Drewe, 1996; Dimondstein, 1985; MacDonald, 1993; Richmond, 1991). Understanding the meaning of a proposed change, that is understanding the desired change, is a vital step in ensuring that change will occur (Fullan, 1982). The workshop series appeared to be successful in educating student teachers and enhancing their understanding of what creative dance is, why it should take place, and how it can benefit elementary school programs.

The findings from the surveys and focus-group interview also support the literature that states that little or no creative dance is currently being taught in the elementary schools of Canada (Bergmann Drewe, 1996; Courtney & Park, 1981; Fowler, 1989; MacDonald, 1991b). All of the student teachers said that creative dance was not a part of the curriculum when they attended school, and most said that they did not have previous dance experience of any kind. Only two of the student teachers in this inquiry had seen creative dance taught during their practice teaching and in both cases this was in primary grades.

Level of comfort

In both the surveys and the focus group interview, student teachers reported that a major reason for the change in their attitudes towards teaching creative dance was the comfort they experienced while participating in the creative dance workshops:

The teacher made us feel comfortable. She led us into self-confidence slowly and sensitively. I felt confident and creative. We kept moving so there was no opportunity to think too much about ourselves. The teacher modelled enthusiasm and energy and did not express expectations that might make us feel inadequate. (Ted, post-workshop survey)

During the workshop I felt at ease and very comfortable. I felt like I was trying to remember everything so I could take it back into the classroom. I really enjoyed the workshops and hoped to take the things I learned and do them with my students. I feel this workshop has given me the beginning skills. I became enthusiastic about creative dance. I was given specific activities that I could take into the classroom and references for good resources. This proved very beneficial. (Mary, focus group interview)

Taking the time to understand student teachers' concerns about teaching creative dance, and then taking the time to design the workshop series around these concerns, appears to have had a positive effect on changing student teachers' attitudes toward the teaching of creative dance. As the excerpts presented above suggest, when the instructor is able to establish a climate of respect for student teachers' uniqueness as individuals and is flexible in response to their questions and concerns, the student teachers' level of comfort significantly increased.

Physical and therapeutic benefits

The recognition of how much creative dance could benefit their program and the children in it also helped change student teachers' attitudes toward the teaching of creative dance in elementary school. The two types of benefits recognised were physical and therapeutic.

The student teachers reported that during the workshops they were constantly moving and holding isometric contractions and body shapes. They noted that they did not realise at the time what a good physical workout they were getting because they were so mentally and emotionally involved in creative dance activities. Several student teachers remarked on how sore their muscles were the day after the workshops:

My muscles hurt. I do aerobics and run several times a week. I am in good shape and was surprised that I was sore after participating in creative dance. (Mary, post-workshop survey)

Besides the physical benefits of creative dance, student teachers described the therapeutic effects of creative dance. Many emphasised how good they felt when they participated in creative dance and commented in particular on its expressive and relaxing qualities:

I find that through dance I feel a complete sense of freedom. The soul takes flight. I want children to feel this sense of freedom and relaxation. What is important is that the children are free to let their minds and bodies explore. (Pria, focus group interview)

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[Creative dance] promotes self-awareness and increases one's positive self-image because we can all succeed at it. It increases one's energy, confidence, teamwork, co-operation, pride, etc. (Suzanne, post-workshop survey)

I believe [creative dance] to be a positive activity for children. It is another method of expression and for some it may be their best method. To not do creative dance may rob some students of a great joy in life. (Kathie, post-workshop survey)

Ease of integration

Participating in the workshops led the student teachers to realise how simple it was to integrate creative dance into the curriculum. Moreover, they allowed the student teachers to see how capable they were of teaching it. Both these factors appeared to influence the student teachers' attitudes towards teaching creative dance:

The ease with which it was taught and the new-found awareness that I too can teach this in the classroom. At first I felt like a fish out of water, but as the workshop progressed, I started to relax and have fun and realised that I don't have to be a Broadway dancer to teach creative dance. (Suzanne, focus group interview)

I gained knowledge about the uses of creative dance and how it could be taught. The wonderful ideas I gained are great. As well, the realisation that I can teach it. (Sandy, post-workshop survey)

Indeed, the practical ideas that were provided during the workshops were also instrumental in changing the student teachers' attitudes toward teaching creative dance. Student teachers noted that practical ideas that allowed them to integrate creative dance across the curriculum were particularly helpful. Specifically, they appreciated the explicit information on how to integrate creative dance into core programs.

The resources (e.g., journal articles, textbooks, and teaching videos that presented abstract ideas in concrete form) that the student teachers were provided with during the workshop, further contributed to changing the student teachers' attitudes towards teaching creative dance. Most noteworthy were the teaching videos used during the workshop series. These videos were influential in convincing the student teachers that children enjoy creative dance. Perhaps their success was because they showed children being successfully taught creative dance by teachers like them. Student teachers admitted having misconceptions and stereotypical beliefs about how children in the junior grades, especially boys, would feel about participating in creative dance. The following comment illustrates this:

Looked like they loved it on the video. I was a little surprised at the boys' reaction. (Mary, post-workshop survey)

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings from the two surveys and the focus group interview indicated that prior to the workshop intervention, student teachers were uncomfortable about teaching creative dance in the elementary school setting. Reasons for this discomfort appeared to centre on physical concerns, a lack of practical ideas, and an inadequate understanding of creative dance.

In the pre-workshop survey, student teachers said that an understanding of, resources on, practical ideas about, and exposure to, creative dance would help them feel comfortable and confident toward teaching this activity. Consequently, the workshop series was designed to address these needs. Student teachers said they felt more comfortable about teaching creative dance following their participation in this workshop series. Indeed, they reported that their change in attitude toward teaching creative dance was due to their participation in the creative dance workshops. More specifically, student teachers said that a major reason for their change in attitude was the comfort they experienced while participating in the workshops. It is therefore critical that instructors establish a climate in which student teachers feel free from tensions, stress, doubt, or embarrassment if attitudes are to be changed.

Once student teachers had a greater understanding of creative dance and recognised how beneficial creative dance could be to their program and to the children involved, their attitudes towards teaching creative dance in the elementary school became more positive. Moreover, the practical ideas presented during the workshop, which highlighted how easily creative dance can be integrated into the curriculum, were also instrumental in changing student teachers' attitudes towards teaching creative dance. The instructor noticed that as the student teachers began to appreciate the usefulness of the workshop material for their personal teaching situation, they became excited about participating in the workshop series and eager to learn more about creative dance.

This study has implications for teacher education. Teacher educators can change student teachers' attitudes toward teaching creative dance by identifying needs and then addressing these through a series of workshops. However, follow-up research is needed to investigate the relationship between the student teachers' reported changes in attitudes and their actual practices in order to determine whether interventions implemented during teacher training have long-term effects on teaching behaviour. As Borko, Lalik, and Tomchin (1987) stated:

A research project which investigates the relationship between student teachers' conceptions of teaching and their actual teaching behaviours, across the entire clinical field experience, is an important next step in increasing our understanding of learning to teach. (p. 90)

Given the benefits of creative dance and the ability of teacher training to change student teachers' attitudes towards creative dance, it is recommended that departments of education support the inclusion of creative dance in teacher-education programs. This opinion is not new, and has been stated by many research-practitioners in the past (e.g., Courtney, 1989; MacDonald, 1991b; Miller, 1988). Unfortunately, the effect of recent educational policies has been to de-emphasise the arts in general, and creative dance in particular, within the curriculum and these priorities have tended to be reflected in the elementary school system (Fowler, 1989; MacDonald, 1992). Support and encouragement from all levels of administration seems basic to improving and changing the situation (Courtney & Park, 1981; Fullan, 1982; Goodlad, 1984). If teacher education is to be teaching for conceptual change, we may have to rethink the ways in which we prepare prospective teachers (Clark 1988; Weinstein, 1989).

Researchers and practitioners have repeatedly called for school programs that are inclusive, meaningful, multi-dimensional, and well researched. Developing and implementing such programs requires exploring alternative teaching methods and changing our traditional ways of thinking. Creative dance meets the challenge – it provides innovative content, and it features effective, efficient, and creative teaching methods.

NOTE

1. For a detailed outline of the workshop content readers may refer to MacDonald (1986).

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Question 1 for pre-survey only.

1. Have you ever taken any dance courses? Please explain. If yes, where?
(i) private studio; (ii) elementary school; (iii) high school; (iv) university; (v) other
2. Have you ever taught creative dance in the elementary school system? Please elaborate.
3. Have you ever seen or heard of creative dance being taught in the elementary school system? Please elaborate.
4. Do you think creative dance activities have a place in the elementary school curriculum? Please elaborate.
5. How do you feel about teaching creative dance in the elementary school?

Attitudes Towards Teaching Creative Dance

6. Do you have any plans to implement creative dance in your program when you become an elementary school teacher? Why or why not?
7. If yes, in what capacity?
8. If you do not presently intend to include creative dance in your elementary school curriculum, what would it take to change this practice?
9. Do you have any suggestions for the workshop series you (will be attending) (attended)? Please be specific.

Question 10 post-survey only

10. Has your attitude towards teaching creative dance changed as a result of your participation in the workshop series? If so, how? Why?
11. Do you have any other comments regarding creative dance or teaching creative dance in the elementary school curriculum?

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe your knowledge of creative dance before the workshop series took place?
2. Has your attitude towards creative dance changed? How and in what ways? If yes, to what do you attribute the change in attitude? If not, why not?
3. Has your attitude towards creative dance been affected as a result of your participation in the workshop series?
4. If yes, specifically what was it about the workshops that influenced your attitude towards creative dance. Please elaborate.
5. Do you plan to use creative dance as an educational tool in the future? Please elaborate.
6. Do you have any comments or recommendations for future creative dance workshops?

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